All Roads Lead to San Francisco:
Black Californian Networks of Community and the Struggle for Equality, 1849-1877

By

Eunsun Celeste Han

B. A., Seoul National University, 2009

M. A., Brown University, 2010

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History at Brown University

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

MAY 2015

© Copyright 2015 by Eunsun Celeste Han

This dissertation by Eunsun Celeste Han is accepted in its present form
by the Department of History as satisfying the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date___________________ ___________________________________

Michael Vorenberg, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date___________________ ___________________________________

Françoise Hamlin, Reader

Date___________________ ___________________________________

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date___________________ ___________________________________

Peter M. Weber, Dean of the Graduate School

CURRICULUM VITAE

Date of Birth: April 11, 1986, Junjoo, Jeollabuk-do, South Korea

EDUCATION

Ph.D., History, May, 2015
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
M.A., History, May, 2010
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island
B.A., Western History, Feb., 2009
summa cum laude, Seoul National University, Seoul, Republic of Korea

QUALIFYING FIELDS

Nineteenth-Century U. S. History
African American History
Colonial Latin American History

PUBLICATIONS

Eunsun Celeste Han, "Making a Black Pacific: Black Californians and Transpacific Community Networks in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," under review at *The Journal of African American History* (2015).

HONORS AND FELLOWSHIPS

W. M. Keck Foundation Fellow at the Huntington, July-August, 2013
The Huntington Library, San Marino, California
William G. McLoughlin Travel Fund, October, 2012
Brown University Department of History fund for research and conference travels
William G. McLoughlin Travel Fund, November, 2011
Brown University Department of History fund for research and conference travels
Brown University Teaching Fellowship, September, 2010 to May, 2012; September, 2014 to present. Brown University Graduate School
Brown University Graduate Fellowship, September, 2009 to May, 2010; September, 2012 to

May, 2014, Brown University Graduate School

2009 Fulbright Graduate Study Award, September 23, 2008

Korean-American Educational Commission (Fulbright Commission) - Declined

Seoul National University Certificate of Scholarship Award, academic year of 2008

Awarded to top one person in the department for academic excellence

Seoul National University Scholarships for Academic Excellence, 2005-2007

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

The Black Pacific Rim: Black Californian Laborers, Merchants, and Ship Workers, and the Rise of Pacific Commerce. (October 18, 2014)

The New England Historical Association 2014 Fall Conference.

Franklin Pierce University, Rindge, New Hampshire.

What the Civil War Stands For: The Diverging Ideologies of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, 1860-1865. (November 11, 2011)

2011 Legacy Series Conference: The Legacy of the Civil War: An Interdisciplinary Conference. Chestnut Hill College, History and Political Science Department.

"After Five Years": The Political Identity of Ex-Slaves and Their Political Dream, 1860-1865. (February 19, 2011)

Fifth Annual New Perspectives on African American History and Culture Conference.

University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, Triangle African American History Colloquium (TAAHC).

Frederick Douglass and the Founding Fathers. (June, 2009)

2008 Western History Department B.A. Thesis Presentation, Seoul National University.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE and PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING

Teaching Assistant

HIST1965, Social Change in the 1960s, Spring 2015

HIST1740, Civil War and Reconstruction, Fall 2014

HIST1740, Civil War and Reconstruction, Spring 2012

HIST1640, Clash of Empires in Latin America, Fall 2011

HIST1740, Civil War and Reconstruction, Spring 2011

HIST0510, American History to 1877, Fall 2010

Sheridan Teaching Seminar Certificate I, September, 2009 ~ May, 2011

The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The journey to finding the details of the lives, activities, and thoughts of nineteenth-century African American women and men in the San Francisco Bay Area has been a richly rewarding experience. I was amazed by the resilience, the creativity, and the fervor of black Californians as they agitated for equal rights in the face of pertinacious oppression. I was excited to discover their activities in the transpacific commerce, and was repeatedly impressed by their efforts to create a greater community consciousness by connecting distant communities to the black community in San Francisco. This same journey has also been a time during which I looked into myself, found meaning in the work that I did, and discovered the people and the values that were truly dear to me.

This dissertation would not have been possible if it were not for the wonderful support of my advisor and committee chair, Michael Vorenberg. His thoughtful advice and attentive feedback have been invaluable in both formulating the key arguments and refining the details of this work. My sincere gratitude also goes to Françoise Hamlin and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, who as readers on my committee offered valuable comments and suggestions for further development of the manuscript.

I am indebted to the wonderful archival staff at the North Baker Research Library of the California Historical Society, where I spent months calling up every collection that I thought might be remotely connected to my work. I thank them for the patience and the

cheerfulness with which they helped me during my stay in San Francisco. I am also grateful for the assistance I received at the Center for Sacramento History, California State Archives, California State Library, San Francisco Public Library, the Bancroft Library at University of California at Berkeley, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, and the Huntington Library at San Marino.

Brown University graduate scholarship and the fellowship from the Huntington Library have greatly aided in conducting research for this dissertation, for which I am truly thankful.

Finally, to my Mom and Dad who have shown me amazingly steadfast and loving support through the most difficult times, words will not express the full depth of my heartfelt gratitude. And through it all, Papa God held me all the way.

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. Arriving 24

Chapter 2. Networking the Pacific Coast 80

Chapter 3. From the Pacific to the Atlantic 142

Chapter 4. The Black Pacific 186

Chapter 5. An Exclusive Community 227

Bibliography 273

INTRODUCTION

Wherever there is a Colored man, there we claim to have a brother.

5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*

It was the opening declaration of the *Pacific Appeal*, the first grand-scale black Californian newspaper. The ambitious claim to global black Pacific representation was not a mere hyperbole. Coming from editor Philip A. Bell, who had worked on the board of editors for the *Colored American* of New York City from 1837 to 1842 alongside Reverend Samuel E. Cornish, the statement aligned the new Californian paper with nationally circulating black newspapers of the Atlantic coast dating from the *Freedom's Journal*. His experience with the *Colored American* had taught Bell the great potential a black newspaper could have in fostering interregional communication, engaging in discourses in national public spheres, and creating a black community consciousness that transcended geographic boundaries.[1] Together with Peter Anderson, the proprietor of the

---

[1] For a history of the *Colored American* of New York City, see Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson, II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, D. C.: Howard University Press, 1997), 29-31; Benjamin Fagan, "'Americans as They Really Are': The 'Colored American' and the Illustration of National Identity," *American Periodicals*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2011), 97-100; Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993). For a discussion of Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere and public culture in relation to circulated print, and the role of black newspapers in contributing and interacting discursively as members of that sphere, see Robert S. Levine, "Circulating the Nation: David Walker, the Missouri Compromise and the Rise of the Black Press," in Todd Vogel ed., *The*

Pacific Appeal, Bell made it clear that the *Appeal* aimed to be for African Americans of the Pacific coast what black papers such as the *Freedom's Journal*, the *Colored American*, and the *North Star* had been for the Atlantic. "A Weekly Paper is needed in California as much as in the Atlantic States," Bell and Anderson announced. And the *Pacific Appeal* will be precisely the "one which will be the exponent of our views and principles, our defense against calumny and oppression, and our representative among one of the recognized institutions of Civilization."[2]

The circulation and dissemination of black Californian newspapers played a crucial role in defining and fostering a black community that was not limited to geographical boundaries. Leaders of the black community in San Francisco actively sought to harness the power of newspaper circulation to create extended networks of communication connecting the black settlers up and down the Pacific coast, uniting the resources of multiple communities in the battle for racial equality. "Our object is to form a bond of unity among the Colored community of this country, to bind them together for one common purpose – for our mutual benefit," Bell and Anderson had declared in their opening issue of the *Pacific Appeal* in 1862. "In an object so laudable who will not support us?"[3]

In April 1865, Bell dissolved partnership with Anderson and launched his own newspaper, the *Elevator*. The new enterprise quickly gained reputation across the state and soon across the nation for being the more faithful, more militant, and better edited of the two. While the *Pacific Appeal* came out irregularly due to financial difficulties after

---

Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 29-32.

[2] 5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal.*

[3] 5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*.

Bell left, the *Elevator* boasted of printing without missing a week for thirty-three years, from 1865 to 1898. Under the leadership of Bell, the *Elevator* embodied the power of the black press through circulation and community networking, expanding the boundaries of black San Franciscan community consciousness well beyond the limits of the city. Networks soon spread across California at large, and then up and down along the Pacific coast from Victoria, British Columbia, to Panama City, Panama.[4] The *Elevator* also enabled black Californians to overcome the vast geographical separation and participate in the national discourses of the East, and even enlisted the resources of black settlements on the other side of the Pacific Ocean in Asian, Australian, and New Zealand cities for the civil rights activities in California.

By promoting a sense of a common interest, defining the boundaries of community through subscription, circulation, and dissemination, and providing the forum in which to conceptualize the legal, political, economic and social conditions of the Pacific coast, the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal* served to create and reinforce a sense of an extended imagined community. In a way, the process by which the popular black newspapers fostered a cohesive network of coastal African American communities of the Far West bore resemblance to the contribution of print-language to the rise of European nationalisms during the early nineteenth to early twentieth century, described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*.[5] Unlike in European nations, the English language itself was not a means of defining communal identity for black settlers on the Pacific

---

[4] Bell first printed the list of distribution agents in the issue of 4 October 1867, *The Elevator*. It contains names of agents in seventeen different locations in California, two in Oregon, three in Nevada, two in Idaho Territory, and two in British Columbia. On 18 October 1867, Bell added Panama City, Panama, to the roster.

[5] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York, Verso, 1991), 67-81.

coast. Black periodicals "produced *by* African Americans *for* African Americans," however, as historian Erid Gardner points out, forged a space "for a kind of nascent black nationalism absent from most white reform papers."[6] By providing the arena for a common conceptualization of the events and legal and political conditions of the Pacific coast, the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal* supported a community of people who shared the same language and vocabulary, as well as a consciousness of the problems and issues in their society. By defining the meanings of oppression and victory, presenting a common goal for its body of readers to follow, and furnishing a place through which various individuals could debate strategies and compare opinions, the black newspapers of California thus fostered a larger imagined community of African Americans up and down the Pacific coast with San Francisco as the great communal hub.

Understanding and consciously trying to create a greater community network through circulation of print matter was not, of course, the new invention of black Californians. In his study of the founders of early nineteenth-century black newspapers and print culture, historian Robert S. Levine points out that writers like John Russworm, Samuel E. Cornish, and David Walker clearly understood the importance of circulation in bonding together not just the African American readers and listeners in the North, but also those in the South. When Russwurm and Cornish founded the *Freedom's Journal* in New York City, the first black newspaper to be edited solely by African Americans, they actively tried to gain subscribers outside of the free northern states. They installed authorized agents in southern locations such as Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, and New Orleans. They even went beyond national boundaries, selling their issues in Canada,

[6] Erid Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), xviii.

Haiti, and England. When the *Freedom's Journal* ceased in early 1829, Cornish followed up with the *Rights of All* in May, 1829. In the September 18, 1829 issue of *Rights*, Cornish declared that he intended the paper to link "together, by one solid chain, the whole free population, so as *to make them think and feel, and act, as one solid body,* devoted to education and improvement."[7] Walker, who had been one of the distributing agents of *Freedom's Journal*, likewise understood the role of circulated print in creating a "black nationalist consciousness."[8] When circulating the *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, Walker specifically approached free black sailors and requested them to disseminate his ideas in southern port cities. As historian Jeffrey W. Bolster points out, "it was no coincidence that the *Appeal* circulated first in seaports."[9]

Some scholars have disputed the power of print material to influence communities with low property ownership and high illiteracy rates. In his criticism of Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, where Habermas emphasized the role of newspapers in the development of a rational and participatory public culture in eighteenth-century Britain, Houston A. Baker, Jr., pinpointed early nineteenth-century black American communities as the exception to Habermas's theory. "Insofar as the emergence and energy of Habermas's public sphere were generated by property ownership and literacy," Baker argued, "how can black Americans, who like many others have traditionally been excluded from these domains of modernity, endorse Habermas's beautiful idea?"[10] Nevertheless, as historian Todd Vogel points out, reading

---

[7] 18 September 1829, *The Rights of All*, quoted in Levine, "Circulating the Nation," 25. Emphasis mine.
[8] Levine, "Circulating the Nation," 21-32.
[9] Jeffrey W. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 197; Levine also quotes from Bolster in page 32.
[10] I borrow from Levine's historiography. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 16; Houston A. Baker, Jr., "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere," in *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture*

was not the only way black Americans could learn the contents of a newspaper. The "press's cultural work" lay not simply in the text itself, but in "the way the page peeled off a letterpress, traveled to far-flung towns, landed in the hands of literate people, and then accelerated to the speed of sound through the voice of a reader who broadcast to friends and community."[11] While it is difficult to give exact statistics on the readership, or the "listenership," of the two black newspapers, it may safely be argued that the community created through the circulation of these newspapers was not limited only to those who could read, or to those who could afford the subscription fees.

The principal mode of transportation that ferried the black newspapers out of San Francisco to various towns and cities along the coast was the steamer. While the internal river routes of California were serviced by various steamship companies and individual ship owners, a major player in Californian waters was the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC), chartered in 1848 in New York as a direct result of two bills passed in Congress in 1847 for the transportation of the U. S. Mail to Oregon Territory. These bills had dictated that in time of war, following the tradition of the American merchant marine, the steamers to be used in the Pacific coast mail service would also be placed at the disposal of the Navy Department.[12] On May 4, 1847, the Secretary of the Navy had advertised for offers to contract for the service between Panama and Astoria, in Oregon

---

Book, ed. The Black Public Sphere Collective (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13, both cited and discussed in Levine, "Circulating the Nation," 29-30.

[11] Todd Vogel, "Introduction," in Vogel ed., *The Black Press*, 2.

[12] After the steamers were built in 1848, the Navy quickly realized that they were useless for battle service. For a history of the nineteenth-century American merchant marine, see Andrew Gibson and Arthur Donovan, *The Abandoned Ocean: A History of United States Maritime Policy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 26-102; Winthrop L. Marvin, *The American Merchant Marine: Its History and Romance from 1620 to 1902* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902); John R. Spears, *The Story of the American Merchant Marine* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1915); and Willis J. Abbot, *The Story of Our Merchant Marine; Its Period of Glory, Its Prolonged Decadence…* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919).

Territory. The contract was awarded to businessman Arnold Harris on November 16, 1847, who had offered execute the operation for $199,000 per year. Harris assigned the project to William H. Aspinwall of New York, who launched the Pacific Mail Steamship Company for the purpose. In accordance to the contract, Aspinwall ordered three moderate sized steamers, the *California*, the *Panama*, and the *Oregon*, to be built in January, 1848. With Aspinwall as first president, the company was chartered on April 12, 1848 in the state of New York for a term of twenty years.[13]

The PMSC happened to be in a streak of luck. What Aspinwall and his partners believed would be a quiet, unnoticed mail operation along a sparsely settled coastline suddenly transformed into the main mode of transportation for goldseekers flooding into the new boomtown of San Francisco. E. S. Capron, writing an early history of California in 1854, mused that "previous to the year 1848, the wildest imagination could scarcely have conceived that a large and populous city would suddenly arise under the flag of the Union on that remote and alien shore." Before goldseekers turned the peninsula into a bustling metropolis, San Francisco had been merely a "silent harbor," hardly noticed by either politician or businessman. Now, just five years after gold was first discovered in October, 1848, the waters of San Francisco had been "whitened with the canvas of every nation," and the burgeoning city had become the center of "the restless commerce of the world."[14] The PMSC, together with smaller steamship companies and individual shipowners that cropped up in San Francisco, now plied the rivers and the coastline of the Pacific coast with multiple vessels, providing regular service between cities on the coast

---

[13] John Haskell Kemble, "The Genesis of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company," *California Historical Society Quarterly* vol. 13, no. 3 (Sep., 1934), 241-50.
[14] E. S. Capron, *History of California, from Its Discovery to the Present Time…* (John P. Jewett, 1854), 122-123, quoted in James P. Delgado, *Gold Rush Port: The Maritime Archaeology of San Francisco's Waterfront* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2009), 1.

several times a week and offering weekly lines down to Panama for connection with the Atlantic coast steamers. In 1867, having contracted with the Postmaster General to carry the U. S. Mail to Japan and China, the PMSC even spread its operations across the great Pacific Ocean, boosting transpacific commerce between the United States and the empires of Asia.[15]

Black Californians proved especially apt in using the steamer systems to weave and strengthen the greater black community of the Pacific coast. They frequently conversed with family, friends, and organizations in geographically distant cities through the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator*, personal correspondence, and pamphlets. Black community institutions such as churches, the masonry, mutual benefit organizations, political conventions, and literary clubs made their announcements in the columns of the *Appeal* and the *Elevator*, which then spread to African American communities throughout California and beyond, into the surrounding U. S. territories, up to British Columbia, down to Panama, and even across the ocean into Japan, China, Australia, and New Zealand. Upon receipt of the news, African Americans in various locales responded to the editorials, advertisements, and resolutions by marking their calendars to travel to San Francisco to attend a meeting, holding a rally at their local church to raise awareness for the cause they had read about, signing petitions to the state legislature spearheaded by black community leaders in San Francisco, and sending monetary collections when they believed there was a worthy cause. For African Americans of the Pacific Rim on both sides of the ocean, the rhythm of the steamer that arrived with the next issue of the

---

[15] For the history of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and related legislation in Congress, see: Robert J. Chandler and Stephen J. Potash, *Gold, Silk, Pioneers and Mail: The Story of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company* (El Cerrito, CA: Glencannon Press/Friends of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Library, 2007); Kemble, "The Genesis"; and Timothy G. Lynch, "Crucible of California Capitalism," *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 4 (Winter, 2012).

Elevator became a clock by which they tuned in to community activity and identity.

Just as the "black jacks" of the Atlantic facilitated the dissemination of Walker's *Appeal* throughout the South, African American shipworkers aboard the steamers churning the rivers of California and the Pacific Ocean were entrusted with the delivery of newspaper issues, personal correspondence, and various packages to black communities separated by vast geographical distance. Their roles in connecting black Pacific communities were especially prominent on the transpacific PMSC vessels after 1867, when PMSC employees such as Charles S. Bundy or Z. J. Purnell regularly delivered newspapers and parcels to either side of the Pacific.[16] Going beyond the role of simple delivery, black shipworkers also provided a sense of continuity and community for black overseas travelers and migrants heading for Asian destinations. It was not unusual for a steamer to have multiple African American employees on board, and these workers transformed what would have been a lengthy and fraught voyage to an unfamiliar destination into a warm and heartening experience of connection, continuity, and familiarity between geographically separate communities.[17]

The activities of the black San Francisco community of the nineteenth century, then, was by no means restricted to the boundaries of the city, or even the larger Bay Area. Through the aid of black newspapers and steamer communication, African

---

[16] Charles B. Benjamin, delivery of the Japan *Herald, Times, Chronicle*, and the *Overland Mail*, 10 January 1868; Z. J. Purnell, of steamer *Colorado*, "late Japanese papers," 25 October 1873, *The Elevator.* Also acknowledged for delivery of Asian documents: Henry Smith, delivery of the Japan *Herald* to the office of *The Elevator*, 16 March 1866; Thomas Pell, delivery of the *Friend*, of Shanghai, to *The Elevator* office, 30 March 1866;; William Thomas, delivery of the Japan *Times* and "other interesting papers," 29 October 1869; and Captain Alexander G. Dennison, for "late Oriental papers, among which are the Hong Kong Daily *Press*, the Calcutta *Englishman* and the Japan *Gazette*," 26 April 1873. For more examples, with agents named and unnamed, and for announcements of receipt of personal correspondence see: 25 December 1868; 22 January 1869; 25 June 1869; 17 June 1870; 23 November 1872; 6 September 1873; 4 October 1873, *The Elevator*.

[17] The role of shipworkers in this respect is well illustrated in a letter by Alexander Ferguson, a prospecting traveler to Japan and China, to the *Elevator*, in Alexander Ferguson, "On the Deep – Across the Sea," 23 October 1873, in 29 November 1873, *The Elevator*.

Americans of San Francisco self-consciously tried to foster a greater community consciousness along the Pacific coasts, hoping to combine the resources of black settlers in multiple places around the Pacific Rim for the cause for freedom and equality. As their networks expanded, black Californians saw their community as spanning not just the American side of the coast, but stretching eastward across the continent to the Atlantic seaboard and to the west to Asia across the Pacific Ocean.

To date, the only books that study the nineteenth-century black communities of California in depth are Rudolph M. Lapp's *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, published in 1977, and Douglas H. Daniels's *Pioneer Urbanites*, published in 1991. Lapp's book, a meticulously researched monograph studying the formative years of black communities in California during the 1850s, gives a detailed comparison of the rates of population growth, black occupations, establishment of community institutions, political activities, and residential patterns among different cities in northern California, including San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, and Marysville. Daniels's *Pioneer Urbanites*, which spans a longer period of time from 1850 to the Second World War, focuses primarily on statistical information concerning the distribution of population, categories of occupations, and sex ratios of the black community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Because of his concentration on census statistics, his portrayal of black San Franciscans is largely static, a population frozen in time and sorted into categories. Daniels admits that he sees little change over time in the occupations, residential quarters, and living conditions of black San Franciscans during the first five decades of settlement until 1900. By comparison, Lapp's monograph is much more colorful. Besides providing statistical information, Lapp pays close attention to the development of political thought and

activism among black Californians, if only during the 1850s. He examines the creation of the first black newspaper in California, the short-lived *Mirror of the Times*, launched in late 1856 but out of print by 1858, the creation of black churches and literary organizations, the petition campaigns seeking the right to testify in court in cases in which white persons were a party, and the three statewide colored convention movements.[18]

In the context of Civil War and Reconstruction, several historians have shown that California was meshed in the national turmoil for black freedom and equal rights despite its geographical separation. Reconstruction in the United States had never been just a southern phenomenon, and since the 1970s, historians have recognized the influence of Reconstruction policies on northern politics, and further on, in the West as well. In 1970, historian Felice A. Bonacio closely followed the political history of Ohio for five years after the war in *North of Reconstruction*, while Phillys F. Field and David Quigley paid special attention to New York's party system, voting patterns, and state conventions.[19] In the late 2000s, historians Leslie A. Schwalm and Heather Cox Richardson made headway into the study of western Reconstruction with works such as *Emancipation's Diaspora*, which deals with Reconstruction in the upper midwestern states, and *West from Appomattox*, which examines the perceptions of, and policies

[18] Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980).
[19] Felice A. Bonadio, *North of Reconstruction: Ohio Politics, 1865-1870* (New York: New York University Press, 1970); Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982); David Quigley, *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004). See also Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

toward, the West during Reconstruction.[20] Most recently, historian Stacey L. Smith has shown the persistence of "unfree" institutions, laws, and practices in the nominally free state of California before and after the American Civil War. In it, she also deals with the impact that the institution of slavery had on the lives of black Californians, and some of the ways in which they sought to resist the racially oppressive laws and social practices.[21]

While these monographs tend to focus more on party politics and debates carried out in state legislative halls during Civil War and Reconstruction, several articles and unpublished dissertations give the center stage to African American activists. Jeanette D. Mantilla's 2000 dissertation "Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte" tracks black San Franciscans from 1850 to 1875 to study how they fought to end discrimination in public transportation and to gain equal access to testimony rights, suffrage, and education. Acknowledging that black struggles in California were not an isolated phenomenon, Mantilla draws direct lines between what was happening in San Francisco to the rest of the United States, whether discussing the impact of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation on the struggle for black testimony in California, or the response of Californian courts to the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendments compared to the courts in other parts of the nation.[22] In "The Struggle for Negro Testimony in California," historian James A. Fisher also conducts a close study of the black struggle for testimony rights and the Colored

---

[20] Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America after the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 2008).
[21] Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); also see Stacey L. Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 1 (Feb., 2011), 28-63.
[22] Jeanette Davis Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte': A Quarter-century of Civil Rights Activism by the Black Community of San Francisco, 1850--1875" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000.)

Convention movements in California from 1851 to 1863.[23] Meanwhile in "African American Women and Community Development in California, 1848-1900," historian Willi Coleman pays special attention to the role of black San Franciscan women in undermining the racially discriminatory practices in Californian streetcars. In 1863 and 1868, African American women such as Charlotte Brown and Mary Ellen Pleasant led the nation by setting one of the earliest precedents of using the court system to battle segregation in streetcars, successfully undermining racially discriminatory practices in the transportation systems of San Francisco.[24]

My dissertation contributes to the narrative of black struggle for freedom and equality in California by highlighting the ways in which black Californians sought to maximize their resources by creating and drawing upon extensive community networks, aided by wide-scale newspaper circulation and the agency of workers aboard steamships. Nineteenth-century black civil rights struggles in California was not merely a copy of northern or western Reconstruction. Despite the smaller size of the black community in San Francisco compared to that of Philadelphia or New Orleans, black Californians were continually communicating with a vibrant coastal, nationwide, and even international black network. African Americans in the San Francisco Bay Area believed that they were at the forefront of the movement for equal rights, a beacon of hope for the rest of the nation. Typical was a black goldseeker who wrote back to his family that "California is the best country in the world to make money. It is also the best place for black folks on

---

[23] James A. Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony in California, 1851-1863," *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec., 1969), 313-324.
[24] Willi Coleman, "African American Women and Community Development in California, 1848-1900," in Lawrence de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 100-109.

the globe."[25] Although the racial climate soon proved more oppressive than they had hoped for, many black Californians clung to the belief that California could be one of the most advanced states in terms of racial equality. Black leaders in the East often agreed. Frederick Douglass made frequent mention of California as a congenial state for African Americans in his newspapers, as did many other black periodicals around the country.[26] Believing themselves at the forefront in the fight for equal rights, black San Franciscans strove to change the racially oppressive laws and practices by tapping on the larger body of communities across the state and beyond through their quality newspapers, calling together statewide conventions, forming executive and educational committees, masonic lodges, civil rights organizations, and mutual-benefit societies.

Chapter one depicts the migration of thousands of African Americans into northern California during the late 1840s and the 1850s. While many entered as enslaved persons accompanied by their owners, the majority of African American migrants were of free origin from New York, Pennsylvania, and the New England area. Like their white counterparts, these pioneers came to make a fortune for themselves and their families. As news of African American successes in the gold mines reached the East coast, more black goldseekers launched out for the golden land in hopes of finding not only gold, but more fluid social and racial status than could be found anywhere else in the United States. In 1850, the federal census recorded 962 “free colored” black people residing in California, with 872 men and 90 women. The largest age group was in their twenties, 374 men and

[25] Peter Brown to Alley Brown, December 1851, California-Oregon Collection, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri, quoted in Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 84.
[26] Issues of the *North Star* from 1848 to 1850; *Frederick Douglass Papers* from 1851 to 1854; also *The New Orleans Tribune* (New Orleans) and *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia) made frequent reference to California and especially to newspapers from San Francisco, *The Elevator* and *The Pacific Appeal*.

29 women, and the second largest was in their thirties, with 256 men and 12 women. 709 out of the total 872, or 81 percent, were born within the United States. The enslaved population, of which there was a considerable number in the state, was not counted. Throughout the nineteenth century, census returns for the "slave" population in California, nominally a free state, remained zero.[27]

A decade later, the number of free black persons had grown to 4,086, with a concentration of 1,176 in San Francisco and 468 in Sacramento. Male to female ratio had grown more even during the decade, with 2,827 men to 1,269 women, mostly because of the increase in the number of children, whose sex ratio was nearly equal. The largest age group was now in their thirties, with those in their twenties following close behind. 3,635 African Americans, or 88.9 percent, reported their nativity as the United States.[28]

In 1870, by which time slavery had been officially abolished, the census reported 4,272 black Californians. 1,330 lived in San Francisco, and 475 were found in Sacramento. Of the 4,272 black Californians, 3,835 of them, or 89.7 percent, were born in the United States.[29]

By 1880, there were 6,108 black men and women who called California their home. 1,628 were in San Francisco, and 560 in Sacramento. By this time, Alameda County across the Bay had grown to boast of 686 African American residents. It is difficult to know how many of them were native-born, because the 1880 census returns count black, Chinese, Japanese, and Native Americans all as one group when

---

[27] J. D. B. DeBow, Superintendent of the United States Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 966-972.

[28] Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 22-34.

[29] Francis A. Walker, Superintendent of Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States…Compiled, from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census, (June 1, 1870,) …* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 15-16;

enumerating population by race and nativity.[30]

Although the proportion of African Americans in the entire population in California was small when compared to that of the southern states, where the proportion of black population held in bondage reached 37.3 percent in 1850, it cannot be said that California had an exceptionally small percentage when compared to other regions of the United States outside the South. The proportion of black residents in California easily matched, for example, that of New England or the Middle Atlantic states in 1860, where blacks made up 0.8 percent of the population. In the same year, California recorded blacks as 1.1 percent of the population.[31] It is also possible that the number of total black Californians in 1850 and 1860 was greater than in the census returns, for only the "free colored" population was reported.[32]

The next two chapters examine the expansion of the San Francisco-centered network across the continent. Chapter two discusses how black Californians used the steamer and the press to create a network of black communities from British Columbia to Panama along the American Pacific coast. Centered in San Francisco, this greater black community used the networks of communication to launch battles for equal rights in California. Chapter three shows an expansion of that network across the nation to the Atlantic coast, following the activities of black Californians as they participated in issues

---

[30] United States Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)…* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 378, 488.

[31] New England: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut; Middle Atlantic: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 51; Warren Simpson Thompson, *Growth and Changes in California's Population* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1955), 75.

[32] Enslaved black men and women were sometimes recorded by the census taker in the manuscript census sheets. It is unclear, however, if they were counted in the total tally of "free colored" population, or were simply omitted, as slavery was prohibited in the state. State Census, 1852, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA; Federal Census, 1860, City and County of San Francisco, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.

of nationwide interest. Using the steamer, the railroad, and the black press, African Americans of the Golden State sought to keep California prominent in national politics through correspondence with black newspapers of the Atlantic coast, while using national politics to promote equality in their own state.

Chapter four delves into the exciting ways in which black merchants, shipworkers, and journalists expanded the boundaries of the African American Pacific community beyond the coasts of America and spun an international web of black communities in Japan, China, Australia, and New Zealand. With San Francisco as the hub of this international community network, black Californians broadened the scope of African American history into global history not just on the Atlantic side, but on the Pacific side as well, creating an early "black Pacific" in the mid-nineteenth century. A striking counterpoint to the well established concept of the black Atlantic, this nineteenth-century black Pacific exhibited a unique pattern of voluntary black migration into Asia in pursuit of profit and racial elevation. The phenomenon generated discourse on racial and cultural identities among black San Franciscans both at home and abroad.[33]

---

[33] For detailed discussion of the concept of the "black Atlantic," see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Alan Rice also explores black culture in light of the black Atlantic in *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum Books, 2003). The term "black Pacific" has been used by Heidi Carolyn Feldman to describe the black Peruvian experience, a term she uses to describe African diasporic experience in countries on the American Pacific coast. See Heidi Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006). By contrast, I use the term to describe African American engagement in transpacific activity, which was largely voluntary and motivated by self-interest. It is in a similar vein to the study of black Pacific engagement in the early twentieth century, when some African Americans sought a racial alliance with Japan against Western white supremacy. See: Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Gerald Horne, *Race War: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004); Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Ernest Allen Jr., "When Japan Was 'Champion of the Darker Races': Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 24, no. 1 Black Cultural History - 1994 (Winter, 1994); Yuichiro Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged

Finally, chapter five deals with the boundaries of the black Pacific community through discussions of complex and multi-level racial relations with the biggest minority racial group in California: the Chinese Americans. The San Francisco Bay Area was one of the most multiracial places in the nineteenth-century United States, and the most prominent minority racial group was not African American, but Chinese. Although historians of nineteenth-century black Californians have generally acknowledged the presence of a large population of Chinese migrants that intermingled on a daily basis with African Americans, there needs to be more analysis into the complex interactions between the two groups of people.[34] The Chinese are often mentioned only briefly in black Californian history, usually a nod to a simplistic picture of a mutually supportive relationship between two minority groups helping each other in the face of greater white oppression. The relationship, however, was not always so rosy or straightforward. While some black Californian women and men were outspoken for the rights of the Chinese, most prominent black male activists in California stubbornly refused to consider the possibility of a racial alliance with Chinese Americans in the battle for equality. Up

---

Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922," *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 92, no. 2 (Spring, 2007). For a discussion of African diaspora historiography, see Elliott P. Skinner, "Transcending Traditions: African, African-American and African Diaspora Studies in the 21st Century - The Past Must Be the Prologue," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, Transcending Traditions (Fall-Winter 2000).

[34] Leigh Dana Johnsen's "Equal Rights and the "Heathen 'Chinee'": Black Activism in San Francisco, 1865-1875," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Jan., 1980) is the most extensive analysis that exists of the interactions between two races. Although focused primarily on black activism for black male suffrage and desegregation of schools in San Francisco, Johnsen examines the differences in population statistics between black and Chinese San Franciscans, and black perception of the Chinese as a nuisance in their agitation for equal rights for themselves. Johnsen attributes the fundamental problem to black activists' view of the Chinese as a political, economic, and "foreign" threat. A recognition of the population of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco can be found in Garnder ed., *Jennie Carter*, xiv. Most often, the Chinese are only mentioned briefly in studies of black Californians, usually to only give the population ratio, or in just one or two examples of harmonious relationship in everyday interactions. See Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites*, 97. Or they are discussed in quick comparison to the legal oppression faced by African Americans in California. See Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 197. A slightly more analytical discussion of Chinese-African American relationships in California appear in a book written by a historian of Chinese immigration. In it, Jean Pfaelzer argues that black Californians tried to join the mainstream white opinion by discriminating against the Chinese. See Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007), 79-81.

against the vicious racial propaganda of the Democratic Party, which mingled negative stereotypes of African Americans with those of the Chinese to deny both groups the right to vote, black community leaders sought to distance themselves as far from possible from the Chinese rather than to attack the root of racial prejudice itself. In the process, some even developed an essentialist argument that Chinese Americans were as a race permanently and inherently inferior.

The dissertation engages with the twentieth-century civil rights activists and present-day scholars who criticize the nature of nineteenth-century black struggles for equality. They tend to categorize African Americans who sought to "uplift" their race as "middle-class reformers" advocating such naïve ideals as black "self-help" and "respectability" rather than taking the more ambitious track of criticizing the oppressive white social structure or launching a more aggressive form of black nationalism. Admittedly, the bulk of my subjects also come from this group of self-righteous activists. Critics of nineteenth-century black middle-class reformers argue that these self-fashioned leaders were unable to identify with the interests of the majority of the African American populace, who tended to be poorer and working-class. They tend to clump these people into a group with Booker T. Washington, who rose to prominence later in the nineteenth century, and see the activists simply as taking the "Washingtonian" accommodationist approach to racial oppression.[35]

---

[35] For a discussion of nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas of middle-class respectability, and how African Americans used, enacted, and challenged the ideals, see Victoria W. Walcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14-15, 185-229; Jane E. Dabel, *A Respectable Woman: The Public Roles of African American Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 112-115.

Nevertheless, strictly categorizing people by class, especially in the case of nineteenth-century African Americans, could create a stereotypical image that may not be sensitive enough toward the more complex reality of the lives of black activists and their activism. On the ground, classification was not so easy. Many of these reformers had been born into slavery, were never "rich," and sometimes died in dire poverty. As historian Leslie Harris has pointed out, nineteenth-century black middle class had more to do with ideology than with economic status.[36] But even here, the distinction was not so clear. Not all nineteenth-century black Californian leaders automatically believed that a show of respectability was the highway to racial uplift, although some did adhere to the strategy. Throughout Reconstruction and after, black activists of California struggled with a wide range of approaches in the effort to alleviate oppressive racial conditions. Every activist had his or her own beliefs, and these spread across a broad spectrum: some used the rhetoric of respectability; some blatantly condemned the social structure; and a few even urged early forms of black nationalism. While representatives like William H. Newby, a prominent black leader from San Francisco, believed in appeasing white legislators with reverent language and persuading them of the good qualities of the black people, more outspoken and radical activists like Jonas H. Townsend argued that resolutions ought to object directly to the vicious and unjust white prejudice that was prevalent in Californian legislation.[37]

---

[36] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[37] See Adam S. Eterovich ed., *Proceedings of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California, 1855, 1856, 1865* (Saratoga, Calif.: R & E Research Associates, 1969), 6-27. Reverend D. P. Stokes made the first declaration: "By the blessing of God, we will stay with [the white man,] side by side." William H. Yates of San Francisco brought up the subject again: "Where does the white man go that the black does not? … the black is found at his side." Jonas H. Townsend, also of San Francisco, again capitalized on the rhetoric: "our forefathers were among the first who took up arms and fought side by side with yours, poured out their blood freely in the struggle for American independence," he pointed out. Then

Looking beyond the formal and well-advertised conventions and the rhetoric of self-appointed male community leaders, the picture of the struggle for civil rights in California becomes even more colorful. A black woman in San Francisco, Charlotte Brown, led the nation in 1863 by setting one of the earliest precedents of using the court system to battle segregation in streetcars.[38] Five years later, Mary Ellen Pleasant, labeled by her contemporaries as "a mammy, madam, voodoo queen, and sorceress," successfully brought down segregation in California transportation systems by using Brown's case as precedent in court. Although far from being even remotely "respectable," Pleasant was one of the most successful entrepreneurs of San Francisco -- but not necessarily through idealistic characteristics of industriousness or honesty. Rather, she was known to wield her "secret" knowledge, gleaned from her experience as a "madam" and a boardinghouse keeper, to maximum economic and political advantage. Respectable or not, however, Pleasant remained a devoted civil rights activist throughout her long life.[39] From Nevada County, California, another woman named Jennie Carter wrote regularly for the *Elevator* for seven years. She engaged in lively debate with other male correspondents for the newspaper, discussing Californian and national politics, racism, women's rights, Chinese rights, temperance, morality, education, and housekeeping -- which, coming from a black woman, was a poignant show of the black capability of "civilizing" the far western "wilderness."[40]

There is no separate chapter in this dissertation dedicated to the activities of black

---

why, Townsend demanded, "instead of treating us as good and loyal citizens," did white Californians seek "to degrade us in all walks of life"?

[38] December 1, 1864, *New Orleans Tribune*; de Graaf et al. eds., *Seeking El Dorado*, 5, 13.

[39] Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 1; de Graaf et al. eds., *Seeking El Dorado*, 5.

[40] Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter,* vii-viii.

Californian women. Instead, whenever the sources permit it, the contributions of African American women to black Californian history have been included within the main flow of the text as naturally occurring phenomena, rather than as a special or extraordinary event that requires explanation. Although records of their thoughts, rhetoric, and actions have not been preserved nearly as well as the men's, some have survived in court records, advertisements, magazine and newspaper articles, hints within letters and editorials written by men, and even community rumors. The actions and thoughts of various black women, the way they kept the black Californian newspapers alive for over three decades, organized all community events and celebrations, and voiced their conflicting opinions against those of black male leaders on issues such as Chinese rights, then, are woven into the chapters as part of the main narrative.

Nineteenth-century California had a distinctive history different from those of the mid-western states. It developed its own unique race relations, ideas of freedom, and its role in the American nation. A territory of Mexico before the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, California had become U. S. territory as a result of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. When gold was found in October of the same year, goldseekers began pouring into the new territory from around the globe. They created a uniquely multiracial terrain, with a population open-minded toward a mobile lifestyle in pursuit of profit and better living conditions. In this burgeoning young state, African Americans developed unique methods to battle racial oppression and pursue equality. As they launched and consciously circulated quality black newspapers not just around the vicinity of San Francisco, but up and down the American Pacific coast, eastward to the Atlantic states, and even across the Pacific Ocean in black Asian communities, they created

vibrant and useful networks of communication that connected geographically separate communities and fostered a greater black Pacific community consciousness. This is their story.

CHAPTER 1. ARRIVING

It was a bizarre city. A flood of fortune-seekers from all over the United States, and indeed from all over the world, poured into the new boomtown San Francisco with hearts soaring with expectation. "Whole Streets," wrote Charles P. Kimball, the compiler and publisher of *The San Francisco City Directory* in 1850, "are built up in a week and whole Squares swept away in an hour. … The floating population numbers thousands."[1] Almost overnight, San Francisco had become a "beehive of the largest kind," a city that "seemed to have sprung out of the earth as if by miracle."[2]

Among those "seized with the California fever" was John David Borthwick, an artist from Edinburgh who had been residing in New York at the time of the California Gold Rush. In 1851 he joined the stream of fortune seekers to San Francisco. When he arrived, he found the city a most extravagant hub of excitement that he had ever seen. "In the course of a month, or a year, in San Francisco," Borthwick observed, "there was more hard work done, more speculative schemes were conceived and executed, more money

---

[1] Charles P. Kimball, *The San Francisco City Directory, September 1, 1850* (San Francisco: Journal of Commerce Press, 1850), Preface.

[2] The first quote from 11 June 1892, *San Francisco Examiner*, quoting an article by George W. Sheldon, "The California Gold Fever," in the *Harper's Magazine*. The expression "beehive of the largest kind" is quoted in the same from an uncited Californian newspaper of 1849. The second quote from Dr. Dietrich, *The German Emigrants; or Frederick Wohlgemuth's Voyage to California*, Leopold Wray trans. (Guben. F. Fechner [1852?]), 32. It is a book written for young German readers, describing the journey to California and the experiences there by a fictional protagonist Frederick. Despite its fictional characters, descriptions of San Francisco and the mining regions in the period between 1849 and 1851 are very accurate, and are likely accrued from the author's first-hand experiences in California.

was made and lost, there was more buying and selling, more sudden changes of fortune, more eating and drinking, more smoking, swearing, gambling, and tobacco-chewing, more crime and profligacy." At the same time, however, Borthwick mused that there was "more solid advancement made by the people, as a body, in wealth, prosperity, and the refinement of civilisation, than could be shown in an equal space of time by any community of the same size on the face of the earth." When new arrivals tried to find lodging in a hotel in San Francisco, they were again shocked by its "most barbaric splendour." Although the exterior of the buildings were "flimsy concerns, built of wood," the insides were "fitted up with all the lavish display which characterizes the fashionable hotels of New York … [with] costliest French furniture, … immense mirrors, gorgeous gilding, magnificent chandeliers, and gold and china ornaments."[3]

Throughout the tortuous journey to San Francisco from various states of origin, travelers kept themselves buoyed by the hopes of the extraordinary riches they would find. Recalling his voyage through the Isthmus of Panama, Borthwick remembered that "the all-engrossing subject of conversation, and of meditation, was of course California, and the heaps of gold we were all to find there."[4] This feverish desire for gold was not, however, limited to white Americans alone. Americans of African descent, both enslaved and free, joined in the rush for gold as well, sharing in the wildest dreams and fantasies of their white, and also Chinese, counterparts. These black emigrants tackled the harrowing journey, thousands of miles long, harboring hopes for more wealth and more opportunity than could be found anywhere else in the United States. Like the white Forty-Niners, black Californians also came from all parts of the United States and also beyond, arriving

---

[3] John David Borthwick, *Three Years in California* (Edinburgh; London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1857), 48-49.
[4] Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 6.

from the West Indies, South America, and even as far as from Europe, Africa, and Asia.[5]

Simple economic profit was not the only expectation that propelled African American argonauts to California from distant states. East coast newspapers had reported that "there are no gentlemen here [in California.] Labor rules Capital. A darkey is just as good as a polished gentleman and can make more money." African Americans around the nation had begun to espouse hopes for a more fluid social and racial status in the Golden State.[6] Letters from black miners also seemed to confirm the exciting accounts in the newspapers. "I am now mining about 25 miles from Sacramento City and doing well," Peter Brown wrote from Cosumne diggings, California, to Alley, his wife in Saint Genevieve, Missouri, in 1851. "I have been working for myself for the past two months … and have cleared three hundred dollars. California is the best country in the world to make money. It is also the best place for black folks on the globe. All a man has to do, is to work, and he will make money."[7] While some white abolitionists voiced skepticism at the materialistic nature of the gold fever, many African Americans saw in the Gold Rush not just a fantastic chance at economic fortune, but a unique opportunity that offered more social fluidity, and perhaps more racial equality, than in any other state in the Union. As historian Rudolph M. Lapp points out, the California gold for black Americans presented a sort of "economic springboard," which might just give them the boost to improve their financial, social, and political statuses.[8]

The first African Americans to dig prized gold nuggets out of the Mother Lode

---

[5] State Census, 1852, State of California Manuscript Records, California State Archives.
[6] 22 August 1849, *New Bedford Mercury*, quoted in Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 13.
[7] P. Brown to Alley Brown, December 1851, California-Oregon Collection, Missouri Historical Society, Saint Louis, quoted in Lawrence B. de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 8; also see Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 23.
[8] See Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 14-17.

were mostly black seamen from New England. Many African Americans had been working aboard whaling vessels in the Pacific Ocean, having come from the East coast around Cape Horn. In 1848, when rumors of gold first began to spread, these black New Englanders deserted their vessels in the San Francisco Bay and headed for the golden hills deep in northern California territory. By the end of 1848, sixteen whalers from New England reported that their crew had abandoned ship in San Francisco. Hector, a black cook from the naval ship *Southampton*, dug out $4,000 worth of gold when he deserted in 1848 at Monterey, California.[9] Having gathered bags of golden treasure, some of these men returned to their homes on the Atlantic coast, where their stories lent credence to the rumors of California gold and intensified the gold fever in the New England states.[10]

When the California gold craze swept across the United States and the rest of the world in 1849, a large number of African Americans entered the region as enslaved persons, personally brought or sent alone by southern white owners to dig in the mines. Besides performing mining work, those who accompanied their owners also performed housekeeping chores, cooked meals, and earned money as hired-out mechanics and servants. Although enslaved when they first arrived, these early black Californians strove to find ways to use the unique environment of the young state to gain their freedom, as well as that of their family members. A considerable number did ultimately obtain their long desired freedom, more precious than the gold they dug out of the mines. While some returned to enjoy their newfound liberty in the East, many brought their families out of

[9] William Redmon Ryan, *Personal Adventures in Upper and Lower California in 1848-9* (London, 1850), 2: 104-10, cited in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 51.

[10] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 18, see also footnote 21 on page 277; Rudolph M. Lapp, *Archy Lee: A California Fugitive Slave Case* ([San Francisco]: Book Club of California, 1969), v; Paula Mitchell Marks, *Precious Dust: The American Gold Rush Era: 1848-1900* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), 288.

the southern states and settled down in California. Some consequently established flourishing businesses, gaining respect from both black and white communities.

The greater portion of black Gold Rush migration, however, came from the free North. These free black migrants dug in the mines, built up ranches and farms, worked as laborers for wages, and launched thriving businesses. They operated boarding houses, offered teaming and delivery services, and opened up drinking saloons, barber shops, laundry services, and restaurants for other miners. Although many initially came with plans of only a brief sojourn during which they would send money to their families back home, a sizeable number eventually settled in California and brought their families out to live on the West coast. As they organized community institutions and established their places in the economic, political, and social spheres of the burgeoning state, African Americans transformed California into a unique site of battle for black freedom and first-class citizenship. Adeptly using local, state, national, and even international resources, black Californians would work doggedly to reclaim the rights that racially discriminatory laws of the state initially denied them.

The study of African American participation in the Gold Rush and the formation of the state of California offers significant contributions to several historiographically important questions. Free and enslaved black presence in the mines of California not only complicate the overly white and straightforward rich-seeking narrative of the American Gold Rush, but they allow a reinterpretation of the state of California as a unique destination of black migration, as well as a prominent site of struggle for African American freedom and equality. From its statehood until the onset of the Civil War, California was a stage where black and white contestants struggled to define the meaning

of freedom by using community knowledge and networks. Historian Rudolph M. Lapp has well highlighted the role of California as a preferred destination for fugitive enslaved persons as well as African American emigration movements, and historian Stacey L. Smith illustrates the ways in which slaveowners and proslavery politicians transplanted and sustained systems of "unfree" labor in the nominally free state.[11] Nevertheless, careful attention to the actions of men and women struggling to escape the vicious grips of slavery and inequality, first from the slave states of the South and consequently within California, reveals an even more complex terrain of racial and power dynamics, in which black use of community knowledge played a prominent part. While white slaveowners sought to install legal and communal means to continually subjugate enslaved African Americans in California, free and enslaved black persons enlisted the power of community knowledge on their side to make California a freer state.[12] The courage and the careful calculations of enslaved persons in striking out for their own freedom, together with the concerted efforts of free black communities across northern California,

---

[11] For discussion of California as a destination in the black emigration movement, see Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 16-17; 23-24. Historian Quintard Taylor discusses the nineteenth-century African American view of the West as a region for "economic opportunity and refuge from racial restrictions" in Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 81. To see examples of fugitive enslaved persons heading for California rather than another state or for Canada, and activists in both the East and in California who encouraged and funded such a movement, see Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 18-21. Historian Stacy L. Smith studies the presence of enslaved persons and slaveowners within the free state of California, the laws that protected and perpetuated such a relationship, and the various tactics used by slaveowners to coerce enslaved persons to keep working for them in a free state. Although Smith focuses more on constructing the image of California as an unfree state, she does discuss a few of the ways in which enslaved persons attempted to subvert, negotiate, or flee slaveowner authority and coercion. See Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 39-46; 50-79. Also see Stacey L. Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 1 (Feb., 2011), 28-63.

[12] In a similar strain, historian Dylan C. Penningroth demonstrates how enslaved black persons used the knowledge and acknowledgement of black and white communities to hold and claim their own property, despite the fact that southern laws did not recognize such rights. See Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

time and again succeeded in evading the legal and communal efforts of white enslavers. Ultimately, then, enslaved and free black Californians succeeded in significantly undermining the systems of unfree labor that southerners sought to reinstate.[13]

Once a Spanish colony, California only became territory of the United States after the Mexican-American War in 1848. Since 1829, when Mexico abolished slavery in its provinces, there had been no slaves in the region until southern slaveholders came into the territory during the Gold Rush era.[14] California joined the Union as a free state in 1850, but not entirely because its white inhabitants cherished ideas of equal human rights or abolitionism. When goldseekers began flooding the territory in 1849, many found the vast geography of California, the mixed population from both North and the South, and the kind of work required in the mines more suited to free labor than that of the slave. During the state constitutional convention held in September, 1849 in Monterey, California, William E. Shannon, the representative from the Sacramento District, proposed to add the following section to the Bill of Rights of the constitution: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, unless for the punishment of crimes, shall ever be tolerated in this state." The section, borrowed from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, was adopted as part of the state constitution without a dissenting vote.[15] The memorial of the California state constitutional convention to Congress read: "The undersigned have no

---

[13] For examples of interactions between enslaved persons, slaveowners and their friends, and the free black population of California, see Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 20-21; 135-39; 140-56; 190; Lapp, *Archy Lee*; Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 55-56; de Graaf et al. eds., *Seeking El Dorado*, 9; Willi Coleman, "African American Women and Community Development in California, 1848-1900," in de Graaf et al. eds., *Seeking El Dorado*, 103.

[14] Native American labor was sometimes bartered, but they were not held, at least officially, as slaves. See Lucile Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation: With an Introductory Sketch of the San Francisco Labor Movement* (Berkeley: The University Press, 1910), 82; Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 7.

[15] J. Ross Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California, on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington: J. T. Towers, 1850), 43-44, cited in Cardinal Goodwin, M. A., *The Establishment of the State Government in California, 1846-1850* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1914), 112-13; also discussed in Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 83.

hesitation in saying that the provision of the Constitution excluding that institution [slavery] meets with the almost unanimous approval of that people … Since the discovery of the mines the feeling in opposition to the introduction of slavery is believed to have become, if possible, more unanimous than heretofore."[16] This unanimous agreement to ban slavery from the state did not translate into a ben..ign reception toward African American migrants into the state. In fact, the majority of the framers would have gladly banned not just slavery, but black presence altogether from California. When Shannon introduced his antislavery clause, Morton M. McCarver from Sacramento followed it up with the proposal: "Nor shall the introduction of free negroes under indentures or otherwise, be allowed."[17] McCarver's black anti-immigration resolution ultimately failed to find its way into the state constitution. The omission, however, occurred more because of a fear among the delegates that such a restrictive clause might delay the decision of California statehood in Congress, than because of an opposition to the idea itself. In fact, the majority had initially voted in favor of McCarver's resolution on September 20, before Edward Gilbert from San Francisco warned that it might lead to a rejection "by the revisory power which it must pass at Washington."[18] Ultimately, the convention decided to relegate the matter to the first state legislature than to discuss it directly in the state constitution.[19]

The narrative of Major Edwin T. Sherman, a white miner from Sacramento County, offers pertinent insight into why the majority of white miners favored a ban on

---

[16] Browne, *Report of the Debates*, xix, quoted in Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 83-84.
[17] Browne, *Report of the Debates,* 44, quoted in Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government*, 113.
[18] Browne, *Report of the Debates*, 150, quoted in Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government*, 120; see also Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 88.
[19] Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government*, 121-125.

the institution of slavery.[20] Sherman had been a member of the committee at Rose's Bar that selected William E. Shannon to represent them at the state constitutional convention. Before California became a state, miners created regional committees to formulate and enforce their own by-laws. These committees determined the boundaries of mining districts, elected officials to record and protect individual claims, and settled disputes among claimants. In late July, 1849, Sherman had been working in the mines in Sacramento District when a General T. J. Green arrived with "a dozen other Texans, accompanied by about fifteen negro slaves." Green and his company went up to Rose's Bar on the Yuba River and, without consulting the mining laws or the officials of the district, proceeded to occupy "about a third of a mile of land along the left bank of the stream, locating claims of their own measurement, not only in their own names but in the names of their negro slaves."[21] Using enslaved persons to work the mines and to register claims obviously gave the slaveowner a clear advantage over the individual free white claim holders, and this infuriated many miners in the district. A miner's meeting was called, in which Sherman was present. Sherman recalled that the meeting denounced the actions of Green and his company to be in violation of both the district mining laws and the laws of the federal government concerning public lands. Such lands, white miners believed, could only be occupied by U. S. citizens or by those who had declared their intentions to become citizens, not enslaved persons. The miners appointed a committee,

---

[20] Major Edwin T. Sherman, *Reminiscences*, manuscript collection, cited in Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government*, 110-112. Goodwin, who published his book in 1914, does not give the location of the manuscript. Goodwin explains that what he gives is "a condensed account of the original," in a "hitherto unused manuscript." The quotes that I use in the following paragraph are, then, from Goodwin's "condensed account." As for Shannon's personal beliefs toward slavery and black equal rights, his arguments on 20 September 1849 hint that he believed African Americans could indeed become useful and respectable citizens of the United States, and also of the state. See Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government*, 118-9 for excerpts from Shannon's speech.

[21] Sherman, *Reminiscences*, quoted in Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government,* 110-12.

comprised of the oldest miners of the district, to inform Green that he must respect the mining laws of the district. Green refused to back down easily. He threatened that he would "fight them if necessary, but that he would not surrender the claims occupied by his negroes." The reckless answer disgruntled the miners even further. Another general meeting was held on July 29, 1849, at which the miners determined to expel the blatant violators altogether from the district. When they passed resolutions to prevent future attempts to register claims under names of enslaved persons, however, they actually went a step further to rule that "no slave *or negro* should own claims or even work in the mines." In the eyes of white miners of Sacramento District, not only were enslaved persons non-citizens, but African Americans as a race were excluded as well, ineligible for claims upon public lands. A new committee was drawn to confront Green once more, and this time Sherman, at the time the youngest miner present, was appointed a member. Green finally backed down. Two days later after the final warning, Green and his enslaved men left the district. The next day on August 1, 1849, the same miners who sought to restrict the rights of free African Americans together with the enslaved elected Shannon to the constitutional convention. They had imbued him with specific instructions that connoted a deeper racialized meaning: "use his influence for a constitutional provision which would forever prohibit slavery in California."[22]

Although the black anti-immigration clause failed to find its way into the California state constitution, it was never far from the minds of the white politicians in the state legislature. Peter H. Burnett, the first governor of California, invoked it during his inaugural message in December, 1849, urging the state legislature to prevent African

[22] Sherman, *Reminiscences*, quoted in Goodwin, *Establishment of the State Government,* 110-12. Emphasis on "or negro" mine.

American migration into the state.[23] During the state constitutional convention, where discussion of McCarver's anti-immigration clause had taken all of two days, delegates such as Oliver M. Wozencraft from Stockton had promoted the clause on the basis that white Americans should not be forced to mingle with inferior races. "Be assured the one will rule and the other must serve," he had asserted. "The low, vicious, and depraved" must therefore be excluded altogether from the state to prevent a servile system from springing up in their midst, for such "discordant particles" were by nature only fit for systems of fettered labor.[24] Historian Lucile Eaves, writing in 1919, organized the lengthy arguments for black exclusion into five categories: first, that black racial inferiority made assimilation on terms of equality impossible; second, that black presence in the workplace would degrade the dignity of labor, preventing desirable white immigration; third, that socially evil institutions would spring up when an inferior race inviting exploitation was among them; fourth, that they would become a vicious and disorderly element; and finally, that the expenses of governing and supporting them would increase the burden of taxation on the free white population.[25] Indeed, the state legislature did attempt to pass laws to exclude African Americans from California in both 1850 and 1851. Technical problems, however, stalled the progress of the bill, and it never became law in the young state. A close call came as late as in 1858, when a bill to "prohibit free Negroes and other obnoxious persons from immigrating to the state" passed both the assembly and the senate by a large majority, and was signed by Governor John Bigler. To the relief of thousands of black Californians, the bill failed to become law

[23] For Burnett's commitment to black exclusion from the states of the Far West, see Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 89-90.
[24] J. G. Brooks, "Origin of the Union Label," in *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*, no. 15, p. 197, March 1898 (Washington, 1898), 49, quoted in Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 85-86.
[25] Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 85.

because of an accidental discrepancy of timing before the legislative session closed for the year.[26]

Although African Americans could legally migrate into California, the laws of the so-called free state were anything but benign toward its black residents. In 1852, to prevent people justifying their escape from enslavers with the free constitution of California, the state legislature passed its own version of the fugitive slave law. The 1852 California fugitive slave law decreed that slaveholders could procure a warrant for the arrest of any enslaved person they had brought into California prior to official statehood in September, 1850. Compelling civil officers to serve the warrant and make the arrest, the law also ordered fine, imprisonment, or civil damages to anyone who dared assist a fugitive. Consequently renewed twice by the legislature and upheld by the state supreme court, this law, as historian Stacy L. Smith points out, successfully "vitiated the antislavery constitution and carved out a foothold for slavery on free soil."[27] The fugitive slave law was just the beginning. From its statehood until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, white politicians continued to pile up discriminatory laws against the state's non-white citizens. The state constitution denied the right of suffrage to black citizens, and the state legislature stripped African Americans of the rights to intermarriage with white persons, attend public schools not specifically established for nonwhite children, homestead, and serve on the jury. The law most threatening to the life and property of

---

[26] George Henry Tinkham, *California Men and Events; Time 1769-1890* (Stockton, California: Record Pub. Co., 1915), 136; Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation*, 89-90. Although the California constitutional convention and the state legislature never succeeded in excluding African Americans from the state, black anti-immigration laws were not a novelty for contemporary Westerners. Three other western states, Illinois, Indiana, and Oregon, actually wrote anti-immigration provisions into their state constitutions. For a discussion of black anti-immigration laws in the West, see Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 66-71.
[27] Tinkham, *California Men and Events*, 134-35; Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 9.

black Californian residents was passed in April 1850. It banned "black or mulatto person[s], or Indian[s]" from giving "evidence in favor of, or against, any white person" in a criminal case.[28] In 1851, the act was amended to deny "Negroes or persons having one half or more Negro blood" from testifying in civil and criminal cases "to which a white person is a party."[29]

Despite the oppressive legal environment, however, African Americans continued migrating west to the newborn state. Between 1850 and 1880, the western black population surged at a rate of 855.0 percent, while the white population increased by 807.9 percent.[30] The actual number of African Americans remained relatively small. The 1850 federal census recorded 962 "free colored" black men and women residing in California. By 1860, the number had grown to 4,086; in 1880, there were 6,108 black Californians.[31] Contemporary black Californians, however, raised questions at the numbers given in the federal census, arguing that there were more African Americans in the state than the census recorded. In 1870 the *Elevator*, a black newspaper in San Francisco, complained that the census figures for the city and county of San Francisco

---

[28] Theodore H. Hittell, *General Laws of California, 1850-1864*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft & Company, 1870), 235.

[29] *Statutes of California, 1851* (Sacramento, 1861), 113-14, cited in the following: James A. Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony in California, 1851-1863," *Southern California Quarterly,* vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec., 1969), 313; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 192; de Graaf, *Seeking El Dorado*, 9-10. California was not the only western state to prohibit black testimony in courts. Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa also banned black testimony in cases where white persons were a party. Oregon went further, denying African Americans the right to hold real estate, make contracts, or maintain any lawsuits at all. For a discussion of anti-black legislation in the West, see Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 93, and Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery; Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967).

[30] U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 35.

[31] U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population*, 37; Warren Simpson Thompson, *Growth and Changes in California's Population* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1955), 75; J. D. B. DeBow, Superintendent of the United States Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 966-972; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 22-34; United States Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)…* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883), 378, 488.

were widely off. While the census reported 225 black children between the ages of 5 and 15 in San Francisco, when John J. Moore and William H. Ringgold had counted black children in the fall of 1868 they had numbered "over three hundred." Also, although the census recorded the number of colored voters in San Francisco at 352, the editors of the *Elevator* confirmed that "the whole number of colored voters on the Great Register is FOUR HUNDRED AND TWENTY-THREE" - off again by over 20 percent. The newspaper also gave examples of black families not visited at all by the census taker, as well as those of black persons erroneously listed as white.[32] Also the 1850 and 1860 federal census returns have no record of the slave population in California, a questionable report because corresponding manuscript census sheets do show entries listing enslaved black persons. Even in the manuscript, however, census takers did not faithfully record enslaved African Americans in various instances. Although nearly every mining journal mentions multiple encounters with enslaved black miners, few black persons were actually marked as "Slave" in the 1852 and 1860 manuscript censuses. The discrepancy may have been due to the fact that white owners reported their status as only temporary sojourners, for whom it was legal to bring enslaved persons into the free state if they intended to take their enslaved persons with them when they left California.[33]

For many African Americans, however, traveling over thousands of miles to reach the golden land indeed presented a daunting task. While there are very few existent firsthand sources that allow us to fully grasp what black travelers had to undergo to reach California, a careful comparison of the journals and memoirs written by white Forty-Niners together with the rare bits of African American letters and memoirs does allow

[32] 2 December 1872, *The Elevator*.

[33] State Census, 1852, State of California Manuscript Records; Federal Census, 1860, City and County of San Francisco, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.

very interesting if incomplete glimpses into what black gold seekers experienced on their overland and overseas routes to California.

In 1849, Alvin A. Coffey, the only black member of the Society of California Pioneers, made the overland trip from Missouri to California with his owner, Doctor Bassett.[34] Originating from Missouri, stretching over the Rocky Mountains and ending in northern Californian mining country, this trail was the main route taken by many overland trekkers, both black and white.[35] White travelers often recalled seeing African Americans on the trail, as did Margaret A. Frink, a white woman who left a memoir of her 1850 overland journey to California. When Frink saw a black woman near the Humboldt Sink, "bravely pushing on for California" with "a cast-iron bake stove on her head, with her provisions and a blanket piled on top," the image left an imprint on her mind that lasted forty-seven years.[36] Another white traveler from Ohio remembered encountering on the trail "a colored man going to the land of gold prompted by the hope of redeeming his wife and seven children. Success to him. His name is James Taylor."[37] Although these African Americans were singled out in the memories of white travelers, probably because of the inspirational quality of the idea of socially weak and oppressed persons undertaking a fraught journey to better their own lives, most black goldseekers who came by the overland trail seldom traveled alone or in all-black groups. Many African Americans actually made the journey in racially mixed trains where whites were

---

[34] Alvin Aaron Coffey, *Autobiography and Reminiscence of Alvin Aaron Coffey* (Mills Seminary P. O., 1901). The Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco.
[35] de Graaf et al., *Seeking El Dorado*, 8.
[36] Margaret A. Frink, *Adventures of a Party of California Gold Seekers* (Oakland: Ledyard Frink, 1897), 92, quoted in Coleman, "African American Women and Community Development," in de Graaf et al., *Seeking El Dorado*, 101.
[37] Howard L. Scamehorn, *Buckeye Rovers in the Gold Rush* (Athens, GA, 1965), 5, quoted in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 21.

the majority.[38] John, a black barber from Kentucky who claimed that his owner had "left" him, was part of such a group. Besides barbering for a Texan mule-back party, John also cooked and drove the pack animals in return for food and his own mount in the band. In the same train was also Dick, a servant to a Captain A. Powell. Benjamin Butler Harris, the white man who later wrote the memoir of the travel, remembered that Dick had been "a Negro loved by all."[39] White travelers, however, did not usually record black companions by name unless they were involved in special or interesting events. In most cases, accounts of African Americans on the trail looked more like the following: "A number of packed pedestrians (nine white and one black), and three ox wagons, passed on"; "Colonel Bonner's party for California have arrived consisting of 7 whites and 6 blacks"; or "Big mule teams from Tennessee used black drivers all the way to California."[40]

While there are many white memoirs and journals describing the route to gold, the autobiographic account of Alvin A. Coffey stands out for its rare direct insight into the experiences of an enslaved black man on the overland trail and in the California mines. Fifty-two years after he made the journey with his owner Bassett, Coffey left a memoir to the Society of California Pioneers, the only black contribution in its collection. On April 2, 1849, Coffey, Bassett, and their team of twenty wagons had started out from St. Louis, Missouri. There were three to five men in each wagon, and Bassett's vehicle led the way.

---

[38] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 25.
[39] Benjamin Butler Harris, *The Gila Trail: The Texas Argonauts and the California Gold Rush*, Richard H. Dillon ed. (Norman, Okl.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 78.
[40] Joseph Goldsborough Bruff, Ruth Louise Gaines, and Georgia Willis Read, *Gold Rush: Journals, Drawings and Other Papers of J. Goldsborough Bruff, Captain, Washington City and California Mining Ass'n, April 2, 1849 – July 20, 1851*, vol. I. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), 252; "The Journal of John Lowery Brown of the Cherokee Nation en Route to California in 1850," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 12 (1934), 183; 9 August 1849, *Era*; and L. C. McKeeby, memoirs, typescript copy, Beinecke Library, quoted in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 25-26.

As they started out on the long journey, Bassett and his team were aware that there were several trains traveling ahead of them on the trail. Every night, teams of three men took turns standing guard in six-hour shifts against theft, wild animals, and possible clashes with Native Americans while the others slept. Coffey and two white men stood guard the first evening up until midnight, when the next team came to relieve them of their duty.[41]

Various difficulties met these overland travelers, including illness, crippling of oxen, breakdown of wagons, theft, and sometimes hostile encounters with Native Americans. Coffey's team also had a death by cholera early in the trip, when a man who had stood the six o'clock guard in the morning fell ill and died four hours later. When news reached them that people were "dying by the hundreds in St. Joe and St. Louis," Dr. Bassett, who led the head of the train, urged the men to "drive day and night" until they were out of the reach of the epidemic. Luckily, Coffey's train did not have any more incidences of the disease.[42] While Coffey was an excellent driver, watchful of the physical conditions of the oxen and making sure to rest them when necessary, many were not as competent to drive animals thousands of miles across unknown territory. Indeed, Coffey noted that many an "ignorant ox driver broke down a good many oxen," ending up abandoning their wagons and leaving "tons upon tons of bacon and other provisions" on the road as they doubled up with others.[43]

Native American tribes on the route to California did not always interrupt passing wagon trains; some were even hospitable. Nevertheless, overland travelers were sometimes attacked, as was the case for the free black man Peter Powers and his company of wagons in 1857. At Gravelford on the Humboldt River, Native Americans

---

[41] Coffey, *Autobiography,* 46.
[42] Coffey, *Autobiography*, 46.
[43] Coffey, *Autobiography*, 47.

raided Powers and his men, and a Mr. Marten lost three hundred head of cattle. Luckily, only one man in Powers's train was wounded, and the tribe retreated without inflicting further damage.[44] No group was blameless for the distrust and hostilities that arose between Native Americans on one side and black and white gold seekers on the other. In fact, it was sometimes the aggressive actions of white and black gold seekers that instigated and fueled such interactions. Captain Joseph Goldsborough Bruff, later to work for Washington City and California Mining Association, rode the overland trail in 1849 and arrived in California by 1850. On August 11, 1850, he noted that "near sun set, Nicholas, [James] Marshall, and Andy [a black man in his team], rode off, to visit the indian village above. … They returned, at night intoxicated, and tell how that they reached the village and found the males all absent, and caught a Squaw, who offered them roots, willow baskets, &c if they would not molest her, but that they successively, did molest her."[45] Historian A. Odell Thurman noted that "such was the conduct of black and white alike, on the trail, in their relationships to the Indians, and is the type of aggressiveness for much of the trouble between emigrants and Indians."[46]

Among themselves, however, travelers tended to be kind to one another. En route to California in 1849, Bruff had an encounter with a colored couple on the trail who offered him food and drink while the broken wheels of a wagon in his train were being fixed. "Under the shade of some large willows, was a wagon & tent, -- and a colored man and woman; on going up, I had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of Mr. Pickering and lady, from St. Louis. … Being very hungry and fatigued, I accepted their polite

---

[44] *Souvenir & Directory of Prominent Afro-Americans on the Pacific Coast* (San Francisco, California: Valleau & Peterson, printers, [1890]), 45. California Historical Society.
[45] Bruff, Gaines, and Read, *Gold Rush*, 818, quoted in A. Odell Thurman, "The Negro in California before 1890" (Thesis, College of the Pacific, 1945), 24. Emphasis as in original.
[46] A. Odell Thurman, "The Negro in California," 24.

invitation [to lunch], and [had] a cup of good coffee, with milk."[47] The hospitality was also offered the other way around, although probably not on the terms of equality as shown by Pickering and his wife to the fatigued Bruff. Benjamin Harris remembered how one day John, the black barber in the Texan band, left the pack mules to Harris and fell back behind the team. The train went on, camping at San Xavier for the night. When other travelers arrived at the site, they reported that they had seen John "perishing by the roadside of thirst." Although initially alarmed, Harris and his companions soon learned that when they added up the amount of water given John by each different traveler, John had had more than two gallons to drink! Indeed, John arrived "in fine condition about dusk, chock-full of horrible experiences for the "marines.""[48]

Other routes to California involved overseas travel, either around Cape Horn or through the Isthmus of Panama. Many free black travelers originating from the East coast, especially from the New England region or from New York, took these routes. Since those in the eastern coastal regions were often already familiar with seafaring vessels as modes of transportation and also as places for work, New Englanders and New Yorkers preferred to travel by sea than by land. The route around Cape Horn had special merit in the winter, when turbulent weather and freezing temperatures made overland travel dangerous despite the shorter distance.[49] Although no firsthand black journal or memoir of a trip around the Cape Horn survives today, there is evidence that some African Americans did come this way. On September 4, 1930, Elizabeth Venable, a resident of Oakland, California, wrote to the Standard Oil Company to apply for a "49er Certificate,"

---

[47] Bruff, Gaines and Read, *Gold Rush*, 45-46, quoted in A. Odell Thurman, "The Negro in California," 22.
[48] Harris, *The Gila Trail*, 78.
[49] Raymond A. Rydell, *Cape Horn to the Pacific: The Rise and Decline of an Ocean Highway* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), 111.

which the company was apparently issuing to those who could prove that their ancestors had come to California during the Gold Rush era. She wanted to give it as a gift to her great-grandson Albert Warren Kingsbury as a keepsake, so that he could cherish his familial legacy. In her letter, Venable explained that she was the daughter of Anne Fuller, a black stewardess who served "on board vessels coming around the Horn (Cape Horn)." Fuller had first come to San Francisco in 1852, and returned again in 1854, on both trips as a ship stewardess. She married John R. Landeway in San Francisco in September, 1855. Together they returned to New Jersey, travelling through the Isthmus of Panama, and had two children: Elizabeth and a son, who died young. In 1863, the family moved back to San Francisco, this time to stay. Elizabeth married in Vallejo, California, in 1876; by September,1930, she was living in Oakland, having lived "in this State 67 years last April."[50] Mary Ellen Pleasant, the well known entrepreneur and civil rights activist of San Francisco, may also have come around Cape Horn from Boston.[51]

More frequent were trips made through the Isthmus of Panama. Since the Panama Canal was not built until 1914, taking the Panama route meant boarding a ship for Chagres or Aspinwall, Panama, landing sites on the eastern side of the isthmus, then proceeding overland to Panama City on the other side, so that they could board another ship bound for San Francisco.[52] Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, who would later gain fame for his dedication to black education in California, was one of many black travelers who came through this way. Having started out from New Bedford, Massachusetts and taken a

---

[50] John R. Landeway File, Biography Collection. California Historical Society.
[51] Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 47. Historian Lynn M. Hudson, however, in *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 29-31, argues that more likely Pleasant started out from New Orleans, not Boston, and took the steamer *Oregon* to reach California via Panama, rather than around Cape Horn.
[52] Aspinwall is present day Colón.

ship from Boston for Panama, Sanderson arrived in San Francisco aboard the steamer *Sonora* in 1854.[53] Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, another prominent black activist, also sailed from New York for Aspinwall, and, once on the other side of the isthmus, boarded the *Golden Gate* to San Francisco.[54] James Williams, a lesser known once-enslaved man who had run away from his owner in 1838 from Elkton, Maryland at just thirteen years of age, likewise set out for California from New York in 1851. Williams's case is especially significant, because it shows California as a destination for fugitive enslaved persons at least as desirable as Canada, a more famous safe haven from American slavery. Although Williams had no money of his own, nor wealthy relations who could provide for his fare, he still chose California over Canada as the ultimate solution to evade recapture by his ex-owner. Canada "was so cold; at least, from what I had heard, I had come to the belief that it was so cold I could not live there at all," Williams recalled. "Hearing such bad reports of starvation and knowing that I was poor, I concluded that I would go to California."[55] The promise of easier access to profitable enterprise in California than in Canada, together with a milder climate and the great distance from Maryland, lured the fugitive Williams to the far western state rather than farther up north.

Dreams of gold and freedom meant that travelers had to have initial capital to pay for the fare. Some men organized companies to defray the costs of the voyage, the freight, and the mining equipment. In February, 1849, sixteen white "young men from Worcester,

---

[53] Jana Noel, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Educator and Organizer for the Rights of "Colored Citizens" in Early California," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Spring, 2005), 151. It is not clear where Noel is getting the name of the ship, for the letters in the Jeremiah Burke Sanderson Papers collection at the Bancroft Library, which Noel cites, do not contain the information.

[54] Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1968), 38-39; Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 52.

[55] James Williams, *Life and Adventures of James Williams, a Fugitive Slave, with a Full Description of the Underground Rail Road*, Fourth Ed. (San Francisco: Women's Union Book and Job Printing Office, 1874), 24.

Massachusetts" made their arrival in New York City. Before starting out, they had "organized into a company to trade and mine in California." In New York City, they proceeded to buy mining equipment for "several thousand dollars," very likely from specialized shops such as the "California Outfit Depot" run by Arnold Buffum at 11 Park Row, New York City. These shops sold equipment such as the "Gold Borer" and the "Gold-Saving Creviced Ravine," devices which they advertised as "the most perfect apparatus for taking up gold from river beds 20 feet under water."[56] Having completed their outfit, the Worcester company sent the cargo on a ship around Cape Horn, while they themselves sailed out on the *Northerner* for Chagres on the first day of March.[57] In November, 1849, a company of ten black men also set out from New York for California. Among the members were prominent abolitionists, including journalist Jonas H. Townsend and Newport Henry, an employee in the firm of the Tappan brothers, famous antislavery activists.[58] The company gained a degree of notoriety when white newspapers around the nation decided to print critical remarks on the enterprise. The *New Orleans Picayune*, noting that "some merchants of New York have formed an association of colored men for the purpose of mining in California," remarked that it "will prove rather a bad speculation … as the constitution of California prohibits the immigration of free negroes." The *Daily Alta California*, a widely read newspaper in San Francisco, mused that while the *Picayune* was misinformed about the California constitution, it nevertheless "rather suspect[ed] that the association will not hold together long after its arrival here." While the Californian editors did not spell out a reason for their gloomy prediction, the title with which they headed the article told of their racialized criteria: "A

---

[56] See advertisements in 22 November 1849, 3 January 1850, and 21 February 1850, *The National Era*.
[57] 20 April 1849, *North Star*.
[58] 21 November 1849, *New York Tribune*, quoted in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 13.

BLACK CARGO."[59]

While some African Americans viewed the Gold Rush as a joint enterprise, most black Forty-Niners traveled individually to California, as did Jeremiah Sanderson, Mifflin Gibbs, or James Williams. In some rare cases, people with no capital managed to hire themselves throughout the entire journey to cover travel expenses. When Williams found that he did not have enough money to board a vessel to his chosen land of freedom, he haunted the seaside docks in hopes of finding employment aboard a ship bound for Panama. His chance came when "standing on the wharf one day and looking at a steamer that was going to California, the second pastry-cook backed out, and I agreed to take his place."[60] On March 3, 1851, Williams finally glided out of the New York harbor aboard the steamer *North America*. In his heart beat hopes not only for California gold, but for the ultimate freedom from the ever present threat of re-enslavement. On board he found seven other black men, some of whom, Williams remembered, had "plenty of money."[61]

Once he arrived at Chagres, Williams quit his position on the ship, "picked up a pillow-case, and put half a ham in it and two loaves of bread, and started over the side of the ship with it into a boat, and went on shore."[62] Chagres was at that time the main landing port for California-bound passengers. In 1849, Howard C. Gardiner, a white gold seeker who passed through the village en route to California, described Chagres as a small town containing forty to fifty houses that were "rather huts of primitive construction, thatched with palm leaves."[63] The town seemed not to have developed

---

[59] 31 January 1850, *Daily Alta California*.
[60] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 24-25.
[61] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 24-25.
[62] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 25.
[63] Howard C. Gardiner, *In Pursuit of the Golden Dream: Reminiscences of San Francisco and the Northern and Southern Mines, 1849-1857*, Dale L. Morgan ed. (Stoughton, Massachusetts: Western Hemisphere, Inc., 1970), 34.

rapidly; a year later, to the eyes of another white traveler Samuel Francis Marryat, Chagres still presented a sight "far from inviting" to the passengers arriving from the eastern ports of the United States.[64] Like most other travelers, Williams probably stayed in Chagres for about three or four days before starting up the Chagres River to reach the other side of the isthmus. Borrowing ten dollars from a white man from California at Chagres, Williams managed to buy the fare to take the boat up the Chagres River.[65] Notwithstanding the oppressive heat and the swarm of fleas that sapped the strengths of travelers day and night, the passage up the Chagres River was usually uneventful.[66] Once the river journey ended, Williams borrowed money again from Mr. Agner, a fellow white passenger who had been on the boat. He struck out for Panama City with a couple of mules and two horses, where he hoped to board a steamer to California. To earn money for the steamer fare, he procured a temporary position as a porter at the American Hotel for seventy-five dollars a month. Williams also ran errands for Mr. Agner to pay for his accommodations while he stayed at the hotel.[67]

When it was time for the steamer *Republic* to sail for San Francisco, "one man of dark complexion" – whether or not this man was black, Williams does not clarify – helped Williams get a position on board under the head steward. Although the steward did not entirely approve of Williams, the captain listened to Mr. Agner's recommendations and allowed Williams to work for both the head steward and a doctor on board.[68] Williams had actually been incredibly lucky to board a ship. Borthwick, who

---

[64] Frank Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills, or Recollections of a Burnt Journal* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855. Reprint. Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, [c1952]), 13.
[65] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 25.
[66] Gardiner, *In Pursuit of the Golden Dream*, 35.
[67] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 25-26.
[68] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 27-29.

also made the trip in May, 1851, remembered that "every steamer to leave panama, for months to come, was already full, and that hundreds of men were waiting there to take advantage of any opportunity that might occur of reaching San Francisco."[69] In fact, the company of sixteen young men from Worcester actually gave up the entire enterprise at Panama City, because they became "certain that no chance [was] available to go to San Francisco." Not only did they find the heat in Panama City "insufferable" and "Lizards, ants, gallinippers, scorpions" crawling everywhere, but they found "about 1,200" Americans milling around in town, with five hundred more at Gorgona, a village close by, all "waiting for transport to California." Travelers had been waiting for "weeks and months" in great distress, "some out of money, sick, dying." The *California*, the vessel that was supposed to have arrived by March 13th, was still not there by the 23rd. The rainy season was coming on, adding onto the misery. The disheartened young men could take it no longer. Although their equipment, which had cost them thousands of dollars, was on its way to California around Cape Horn, the Worcester company broke up and returned to New York.[70]

Once Williams boarded the *Republic*, it took four weeks to reach San Francisco from Panama City, during which it survived a gale.[71] Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, who rode the *Golden Gate* to San Francisco, also remembered that they had had a "stormy passage." By the time the *Golden Gate* pulled into San Francisco in September, 1850, Gibbs recorded that "the top of smoke stack" of the steamer had been "encrusted with the salt of the waves" because of the turbulence, and that the "paddle wheel [was] broken and

---

[69] Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 6.
[70] 20 April 1849, *North Star*, copying a letter from the *New York Tribune*.
[71] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 27-29.

otherwise disabled."[72] Although Williams felt the trip to have been lengthier than expected, it was not unusual for the Panama-San Francisco trip to take longer than a month. In the early summer of 1850, Samuel F. Marryat's passage in "a small barque" took forty-five days. Marryat, a white man, recalled five years later that it had been a harrowing experience, being "cooped up … with one hundred and seventy-five passengers, of whom one hundred and sixty were noisy, quarrelsome, discontented, and dirty in the extreme. … Quarrels were of daily occurrence; there was a great deal of knife-drawing and threatening, but no *bloodshed*, and this was probably attributable to the fact that there was no spirit on board."[73] Not all ships, of course, carried as many passengers. John D. Borthwick, who took another bark for San Francisco in 1851, rode with "about forty" others on board, had "ample cabin accommodation," and felt that they "were so far comfortable enough."[74]

Although Williams and Gibbs do not mention any other serious dangers during the journey than the weather, disease was also a factor to be wary of on a vessel from Panama to San Francisco. William Tell Coleman, a white passenger who was on the California bound steamer *Tennessee* in January, 1853, remembered the nightmarish breakout of yellow fever during the voyage that had caused high-pitched panic and led ultimately to the insanity of the ship surgeon. "Between thirty and forty poor unfortunates" died before the steamer reached San Francisco.[75] Only the concerted relief efforts of an unnamed "free colored man, who had been long with my [Coleman's] wife's family, and who was coming to California to better his condition," together with an

---

[72] Gibbs, *Shadow and Light*, 39.
[73] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills*, 28-29.
[74] Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 34.
[75] William Tell Coleman, "William Tell Coleman Reminiscence: [undated]. typed transcript," 4. California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA.

apothecary named Spofford and Coleman himself, helped calm the frantic and scared passengers and keep order and cleanliness on the stricken ship. Throughout the passage, the three men worked together to care for the sick and the dying, encouraged the frightened travelers, cordoned off disease-ridden sections of the ship, and created new rules to prevent the rampant spread of the fever.[76]

As vessels entered the San Francisco Bay, hearts on board were thudding loudly with expectation. They could feel the long and difficult journey finally culminating as they flew "past the 'Golden Gate' rocks that guard[ed] the harbor's mouth."[77] Nevertheless, the sight that greeted their eyes was often not exactly inviting. San Francisco was often blanketed by fog and mist throughout the year, especially during the winter months. Even during summer, the sky was often overcast and the landscape barren. Marryat, who probably arrived in May or June of 1850, admitted that the first scenes that greeted the eyes of the passengers who were entering the San Francisco Bay, with its "rugged cliffs and round, gravelly, grassless hills, that extend on either side," definitely needed "a little sunshine to give a cheerful look." Dismal-looking natural surroundings were not the only letdowns. San Francisco, and in fact all the towns in the Bay area and in the mining regions, were time and again plagued by fire. As Marryat's bark pulled into the bay, he and the one hundred seventy-five passengers found themselves amidst "dense masses of smoke rolling to leeward; the town and shipping are almost undistinguishable, for we have arrived at the moment of the great June Fire of 1850, and San Francisco is again in ashes!"[78] Nevertheless, the damp fog, chilly air, billowing smoke, bare cliffs and hills, and the sight of scorched shacks and streets could not extinguish the ardor that burned

---

[76] Coleman, "Reminiscence," 3.
[77] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills*, 31.
[78] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills*, 30-31.

inside the breasts of the new arrivals. Marryat remembered that even with the disheartening scenery all around them, "quarrels were now forgotten, and each heart beat high with expectation, for now was in sight that for which many had left wives and children, farms and homesteads, in hopes, of course, of something better in a land so favored as undoubtedly was this before us."[79]

The hearts of enslaved persons arriving in San Francisco often beat with no less excitement than did those of free gold seekers. Many enslaved African Americans knew that their white owners were as nervous about bringing them into California as they were eager to arrive there. Not only was California a free state with a mixed population from both North and the South, but unlike the other the free states of the North, it had the advantage of a vast geography yet little explored and largely unknown. It was true that slaveholders and proslavery politicians tried in many ways to perpetuate and protect the use of slave labor in California. As historian Stacey L. Smith illustrates, not only did proslavery southerners institute hostile laws such as the California fugitive slave law of 1852, but they also tried to defy the geographical and demographical advantages that enslaved persons had in California by settling together in concentrated groups. This helped enslavers reconstruct a system of white community vigilance in the nominally free state, an effective guard against enslaved black resistance as well as abolitionist influence. White neighbors kept an eye out for the whereabouts of each others' enslaved persons, formed posses to catch runaways, and exercised various forms of violence upon enslaved persons who showed signs of discontent.[80] Thomas Lenoir Avery, for example, came with twelve enslaved black persons from North Carolina. He traveled with his uncle

---

[79] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills*, 30.
[80] Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 42-44.

Alexander Hamilton Erwin, who brought seven enslaved persons, and they settled together in Wood's Creek Diggings in Tuolumne County. At least four more relatives came from North Carolina with more enslaved persons and joined them at Wood's Creek. Later, when an "abolishness" man who was "prejudice[d] against … every one that had negroes here" tried to open a shop in the town, these North Carolinians boycotted his store and ruined his business.[81] Nevertheless, despite the best efforts of the slaveowners, enslaved and free African Americans in California used every means to evade, resist, and sometimes directly battle the proslavery efforts to subjugate them to the institution of slavery. Borthwick remembered that although "there were many slaves in various parts of the mines working with their masters," it was common belief that "California is a free State, a slave, when once taken there by his master, became free by law." All the legal and community efforts to keep enslaved persons bound could not completely dissolve the slaveholders' dread that men and women would still grasp their best opportunity for liberty. "No man" therefore, Borthwick remembered, "would bring a slave to the country, unless one on whose fidelity he could depend."[82] And too often, what white enslavers had taken for fidelity turned out to be a well calculated veneer for ultimate resistance.

In an effort to bind their enslaved men and women to themselves in a free land, many slaveholders worked out a contract before they left their hometown. These arrangements usually included a certain number of years the enslaved person would provide labor for the owner, and/or a certain amount of money for the price of freedom if

---

[81] W. P. Robinson to George P. Dodson, 18 May 1852, folder 2, subcollection 2, Thomas Parks Collection of Parks and McElrath Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, quoted in Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 44. For information on Avery and his relatives, see Edward W. Phifer, "Saga of a Burke County Family: Part II," *The North Carolina Historical Review* vol. 39, no. 2 (April, 1962); and Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 42-44.
[82] Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 164.

the person should try to purchase it in California. Drawing up contracts with enslaved persons was not actually a novel idea. Although slaves had no legal agency to make contracts, some slaveholders still resorted to this device when they wanted to take their enslaved persons into free states or territories, and southern courts upheld the contracts. Even before Illinois gained statehood in 1818, slaveholders had brought enslaved men and women into Illinois Territory under such long-term agreements. Those who took their enslaved persons to Mexican Texas also forced people to work for them under contract, despite the fact that Mexico outlawed slavery.[83] In a similar way, slaveholders hoped to legally bind their enslaved people under contract in California. Not only did the contract spell out the term of service to be rendered, but even when the man or woman sought freedom, the slaveholder could garner an extra thousand dollars for the price of liberty.

Although these contracts weighed heavily in the slaveowner's favor, enslaved persons were not entirely deprived of all advantages, very likely because enslaved persons themselves exercised some leverage. Whether or not either party mentioned it out loud, both parties knew, implicitly, that enslaved persons might abscond. The threat seemed especially potent when considering migration into a distant and vast state, one with an extremely fluid and isolated population interspersed with northerners. When J. D. Stephens from Missouri decided to join the Gold Rush in 1854, he wanted Basil Campbell, a person he had recently purchased for twelve hundred dollars, to accompany him to the mines and help with the digging. Before starting out they made an agreement, which stated that once they arrived in California, Campbell would work for Stephens for

---

[83] Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 57; Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 380-85.

ten years. If Campbell paid Stephens a hundred dollars per year, Stephens would relinquish all rights to Campbell's person after the term of service. Campbell must have pushed Stephens further, for the contract added that if Campbell paid the remainder of the money in less than ten years, Stephens must set him free.[84] Likewise, Elijah Jennings, an enslaved person held by Rhoda and Thomas J. Maxwell in Missouri, also struck out for California in 1856 under the agreement that he would work for them ten years, after which he would receive his freedom.[85] In a similar strain, George Washington Dennis, an enslaved person from Mobile, Alabama, accompanied the slave trader Green Dennis in 1848 under the promise that he would be given "his legal freedom" if George would help Green and his three friends establish a hotel in San Francisco, and pay him a thousand more dollars to seal the deal.[86]

While slaveholders thought that they were using the contract as a device to force enslaved persons to continue rendering slave labor in a free state, enslaved persons often worked on their own agenda to achieve what they valued the most. Many enslaved persons knew that they could run away from their enslavers much more easily in California than back in southern communities. If they had not already overheard white southerners discussing their worries over slaveholding prospects in California, some people heard while they were on the way to the Golden State. When Thompson and her son from Kanawa, West Virginia decided to migrate to California in 1856, they wanted to take Jane Elizabeth Whiting and her three children with them. The group boarded a

---

[84] *Memorial and Biographical History of Northern California, Illustrated: Containing a History of this Important Section of the Pacific Coast from the Earliest Period of its Occupancy to the Present Time, together with Glimpses of its Prospective Future; Full-Page Steel Portraits of its Most Eminent Men, and Biographical Mention of Many of its Pioneers and also of Prominent Citizens of To-day* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1891), 323-24. The same biography is also in *The Illustrated Atlas and History of Yolo County, California* (San Francisco: De Pue & Co., 1879).
[85] *The Illustrated Atlas and History of Yolo County*, 90.
[86] Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 5.

steamer at New Orleans, hoping to settle on a ranch in Petaluma, California. On the ship to California, however, was a man from New Bedford, David Johnson, traveling with a white abolitionist friend. Whiting befriended Johnson and the white companion, and together they laid out a plan of liberation once they reached California. The plan succeeded: Whiting and her children hid themselves in a black boardinghouse in San Francisco, and with the help of the free black community in the city, evaded recapture despite the five-week search that Thompson and her son put on.[87] While Whiting was able to make the leap for freedom more easily because she had all her children with her, many enslaved men and women had left families in slavery back home. Running away alone and severing themselves from their enslavers was often not the best way to achieve the ultimate goal: freedom for the other members of her/his family. Even though freedom felt so near and tangible in the Golden State, many enslaved persons still decided to keep the contract as a way to protect the values they most cherished.[88] This was the choice of many like Henry Valle, who had come from Fredericktown, Mississippi with his owner. After paying $2,500 for his own freedom, he raised $2,200 more to make his wife a free woman as well.[89] Some enslaved persons also preferred to earn a legal freedom than to become a fugitive on the run, perpetually hiding from anyone who might have known him or her as a slave in a southern state. When Sandy, Robbin and Carter, three men who were held by Carter Perkins, a slaveholder from Mississippi, tried to claim their own freedom by running away, their owner quickly issued a warrant for their arrest. Using the

---

[87] Delilah Leontium Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California Archive in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, in Berkeley; and from the Diaries, Old Papers, and Conversations of Old Pioneers in the State of California* (Los Angeles, California, 1919), 91-92.
[88] For a discussion of how enslaved persons weighed their options of running away versus staying with their owners in light of their familial statuses, see Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 45.
[89] Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers*, 71.

Fugitive Slave Law, Perkins successfully regained control over his unruly enslaved men, forcing them to return with him to the South.[90]

African Americans also knew how fickle slaveholders could be, and without a written contract and legal proof of freedom, they were well aware that slaveholders could easily renege on their words even after they initially allowed their enslaved persons to go free in California. Many slaveholders did, in fact, try to re-enslave people who thought they were free. Stephen Spencer Hill came to California in 1849 with Wood Tucker from Arkansas to work in the mines. When they finished work in 1853, Tucker returned alone to Arkansas. According to Hill, he had paid Tucker the price of his freedom and received his liberation papers on April 1st, 1853. After Tucker left, Hill lived in Tuolumne County and bought 160 acres of land on "gently rolling, well watered slopes." He cleared forty acres, planted wheat and barley, and raised animals. He was also successful in mining, as evidenced by an article in the *Columbia Gazette* on April 1st, 1854: "On 'Steve's claim, at Gold Spring, a beautiful specimen was taken out, weight 9 ounces, pure gold." Trouble came when Owen R. Rozier, an old friend of Tucker, arrived on Hill's ranch on March 27st, 1854. Seeing Hill's flourishing estate, Rozier claimed that he did not believe Tucker had ever freed Hill. Rozier sent word to Tucker describing Hill's properties in California. When Tucker heard Rozier's account, he decided to authorize Rozier to recapture Hill, confiscate his property, and bring Hill back to Arkansas under the Fugitive Slave Law. Hill, after just a year of sweet freedom, was forced to abandon his estate and go into

[90] "In the Matter of Carter Perkins on Habeas Corpus," 1852, WPA #3285, California Supreme Court. Also see Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, Mrs. Ralph C. H. Catterall ed. (New York, Octagon Books, 1968 [Origin. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution, 1926-1937. 5 v. Publication no. 374 of the Carnegie Institution]), v. 5, 331-32.

hiding to escape recapture.[91]

While a prior agreement for freedom was not always a guarantee, some enslaved African Americans used community knowledge of the contract to try to force slaveowners to honor their word. Entering into contract before they left home and publicizing the contents meant the involvement of not just the two directly interested parties, but of members of the entire community in the understanding of the conditions and the outcomes of the arrangement. In the case of Daniel Rodgers, an enslaved person who accompanied his owner from Arkansas in 1849 to California via the overland route, the role of home community knowledge in enforcing his freedom was especially pronounced. The owner had promised Rodgers his liberation papers if Rodgers paid him a thousand dollars while working for him in the California mines. Before they left Arkansas, Rodgers took great care to make sure that everyone in the neighborhood, especially the prominent white planters, knew of the agreement between himself and his owner. Once in California, Rodgers raised the sum by spending all his spare time and evenings juggling multiple jobs, as was often the case with enslaved persons who wished to purchase their own freedom. Rodgers paid the full thousand dollars, but when the time came for the owner to return to Arkansas, he broke his word and dragged Rodgers back with him. Back in their home state, Rodgers enlisted the power of community knowledge to aid his cause. He mustered fourteen white planters who knew of the previous agreement, and who were consequently outraged at both the violation of the conditions and the fact that the honor of the white man's word had not been upheld, if only to a slave. These planters actually went so far as to raise the money to buy Rodgers's freedom a

[91] Carlo M. De Ferrari ed., *Gold Spring Diary: The Journal of John Jolly*, first ed. (Sonora, California: Tuolumne County Historical Society, 1966), 126-39, which includes "A Brief History of Stephen Spencer Hill, Fugitive from Labor," by Carlo M. De Ferrari.

second time, and draw up the following certificate: "Dardanell, Yell Co., Ark. April 30, 1859. We the undersigned citizens of Yell County, Arkansas, having been personally acquainted with the bearer, Daniel Rodgers, a free man of color, for many years past and up to the present time, take pleasure in certifying to his character for honesty, industry and integrity; also as a temperate and peaceful man, and one worthy of trust and confidence of all philanthropic and good men wherever he may go."[92]

Once in California, enslaved persons who entered into contract with their owners were again very vocal about the contents of the agreement. Enslaved miners told the white people they met in the workplace of the contract that they had drawn up with their slaveholders, and explained how they planned to keep it to the letter. When they paid the required sum for freedom, enslaved persons again tried to involve other white miners in the transaction, as well as to secure a written proof of the deed. All of these actions, of course, were calculated to enlist the power of community knowledge on their side, this time in California. On April 19, 1853, Lewis Taylor took A. G. Simpson, a white miner, to the county clerk to testify on his behalf. "Sometime in the Spring or sumer of the year A. D. 1851, there came to Ophir, Butte County, California, a man caling himselph Samuls, who said that he had control of a Collered man called Lewis Taylor, and that the said Taylor was to work for the said Samuls, … for one yeare," Simpson consequently testified. "After the said Taylor working about six month he made an agreement with the said Samuls that he should be a free man if the said Taylor would pay … the sum of five Hundred Dollars." By "the spring or sumer of 1851," Taylor had succeeded in

[92] Document was still in possession of the Rodgers family when Sue Bailey Thurman wrote *Pioneers of Negro Origin* in 1949. The document was signed by: Robert E. Walters, George Williams, Joseph Miles, W. H. Spirey, L. D. Parish, George L. Kimble, Samuel Dickens, Haunis A. Hawill, A. Ferril, James A. Baird, William A. Ross, C. M. Mundock, A. H. Fulton, Joseph P. Williams, B. I. Jacoway. Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 17-18.

accumulating "the sum of five Hundred Dollars of good cleen Gold Dust." Instead of paying "Samuls" himself, however, Taylor entrusted the gold dust to Simpson, and asked him to pay Samuls on his behalf. Samuls objected: "I advised him not to do so because the said Samuls could not showe any wright to receve it." Nevertheless, Taylor "insisted that I should pay him which I did."[93] As Taylor had wished, Simpson was convinced that Taylor had not only confirmed himself a free man by contract, but was also the more honorable and law-abiding of the two parties. Two years after he paid for his freedom, perhaps because he had occasion to feel his free status threatened, Taylor put the white miner's knowledge to use when he had the transaction officially recorded by the county clerk in 1853.

While in most cases owners accompanied their enslaved persons, bondspeople were sometimes sent alone to mine in California. Edna Bryan Buckbee, who wrote the history of Gold Rush era Tuolumne County in 1935, described the experiences of a Tom Gilman, an enslaved man from Tennessee. A "polite, friendly and obliging young Negro," Gilman had been sent by Thomas Gilman, a planter in Mt. Pleasant, Tennessee, in 1850 to go and dig alone in the mines. Thomas had been apparently dubious of the prospects of success in the gold mines, for he promised Tom that "liberty [would be] given him with the very first gold that he might unearth in the mines of California." When Tom arrived in California, he went up to the Dragoon Gulch and found a sizeable claim there. Having gathered an initial sum, he immediately forwarded it to Thomas back in Tennessee. The sweet taste of gold, however, proved too strong for the Tennessee planter to carry out their prior agreement. He demanded that Tom forward gold a second

---

[93] Quoted in George C. Mansfield, *History of Butte County, California, with Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County Who Have Been Identified with its Growth and Development from the Early Days to the Present* (Los Angeles, California: Historic Record Co., 1918), 227.

time to obtain his freedom. Tom obliged again, but still unable to make himself honor his word, the greedy owner sent a letter to Tom on June 29th, 1855, urging him to come back to Tennessee. He even reminded Tom of the promise he had made "to take care of him in his old age," a promise that Tom could not remember ever having made.[94] Before Tom made any decisions, however, he made sure that everyone around him knew what was going on. He told fellow white miners that he thought it might be better to acquiesce his inconsistent owner, than to flee and perhaps get embroiled in a fugitive slave lawsuit. Obviously, Tom was not only making sure that they knew he had already paid more than double the original sum for his freedom, but also carefully weighing their reactions to see if they were people who would support him if he decided to stay in California. When he saw that his white friends actively dissuaded him from returning to Tennessee, Tom decided to take his chance at freedom. Tom remained in California until his death in 1911.[95]

While enslaved people were adept at using white community knowledge to secure their freedom, the aid of free black communities across northern California proved indispensable. Peter Lester, a black abolitionist from Philadelphia who came to California in 1850, invited enslaved African Americans to his home and gave lectures on their rights and urged them to take their chance at freedom. "When they left," Lester wrote to the *Pennsylvania Freeman* in December, 1850, "we had them strong in the spirit of freedom. They were leaving [slavery] every day."[96] Free African Americans were so vigilant against enslaved persons being sent back to the South that a laughable incident resulted in

---

[94] Buckbee quotes from the letter, which he explains as "faded and yellowish, is still among 'Nigger' Tom's relics at the Mississippi House, in Shaw's Flat." Edna Bryan Buckbee, *The Saga of Old Tuolumne* (New York: The Press of the Pioneers, 1935), 308.
[95] Buckbee, *The Saga of Old Tuolumne*, 308-09.
[96] 5 December 1850, *Pennsylvania Freeman*, quoted in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 137.

San Francisco in October, 1851. When Robert J. Ennis and J. Lehan, black residents of San Francisco, saw an African American man being rushed onto a ship, they thought that slaveholders were forcing a fugitive man to return to the southern states. Chasing after the party, they actually "rescued" the black man - only to find out later in court that they had been mistaken.[97] William Parker and his wife, who had initially entered California as enslaved persons, recalled that Reverend Peter Cassey, Harriet Davis, and Mrs. White, prominent activists in the San Jose black community, had come to their aid when they sought freedom.[98] From Stockton, Jeremiah B. Sanderson, together with Mr. Minor and Robinson, went around San Joaquin County persuading enslaved persons to run away and offering their aid if they should decide to do so.[99] The free black communities of California were so devoted to the cause of freedom that a contemporary observer, a German traveler named Carl Meyer, remarked: "the wealthy California Negroes have become especially talented in such stealing. The negroes exhibit a great deal of energy and intelligence in saving their brethren."[100]

While the majority of enslaved persons brought to work in the mines were in their twenties and thirties, strong able men who could undertake the strenuous work in the hills, enslaved women and sometimes even children made the journey with the onset of the Gold Rush. Men like Washington, a seventeen-year-old "slight copper" colored miner

---

[97] 30 October 1851, *Daily Alta California*. The white man taking the black man aboard the ship was actually the constable, who was arresting the black man on charges of swindling upon the complaint of his captain or shipping master. The black man had received advance pay from the captain or shipping master, but had refused to get onto the ship.
[98] Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 92.
[99] Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 92.
[100] Carl Meyer, *Bound for Sacramento: Travel Pictures of a Returned Wanderer*, Ruth Frye Axe trans. (Claremont, Calif.: Saunders Studio Press, 1938), 144-45, quoted in de Graaf et al. eds., *Seeking El Dorado*, 9; also in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 137. See also endnote 10 in Quintard Taylor, Shirley Ann and Wilson Moore eds., *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 112.

belonging to Franklin Stewart of Arkansas, and Coffey, the twenty-seven-year-old companion to Dr. Bassett from Missouri, comprised the bulk of enslaved migrants to California in mid-nineteenth century.[101] Nevertheless, slaveholders also brought enslaved women, as did William Marr, who made Margaret accompany him to Placer County, California. There, he hired Margaret out to other people and earned money from her services.[102] James Williams, the fugitive man from Maryland, also remembered an enslaved woman in Sacramento City in 1852. He had tried to rescue her from the slaveholder and had provided her a hiding place in his home. The plan failed, however, because his relationship with the woman deteriorated.[103] In 1849, a white man ordered not only Sowarie Long but his wife as well to work in the mines. The two ultimately purchased their freedom and left their owner to build their home in San Jose.[104] Slaveowners sometimes brought even very young boys to assist in the mining work. W. W. Talley, who arrived in California in 1852 from Richmond, Virginia, was only five years old when he was set to work in the mines.[105]

The relationships between owners and their enslaved persons in California were, however, far cries from the picture of paternalistic southern ideal of master and slave, where the slave was supposedly obedient and happily dependent, while the master was benign, caring, and protective. When Peter Decker saw "Some Missourians [who] brought a negro a darkie to work here," he briefly sank into homesick reverie: "it reminds me of domestics at home." He was quick to disenchant himself, however. "But here every

---

[101] Document signed and certified by Charles Lindley, the clerk of Yuba City, May 4th, 1852. Quoted in Mansfield, *History of Butte County*, 226-27; Coffey, *Autobiography*, 48-52; also see Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 15.
[102] May 27, 1850, *Placer Times*. In May, 1850, Margaret married a black man named Lawrence who was living in Placer County. Cited in A. Odell Thurman, "The Negro in California," 32.
[103] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 31.
[104] Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers*, 71.
[105] *Souvenir & Directory of Prominent Afro-Americans*, 40.

man is on the same equal footing. … This is the land of men almost without children."[106] By children, of course, Decker was referring to more than just young people defined by biological age. He was talking about the classes of persons that nineteenth-century men believed to be in need of white male "protection": namely, biologically young children, women, and nonwhite colored persons. These so-called "children" were supposed to be inferior in mental abilities and therefore necessarily dependent on superior white males.[107] In California mines, however, this image of the dependent and helpless enslaved black men and women was directly challenged. Rather than a class that needed white paternalistic care, African American miners proved themselves often even more able and hardy than their white counterparts. When Marryat was staying in Vallejo, he met a southern slaveowner who had brought several enslaved men with him. Marryat watched one day as the slaveholder repeatedly cried out for "Bob," until finally a young man drew himself out from underneath a wagon where he had been taking a nap. Bob was apparently exasperated with the way the white man depended on him for every little thing, for he muttered, "Bob here, Bob there, Bob everywhere; b'lieve, by Gad, you couldn't come to California without Bob." The slaveholder became angry, and Bob, possibly foreseeing some form of retaliation, or perhaps to let the owner realize that he actually had the upper hand with the quality of his services and the threat of running away, left the site and refused to return for three days. When he did come back, Bob indeed "set himself to work so assiduously" that Marryat had to admit "it really did

---

[106] Peter Decker, *The Diaries of Peter Decker: Overland to California in 1849 and Life in the Mines, 1850-1851*, Helen S. Giffen ed. (Georgetown, Calif.: The Talisman Press, 1966), 210.
[107] For an argument concerning how "independent" southern white males needed inferior "dependents" to define their master status in a slave republic, see Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 4 (Mar., 1992); McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

appear as if nothing could be done without him."[108] Coffey, the thoughtful, intelligent young man who was well experienced with cattle during the overland journey, also proved a stronger worker than his owner. During their stay in California, Bassett continually fell ill and lay incapacitated as Coffey performed the bulk of labor.[109]

While there were owners who brought multiple enslaved persons to California, in many cases slaveholders brought no more than one. As historian Hubert H. Bancroft noted, in California the "master and slave from the southern states could be seen working and living together," and it was not the owner who was on top of the enslaved.[110] Of course, such small-scale slaveholding was not unique to California. In fact, the majority of white slaveowners across the South actually owned no more than a few slaves, and were used to a mobile life in pursuit of wealth farther out west.[111] In California, however, the relationship between the slaveholder and the enslaved developed more resemblances of the characters of a partnership, perhaps because both parties were usually young men of similar age with no other members of the family, and both shared the desire for gold. When Borthwick visited Hangtown, later to develop into Placerville, he found his friend, a doctor, digging up the ground inside his own cabin. When Borthwick asked what he was doing, the doctor told him an anecdote that provides insight into the relationship between an enslaved black miner and his owner in the mines. A young southerner had bought a cabin in town, and was working side by side "sharing equally the labours and hardships of the mines" with an enslaved man that he had brought with him. The black

---

[108] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills*, 251-52.
[109] Coffey, *Autobiography*, 48-52; Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 15.
[110] Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California* (Santa Barbara: W. Hebberd, 1884, 1963), VI, 227, quoted in A. Odell Thurman, "The Negro in California," 27.
[111] Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 40; see also James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

man persuaded his white owner to purchase another cabin, a certain one on the street, because he was sure from his dreams that there was gold buried underneath. Although dubious at first, the white man decided to listen to his partner and purchased the cabin. Their wildest dreams came true when they dug up the earth inside. By the time they finished, they had taken out gold dust worth twenty thousand dollars - at least, according to Borthwick's friend. The news had undoubtedly gotten exaggerated and perhaps distorted, but whatever the exact amount, the rumor was enough to set fire to the gold lust of many Hangtown residents. If gold was found under one cabin, why not under others? Thus when Borthwick visited, he found the Hangtown miners, including his own friend, upturning the ground inside their own cabins.[112]

The majority of African American migrants into the Golden State, however, were not enslaved but free. Although miner laws of the districts were often hostile toward black miners, some did successfully file and dig for gold in claims registered under their own names. Edward Booth, who was born in Washington, D. C. and lived in Baltimore, Maryland, with his family by 1848, came by the overland trail and arrived in California sometime in 1849. He filed a claim and found enough satisfaction, both economically and socially, to decide to bring the rest of his family to California. Returning to the East coast to fetch the rest of his family, he came back to California by way of Panama. They arrived in San Francisco in 1852, took a steamer to Sacramento, and set out again for the mines.[113] Moses Rodgers was even more successful as a miner. Although born a slave in Missouri, Rodgers gained his freedom and set out for California to try his fortune.

---

[112] Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 162-63.
[113] A. Odell Thurman, "The Negro in California," 23-27. Hearing of gold in Alaska, Booth later left California to go North. He stayed in Alaska until his death in 1900. Booth's life is also detailed in Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers*, 123.

Arriving sometime between 1848 and 1850, he headed "straight to the mines." Rodgers succeeded in securing several mining claims in his own name. He also purchased property in Hornitos, Mariposa County, and later became a well renowned mining expert and metallurgist, famous throughout the state as a mining engineer. The *Merced Star* reported: "A carload of machinery arrived at the depot last Friday … Moses Rodgers of Hornitos, than whom there is no better mining man in the state, has been engaged as its superintendent."[114] Early in 1850, the *Daily Alta California* also noted that "about four miles below Mormon Island, on the American River," "some colored gentlemen" had discovered "new diggings … which prove to yield exceedingly well."[115] This place became widely known as Negro Hill. In 1851 a second Negro Hill became famous in Calaveras County. When white miners drove a black miner away from the more lucrative spots, he proceeded to try his hand at a place where others believed there was no gold. Here the unnamed black miner and his partner struck it rich: "A couple of negroes who had been at work at the cayote diggings of Mokelumne Hill," reported the *Calaveras Chronicle*, "took out of one hole during the past four months" gold up to the amount of "eighty thousand dollars."[116]

---

[114] *The Merced Star*, quoted in Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 22.
For more examples of free black miners, see also the *Souvenir & Directory of Prominent Afro-Americans*, 31, which briefly describes the life of George W. Booth, who came to California in 1852 and worked as a miner for several years; Buckbee, *Old Tuolumne*, 329, for the account of Moses Dinks, who came to California in1852 and built a cabin between Jackass Hill and Tuttletown in Tuolumne County; David Brown Papers, The Bancroft Library at University of California at Berkeley, for the life of David Brown, a free black man from Ohio, in the mines. James Williams's *Life and Adventures*, 29-30, also tells of his nine-month stay in the mines, although he was not very successful as a miner. Also see June 10th, 1999, *The Star*, "Park Forest Resident Honor," a newspaper article; an unidentified newspaper article in the collection of black pioneers in the Society of California Pioneers containing an obituary for Clara Ann Steverson; and the Henry Hall Obituary from the San Joaquin Society of California Pioneers, in the collection of the Society of California Pioneers, for information on Henry Hall, who came to California in 1849 from Texas at the age of fourteen, and worked in the mines for a short time before engaging in a successful teaming business for twenty-five years.

[115] 12 February 1850, *Daily Alta California*.

[116] 18 October 1851, *Calaveras Chronicle*, quoted in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 53.

More often, free African American miners collaborated with white men to avoid the racially restrictive mining laws. Because many districts prohibited black men from filing claims, free black miners teamed up with white men who could secure claims more easily. Although some white men complained of black presence in the mines, many were actually quite willing to collaborate with a free black miner, especially if the black man was a strong worker. Reverend Sherlock Bristol came to the mines with a free black man named Isaac Isaacs, who was originally from New York. Although Bristol was overly patronizing in describing this partnership – "as colored men in those days had 'no rights which white men were bound to respect,' I took him under my special charge, and as by miners' law in California he could not hold a claim, I took him as a partner and he worked on my claim" – Bristol actually had nothing to lose. In fact, in the crime-ridden mining districts of the Gold Rush era, having Isaacs by his side probably boosted Bristol's sense of security and confidence as well as money, for Isaacs was, in Bristol's own words, "a man of gigantic proportions, of enormous strength, quick as a cat, and tough as a bear. Withal he was brimful of good nature, and above all, he was an honest Christian. He was the strongest man I ever saw. His arms were long and his great broad hands, when spread out, as they hung down, looked like a pair of spades." When boxing became "all the rage" in Coyotaville, where they were staying, the white Kentuckian who held the title of champion challenged Isaacs into a fight. Although Isaacs initially refused, the boxer, and the crowd who had gathered to watch, made it impossible for Isaacs to back out. The match was quickly settled: having practiced the art of boxing in Philadelphia when young, Isaacs easily flattened the white Kentuckian to the ground. Isaacs, then, was not only the primary bread earner, but the primary protector and guard of both the cabin and the claim

– and Bristol was the one who benefited most from the partnership.[117]

While some men like Edward Booth and Moses Rodgers worked as straightforward miners, many black men in the mining regions juggled more than one job to maximize their earnings. Peter Powers, who came to California in 1857 after being liberated by the husband of his slaveholder as the fulfillment of her deathbed wish, not only dug for gold, but also ran a boardinghouse and offered laundry services for other miners in the region.[118] For enslaved black miners, to raise the thousand dollars often required of them as the price of their liberty, extra jobs were not a matter of choice but of necessity. Enslaved miners like Daniel Rodgers, who were required to work during the day for their slaveholders, used all their "spare time" during the night to try to earn the money for their own freedom by washing and mending other people's clothes, sewing torn boots, and running errands.[119] William Pollock and his wife, enslaved miners from North Carolina, also raised $1,800 to purchase their freedom by doing extra jobs at night. William washed white miners' clothes, while his wife made doughnuts and sold them. When they finally secured their liberation documents, the Pollocks moved to Placerville and worked as cooks specializing in parties and weddings.[120]

Although black, white, and Chinese miners entered California with dreams of "the heaps of gold we were all to find there," actual life in the mines was a far cry from

---

[117] Sherlock Bristol, *The Pioneer Preacher: Incidents of Interest, and Experiences in the Author's Life* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, [1887], 1989), 93. Peter Decker also talks about a white and black man team they met on the trail in the mining hills near Fremont. Decker and his men asked them some questions regarding the geography, whereupon the white man remained pretty much silent, but the black miner was outspoken. Decker wrote condescendingly of the situation in his diary that day: "the *darky* being the smartest & cleverest of them insisted he *did* know & would tell, but did us no good." – Decker, *The Diaries*, 169.
[118] *Souvenir & Directory of Prominent Afro-Americans*, 45.
[119] Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 17-18.
[120] Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 71.

luxurious.[121] Once these migrants arrived at the Mother Lode country, they found that hundreds of others like them were already combing the earth for traces of gold. Miners tried to find places where there were streaks of tiny grains of gold hidden below the earth, sometimes under the sod or in the beds of brooks and creeks.[122] To maximize the efficiency of digging in the ground, and also to protect themselves from both humans and animals in the dangerous country, all miners dressed more or less the same: "a pair of thick pantaloons, heavy boots worn outside the trousers, a red or blue flannel shirt also worn outside, and gathered round the waist by a chinese *banda* or silk scarf, or a black leather belt, perhaps both; and in which a Colts' revolver was invariably stuck."[123] To move from one region to another, miners had to pack up their equipment – shovels, picks, pans, and rockers with which they washed the dirt off the tiny gold nuggets – and travel either on horseback or on foot. Until they found a sizeable claim, most miners simply ate and slept on the ground. James Williams remembered that he slept under trees, making sure to "pack my grub under my head to keep the wolves and coyotes from stealing it."[124] Wolves and coyotes were not the only dangers in nature. The landscape was also littered with rattle snakes, striped and spotted water snakes, deadly scorpions, and ferocious grizzly bears. Peter Decker recalled awaking one morning to find a young scorpion "nestling itself at the head of my bed not a foot from my head."[125] William Perkins, another white gold prospector, noted in his daily journal that in just a matter of days four parties had been attacked by grizzly bears, some of which had killed their victims.

[121] Quote from Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 6.
[122] Dr. Dietrich, *The German Emigrants*, 33.
[123] William Perkins, *Three Years in California; William Perkins' Journal of Life at Sonora, 1849-1852* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 103.
[124] Williams, *Life and Adventures*, 29.
[125] Decker, *The Diaries*, 211.

Probably in dread for his own safety, Perkins wrote that "many miners and hunters have been killed or maimed for life."[126]

The predators of nature were not the only dangers harassing miners' lives and well-being. Nearly everyone who stayed in the Mother Lode country for a length of time distinctly remembered one gruesome aspect of life in the California mines: not only was there "a complete dearth of all the comforts of life," but there were "envy, strife, and violence" everywhere, transforming the gold hills into "a kind of pandemonium."[127] In May, 1856, Jeremiah Burke Sanderson wrote to William C. Nell, his abolitionist friend in Boston, that "there is no doubt that there are more thieves, murderers, gamblers, and desperate scoundrels of every class and grade in California than was ever congregated in any state before. It is said combinations exist among them for their mutual good, which is evil."[128] In 1850 William Perkins wrote in his diary in a calm tone that "We have become so familiarized with murders, bloodshed, terrible accidents etc. that unless my Journal happens to be at hand, and I note down an occurrence at once, in an hour or two something else equally startling happens, and drives the first from memory. There is not a day passes without its deed or deeds of crime."[129] Perkins apparently had his journal handy a few days later on December 17th, 1850, for he recorded the incidence before it was "rubbed out of memory": that evening, a man was showing off his revolver when a young Canadian man named Browning happened to pass by. The gun fired, and the bullet hit the young man. He only lived long enough to give the address of his mother. Just at

---

[126] Perkins, *Three Years*, 181.
[127] Dr. Dietrich, *The German Emigrants*, 34.
[128] 20 May 18[5]6, Jeremiah Burke Sanderson to William C. Nell, in a private collection in possession of Lapp at the time he wrote the article on Sanderson. Quote in Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Early California Negro Leader," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 53, no. 4 (Oct., 1968), 324.
[129] Perkins, *Three Years*, 180.

the same moment, a black man who was in the street "just opposite our door" was also shot dead by an unknown person. Although there had just been two simultaneous deaths on the same street, nobody stirred. "Where Browning was shot there are a number of gambling tables, round which were grouped men and women," Perkins noted. "Not a game was stopped." Even women, who were supposed to be the gentler sex, he mused, "became brutalized by the constantly recurring scenes of bloodshed and violence."[130]

Having endured long stressful weeks of meager and outrageously expensive food, harsh and repetitive work, bad sleep, lurking dangers, and stringent supplies, tired miners occasionally climbed down the weary gold hills to spend their weekends in towns. Sonora, the county seat of Tuolumne County, was one of the most preferred towns of relief for miners, and into this city gathered hundreds of overworked miners who wanted to work off their stress by mingling in its glittering nightlife. Although most of them claimed that their primary motive was to purchase necessities and that they would return to the hills the same night that they arrived, most of them stayed until Monday morning drenched in the pleasures that Sonora had to offer. The main street was set up with gambling tables on either side; decorations inside the wide open buildings and the heaps of gold piled on each table glittered brilliantly in the lamplight. Bars were lined with every kind of intoxicating liquor, and here and there on raised platforms were musical performers – "some Ethiopian serenaders, or, if it is a Mexican saloon, a quartet of guitars" – who, together with the drunk and excited miners, kept up "an infernal noise … all night."[131] From Saturday night to Monday morning, when miners "flocked" down to Sonora, every gambling house and table was filled to capacity, and the "din and clamor that resounded

---

[130] Perkins, *Three Years*, 181-82.
[131] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills,* 235; Perkins, *Three Years*, 107.

throughout the main street" made the "Greenwich Fair … a sober picture of domestic life" by contrast.[132]

Black miners were no exception. Just as many white miners became incorrigible gamblers when they came down from the hills, African American miners were also, to borrow Borthwick's words, "inveterate gamblers." Whatever the moral qualities of drinking and gambling, however, there was one striking difference that many whites noticed in the treatment which black miners received in the mining camps and the towns than in other cities of the United States. Borthwick found that in California, "Americans seemed to exhibit more tolerance of negro blood than is usual in the States." Of course, African Americans were still not allowed to share a table with white men. They were forced to wait until white diners were done to sit at a table, and they were stereotyped to be of inferior mental capacity. Nevertheless, Borthwick mused that "Americans overcame their prejudices so far as that negroes were permitted to lose their money in the gambling rooms; and in the less frequented drinking-shops they might be seen receiving drinks at the hands of white bar-keepers." While there were black boardinghouses established in "a town or camp of any size" and black miners patronized these institutions, there were some places where no black accommodations were available. "On such occasions," Borthwick noted, "[I have] seen the white waiter, or the landlord, … serving a nigger with what he wanted without apparently doing any violence to his feelings." Borthwick believed that this shocking leniency toward black presence in the same drinking and gambling houses in mining towns sprouted from the fact that "a nigger's dollars were as good as any others." He went on further to speculate that "any kind of menial service"

---

[132] Marryat, *Mountains and Molehills*, 235-36. William Perkins also describes the Sonora nightlife in *Three Years*, 103-107.

was valued in California, because "the almighty dollar exerted a still more powerful influence [here] than in the old States, [and] it overcame all pre-existing false notions of dignity."[133]

While many black Californians worked as miners, others found the restrictive and racialized mining laws, together with the harsh realities of mining life, not worth the danger and effort that went into digging in insecure gold hills. For this class of people, the ban on black mining activity actually worked to boost their enterprising spirit. If they could not stake a claim in their own name and dig for gold, they would find other ways to earn money, almost as lucrative – and sometimes even more stable and successful – than that of mining. One of the most popular jobs for black men was cooking. Many black men found that cooking paid, and paid well, in the mining regions. Black cooks were in high demand throughout the Gold Rush era; in 1849, they were paid as much as $125 to $150 a month.[134] Out of 338 African Americans listed in the 1852 California manuscript census in Sacramento County, at least fifty-three of them were working as cooks.[135] In a

---

[133] Borthwick, *Three Years in California*, 164-65.

[134] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 22. Lapp's sources include: Walker D. Wyman, ed., *California Emigrant Letters* (New York, 1952), 160, and Leonard Kip, *California Sketches with Recollections of the Gold Mines* (Los Angeles, 1946), 51. While Lapp gives the figure $125 for black cooks, Dr. Dietrich, in his book *The German Emigrants,* wrote that "a cook can earn one hundred and fifty dollars a month." – Dr. Dietrich, *The German Emigrants*, 32.

[135] State Census, 1852, Sacramento County, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives. The number of cooks (53) exclude illegible items, either by damaged records or by completely illegible handwriting. Also, the number may be less than the actual number of persons working as cooks, since out of 337 African Americans surveyed by the census taker, only 248 had their occupations listed. The county directories are misleading in this respect, as there are no cooks listed in the Sacramento county directory of 1853-54; none for 1854-55; two in 1855, none in 1856, two again in 1857-58, three for 1858-59, and four in 1859-60. For list of names and occupations in Sacramento county directories, see: Dr. John F. Morse, *The Sacramento Directory, for the Year 1853-4, Embracing a General Directory of Ctiziens, an Appendix of General Info …*, compiled and published by Samuel Colville (Sacramento: Union Office, 1853), 30-102; Samuel Colville, *Samuel Colville's City Directory, of Sacramento, for the Year 1854-5: Embracing a General Directory of Citizens …* (San Francisco: Monson & Valentine, 1854), 19-116; Samuel Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory. Vol V. For the Year Commencing August 1, 1855, Embracing a General Directory of Citizens …* (Sacramento: James Anthony & Co., 1855), 11-85; Samuel Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory Vol VI. For the Year Commencing May, 1856: Embracing a General and Business Register of Citizens, …* (San Francisco: Monson, Valentine & Co., 1856), xxvii-138;

memoir of his experiences in the California mines, white miner Howard C. Gardiner left record of at least two black cooks he encountered during his stay. One had set up a restaurant, and was provided regularly by the white butcher in camp who bought and killed cattle.[136] The other he hired himself, as he and his team of miners were wrapping up their mining life and were about to leave for San Francisco. Stephen, one of the members of Gardiner's group, had located a black cook with an excellent reputation. Excited at the thought of a well-prepared feast, he suggested that they hire the cook and enjoy at least one sumptuous meal before leaving their claims. Foodstuffs, and therefore proper meals, were not cheap in the mines, but miners were often hungry for good food after having to endure the difficult work for long periods without proper nutrition. Gardiner's men, eager for the taste of a well-cooked meal, hired the African American cook at an expensive fee. The dinner was a great success, with fried apple pies "cap[ping] the climax as a dessert."[137]

The second largest occupation group for black settlers in Sacramento County was laborers. They comprised thirty-two men out of 338 African American residents in 1852. As wage workers, these men provided labor for white miners and entrepreneurs for an agreed sum paid monthly, yearly, or by the completion of the required work. When Jeremiah B. Sanderson arrived in San Francisco in 1854, he initially went up to Sacramento and opened a school for black children there.[138] Working as a teacher for

---

I. N. Irwin, *Sacramento Directory and Gazetteer, For the Years 1857 and 1858: Containing a General and Business Register of Citizens …* (San Francisco: S. D. Valentine & Son, 1857), 1-105; D. S. Cutter & Co., *Sacramento City Directory, for the Year A. D. 1860; Being a Complete General and Business Directory of the Entire City …* (Sacramento: H. S. Crocker & Co., 1859), 19-127; *Sacramento County Directory for the Year A. D. 1860: Being a Complete General and Business Directory of the Entire City …* (Sacramento: H. S. Crocker & Co., 1859), 4-127.

[136] Gardiner, *In Pursuit of the Golden Dream*, 101.

[137] Gardiner, *In Pursuit of the Golden Dream*, 107.

[138] Noel, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson," 152.

African American children, however, did not provide sufficient means for him to earn both his living and the extra money to send back home to New Bedford, where his wife and children still lived. While there is no existent record left that describes Sanderson's economic activities during the first three years of his residence in California, in 1857 he sent a letter to Catherine E. Sanderson, his wife, from Shasta, a mining town.

> On the 12th of this month [February] I left Sacramento by a Steamer to come to this place … discouraged, sick at heart, and doing but little in Sacramento, I was ready to do anything (accept any chance) that seemed to offer a reasonable prospect of saving something; -- just then Mr Young a gentleman of this Town [Shasta] offered me $75 – month, until the Spring business commences, when he thinks he will be able to pay me something more … Mr Young is to pay me $2,50 a day until April, and after that if business is anything like what it was last year, he will give me more … my plan, is to work with him, through the season, until late in the Summer, to the dry Season.[139]

Wiley Hinds, who came to California in 1858 in the company of a E. Hinds, who might have been his ex-owner, also worked as a laborer for seven years. Although Hinds had been born a slave in 1836, his father, Thomas Hinds, purchased his freedom for three hundred dollars when he was ten years old. Hinds paid his own expenses throughout the journey and obtained work on his own account after arriving in California. Having settled down in Visalia, Hinds made an agreement for thirty dollars per month with a Mr. Pemberton, and worked for him for fourteen months. He then obtained work with Mr. Wallace for a year taking care of his hogs, for which service he was paid four hundred dollars. For the next five years Hinds labored for George E. Long. In 1865, having saved

[139] Jeremiah B. Sanderson to Catherine E. Sanderson, Shasta, February 27th, 1857. Jeremiah Burke Sanderson (JBS) Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA. Sanderson ended up leaving Shasta early than this original plan. By June 2nd, 1857, he was down in San Francisco, teaching in the black school held in the Cyprian African Methodist Episcopal Church. He also became a preacher for the Little Pilgrim Church on Scott Street, San Francisco. He sent a letter dated June 2nd, 1857, to the *Boston Traveller* in Massachusetts, which was published in that paper and was recognized by his friend William C. Nell. – William C. Nell to Jeremiah B. Sanderson, Boston, July 1st, 1857. JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

enough money to start his own enterprise, he entered into partnership with a Mr. Harrington and started his own stock business.[140]

Barbering was the another popular occupation for black Californians. The 1852 manuscript census for the county of Sacramento records twenty-three African American men and women working in hair cutting and styling.[141] In the city directories of Sacramento from 1853 to 1860, barbers, in fact, always comprised the largest group among black male businessmen: in the 1853-54 city directory, three out of seven listed black men with occupations were barbers; in 1854-55, twelve out of twenty-nine; in 1855-56, twenty out of fifty-three; in 1856-57, seventeen out of fifty-three; in 1857-58, ten out of twenty-seven; in 1858-59, eight out of nineteen; and in 1859-60, eight out of twenty-three. Approximately half the men engaged as barbers worked on their own account, either in their own homes or by opening up a hair salon. Black men who established proper hair shops on central streets sometimes formed partnerships with one or more other barbers to pool resources. Women working in the hair styling business, on the other hand, almost invariably worked in their own homes, or provided home-visiting services. Barbers who could not afford to open up their own shops, and did not find it as lucrative to work in their homes, found work as employees in larger establishments such as public bath houses and at hotels. These employed barbers comprised about half of all black hair stylists in Sacramento city.[142]

---

[140] *A History of the Counties of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern, California* ([S. I.]: California Traveler, Inc. Reprint of original [Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1892]), 288.
[141] State Census, 1852, Sacramento County, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.
[142] Morse, *The Sacramento Directory, for the Year 1853-4,* 30-102; Colville, *Samuel Colville's City Directory, of Sacramento, for the Year 1854-5*, 19-116; Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory. Vol V. For the Year Commencing August 1, 1855*, 11-85; Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory Vol VI. For the Year Commencing May, 1856*, xxvii-138; Irwin, *Sacramento Directory and Gazetteer, For the Years 1857 and 1858*, 1-105; Cutter, *Sacramento City Directory, for the Year A. D. 1860*, 19-127; *Sacramento*

Another lucrative job for black immigrants was teaming, usually between mining regions and from mines to the towns with mules. When the white miner Peter Decker had to travel to Marysville from Nevada, he hired a black teamster who drove a three-mule team. The road was a slush of mud and mire in April, and the driver, "complaining about the mules & roads[,] Slashe[d] his [whip] about our heads keeping one in constant dread of getting it applied harder than the mules." Nevertheless, the black driver got Decker and his companion, a Mr. Cochran, through the boggy roads safely.[143] Henry Hall, the expert horseman who came to California from Texas on horseback in 1849 at the young age of fourteen, also built a flourishing business as a teamster after a quick dab at mining. He delivered people and goods to and from the mines for twenty-five years, by which time the mining craze had dwindled and there were no longer enough customers in the region.[144]

Many black Californians also participated in the laundry business. Although as an occupation it was popular among black women, the workings of its actual operation was by no means limited to the female sphere. There were twenty-one black laundresses/laundrymen and sixteen black saloon keepers in Sacramento County in 1852.[145] Among the jobs that black women held, which included working as maids, cooks, waitresses, and boardinghouse keepers, the laundering business was the most popular. This was probably because washing clothes paid very well in the Gold Rush era

---

County Directory for the Year A. D. 1860, 4-127.

[143] Decker, *The Diaries*, 257-58.

[144] "Park Forest Resident Honor," June 10th, 1999, *The Star*; unidentified newspaper article on the death of Clara Ann Steverson, a "descendent of three major African-American Gold Rush Pioneers"; "Mrs. Mary Ann Hall Answers Final Call," June 1st, 1911, *Stockton Daily Independent*; and "Henry Hall: Obituary from the San Joaquin Society of California Pioneers," December 6th, 1892. in the files for Alvin Aaron Coffey, Emmanuel Quivers, Henry Hall, and Moses Rodgers, Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco, CA.

[145] State Census,1852, Sacramento County, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.

California. Dr. Dietrich, in his book to German readers, noted that "a washerwoman is paid from ten to fifteen dollars per dozen articles, whether large or small."[146] While many black men also worked as washermen, this was one area where black women comprised a majority. In 1853-54, the two black laundry services listed in the Sacramento city directory were both run by women. In 1855-56, five out of eight people working in the business were women; in 1856-57, five out of nine laundry services listed were provided by women.[147] Even if the business was run by a woman, however, it did not mean that there were no men involved. Laundress Catherine E. Sanderson, who was living in San Francisco in May 1868, wrote to her husband Jeremiah explaining that she didn't "have any trouble about gathering in my clothes," because "Thomas goes after them for me. and Willy and Jimmy carries them home. I've got along pretty fair so far." William Nell Sanderson, nineteen years old at this time, was Catherine and Jeremiah's oldest son, and Jimmy was his chum. It is not clear who Thomas was, but black women's laundering business was certainly not a strictly female realm: sons and friends of the community pitched in to complete the work.[148]

While some black women also worked as saloon keepers -- Charlotte Henson, for example, ran a saloon on Second Street between I and J Streets in Sacramento in August, 1855 -- most saloon and bar keepers were men.[149] Because opening a sizeable saloon often required a considerable amount of starting capital, some black men formed

---

[146] Dr. Dietrich, *The German Emigrants*, 32.
[147] Morse, *The Sacramento Directory, for the Year 1853-4,* 30-102; Colville, *Samuel Colville's City Directory, of Sacramento, for the Year 1854-5*, 19-116; Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory. Vol V. For the Year Commencing August 1, 1855*, 11-85; Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory Vol VI. For the Year Commencing May, 1856*, xxvii-138; Irwin, *Sacramento Directory and Gazetteer, For the Years 1857 and 1858*, 1-105; Cutter, *Sacramento City Directory, for the Year A. D. 1860*, 19-127; *Sacramento County Directory for the Year A. D. 1860*, 4-127.
[148] Catherine E. Sanderson to Jeremiah B. Sanderson, n.d. [Very likely the second week of May, 1868]. JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[149] Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory. Vol V. For the Year Commencing August 1, 1855*, 42.

partnerships to create the establishments. In 1854, Edward Hill, Henry Murray, and William Smith together operated a saloon on Third Street between J and K Streets in Sacramento. In 1855, on the corner of I and Third Streets, another saloon run by the black Californians William Armstrong and Cornelius Brown opened its doors for public entertainment.[150]

As fervor for gold subsided by the 1860s, many black Californians, along with their white and Chinese counterparts, began to move to the more metropolitan areas in northern California. African Americans who had been working in the Mother Lode either as miners or as various service providers for the miners now gathered into more centralized cities like Sacramento, Stockton, San Jose, and San Francisco. As they began to find employment for wages, establish their own businesses, build up families, churches, and schools, they started to create a community, and strong networks of communication that connected the metropolitan centers to the remote places of the Pacific coast. The vigorous efforts of black Californians, and especially black San Franciscans, would ultimately establish black San Francisco as the center of the Pacific world, creating a large black community that overcame geographical boundaries not only on the eastern side of the Pacific, stretching from Victoria, British Columbia, down to San Diego and even further down into Mexico, but also on its western coastline – in Hong Kong, Shanghai, China, and in Yokohama, Japan.

---

[150] Colville, *Samuel Colville's City Directory, of Sacramento, for the Year 1854-5*, 49, 68, 82; Colville, *Colville's Sacramento Directory. Vol V. For the Year Commencing August 1, 1855*, 11, 18.

CHAPTER 2. NETWORKING THE PACIFIC COAST

The sun was rising on the Golden State of the Pacific. On its gateway peninsula, black San Franciscans were waking up to a foggy September morning in 1861. Mrs. Harriet Washington's voice floated out of the window of 720 Broadway as she sang out good day to her boarders, who tumbled into the dining room for breakfast or breezed out of the door for a new day of work. At 615 Kearny Street, George H. Blake hummed to himself as he diced vegetables and marinated meats, preparing to serve his hungry customers another day. Several blocks down on 105 Sansome Street, Isaiah Buchanan bent over the boots of his first patron, rubbing, waxing and shining them with deft hands.[1]

A hundred miles northeast of the peninsula, African Americans in Sacramento were also waking up. David Adams smiled at the cloudless blue sky as he unlocked the doors of the Golden Eagle Shaving Saloon on K Street. One street down, Sarah Blake heated up her irons as she spread out the clothes she had gathered and washed the day before.[2] Further inland in the Mother Lode country, mules and horses neighed and shook their heads as Henry Hall hitched them up to his wagons. Another busy day was waiting

[1] Henry G. Langley, *The San Francisco Directory for the Year Commencing September 1861…* (San Francisco: Valentine & Co., 1861), 342, 70, and 40.
[2] H. J. Bildeman, compiled, *The Sacramento Directory, for the Years 1861 and 1862…* (Sacramento: H. S. Crocker & Co., 1861), 1, 10.

for him to provide delivery service for his mining customers.[3] Day was starting all over California, and black Californians were waking up in every city, village, and hillside.

Although northern Californians in the late nineteenth century were spread out in settlements over eighty thousand square miles, no town stood isolated, no single miner's shack remained aloof from the rest of the world. A vital circulatory system was quickly developing in California, one that connected and interwove every city and township in a tight-knit communication network. It was the mighty steel steamers coursing the river veins of California, connecting with coaches and, later, trains to reach every nook and cranny of the vast state and stirring a constant flow of persons, letters, gifts, necessities, newspapers, and petitions. Together with the press, the steamship connected black San Franciscans from the city to the countryside, weaving intimate bonds that gave black Californians a sense of a black community that overreached the geographical boundaries of the peninsula city. Indeed, when in the late 1850s a large group of black Californians relocated to Victoria, British Columbia, steamers and newspapers traversing the five thousand miles of the American Pacific coastline from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, to Panama City, Panama. At the center of this black American Pacific network was black San Francisco, serving as the great community hub with two African American newspapers rivaling each other for the title the "organ of the Pacific coast."

The ways in which the black community of San Francisco tried to reach beyond the geographical limitations of the Golden City to create a vibrant communication network that encompassed not only the black communities of northern California, but

---

[3] "Park Forest Resident Honor," June 10th, 1999, *The Star*; unidentified newspaper article on the death of Clara Ann Steverson, a "descendent of three major African-American Gold Rush Pioneers; "Mrs. Mary Ann Hall Answers Final Call," June 1st, 1911, *Stockton Daily Independent*; and "Henry Hall: Obituary from the San Joaquin Society of California Pioneers," December 6th, 1892. In the files of Alvin Aaron Coffey, Emmanuel Quivers, Henry Hall, and Moses Rodgers, Society of California Pioneers.

also those in Nevada, Oregon, Idaho Territory, Washington Territory, and even beyond national boundaries in Victoria, British Columbia, and Panama City, Panama, reveal a vital and often overlooked dimension in the struggle for black first-class citizenship in the Far West. Historians, while recognizing the instances of cooperation between black community leaders in various parts of northern California, have usually focused more on describing the differences between populations in cities separated by vast geographical distance, or on depicting black community life and political activism in one contained region of California. Statewide movements, such as the Colored Conventions of the 1850s and the 1860s, and the circulation of petitions to abolish the racially discriminatory testimony law, are usually treated as cases of special cooperation among normally disparate communities, rather than a result of concerted and continual efforts of black Californians to create and sustain a strong and efficient network to fight against legal and social oppression.[4] In a region where viciously racialized legislation and prejudiced court

[4] See Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 94-117, for statistical information. On statewide colored convention movements, petitions to state legislature, and efforts at integrating schools, see Lapp, *Blacks on Gold Rush California*, 181-185; 194-209; 210-238. A dissertation by Jeanette Davis Mantilla also studies civil rights activism by the black community in San Francisco in Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte': A Quarter-Century of Civil Rights Activism by the Black Community of San Francisco, 1850-1875," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000). A close study of the struggle for testimony rights and the Colored Convention movement during the 1850s appears in James A. Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony in California, 1851-1863," *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec., 1969), 313-324. Delores Nason McBroome's study of black communities of the East Bay, especially in Alameda, Berkeley, Oakland, and Richmond and the institutions they created to end political and economic discrimination briefly touches on nineteenth century black Californian activities, but her real focus is on the twentieth century. See McBroome, "Parallel Communities: African-Americans in California's East Bay, 1850-1963," (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1991). For a statistical review of the early black population in California, a brief review of the struggle for civil rights in the nineteenth century, and comparison between cities in terms of occupation and organizations, see Lawrence de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 8-18. In regard to black Californian women in the struggle for equal rights in California during the nineteenth century, see Willi Coleman, "African American Women and Community Development in California, 1848-1900," in de Graaf, *Seeking El Dorado*, 100-109. Lynn M. Hudson writes a biography of Mary Ellen Pleasant, a well known entrepreneur and civil rights activist in San Francisco, in Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). In an introduction to a compilation of the letters of "Jennie Carter," or Mrs. Dennis D.

systems placed African American life and property in real and tangible danger, black San Franciscans were acutely aware of the need to utilize resources and mobilize populations beyond just those in their city and their state to force white politicians and officers to recognize the necessity of granting African Americans the legal, political, and educational rights already accorded the white citizenry. To this end, black Californians used the steel vessels coursing the river and coastal routes of the Pacific, and even more importantly, the circulation of newspapers printed by black men in San Francisco, to create a vibrant communication network that could effectively mobilize communities separated by vast distances.

For nineteenth-century Californians, the steamship proved to be more than just a mode of transportation. The arrival and departure of steamers defined the very rhythm of life. The steamship schedules told them when a long-waited letter, parcel, necessity, or person would arrive. At a time when there was no equal means of communication or transportation, the steamship made Californians count time not just by hours, days, weeks, and months, but also by the frequency of steamers in their respective regions. Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, who kept up a continual correspondence with his family and friends, apologized to his wife in 1859 by using "mails" as a unit of time. Instead of saying he

---

Drummond, to the *Elevator*, Eric Gardner discusses early black newspapers and the role of black women, as well as the general historical background of nineteenth century California and a special focus on black residents in post-Civil War Nevada County, California, in Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), vii-xxxiii. On the life of Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, a leader in black Californian education from 1854 to 1875, see Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Early California Negro Leader," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 53, no. 4 (Oct., 1968), 321-333; Jana Noel, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Educator and Organizer for the Rights of 'Colored Citizens' in Early California," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Spring, 2005), 151-158. For other historical works on the black communities of nineteenth-century California, mostly of a descriptive quality concerning the pattern of settlement, organization of community institutions, and political activism of black San Francisco Bay residents, see: Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (University of California Press, 1991); Quintard Taylor, *In Search of a Racial Frontier: African Americans in the West, 1528-1990* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998); Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* (San Francisco, 1952).

was sorry for not writing to her for several weeks or months, he apologized instead for not sending her a letter "for the three mails previous."[5] The *Elevator*, one of the most widely circulated black Californian newspaper during the nineteenth century, was printed and sold every Friday in San Francisco from April, 1865 to 1871, and every Saturday from 1872. For patrons of the newspaper who lived outside of San Francisco, however, it mattered less that the paper was a weekly printed on Friday or a Saturday. More important to them was the rhythm of the steamship schedule in their respective areas, for the editors of the newspaper sent up issues "regularly by every steamer mail."[6]

The extreme mobility of the population in California made the lives of Californians even more intertwined with the rhythm of steamer frequency. Fortune seekers drifted from one city to another, up into the Mother Lode Country and back down in the Bay, as they sought the most lucrative means of making money. Members of a single family also often lived apart, usually for financial reasons, and sustained the bonds of familial love by keeping up a constant flow of letters, parcels, and personal visits. From 1868 to 1875, the members of Jeremiah B. Sanderson's family were scattered over four different cities. Jeremiah himself lived in Stockton, sixty miles east of San Francisco, teaching at a public school for "colored" children. His earnings at sixty dollars a month compared to the seventy-five dollars of his white colleagues was not enough to support his large family.[7] To make ends meet, his wife Catherine worked as a laundress in San Francisco, while his oldest son worked as a barber in San Jose, fifty miles south of the metropolis. Mary Jane, the second child of the family, taught a colored school in

---

[5] Jeremiah B. Sanderson to Catherine E. Sanderson, 20 April 1859. Jeremiah Burke Sanderson (JBS) Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
[6] 11 January 1867, *The Elevator*.
[7] 6 December 1868, *Stockton Daily Independent*, cited in Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson," 330.

Brooklyn, Alameda County, across the Bay. The younger children took turns living with their father and mother in Stockton and San Francisco.[8] Families such as the Sandersons extended over a vast geographical space in four different cities of northern California and effectively obliterated the distance by frequent and intimate communication via the steamships. Every so often, family members sent each other letters brimming with the details of their everyday lives, greetings from their neighbors and friends, news of special events and happenings in their respective localities, advice and opinions on one another's circumstances, gifts, necessities, photographs, and, often, their own selves via the steamers.[9] In the summer of 1868, when Jeremiah was trying to find a house to rent in Stockton, he sent descriptions of the locations of the buildings he was looking at, as well as the size, number and the condition of the rooms to his wife in San Francisco. In turn, Catherine gave him detailed advice on which house she thought would be the best choice. "I think it will be best for you to take the house next to the Baptist Church," she recommended, as it was close to both his school and a friend of theirs. She added that "the two rooms on it will be more comfortable pecuniarily as well as the amount of room." Catherine hoped Jeremiah would "engage [the house] in the 1st of September," as she and the children planned to visit in September or October. She also asked him for dimensions of the "front room," so she could try purchasing a carpet for it in San Francisco to send up.[10]

During the 1860s and the 1870s, there were three main American steamship

---

[8]Jeremiah B. Sanderson to Lydia, 3 October 1870, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[9] William thanks Jeremiah for sending him a good comb, in William Nell Sanderson to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 4 November 1868; Mary sends Catherine material for making a dress for Kate, her younger sister, in Mary Jane Grases to Catherine E. Sanderson, 21 July 1870; Mary sends her mother pictures of her daughter, in Mary Jane Grases to Catherine E. Sanderson, 14 February 1872. JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[10] Catherine E. Sanderson to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 18 July 1868, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

companies operating in the port of San Francisco. Many of the major interior lines were run by the California Steam Navigation Company (CSNC), which owned a fleet of five steamers that left the Broadway Wharf every afternoon for Sacramento and Stockton. Passengers who wanted to go on to Marysville, Colusa, Chico, or Red Bluff could connect with light-draft steamers at Sacramento or Stockton.[11] On June 12th, 1867, after consolidation with the California, Oregon and Mexico Steamship Company, the operations of the CSNC extended "to the whole Pacific coast." It now offered six extra steamship lines that went beyond the vicinity of San Francisco, reaching as far north as Portland, Oregon; New Westminster, British Columbia; Victoria, Vancouver Island in British Columbia; and down south to Santa Barbara, San Pedro, and San Diego, California.[12]

Meanwhile, travelers who wished to gain passage to the East coast had two choices: the lines offered by the North American Steamship Company (NASC), and those of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC). Both the NASC and the PMSC operated steamers bound for the Isthmus of Panama several times a month. Once at Panama, passengers could take connecting steamers on the other side of the peninsula bound for New York. The NASC steamers left the Mission Street Wharf at eleven o'clock on designated days, which were advertised in advance in the black and white newspapers

[11] The California Steam Navigation Company, established in 1854 by a group of steamship captains, continued to provide service until 1871 when the California Pacific Railroad Company acquired their property. The company advertised their schedule weekly in the newspapers, including *The Elevator*. The time of departures, destinations, and the location of their designated wharf remained the same throughout the period. The names of the steamers in possession of the California Steam Navigation Company were: *Capital, Chrysopolis, Yosemite, Cornelia,* and *Julia*. It appears that briefly in January, 1868, the company was in possession of one more steamer, the *Paul Pry*, but this steamer does not appear before or after this time. - 21 June 1867; 3 January 1868; 3 July 1868; 8 January 1869; 11 February 1870, *The Elevator.*

[12] 21 June 1867, *The Elevator*. The names of the additional steamers were: *Ajax, Pacific, Orizaba, California, Active,* and the *Senator*. It was the *Orizaba* on which Charles Stovall had tried to escape Californian authorities while forcibly taking Archy Lee with him in the famous Archy Lee case.

of San Francisco. The PMSC steamers departed from the wharf at the corner of First and Brannan Streets, also at eleven o'clock, three times a month. By the July of 1868, the flourishing PMSC had increased their San Francisco-Panama-New York runs to four times a month, and carried the U. S. Mail.[13]

While the three large steamship companies circulated powerful steamers throughout the main arteries, smaller companies and individual ship owners also provided myriad extra lines to various destinations. T. C. Walker, who owned "The New and Elegant Steamer CORA," offered a ride to Alviso from the Pacific Street Wharf in San Francisco every day at 2 o'clock PM. He had formed partnerships with the stage coaches that connected Alviso to San Jose, Santa Cruz, Warm Springs, and Santa Cruz, promising direct connections for his passengers to their final destinations. Return trips were just as easy, Walker assured his patrons, as he had stages leaving Santa Clara and San Jose at 7 o'clock AM, with his steamer connecting at Alviso for San Francisco at 8 o'clock every morning. Besides transporting passengers, Walker also delivered freight daily from San Francisco to the very doorsteps of recipients living in Santa Clara and San Jose.[14]

Aside from carrying letters, parcels, and people, the steamers helped circulate one of the most crucial mediums of nineteenth-century community-building: newspapers. Newspapers at this time were more than just daily or weekly pages of recent news. They were the great bulletin board for the public, and if they were the organ of one specific group of people, then they also served as the primary contributor to defining, expanding, and sustaining the boundaries of that community. Black Californians learned of every

[13] The PMSC was chartered in 1848, and grew to be the largest American steamship company operating on the Pacific. - Robert J. Schwendinger, "Chinese Sailors: America's Invisible Merchant Marine 1876-1905," *California History* 57, no. 1, The Chinese in California (Spring, 1978), 60. For steamship schedule advertisements, see 21 June 1867; 3 January 1868; 3 July 1868, *The Elevator*.
[14] 21 June 1867, *The Elevator*.

upcoming event, newly opened black business, Sunday schedules of black churches in various different cities, the prominent political issues of the day, and the births, deaths, weddings, and injuries of black people up and down the Pacific Coast, from Victoria, British Columbia to Panama City, Panama. In the early summer of 1865, the black women of San Francisco filed into Seals' Hall on Monday evenings where, the *Elevator* informed them, a weekly sewing circle was held to raise funds for the Freedmen's Relief Fund.[15] In July 1865, the trustees of the Livingstone Institute, an organization aiming at building an institution of higher education for black students, marked their calendars around the state upon the notice of the *Elevator* announcing an upcoming meeting in San Francisco.[16] Black newspapers also served as an open forum to which people could try to post an opinion, argument, question, or request. Various contributors sent their opinions on political, economic, and social issues to the *Elevator* from around the state, sometimes openly disagreeing with its editors over controversial questions or criticizing the actions of certain members of the community. Men and women, writing under pseudonyms such as "Osceola," "Avis," "Amego," "Tyro," "Private L'Ouverture," and "Semper Fidelis," from various parts of the Pacific coast, wrote to the newspaper as regular correspondents.[17] To keep this important community medium circulating through and intertwining the physically distant places in the vast state and beyond, African American Californians throughout the nineteenth century kept up a persistent and oftentimes self-sacrificial effort to sustain the newspapers printed by their own people and their own

[15] 5 May 1865, *The Elevator*.
[16] 7 July 1865, *The Elevator*.
[17] The newspaper discusses the names of the various regular correspondents in the issue of 3 January 1868, *The Elevator*.

press.[18]

The first black Californian newspaper was the *Mirror of the Times*, a short-lived enterprise that made its debut in October, 1856 as one of the outcomes of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California in November, 1855, in Sacramento. Feeling the urgent necessity of a statewide black newspaper after the conference, Peter Anderson, one of the prominent representatives at the convention, called a meeting at St. Cyprian's African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in San Francisco for the purpose of creating a newspaper on August 19, 1856. Pastors, businessmen, and antislavery activists such as William Newby, Henry M. Collins, Jonas H. Townsend, John Jamison Moore, and Nathan Pointer were elected as members of a publishing committee. On September 2, 1856, a second meeting was held, and a finance committee was formed comprised of Nathan Pointer, H. F. Sampson, W. D. Moses, Charles Mitchison, Barney Fletcher, Charles B. Smith, and F. Spotts.[19] While the date of the first issue is unclear, October 31, 1856 seems to be the likely date for the launch of the *Mirror.* Its masthead declared the motto, "Truth Crushed To The Earth Will Rise Again." During its lifespan, the *Mirror* strove to remove the discriminatory clause prohibiting black testimony in court in cases in which white persons were a party.[20]

While this initial enterprise never succeeded in extracting itself from financial

---

[18] For examples of the efforts of the black communities to sustain their newspapers, see: *Proceedings of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California, 1855, 1856, 1865* (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1969), 59; Colored Citizens of the State of California. State Executive Committee, *Address of the State Committee to the Colored People of the State of California* (Sacramento, 1859), 19; 17 January 1868, *The Elevator*. Also 22 August 1857, and 12 December 1857, *Mirror of the Times*, cited in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 231-32.

[19] 7 June 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*. In this issue, editors claim to copy from the first number of the *Mirror of the Times* of September 13, 1856 in order to "preserve the records of the principal events which have occurred in the history of the Colored people in California."

[20] J. William Snorgrass, "The Black Press in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1856-1900," *California History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (Winter, 1981/1982), 306-7. Motto from *Mirror of the Times*, 12 December 1857, quoted in Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 307; also see Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 412-413.

problems, the support for the fledgling newspaper clearly showed a mobilization of black communities across the state in various counties for one purpose. At the beginning the *Mirror* was financed largely by two prominent businessmen, Mifflin Wistar Gibbs and Jonas Townsend, added to which were small contributions from the black residents of various counties. The fact that it had no press of its own, no established base of subscription, and no payment to offer its editors, soon spelled financial disaster for the young journal. In time of trouble, it was the black women of San Francisco who came through, keeping the sinking paper afloat by organizing a Mirror Association and actively raising funds. This effort allowed the *Mirror* to survive until December, 1856, when the second Colored Convention began in Sacramento.[21] At the convention the delegates resolved to take over the proprietorship and the administration of the fledgling paper. The Executive Committee, appointed to serve the political needs of the black community throughout the year in between conventions, was to be in charge of its operations. The paper would now be financed by donations collected by smaller committees to be formed in every county for the purpose, together with subscription and advertisements.[22] This funding, nevertheless, still did not prove sufficient to pay the printers and the editors regularly, and the *Mirror* continued to urge black communities across California to send funds in its support.[23] As a result, organizations sprung up in multiple counties to raise money to sustain the newspaper: the Ladies' Club in Placerville, Excelsior Club in Stockton; Banneker Society in Sacramento; and Liberty Club in Yreka, Siskiyou County. The Yreka Liberty Club, despite its small size of only twenty-three members, succeeded in raising $180 at one time in a meeting in August, 1857, with several white guests also

---

[21] *Proceedings,* 59.
[22] *Proceedings*, 34, 40, 52-66.
[23] Colored Citizens, *Address of the State Committee*, 19.

in attendance.[24] Meanwhile, twenty-three agents in various cities and towns across California collected and remitted subscriptions to San Francisco.[25]

The *Mirror*, nevertheless, did not enjoy a very long life. In 1858, during a black exodus out of California to Victoria, British Columbia, the two editors of the *Mirror* also emigrated out of the state. Gibbs, one of the editors, joined the stream of black migrants to Victoria, while Townsend, the other editor, decided to leave the Far West altogether and return to the East Coast. Townsend sailed to New York, and later settled down in Brazoria, Texas, where he lived until his death in1872.[26] With both of its editors gone, the publication of the *Mirror* came to a halt sometime in 1858. In January, 1862, the editor of the *San Francisco Bulletin* remarked that "for the past four years the colored people have had no organ in town."[27] The years of hiatus finally ended in 1862, when two new periodicals launched San Francisco: the *Lunar Visitor*, a monthly magazine, by John Jamison Moore, the pastor of the First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in San Francisco; and the *Pacific Appeal*, under the proprietorship of Peter Anderson, who had previously been on the committee managing the *Mirror*, and the editorship of Philip A. Bell, a journalist with prior experience in newspapers on the East coast.[28]

The first issue of the *Lunar Visitor* came out in January. Its editor hoped that the "little bark" just launched would "moor into some hearts and make fast our design – the

---

[24] 22 August 1857, and 12 December 1857, *Mirror*, cited in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 231-32.
[25] Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 306.
[26] Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 307; Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 413.
[27] 17 January 1862, *Marysville Daily Appeal*, copying from the *San Francisco Bulletin*.
[28] 5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*.
For more discussion on the launch of the *Lunar Visitor* and the *Pacific Appeal*, see Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 399; Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 307; Frank H. Goodyear, "'Beneath the Shadow of Her Flag': Philip A. Bell's 'The Elevator' and the Struggle for Enfranchisement, 1865-1870," *California History*, vol. 78, no. 1 (Spring, 1999), 29.

elevation of our race."[29]

The *Appeal* followed several months later on April 5, 1862, announcing its goal to not only devote itself "to the interests of the Colored People of California and to their moral, intellectual and political advancement," but to "become the organ and representative of the Colored population of the Pacific Coast." From the very first, editor Philip A. Bell declared that "we shall not confine ourselves particularly to California, nor to the States and Territories of the American government." Rather, the new voice of the black Far West would reach beyond the boundaries of statehood and even nationhood, including "within the sphere of our duties the British Possessions," binding in brotherhood "Wherever there is a Colored man" on the entire Pacific coast.[30] In 1865, the *Appeal* began carrying the title, "Official Organ of the People of Color in the State of California, and of the American Colored People on the Pacific Coast."[31] In January, 1868, the list of agents for the newspaper reported distributors not just in the cities and towns of California, but also in various places in Oregon, Washington Territory, Idaho Territory, Nevada Territory, and British Columbia.[32] By 1870, the *Appeal* claimed the title of being the "*Original* Organ of the Colored Citizens of the Pacific States and Territories."[33]

Three years later, and just two days before General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox, another black Californian

---

[29] 17 January 1862, *Marysville Daily Appeal*, copying the *San Francisco Bulletin*, which quotes the first issue of the *Lunar Visitor*. Richard N. Schellens Collection, California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA. The *Lunar Visitor* was still going strong by summertime, when it published its sixth number on 1 June 1862, *The Lunar Visitor*.

[30] 5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*.

[31] 24 June 1865, *The Pacific Appeal.* The fact that Anderson began using this header in 1865 probably has to do with rivalry with the *Elevator*, a newspaper launched by Philip A. Bell in April, 1865.

[32] 25 January 1868, *The Pacific Appeal*.

[33] 10 January 1874, *The Pacific Appeal*, emphasis added. Again, the emphatic use of the word "Original Organ" was probably the result of the rivalry with the *Elevator*, which also claimed to be the organ of the black residents of the Pacific coast.

newspaper launched its "bark" onto the Pacific waters.[34] Named the *Elevator* to signal the purpose of the enterprise to uplift and elevate the oppressed black race, it quickly grew to be the *Appeal*'s greatest rival. The editor of the newly born journal was none other than Philip A. Bell, the former editor of the *Appeal*. Due to disagreements both personal and political, Bell had dissolved partnership with Anderson sometime between 1862 and 1865.[35] Now, as the Civil War was drawing to a close, Bell decided to broadcast his version of events, demands, goals, and concepts on behalf of the black communities of the Pacific coast. On April 7, 1865, the first issue of the *Elevator* made its rounds in San Francisco. By October, 1867, when Bell began printing a list of agents in his columns, the newspaper was being circulated in seventeen cities and towns in California, two in Oregon, three in Nevada, two in Idaho Territory, and also two in British Columbia.[36] Two weeks later, an agent was also listed for Panama City, Panama, connecting black communities along the Pacific coast from Central America up to British Columbia.[37] When the *Elevator* issued a call for help relieve the paper from "financial embarrassments" in late 1867, staunch supporters forwarded "liberal response[s]" to Bell's office from places such as Lincoln, Placer County; Nevada City and Coburn Station, Nevada County; Lancha Plana and Fiddletown, Amador County; Lower Lake,

[34] For a discussion of the history of the *Elevator* and its editor Philip A. Bell, see Goodyear, "'Beneath the Shadow,'" 26-39; Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 308-311; Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 413-422; Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter*, xix-xxi.
[35] Reasons for dissolution of the two men's friendship as well as partnership is unclear. Scholars have speculated that differences of opinion on the black colonization movement may have been central, with Anderson considering colonization in a positive light while Bell was adamantly opposed to such a plan. Both men were noted by contemporaries as temperamental. For discussions on the dispute between the two men, see Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 308; Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 414; Goodyear, "'Beneath the Shadow,'" 29.
[36] 4 October 1867, *The Elevator*.
[37] 18 October 1867, *The Elevator*.

Lake County; and Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County.[38]

From the very beginning, it was evident that Bell did not intend his paper to be limited to San Francisco, or even the state of California. His previous experience in abolitionist and black journals on the East coast primed him for a more ambitious circulation of his prized enterprise. Born in 1808 in New York City, Bell had attended the African Free School and got his first job in 1831 as a New York City agent for the *Liberator*, the famous Boston-based abolitionist newspaper published by William Lloyd Garrison. Six years later, Bell founded the *Weekly Advocate* in January, 1837, a black newspaper issued from New York City with Samuel E. Cornish as editor. In the first editorial, the *Advocate* declared that "our entire dependence for support is upon the colored portion of this great community … the ADVOCATE IS THEIR PAPER, in every sense of the word – that it will advocate their just claims and rights – sustain them in every proper appeal to manly generosity and justice."[39] In March, 1837, the paper changed its name to the *Colored American*. During the next five years of its life, the New York *Colored American* became one of the most important representative voices of the eastern black communities with a widespread subscription base.[40] When Bell moved to San Francisco in 1860, he thus came armed not just with a militant zeal for abolitionism and equal rights, but also with in-depth experience in journalism accrued from working for both the *Liberator* and the *Weekly Advocate*/*Colored American*. These newspapers, both aimed at a broader national audience that extended beyond the local readership, shaped Bell's perception of the role of black newspapers in informing, mobilizing, and

---

[38] 17 January 1868, *The Elevator*.
[39] 7 January 1837, *Weekly Advocate*, quoted in H. Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1973), v. 1, 163-64.
[40] Goodyear, "'Beneath the Shadow,'" 29.

conceptualizing African American communities in different geographical locations. As the Civil War ended, black newspapers began cropping up around the nation. The year 1865 saw the birth of the Washington, D. C. *New Era*; New Orleans *Black Republican*; and the Augusta *Colored American* in Georgia.[41] That year, Bell also stepped into the ranks with the San Francisco *Elevator*. His was a vision not limited to the local population of San Francisco. Bell would make the *Elevator* the advocate for the black people of the entire Pacific coast - just as his *Weekly Advocate/Colored American* had been for those of the Atlantic.

The *Elevator* became the longest running black newspaper in the Far West. While the initial years were marked with hints of rivalry and bitterness between the already established *Appeal* and the new upstart, it was Bell's *Elevator* that came out on top. More militant and straightforward in its language and demands, Bell's paper captivated the attention of the black communities across California, Nevada, Oregon, the surrounding territories and British Columbia. When in September, 1868, Anderson was forced to suspend the *Appeal* due to financial difficulties, the *Elevator* stood as the only advocate for black interests for two years until Anderson could issue the *Appeal* again in August, 1870. Even before a complete suspension of the newspaper, the publication of the *Appeal* had already become very erratic during the months leading up to September, 1868. Catherine Sanderson, the wife of Jeremiah Sanderson, wrote in May, 1868 to her husband that she "dont know what has become of the Appeal I believe that it has been out once since you have been away [earlier in 1868]."[42] The *Elevator*, by contrast, never skipped

---

[41] Goodyear, "Beneath the Shadow," 28.
[42] Catherine E. Sanderson to Jeremiah B. Sanderson, 12 May 1868, JBS Collection, The Bancroft Library. Jeremiah had gone up to Stockton from San Francisco to teach at a black school earlier in 1868.
On the hiatus in the publication of the *Appeal,* see Snorgrass, "The Black Press," 308; Mantilla, "'Hush,

an issue until the late 1890s, becoming one the most steadfast nineteenth-century black newspapers in the entire nation. It finally ceased its lengthy existence sometime after June 11th, 1898, having served the people of the Pacific coast for over half a century and outliving even its founder, Bell, who left the helm of the paper in 1885 due to illness and later died in April, 1889.[43]

Together with the steamers, the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal* made it possible for a people scattered over a vast geographical territory not only to unite in action with the interest of attaining the rights of first-class citizenship, but also to share a common community identity defined primarily by race. While the ostensible purpose of the newspaper, as Bell declared in its motto, was to achieve "Equality before the Law," the newspaper served the needs of the black people on the Pacific coast in myriad ways that secured its role as one of the most crucial institutions that created, defined, and sustained black communities and communal networks. From personal letters, queries for people's residential addresses, and notices for various incidents among African Americans to advertisements for various black businesses, the offices of the black presses bustled with the lives, interests, and thoughts of black settlers along the Pacific coast. For example, on August 29, 1863, readers of the *Pacific Appeal* learned that William Scott, of San Francisco, had broken his leg "from a fall on the side-walk, Broadway, several days since," and had begun to recover.[44] Mrs. Dennis Drummond Carter, from Nevada City, California, wrote to the *Elevator* on January 7, 1868 informing its widespread readership

---

Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 419. African Americans in California themselves complained often about the erratic publication of the *Appeal*, even before 1868. See, for example, 10 November 1865 issue of the *Elevator*, in which a correspondent criticizes Peter Anderson and the *Pacific Appeal* for "not appear[ing] scarcely once a month."

[43] The 11 June 1898 is the last issue of the *Elevator* existent today.

[44] 29 August, 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.

that "the Lincoln Club [a company of black militiamen], with their beautiful new banner, succeeded in making a favorable impression by their good order" during the celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation in Nevada City on New Year's Day.[45] African Americans interested in black education were delighted to learn on January 17, 1868 that the Phoenixonian Institute, an organization focused on securing a school for black children, had formed "a joint stock company to purchase the property now occupied by the school in San Jose, and to place the school on a permanent basis."[46]

Pillar community institutions, such as the church, Freemasons, the Executive Committee, and mutual benefit organizations also found the Pacific circulatory system of steamers and newspapers indispensable in networking geographically separate black communities along the coast. By announcing the times of their regular meetings, upcoming events, names of prominent contributors, and important new resolutions and decisions in the newspapers, these foundational organizations supported and strengthened the sense of a united black community. As the steamers distributed the newspapers that carried various important announcements of these institutions, black readers responded by sending letters, monetary contributions, and their own selves to support and invigorate them in return.

Fledgling churches were organized by black Californians during the 1850s in the various cities of California. In the East, black churches had played prominent roles as community institutions and, as historian Philip M. Montesano pointed out, as "political pressure groups." Nineteenth-century African American communities were often centered around churches, which provided educational and recreational opportunities as well as

---

[45] 17 January 1868, *The Elevator*.
[46] 17 January 1868, *The Elevator*.

economic assistance, and opened its buildings for political meetings. Black pastors often preached on important political issues from the pulpit, and assumed roles of leadership in spearheading movements for petitions, conventions, and organizing other community institutions. In the Far West, the black church continued to play a major role as a communal and political institution.[47] A high level of mobility and mutually supportive community networks were also evident in the creation and maintenance of the black churches in California, as pastors traveled to found, help, and revive churches in various cities and towns.

The first black African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church to be organized in the Far West was in Sacramento, sometime between 1850 and 1851. "Reverend" Barney Fletcher preached to a group of pioneer African Americans in Sacramento, although he was not officially ordained at this time. Local white Methodist ministers also preached from time to time to this black group. By July, 1851, having raised $1,500 for religious purposes, the congregation successfully established the St. Andrews AME Church with its own building free of debt.[48] In 1856, a black Baptist church also started meeting in Sacramento, in a Chinese chapel with twenty-one persons attendant. Named the Siloam Baptist Church, the Sacramento congregation survived the first three years with the aid of Reverend Charles Satchell from San Francisco, who came up from time to time on the steamers to support the small organization. In 1859, Siloam Baptist Church finally acquired its own pastor, Reverend J. W. Flowers, and in 1860 purchased a Jewish synagogue for eight hundred dollars to use as their own church building.[49]

---

[47] Philip M. Montesano, "San Francisco Black Churches in the Early 1860's: Political Pressure Group," *California Historical Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Summer, 1973), 145-46.
[48] Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 33; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 108; 158-59.
[49] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 163.

Down in San Francisco, Reverend John Jamison Moore had founded the Wesleyan AME Church, later to become the AME Zion Church, in August, 1852. In four years, Moore's congregation had succeeded in buying a $4,000 brick building. They also held a Sabbath school for fifty black children, and collected two hundred and fifty books for a church library. By 1864, the AME Zion had moved to a building on Stockton Street, originally the church of the white friend Reverend Thomas Starr King. The friendly transaction had been made well below the market price, and the building thereafter was affectionately referred to as the "Starr King Methodist Church."[50]

In 1854, Barney Fletcher, who had founded the first AME church in Sacramento in 1851, came down to San Francisco to help organize the second AME church on the peninsular city. This was the St. Cyprian's AME Church, which soon grew to have a larger congregation than the AME Zion. In the basement of St. Cyprian was the first black school in San Francisco. Later in 1854, Reverend Thomas M. D. Ward, who had been appointed Missionary Elder to California at the Indiana AME Church Conference, assumed leadership of the church. Three years later Jeremiah B. Sanderson, who had been working as a wage laborer in the mining town Shasta until late February, 1857, came down to San Francisco to teach at the black school at St. Cyprian. At the same time he also gained the position of a preacher at the Pilgrim Church on Scott Street, the third AME church in San Francisco.[51] In 1861, the St. Cyprian congregation purchased for

---

[50] The Zion congregation remained in this edifice until 1906, when it was destroyed by the great earthquake. Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 30. Also see Delilah Leontium Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California: A Compilation of Records…* (Los Angeles, California, 1919), 160; and Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 160. While Beasley offers quotations from many primary sources she claims she had access to, she does not cite their locations. There is, however, little reason to doubt that she was quoting directly from the sources.

[51] Beasley mistakes the Pilgrim Church as being the same entity as the St. Cyprian, and writes that Sanderson took over the St. Cyprian in the stead of Ward from 1856 to 1860. This is very likely incorrect. Sanderson came down sometime after February, 1857 from Shasta, where he had been working as a wage

$5,500 what had previously been the chapel of the Grace Episcopal Church on Powell Street built in 1849. After that it was called the Union Bethel AME Church, often referred to as the Bethel AME Church on Powell Street.[52]

As for the Baptist congregation in San Francisco, ten or more black Baptists had begun meeting in the home of William and Eliza Davis on Kearny Street in 1852 to form the First Colored Baptist Church of San Francisco. Several months later, they renamed their congregation the Third Baptist Church and moved into a building on Washington Street.[53] By 1857, the group had its own pastor, Reverend Charles Satchell from Cincinnati. This was the same Satchell who travelled to Sacramento from time to time between 1857 and 1859 to help stabilize the fledgling Baptist church there. He also seems to have helped Reverend Thomas Randolph energize the black Baptist church in the mining town Marysville in 1857.[54] By 1868, the Third Baptist Church had succeeded in

---

laborer, to take up two different positions in two different churches: teacher at St. Cyprian; preacher at Pilgrim. See Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 160. Sanderson sent a letter to his wife from Shasta on February 27, 1857. See Jeremiah B. Sanderson to Catherine E. Sanderson, 27 February 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library. Historian Philip M. Montesano also makes a similar mistake of describing the St. Cyprian (later renamed the Bethel AME) and the Pilgrim as the same church. Montesano, "San Francisco Black Churches," 145. For more information on the St. Cyprian, see Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte,'" 401, and Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 160. Lapp briefly acknowledges the existence of the Pilgrim Church (or the Little Pilgrim Church) and Sanderson's role in it in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 160. Jeremiah Sanderson and his sermons prepared for the Pilgrim Church on Scott Street can be found in the Sermons folder in JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

[52] 6 June 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*; Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 28-34; Edward A. Morphy, "San Francisco's Thoroughfares," 21 March 1920, *San Francisco Chronicle*, California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA.

[53] Sue Bailey Thurman gives a list of the names in attendance at this first meeting: Thomas Davenport, Henry Fields, Thomas Bundy, Fielding Spotts, George Lewis, Abraham Brown, William Davis, Eliza Davis, Milly Denton, and the presiding officer, Reverend Capon. It is possible that some names were omitted from the list, as while in this list male names are predominant, female members had also been crucial to the formation, financing and the maintenance of many black churches. - Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 23-26; Allen Temple Baptist Church, *Thus Far by Faith* (Oakland, California: Color Art Press, 1973), 9; pictures of Eliza Davis and another pioneer member, Elinor Williams, can be found in the Rev. Frederick D. Haynes (Third Baptist Church and Congregation) File, California Historical Society.

[54] Peter Joseph Delay, *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties, California, with Biographical Sketches…* (Los Angeles, California: Historical Record Co., 1924), 183; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 161-62, 164. The 1924 *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties* states that Reverend Charles Satchell "took up" the Baptist congregation in Marysville in 1856, and organized it into the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. Historian Lapp,

erecting a beautiful edifice on Powell Street, one which "enjoyed a greater popularity among non-colored worshippers than did its Methodist rival." It was remembered by many as the church that hosted weddings that "were the most interesting and entertaining ceremonies of the kind to be witnessed under any ecclesiastical roof-tree in America."[55]

Further inland in Stockton and Marysville, more African American churches were established. Black Christians in Stockton founded the Ebenezer AME Church in 1852 with Reverend Virgil Campbell, and the Baptists were holding worship in the Second Baptist Church on Washington Street by 1854.[56] Marysville had three churches: a Baptist Church whose name is unknown, by Reverend O. B. Stone in the early 1850s; the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, which succeeded in erecting their own church building in 1853; and a small AME Church, ministered by Reverend Darius P. Stokes, in 1854. In 1857, the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church gained the help of Reverend Thomas Randolph and Reverend Charles Satchell, both coming up from San Francisco. In the summer and fall of 1857, Reverend Randolph and the congregation of Mt. Olivet held "Ladies' Festivals" to raise funds to erect a new church building. Local white people were invited to buy baked and knitted goods, and the church succeeded in buying a lot. In October, 1857, Randolph performed public baptism in the Feather River. By January, 1858, the small congregation of Mt. Olivet proudly entered their new building, a "substantial brick church" that had cost approximately $5,000, with a basement to be used as a school for their children.[57]

---

however, states that Satchell arrived in California in early 1857 from Cincinnati, and omits Satchell in the discussion of the Baptist church in Marysville.

[55] Edward A. Morphy, "San Francisco's Thoroughfares Powell Street," 21 March 1920, *San Francisco Chronicle*.

[56] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 163.

[57] Delay, *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties*, 183; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 163. Lapp only recognizes one church existent during the 1850s in Marysville, the Mt. Olivet. He places the beginning of the Marysville AME Church at sometime between 1859 and 1860, instead of 1854. His sources include *Amy's Marysville Directory*, published in 1869 in Marysville, and several issues of the *Marysville Herald*.

The AME Church succeeded in buildings its own church in 1864, which lasted until 1921 when it was destroyed by fire.[58] Reverend T. M. D. Ward, the Missionary Elder and the pastor of the Union Bethel AME Church in San Francisco, established the California Conference of the AME Church in 1856 and further organized churches in distant cities such as Grass Valley, Nevada City, Placerville, Coloma, and as far as in Virginia City in Nevada Territory.[59]

Besides having clergymen in different cities traveling aboard steamers to help congregations in other locations, the institutional activities and events of the AME Church further helped connect geographically disparate communities in an intricate network of mutual support and communication. On August 15, 1863, Elder Ward issued a notice in the *Pacific Appeal* for a statewide camp meeting, a "Feast of Tabernacles," to be held on August 27th in Stanford, Alameda, to continue for "a week or more." It also announced a convention for "all the ministers of the A. M. E. Church" to be held on the 4th of September, in San Francisco. He requested the "churches of the Pacific States" to send "one lay delegate for each 25 members," and to take up a collection in support of the convention.[60] The call was responded to by the notice in the August 29th issue of the *Appeal*, announcing J. P. Dyer, James Madison Bell, Luke Coleman, and Henry C. Cornish as the lay delegates from San Francisco to the conference.[61] Several days later, African Americans in black communities along the Pacific coast read in the *Appeal* that their pastors had safely arrived in San Francisco. The conference had "commenced its

---

The 1924 *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties*, however, records that there were three black churches during the 1850s in Marysville, whose histories I have recounted above. The reports of the *Marysville Herald* and the 1924 *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties* corroborate on Mt. Olivet's new church building in 1857-1858, lending credence to the account in the 1924 *History of Yuba and Sutter*.

[58] Delay, *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties,* 183; Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin*, 27.

[59] T. M. D. Ward, "Colored Men of California," 6 June 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.

[60] 15 August 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.

[61] 29 August 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.

sessions, in the [Union Bethel] A. M. E. Church" on the 3rd of September, and an "utmost harmony" was prevailing thus far among participants.[62]

The work of the AME conference, in orchestration with ocean and river steamboats and the circulation of the *Appeal*, wove together distant cities along the Pacific coast into one large fabric of community. Ministers from San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, Marysville, Grass Valley, Nevada City, Placerville, Coloma, and also from outside of California from Virginia City, Nevada Territory; Idaho Territory; and from even outside of the United States from Victoria, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, had traveled down to San Francisco. Not only were these clergymen pastoring established stations in one city, but a number of them were in charge of circuits, which meant traveling between congregations of various towns. During the two years of service prior to the convention, Peter Kelingworth had made rounds of Placerville, Coloma, Diamond Springs, Mud Springs, Cold Springs, Gold Hill, Georgetown, Greenwood Valley, and other various towns in California. Elder Jacob Mitchell from Stockton had also made visits to Sacramento, Marysville, Coloma, Placerville, and Virginia City.[63] During the convention itself, the clerical and lay delegates shared detailed reports of the places from which they came, including the number of congregations, condition of church buildings, the atmosphere of worship and communion, and the funds collected. The pastor from Placerville could learn of the conditions in Sacramento, and the lay delegate from San Francisco could give advice on the matters in Marysville. As these church representatives discussed the prospects of the AME Church on the Pacific coast,

[62] 5 September 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.
[63] *Journal of Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Ministers and Lay Delegates of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Bethel Church, San Francisco, from September 4th to September 10th, 1863* (San Francisco: B. F. Sterett, 1863), 3-7.

they broke down geographical barriers and imagined the African American citizens living in different places as one extended black community. As discussion continued, delegates also went beyond matters confined within the realm of religion and spirituality to make recommendations for the betterment of the black community as a whole. The convention resolved to promote education across all communities of the Pacific coast by directing the officers of Sunday Schools everywhere to establish "a good library," supplied with books and other reading material that would "attract and interest children, and adults, too."[64]

Another closeknit foundational organization that bolstered the community networks of African Americans living on the Pacific coast was the Freemasonry. Many black men who came from the East had been part of the fraternal order, and in June, 1854, the first lodge was organized in San Francisco.[65] Following the Hannibal Lodge No. 1, consequent lodges were formed in San Francisco, Sacramento, Nevada City, Marysville, Sonora, Portland, Oregon, and Virginia City, Nevada. The Masonry helped uplift and strengthen their spirits in the face of oppressive reality. Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, who often delivered speeches to his Masonic brethren, exhorted them to become "masters and excellent in knowledge and skill," and to overcome the contemporary stereotypes of race and color. "Masonry knows no distinctions founded on color," he emphasized repeatedly throughout his various speeches. "I am a man," he declared, and that was all that was important. Masons were descended from the "Architect and Governor of the Universe," God himself, and as such, they would overcome prejudices over skin color and devote themselves to observing "Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice."[66] Besides the spiritual encouragement against racial prejudice, the Freemasonry also bolstered the sense of

---

[64] *Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference*, 22-23.
[65] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 102.
[66] JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

community among members of lodges in disparate locations through various events that brought men and women together from different parts of the state. Throughout the year, black newspapers announced literary events, social dances, excursions, athletic and literary competitions, special celebrations and dinners hosted by various lodges.[67]

In June, 1855, members of the lodges around the state gathered in the Masonic Hall on Broadway, San Francisco, to form a Grand Lodge for the state of California. While every lodge had sent delegates to San Francisco, one had neglected to do so: the Philomathean Lodge of Sacramento. The grand body nevertheless quickly solved the problem by making use of the CSNC's daily steamer line between San Francisco and Sacramento. They resolved that J. C. Carter would take the Thursday afternoon steamer up to Sacramento, meet with the members of the Philomathean Lodge, and return by the Friday steamer on the 22nd of June. Carter would either bring the Philomathean representative, or come back with a document certifying himself as a proxy for the absent lodge. He apparently succeeded in his mission, for the meeting commenced on Friday and the grand lodge was established by the end of its proceedings, with Philip A. Buchanan as the new grand master for the state of California.[68] Despite the establishment of this grand lodge in 1855, black masonry in California grew up in two branches: the Conventional Independent Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, and the Grand

---

[67] List of lodges found in the *Prince Hall Grand Lodge Minute Book, 1855-1875,* MS, California State Library, Sacramento. The names of the lodges are as follows: Hannibal No. 1 of San Francisco, Philomathean No. 2 of Sacramento, Victoria No. 3 of San Francisco, Mt. Moriah No. 4 of Nevada City; Laurel Lodge No. 5 of Marysville, Land Mark No. 6 of Sonora, Hiram No. 7 of Portland, Oregon, and Ashlar No. [?] of Virginia City, Nevada. For examples of lodge events announced in newspapers, see St. John's Day celebrations, 11 January 1867, Annual Meeting, 21 June 1867; St. John's Day, 3 January 1868; Dedication of Masonic Lodge ceremony, 3 July 1868; Holiday entertainments, 8 January 1869, *The Elevator*.

[68] 19-22 June, 1855, *Prince Hall Grand Lodge Minute Book*, MS; *Prince Hall Masonic Digest: Official Publication of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California and Its Jurisdiction*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Third Quarter, 1954-55), 4.

Lodge of the Free and Accepted Ancient York Masons for the State of California. On June 18th, 1874, a meeting was held to finally unite the two into one Most Worshipful Sovereign Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons of the State of California. This united grand lodge was later renamed the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge "to establish our originality."[69]

Black Californians formed various social and political organizations besides the church and the Masonry that also boosted their sense of a Pacific coast black community and added to the myriad channels of communication. These institutions served to unite and organize black men and women by mutual interest, gender, age, and talents. In July, 1853, a two-story building dedicated to the interests of black San Franciscans opened on Washington Street. The first floor served as a saloon, and the second, a library. Black men and women used the saloon for social gatherings and entertainment, while the Athenaum Institute occupied the second. The Athenaum Institute was an organization of black activists and intellectuals who sought to champion the interests of the race. Its leading officials were men with strong antislavery activist backgrounds in New England, Philadelphia, or New York, who tried to benchmark the activities of the Philadelphia Library Company back on the East coast. They sought to serve the black community by collecting books on various subjects, promoting education, literacy, and intellectual exchange.[70] By 1854, Secretary James R. Starkey announced that the library had collected eight hundred books, and that the Institute boasted of eighty-five members. Indeed, the idea and the sense of urgency for the need for a black newspaper of their own

---

[69] *Prince Hall Masonic Digest*, 3.

[70] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 99-100; Dorothy B. Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 5, no. 4 (Oct., 1936), 555-576.

came from the leadership of the Athenaum, many of whom were also delegates to the statewide Colored Convention in Sacramento.[71]

In September 1860, the black women of San Francisco organized the first black mutual benefit society in California, the Ladies' Union Beneficial Society. It was incorporated in February, 1861, with Mrs. Elenora Dodson as president. With six officers, seven trustees, and fifteen members serving as board of managers, this full-fledged organization insured its members from expenses incurred by illness, bodily accidents, and deaths. Black women between the ages of fifteen and fifty of "good moral character, and of good sound health" could apply for membership, which would be maintained by the payment of an entrance fee of one dollar and subsequent monthly fees of the same amount.[72] Five years later in October, 1865, the *Elevator* reported that the condition of the society was "prosperous," having just successfully installed officers for the new term in a meeting held at the AME Church on Powell Street. The guests had enjoyed a "pleasant and agreeable" feast after the official proceedings, with tables decorated with "much taste" loaded with good food.[73]

The Young Men's Union Beneficial Society was organized by Jeremiah Burke Sanderson in 1862, who served as its first president.[74] Led by prominent leaders and activists of the black community, the organization was mostly comprised of aspiring young black men who sought to promote the self-education of black Californians.[75]

---

[71] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 101.
[72] Ladies' Union Beneficial Society, of San Francisco*, Constitution, By-Laws, and Act of Incorporation* (San Francisco: B. F. Sterett, 1861), 1-11. While this was a society for "Ladies," the initial secretary and the board of trustees were comprised of black men.
[73] 13 October 1865, *The Elevator*.
[74] 5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*. J. B. Sanderson was the first president; Edward Quinn, the vice president; John Lawrence the secretary, and R. T. Houston the treasurer.
[75] 5 April 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*; also cited in Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson," 329. For examples of notice of meetings from the Young Men's Union Beneficial Society, see 3 July 1868; 11 February 1870,

Another society for mutual benefit, the West Indian Benevolent Association, established in 1867 and incorporated in 1870, claimed for its object "to render aid to its sick members who are in good standing in the Association and to bury its dead."[76] Far from being a simple insurance agency, however, the West Indian Benevolent Association also provided entertainment activities and excursions for members to come together and enjoy food and communion. On August 2, 1875, the association held the eighth annual picnic at South San Francisco Park, which the *Appeal* noted was "well attended" and graced with "a neat speech" by President William J. Simmons. After the picnic, members of the West Indian joined the Young Men's Beneficial Society for "an enlivening hop in the evening," a courtesy of the Committee of Arrangements who secured complimentary tickets for the West Indian members.[77]

Despite the vigor with which black Californians engaged in labor, business enterprise, and community building, the discriminatory atmosphere was becoming stifling for many African Americans by the late 1850s. The white citizens of California had been contemplating an anti-black immigration law since the creation of its state constitution, although the measure was postponed until the state legislature would convene. Although the anti-immigration bill never passed into law, hostile laws continued to pile up throughout the 1850s. Article 2 of the constitution of California deprived black citizens of the right of suffrage. In 1850, white legislators prohibited African Americans from intermarrying with white persons, attending public schools not specifically established for non-white children, and giving evidence in criminal cases for

---

The Elevator.

[76] Articles of Incorporation, West Indian Benevolent Association, San Francisco, 1867, California State Archives.

[77] 7 August 1875, *The Pacific Appeal*.

or against white persons.[78] The next year, the ban on black testimony extended to civil cases as well.[79] In 1852, the state Fugitive Slave Act, separate from the 1850 national Fugitive Slave Act, was added to the pile of discriminatory laws, authorizing any judge to issue a certificate to force an African American into slavery upon "satisfactory" evidence, provided that s/he be removed from the state.[80]

Put into practice, these laws not only deprived black Californians of the privileges of first-class citizenship, but seriously endangered their very persons, property, and liberty and left them no means of legal redress when these rights were violated. On a July night in 1850, Jackson Jourdan, a black man, was cruising the streets of Sacramento around eight or nine o'clock in the evening. As he was walking, he overheard a man jeer that "If I had that nigger in texas I would sell him." Justly offended, Jourdan turned and asked "Dutch Louis," the sneering white man, why he would insult him when there had been no cause for offense. Louis's answer was not recorded, but Jourdan, disgusted with the reply, slapped Louis in the face and called him a "dirty nosed boy." Enraged, Louis drew out a slingshot from his breast and struck "a violent blow upon the left of Jourdan's

---

[78] "An Act regulating marriages," passed April 22, 1850, declared "All marriages of white persons with negroes or mulattoes […] illegal and void," and violators "deemed guilty of a misdemeanor," punishable by "fine or imprisonment, or both." "An Act concerning crimes and punishments," passed April 16, 1850, declared that "No black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person. Every person who shall have one-eighth part or more of negro blood shall be deemed a mulatto, and every person who shall have one-half of Indian blood shall be deemed an Indian." Concerning the education of black children, it was decreed that "Negroes, Mongolians, and Indians shall not be admitted into the public schools; and whenever satisfactory evidence is furnished to the superintendent of public instruction to show that said prohibited persons are attending such schools, he may withhold from the district in which such schools are situated, all share of the State school fund; and the superintendent of public schools for the county in which such district is situated shall not draw his warrant in favor of such district for any expenses incurred while the prohibited persons aforesaid were attending the public schools therein; provided, that the trustees of any district may establish a separate school for the education of Negroes, Mongolians, and Indians, and use the public school funds for the support of the same." Theodore H. Hittell, *General Laws of California, 1850-1864*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: H. H. Bancroft & Company, 1870), 235.

[79] *Statutes of California, 1851*, 113, cited in James A. Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony," 313.

[80] F. W. Howay, "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island in 1858," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, v. 3, no. 2 (May, 1935), 101.

Eye," snarling out "the intention to have used a pistol if he had had one." Although Jourdan tried to bring the case before court, Judge Charles C. Sackett, Justice of the Peace for the County of Sacramento, discharged Dutch Louis "for want of witnesses": African American testimony were of no value in cases where white persons were a party.[81]

Bodily harm was not the only danger that constantly harassed black Californians. When William H. Potter, a white man, stole the jewelry and clothes of a black woman, Sarah Carroll, at the value of approximately five to seven hundred dollars, the case against him was simply dismissed because there was only black testimony against him.[82] Again on June 27, 1860, when James Howard stole an expensive gold watch, valued at one hundred dollars, from an Albert Grubbs, the Sacramento Court of Sessions initially found him guilty of grand larceny. The Supreme Court of California, nevertheless, quickly reversed the decision of the lower court, accepting the appeal of Howard's lawyers that "admitting the testimony of Grubbs a negro, against defendant a white man," had been an illegal procedure.[83] Indeed, the deprivation of the right to testify for or against white persons left African Americans legally vulnerable to every kind of malice and criminal acts of their white counterparts.

The stifling climate reached a breaking point for black Californians around 1858, when the liberty of a young man named Archy Lee surfaced as the most hotly debated

---

[81] People v. Dutch Louis, Sacramento Justice Court, July 20, 1850. Sacramento History Center, Sacramento, CA.

[82] People v. William Potter, Sacramento Justice Court, December 12, 1850. Sacramento History Center. The case is also detailed in David L. Snyder, *Negro Civil Rights in California: 1850* (Sacramento Book Collectors Club, 1969).

[83] People v. James Howard, California Supreme Court, WPA#12783, September, 1860. California State Archives. The case is also discussed in Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, Mrs. Ralph C. H. Catterall ed. (New York, Octagon Books, 1968 [Origin. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution, 1926-1937. 5 v. Publication no. 374 of the Carnegie Institution]), 5: 330, 335.

issue throughout the state. Lee did ultimately win his freedom, against all the efforts of his enslavers. The process by which he gained final liberty was a solid testimony to the strength, dedication, and collaboration of black communities in various cities across California. Nevertheless, the extremely convoluted process of what should have been a straightforward and obvious case in Lee's favor, the ludicrous wording of the decision against Lee in the California Supreme Court, and the simultaneous debates in the legislative hall on banning African American entry into the state, convinced many people that vicious racial discrimination was impossible to eradicate in California.

Lee's case began on a Wednesday night on January 6, 1858, when the police raided Hackett's House, a black boardinghouse in Sacramento, in search of a fugitive enslaved man named Archy Lee. A few days earlier, Lee had taken flight from Charles A. Stovall, his white owner, when he learned that Stovall was planning to return to Mississippi with him. Lee and the black Sacramento residents who aided him were aware that Stovall had legally lost his rights to detain Lee when Stovall took a job in California. Although there was the 1852 California Fugitive Slave Law, it would not apply to Lee, for it only applied to enslaved persons brought into the state before California gained official statehood. The only way Stovall could have held onto Lee as an enslaved person was if Stovall remained a sojourner in the state, with no intention to settle permanently. As Stovall had taken up a job as a teacher in Sacramento, however, the well informed black residents of Sacramento knew that Stovall had no legal defense against Lee's freedom.[84] When Lee was arrested, therefore, the black community of Sacramento became instantly alert. Charles Parker, one of the black owners of Hackett's House, hired prominent white lawyers Edwin B. Crocker and John H. McKune to draw up a writ of

[84] C. A. Stovall v. Archy Lee case file (13-2480), The National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

habeas corpus to free Lee from the city prison. Prominent black men and women in San Francisco volunteered to provide the funds to see Lee's case through. County Judge Robert Robinson called a hearing on January 8, 1858.[85]

This date coincided with the inauguration of a new governor for the state of California, John B. Weller, a pronounced pro-southern man. The new legislature, overwhelmingly Democratic, was also openly vicious toward the rights of non-white people.[86] Five months before in August, Oregon had framed the 1857 constitution prohibiting the migration of free African American into the state. On November 17, the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* had remarked, not without a degree of sarcasm, that "It is much better to keep them [the free African Americans] away than to let them come [to Oregon], and deprive them of all civil rights and the power of defending themselves or their property as is done in this State [California]."[87] Indeed, black communities along the coast felt themselves increasingly besieged by hostile state judicial and legislative bodies. To make it worse, the Archy Lee case, which black communities had expected to end in a straightforward victory for the young man, dragged on through the courtroom of Judge Robinson in Sacramento, the office of the United States Commissioner George Pen Johnson, back again to Judge Robinson, up to the California Supreme Court, down to Judge Thomas W. Freelon's court in San Francisco, and then finally back again to the office of Commissioner Johnson. It was maddening for

---

[85] On the proceedings of Archy Lee's case, see Rudolph M. Lapp, *Archy Lee: A California Fugitive Slave Case* (The Book Club of California, 1969); William E. Franklin, "The Archy Case: The California Supreme Court Refuses to Free a Slave," *Pacific Historical Review* vol. 32, no. 2 (May, 1963), 137-154.
[86] Of thirty-five members of the Senate, twenty-seven were Democrats; of eighty members of the Assembly, sixty-six were Democrats. See Howay, "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island in 1858," 103, which takes the statistics from the *Quarterly of the California Historical Society*, IX (1930), 268. Also see Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 5.
[87] 17 November 1857, *Daily Evening Bulletin*, quoted in Howay, "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island in 1858," 102.

antislavery activists as they watched Lee declared free in one trial, become immediately rearrested, rejailed, and retried as Stovall and his lawyer kept changing strategies. Added to this harrowing process of witnessing the pernicious grip of slavery in California was the news of the proceedings of the Assembly going on at the same time. The California legislature was now trying to pass a bill to deliver up any enslaved person who "shall be brought or may have been heretofore brought" to California, as opposed to only those who were brought in before 1850.[88]

Goading black communities in California to even more frustration was the decision of the California Supreme Court on the Archy Lee case, whose contents were beyond baffling. Delivered on February 11, 1858, it declared that Stovall had no legal right to enslave Lee, since Stovall had forfeited his status of sojourner when he acquired a job and purchased property in California. Nevertheless, the court would be charitable, just this once, for the poor inexperienced, feeble, young white man, and let him coerce the rightfully free black man back into lifelong slavery in Mississippi.[89] The decision raised a righteous furor not just among the black communities in California, but also among white lawyers and journalists throughout the state and even on the East Coast. Joseph Glover Baldwin, who later became a member of the California Supreme Court himself, sent a mocking correspondence to the *Daily Alta California*: "The Constitution never operates for the first time; The Constitution never operates against a man travelling for his health; Charity is defined, 'to take a man away from himself and give him to

---

[88] For details of the progress of the complicated Archy Lee case, see Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 3-59. For discussion of concurrent legislation in the Assembly and the Senate, see Howay, "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island," 103. Stokes's bill on delivering up fugitive enslaved persons failed to garner enough votes because many thought that such a law would effectually make California a slave state.
[89] C. A. Stovall vs. Archy Lee case file (13-2480), National Archives at San Francisco; Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 13-15.

another.'; A man may gain all the law in his case but lose himself."[90]

Refusing to forfeit Lee to slavery, the black communities of California worked strenuously and networked closely to gain the rightful liberty of the young man. After the decision of the Supreme Court, the black community of Stockton went on alert when they found that Lee was incarcerated at a Stockton jail. They tried to obtain a writ of habeas corpus there, but when Stovall learned of this effort, he took Lee and fled down to San Francisco. The black residents of Stockton immediately sent alarm to the black community in San Francisco, who promptly obtained a writ of habeas corpus for Lee and a warrant to arrest Stovall on charges of kidnapping. Added to these legal measures, black San Franciscans organized voluntary patrol teams to watch and guard the wharves in case Stovall should try to sneak out on a steamer. Shop owners shut down their businesses to help the San Francisco deputy sheriff and his officers intercept Stovall before he got away from the state. Black stewards, cooks, waiters, and laborers aboard the steamers and on the docks were vigilant for any sign of Stovall and Lee.[91] On March 5, a rumor began circulating that "there was to be a colored rescue of Archy" that day when the steamer pulled out. The *Daily Alta California* reported "crowds" of white people gathering on the wharves, trying "to witness the fun." The concerted effort of the black communities finally paid off, for on March 5, Stovall was caught while trying to secretly board the steamer *Orizaba* with Lee.[92] That night, black San Franciscans gathered at the AME Zion Church to raise funds for more upcoming trials, collecting one

---

[90] Lapp quotes from an undated *Alta California* article written by Joseph Glover Baldwin, who then lived in Rattlesnake Bar, Placer County, California, and signed as "Justicia." - Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 15.
[91] Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 19-22.
[92] 6 March 1858, *Daily Alta California*.

hundred fifty dollars on that one night.[93] Another month and a half of trials, rearrests, imprisonment, and delayed proceedings followed, but finally, on April 14, 1858, Archy Lee became a free man at last.[94]

Victory, however, was bittersweet for many African Americans on the Pacific coast. With Oregon's prohibition of black immigration, Lee's extraordinarily complex and harrowing passage to freedom despite having all the law on his side, and a hostile legislature in California, many overstretched nerves now snapped. To make it worse, during March, just as Lee was being tried again in San Francisco, the California legislature was contemplating a bill to prohibit the entry of African Americans into the state. Passing both houses, it barely missed becoming law because of technical issues. It was the last straw for many in the black communities of the American Far West.[95] On the very night of Lee's release, black leaders in San Francisco gathered at the AME Zion Church to discuss detailed options for a mass emigration. Resolving that "they would not be degraded by the enactment of such an unjust and unnecessary law against them by their own (American) countrymen," they debated the best destination for racially equal treatment: Sonora, Mexico; Vancouver Island, British Columbia; or New Granada, Panama. Five days later on April 19, sixty-five people were selected to travel to Vancouver Island and see if it was a suitable place to settle. On May 6, these delegates reported their findings to an eager audience of three hundred people: a "land of freedom and humanity," Vancouver Island was a "God-sent land for the coloured people."[96]

---

[93] Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 26-27.
[94] Lapp, *Archy Lee*, 57.
[95] Howay, "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island," 106-111.
[96] Both quoted in Howay, "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island," 111-112. The first quote is from the report, which is not cited; the second quote comes from the 7 May 1858 *Daily Evening Bulletin*. For details on the process of deciding on emigration, also see Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 240-244.

Together with black goldseekers who had caught wind of the Fraser Gold rush of 1858, over two hundred African Americans turned their backs on what was supposed to be the freest place in the United States to find milder racial climates up north. On April 22, these migrants sailed out of San Francisco for Victoria on the *Commodore*.[97] While this must have been a cause of sadness for anti-emigrationists such as Jeremiah B. Sanderson, the exodus extended the black community network, which had been contained within United States territory. When the *Pacific Appeal* launched four years later in 1862, Anderson and Bell took care to place an agent in Victoria to distribute the black San Francisco newspaper, and they ran a series of reports on the black community in British Columbia, entitled "A Cosmopolite in Victoria" and "Notes of a Trip to Victoria" from December 1863 to February 1864.[98] When Bell established his own newspaper, the *Elevator*, in 1865, he again made sure that the black community in British Columbia subscribed to his San Francisco journal.[99]

Nevertheless, the majority of black Californians refused to leave their newly adopted state, despite the discriminatory laws and the hostile legislature. Throughout the 1850s and into the Civil War and beyond, black San Franciscans worked actively to challenge oppressive laws and practices in the state by drawing upon vibrant black community networks. The first concerted movement of black Californians targeted the black rights to testimony in cases where white persons were parties. In 1851, immediately after the legislature passed the law prohibiting black people from testifying in civil cases for or against white people, a group of black San Franciscans including Jonas P.

---

[97] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 242.

[98] "A Cosmopolite in Victoria," 19 December 1863; "Notes of a Trip to Victoria. Number Four," 9 January 1864; "Notes of Trip to Victoria. Number Five," 6 February 1864; "Notes of Trip to Victoria. Number Six," 13 February 1864, *The Pacific Appeal*.

[99] 4 October 1867, *The Elevator*.

Townsend, W. H. Newby, and Mifflin W. Gibbs published resolutions protesting against the action in the *Daily Alta California*.[100] Although this initial protest drew little attention, the following year black activists in San Francisco formed the Franchise League to spearhead a petition campaign to abolish the discriminatory testimony law. With the primary base in San Francisco, the black communities of San Francisco and Sacramento comprised the mainstay of its leadership in this early movement. They succeeded in enlisting the support of a number of white men, including G. E. Montgomery, a white lawyer in Sacramento. In his journal, Montgomery noted that "the colored men of Sacramento City called upon me some days ago to draw up a petition to the legislature of California." Montgomery complied with the request, and presented what he had written at a meeting held in a black hotel. He was pleased with what he had done, Montgomery wrote, if not because of moral beliefs, at least because he thought "this … secures me the colored business of Sacramento."[101] Having accrued about four hundred signatures, the petition was presented to the legislature by Patrick Canney, representative from Placer County, on March 22, 1852. The first petition met with failure: the Assembly unanimously voted to decline to accept "any petition from such source."[102] Undaunted, the black community continued to petition the legislature. Another petition was submitted to the legislature in 1853. It was rejected once more amid jeers from representatives such as George Carhart and A. G. McCandless, who proposed that petitions "from such

---

[100] Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 47.
[101] [G. E. Montgomery,] "Lost Journals of a Pioneer," *Overland Monthly* (January, 1886), 77, quoted in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 195-96.
[102] *Journal of the Assembly,1852*, 395, quoted in Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony," 314; Snyder, *Negro Civil Rights in California,* [no page number]. For process of gathering signatures and how it fared in the state legislature, also see Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 194-96.

source" be thrown out of the window or be burned.[103]

After repeated failures, the leaders of the petition movement realized that they needed to go beyond gathering signatures from only large cities like San Francisco and Sacramento. They decided to launch a statewide petition campaign, with an organization powerful enough to reach all the remote regions of the state and unite them under one urgent purpose. Representatives would come from all parts of the state, not just from a few large cities, and help circulate the petition throughout the counties of California. Black San Franciscans met in the Athenaeum Library in September, 1855 to discuss how to achieve a united front. The outcome of this meeting was the Colored Convention movement. On November, 1855, the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of California was held in Sacramento - with representatives from every county in which there was a sizable black community. Together, as a united body of African American citizens from every part of northern California, they would agitate for the right to testify in courts. From various counties across northern California, steamers carried delegates into Sacramento in 1855 and again in 1856 to discuss the most pressing issues facing African American residents of the state. One of the most important outcomes of these conventions, then, was the extensive petition movement to repeal the discriminatory testimony law in 1857.[104]

In the winter following the first convention in November, 1855, a major petition campaign was underway in multiple counties including San Francisco, Sacramento, El Dorado, and Yuba. In San Francisco alone, black activists succeeded in registering seven

---

[103] *Journal of the Assembly*, *1854*, cited in Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony," 314.
[104] Also see Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony," 315; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 199-201.

hundred signatures.[105] When this effort failed once again to move the legislature, black Californians mustered their strength one final time and launched the fourth, and the most massive, petition campaign in 1857. In the boxes that preserve the nineteenth-century petitions received by California Legislature at the California State Archives in Sacramento, one bundle of petitions stands out among all others in the folder designated for those presented in 1857. While others were scribbled by hand and signed by only a handful of people, these particular petitions are clean, typewritten, and boast of organized circulation around more than seven different counties. Expressing the necessity of black testimony rights in clear, succinct words, the format evinces the unmistakable presence of a well-organized movement that could garner the support of both black and white advocates across the vast geography of the newly born state. This was the fourth petition campaign for black testimony rights, the result of the Second Colored Convention held in December, 1856. Thousands of signatures, including those from many prominent white businessmen, testified to the desire of black and white Californians that the legislature would amend the racially discriminatory testimony laws. But this petition too was ignominiously snubbed by the legislature.[106] After trying a petition campaign one last time in 1858, this time feebler than the year before, agitation for black testimony rights

---

[105] Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 200-201.
[106] Petitions to Legislature, February-April 1857, California State Archives. The 1857 petitions are typed, and have underlined spaces in which to fill in county names. It clearly signifies that there as a centralized leadership, the Executive Committee of the Colored Convention movement, that issued the typewritten pages and sent them, by steamer, to every county. There were corresponding Executive Committees waiting in each county, and they circulated these petitions in churches, homes, and social organizations to accumulate as many signatures as they could. They then mailed the signatures back to the headquarters, who organized them county by county and sent them to the 1857 Legislature. The process can be seen in the letter from Jeremiah B. Sanderson, the secretary of the Convention, to David Brown, one of the activists in Marysville. In the letter, Sanderson acknowledges receipt of the letter and petition sent down by Brown, containing eighty-four signatures. He informs Brown that the petition from Sierra will be sent on to the legislature, and congratulates Brown for sending it down "quite in time." The letter, while lost in the collections at the Bancroft Library and the California State Library, is quoted in Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 56. Also see Fisher, "Struggle for Negro Testimony," 318, which briefly examines the 1857 petition; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, discusses the fourth petition campaign in pages 201-204.

went into several years of lull as outraged black Californians began to consider emigration as a serious solution. The question resurfaced in 1861, when black Californians who had grown wealthier and more influential during the last decade began to voice more aggressive demands for their rights to testify regardless of color. In March 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, African American Californians finally won the right to testify in court in cases where white persons were involved.[107]

Almost immediately, the people of San Francisco began to utilize their newly won rights to testimony in an effort to bring down racial discrimination in streetcars across the state. When Charlotte L. Brown, a young teacher, was ejected against her will from a horse-drawn streetcar operated by the Omnibus Railroad Company on the evening of April 17, 1863, Brown remembered that her people had the right to stand in the witness box and testify against those who committed crimes against them. She brought her case to the Twelfth District Court of San Francisco, and gave evidence against Thomas S. Dennison, the white conductor of the car from which she was compelled to leave. "The Conductor [came] around to collect tickets & when he came to me I handed him my ticket," she explained, but "he refused to take it." When she asked him why he would not take a legitimate ticket, Dennison replied that "colored persons were not allowed to ride." Although Brown protested that she had a "great ways to go" and insisted "positively that I would not get out," Dennison ordered her to get off at every stop. At the corner of

---

[107] Lapp, in *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, briefly discusses the 1858 petition campaign on page 205. It is not clear exactly how much influence black agitation had upon the amendment to the testimony law in 1863. Historian Theodore Hittell believed it was "merely a special and exclusive movement in favor of the Negro brought about by the war." Nevertheless, Californian historians agree that the dozen years of black activism to abolish the discriminatory testimony law very likely played a significant role in broaching and keeping the problem persistently on the minds of the legislators. - Theodore H. Hittell, *History of California* (4 vols., San Francisco, 1897), IV, 340-41, quoted in Fisher, "Struggle for Negro Testimony," 322. Although black Californians won the right to testify in 1863, this did not abolish the distinction of race in the matter altogether. Chinese and "Indian" persons were not allowed to testify for or against white persons until 1872.

Jackson and Stockton Streets, Dennison finally "took hold of [Brown's] arm" as he reiterated his demand. Realizing that she could not resist him physically, Brown acquiesced quietly. As she left, however, she told him that she would seek redress; the conductor answered "very good" as he drove away.[108]

As one of the first civil rights cases to openly challenge a visible racially discriminatory social custom just weeks after the legislative amendment to the testimony law, Brown's case captivated the attention and aroused the imaginations of black and white citizens across the state. It stirred up even more excitement because Judge O. C. Pratt, a native of New York, was decidedly favorable toward black rights to ride equally in streetcars alongside whites. When Brown ultimately won the case and was rewarded five hundred dollars, bitter white journalists printed remarks and images that sarcastically forecasted a "happy" future in which "the narrow distinctions of caste and color shall be abolished." In an image under the title, "The Effect of Judge Pratt's Decision," the artist depicted the cabin of a streetcar in which black and white persons were sitting together. The white "ladies" with thin, delicate bodies in frilly dresses look either frightened or curious as they sit squeezed between black men and women, who boast of possessing twice the body proportions of the whites. Already taking up twice as much space with just their bodies, black men worsen the situation by sitting with their legs spread wide apart, while black women have giant baskets on their laps. To the horror of nineteenth-century white men who believed white women needed their protection, black men depicted to look like gorillas are actually leaning toward the white "lady" trying to engage her in a conversation, and the white woman is looking back at him with curiosity!

[108] Charlotte L. Brown v. Omnibus Railroad Company, 12th District Court, City and County of San Francisco. MS. California Historical Society.

"For the inauguration of this happy era," reads the article that follow, "we are mainly indebted … to Judge Pratt." Sneering at Charlotte Brown's "sensitive feelings" that were "hurt to the amount of $5,000 by being led out of the car by a conductor," the editor was glad that the jury at least had the sense to reward her only five hundred dollars. "Invest the money in car tickets," he jeered, "and you may possibly have the luck to be turned out again."[109] In return, the *Pacific Appeal* made fun of the irrational "fear" certain whites displayed at the prospect of African Americans "intruding" upon public spaces: "a certain number of the employees of this [Omnibus Railroad] Company, who, if a colored person attempts to cross the street while their car is passing, are seized with a sudden fit of *negrophobia*, which is generally manifested by pulling their alarm bell violently, as if some danger was imminent, so afraid are they that some other of our respectable females might attempt to exercise the right that Miss Brown has just won."[110]

Despite the furor that Brown's case caused among the white populace, three subsequent cases significantly undermined any official policies concerning streetcar segregation throughout California by the late 1860s. Although it appears that the Omnibus Railroad Company changed its discriminatory policy after losing the case against Brown, it was not the only streetcar operator in San Francisco that had implemented the custom. William Bowen was violently thrown out of a horse-drawn streetcar operated by the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company on a Tuesday evening, May 26, 1863, just a month after Charlotte Brown's ejection. He also immediately sued the conductor and driver of the streetcar on charge of assault and battery. In Judge Samuel Cowles's court in San Francisco, Bowen testified that he had

[109] Undated newspaper article in the Charlotte L. Brown collection at the California Historical Society.
[110] 21 November 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.

tried to board a streetcar at the corner of California and Battery Streets with a delivery errand from his employers, but when he stepped onto the platform, the conductor had grabbed him by the shoulder and turned him around, telling him, "We don't carry niggers." Although Bowen offered to ride on the platform instead of inside the cabin and tried to pay the fare, the conductor growled, "we don't take money from niggers." The conductor and the driver then seized Bowen, kicked him in the ankle, and threw him down into the street. Laughing at the hurt man, they turned around and drove away. The physician Dr. Harris, who later examined Bowen, testified that he believed Bowen to be "considerably bruised."[111]

Bowen's trial also "excite[d] great interest," the San Francisco correspondent for the *Sacramento Daily Union* reported. Judge Cowles, a native of Ohio, also believed that black citizens had the right to board a streetcar alongside whites. "As the law now stands," Cowles told the attorneys for the defense, "those who are so sensitive as to object to riding with the colored man will have to walk or ride in their own carriages with a colored man on the box driving and the wind perhaps blowing against them." Cowles, however, was not necessarily a believer of racial equality, for he instructed the jury that "they must not allow themselves to imagine that in permitting a negro to ride with the white man they raised the negro on a pedestal of equality with him," that "he himself every day rode in the cars with people probably above him in social rank and with others with whom he would not like to associate on terms of equality," but that "it had never occurred to him that in riding in the same cars with these people he was made equal with

---

[111] Undated newspaper article in the Charlotte L. Brown v. Omnibus Railroad Company papers at the California Historical Society. It incorrectly gives the date of the ejection as May 16th, 1863, which was not a Tuesday. The correct date of the event is reported in the 5 June 1863 issue of the *Sacramento Daily Union*, which refers to this case among incidents reported from San Francisco on the 4th of June from their correspondent and gives the correct date.

them." The point in debate here was not whether or not black and white people were equal, Cowles explained, but simply whether or not black persons had a legal right to board a streetcar, and if that right had been violated. The jury found the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company guilty, and Bowen won the case.[112]

Nevertheless, the 1863 cases did not completely exterminate the streetcar segregation problem. Although specific superintendent instructions to eject non-white customers were apparently discontinued, conductors of the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company streetcars continued to refuse service arbitrarily to African American customers until after the Civil War. It was only in 1867, when Emma Jane Turner and Mary Ellen Pleasant each challenged the discriminatory custom again in court, that the company at last eradicated the long condoned practice from their cars. On September 13, 1866, Emma Jane Turner had stood waiting for a streetcar at the corner of Broadway and Stockton Street. It was ten o'clock in the night, and there was nobody else in sight. Seeing car no. 9 of the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company approach, she hailed it. As she took hold of the railing and tried to step on, however, the conductor "put his hand on my breast," broke her grip on the car with his hand, and pushed her into the street. Turner tumbled backwards and stepped into her dress, the force of which tore "the skirt from the body for some distance." Judge Pratt's court found the company guilty of illegal discrimination, and awarded Turner $750 in damages.[113]

Just several days after Turner was forcibly ejected from the streetcar, Mary Ellen Pleasant was also refused service by a conductor of the same company. On September 27, 1866, Pleasant hailed a car on Folsom Street, between First and Second Streets, only to

---

[112] Undated newspaper article in the Charles L. Brown papers, California Historical Society.
[113] Emma Jane Turner v. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company, California Supreme Court, WPA#15360, 1867. California State Archives.

be ignored by both the driver and the conductor. Inside the car, however, was Selim E. Woodworth, a white friend who had been waiting for Pleasant to get on. Woodworth quickly got up and asked the conductor to halt the vehicle for Pleasant, but the conductor ignored the request. Woodworth later testified that when asked why he would not listen to her, he answered that he did not take "colored people in the cars." Frustrated, Woodworth asked him to let her off the car. The conductor immediately stopped the vehicle and let her off about a block away from where Pleasant was standing. Judge Pratt's court again found the company guilty of illegal discrimination, and awarded Pleasant $500 in damages.[114]

What really signified the oncoming eradication of discriminatory practices in the streetcar companies was not just the fact that Judge Pratt was decidedly in favor of black rights to ride in the same cars as whites, but the arguments set forth by the attorneys of the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company when it appealed to the Supreme Court of California for both the Turner and Pleasant cases. Although the Supreme Court ultimately reversed the decisions of the lower court and took the side of the streetcar operator instead, it was not on the grounds that racial discrimination was acceptable, but mainly that a large corporation should not be liable for failing to police completely arbitrary and individual acts of an employee. The company itself had not enforced such a racialized policy at all, they argued, and therefore the gist of the cases should not be about race at all. The attorneys for the company in the Turner case actually compared the

---

[114] The conductor later denied all charges against him, asserting that he had never said anything about a policy concerning non-white passengers. When the cross-examiner asked him "Why, then, didn't you stop," he answered, "Because I was going pretty fast at the time." Apparently, he was going just fast enough to be able to stop immediately to let Woodworth out. - John J. Pleasants, and Mary E., (his wife), v. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company, California Supreme Court, WPA#16249, 1867. California State Archives.

offending conductors to vicious dogs that hurt passersby without the knowledge of the owner, and argued that it was not legal to punish the owner for not being able to restrain an animal s/he did not know beforehand to be dangerous.[115] Although Turner and Pleasant lost their cases in the Supreme Court, the process ironically worked to end the longtime unofficial acceptance of the North Beach and Mission Railroad Company of the racially discriminatory practices of its conductors. After 1867, the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* no longer treated the issue of segregation in streetcars.

With the most urgent and threatening problem of black testimony solved in 1863, black Californians next tackled the rights to elective franchise. In 1865, nine counties of the state elected and dispatched representatives to the fourth colored state convention in San Francisco. At its opening ceremony, Frederick G. Barbadoes, the president, told the audience that for the past eight years, the principal object of the black community had been to obtain the right to testify in the courts of justice. That long struggle had borne fruit on January, 1863, when "the statutes of California were cleansed from that foul blot." Now, he announced, the "principal objects of this Convention is to devise ways and means for obtaining of that right, which, under the Constitution of the United States, is guaranteed to all her citizens, namely, the right of the elective franchise."[116] One of the most important outcomes of the 1865 Colored Convention was the petition to the California legislature requesting the right to vote. In the body of the petition, the Committee on Elective Franchise pointed out that African American citizens were "an industrious, moral and law abiding class of citizens" who were "paying taxes yearly upon

[115] Argument for the appellant, by W. W. Crane, Jr., attorney for the appellant, in Emma Jane Turner v. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company. J. G. McCullough, attorney for the appellant in Pleasants v. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company, California Supreme Court, used almost the same line of arguments.
[116] *Proceedings of the California State Convention of Colored Citizens*, 76.

several MILLION of dollars." Reminding the legislature of the "courage and loyalty" of the black soldiers in the "late great rebellion," the petition asked that the state constitution be amended to allow "American citizens of *African descent*, and such other persons of African descent as may have provided to become citizens, may be admitted to the rights of Suffrage and Citizenship of the State of California."[117]

Agitation for the right to elective franchise continued until 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified on February 3rd. Black Californians joined African American citizens across the nation as they jubilantly celebrated the amendment that finally declared that "the rights of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged" by the federal or state governments "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." On February 11, 1870, the *Elevator* broke out in jubilant cries: "PROGRESS OF LIBERTY! *Gloria Triumphe!* We are free! The Fifteenth Amendment which confers upon us full rights of citizenship has received the ratification of the requisite number of States." It immediately proposed a "public meeting" on February 16 for the purpose of commemorating "the event with due observance of joy, praise, and thanksgiving."[118] African American residents of San Francisco were not the only ones excited. In Virginia City, Nevada, the black community sent "a pressing invitation" to William H. Hall of San Francisco, the "silver-tongued orator" of the Pacific coast, to come out to Nevada and speak at the upcoming celebration.[119] In April, as cities and towns broke out in jubilee in observance of the

[117] *Proceedings of the California State Convention of Colored Citizens*, 87. Italics as in original. The committee probably emphasized the words "African descent" to differentiate themselves from other non-white "undesirable" racial and ethnic groups in nineteenth-century California - namely, the Chinese.
[118] 11 February 1870, *The Elevator*.
[119] 18 February 1870, *The Elevator*. The nickname "silver-tongued orator" was used by Philip A. Bell, editor of the *Elevator*, in an 11 January 1867 issue.

ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, the issues of the *Elevator* became a showcase of the network of far western black communities. Correspondents from various counties in California, Oregon, and Nevada sent in full reports of their activities to the communal hub in San Francisco, to the newspaper office of the *Elevator*. On April 22, 1870, the four pages of the newspaper were filled with columns headed: "Celebration in Nevada County," "Celebration in Portland," "Celebration in Stockton," "Celebration at Sacramento City," "Celebration at El Dorado," "Celebration in Virginia, Nev," "Celebration in Santa Cruz County," "Celebration in Sonora," as well as letters and reports from Oroville, Placerville, Napa, Los Angeles, California, and Elko, Nevada.[120]

Despite the happy celebrations, the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment nevertheless remained a bittersweet victory for black Californians. The Californian legislature, together with the Oregon legislature, had been hostile toward its ratification to the end. The Democratic party had circulated viciously racist pamphlets to undermine support for the ratification, and the Senate had voted down the amendment by a large majority.[121] It would not be until 1969, nearly a full century after the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, that California would actually ratify the amendment.

One of the final battles that black Californians waged during the Reconstruction era was the battle to end segregation in the public schools of California. Although it was in 1870, after the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, that the desegregation of public schools became the foremost concern of the black community, education had always been on the top of the list for every black activist and political organization, both

---

[120] 22 April 1870, *The Elevator*.
[121] Joseph Hoge, *Shall Negroes and Chinamen Vote in California? Read! An Address by the Democratic State Central Committee to the Voters of California* (California: 1869).

in California and across the nation.[122] Even before the first Colored Convention was held in 1855, various female and male activists had striven to better the condition of education for black children. Elizabeth Thorn Scott, a young woman living in Sacramento, dedicated her time and resources to open a private school for fourteen colored children in the city on May 29, 1854 on Second Street between M and N Streets. Three months later in August, the black community in Sacramento organized a school for black children in the AME Church and employed Scott there. When she married and had to give up maintenance of the school the next year in 1855, the school committee decided to employ Jeremiah B. Sanderson, who had arrived just a year ago from New Bedford, Massachusetts, in her stead. On April 20, 1855, Sanderson wrote in his diary: "There are thirty or more colored children in Sacramento … and no school provided … by the board of education. They must no longer be neglected … I can do but little, but with God's blessing I will do what I can."[123] On July 10, 1855, Sanderson acted on his word and sent a letter to the Board of Education of Sacramento, requesting to "take [the colored school] under your protection and patronage … for the training of their children's minds, … that they may become upright and worthy men and women." The Board of Education took heed, for it decided to appropriate funds for the colored public school.[124]

In 1857, Sanderson moved back down to San Francisco to teach at the school in the basement of the St. Cyprian AME Church. By 1859, he was in charge of the first

---

[122] Lapp agrees on this transference of priorities in 1870. See Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson," 331. Encouragement for parents to put in all their resources to educating their children, resolutions pledging to improve the libraries and the quality of education for Sunday Schools, and emphasis on the importance of education as one of the most important factors of "uplifting" the race, appear in the records of the proceedings of every Colored Convention, church conferences, and very often in Sunday sermons, black newspaper articles, and speeches.
[123] Quoted in Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 174.
[124] Quoted in Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 174-75.

public school for black children in San Francisco.[125] Some parents living in remote counties where there were no colored schools tried to get their children educated by sending them down to San Francisco. In the 1863 Common School Reports, which were taken for the school year from September, 1862 to August, 1863, there were twenty-seven counties that recorded one or more black children, but no school for colored children. Counties such as Amador, El Dorado, Nevada, and Tuolumne reported more than thirty black children, but still had no designated school. Only five counties reported the existence of a school for colored children: Sacramento, with an attendance of forty-three children; San Francisco, with seventy-six; San Joaquin, with attendance not verified but with forty black children in the county; Santa Clara, with twenty-one; and Yuba, with twenty-two.[126] In 1862, Charles F. Collins, from Yreka, Siskiyou County, wrote to Peter Anderson to inquire after black schools in San Francisco. The 1863 Common School Reports recorded ten black children in Siskiyou County with no school for them, and it seems that Collins wished to remedy this situation by sending his children to the metropolis. "What Schools are there in San Francisco for colored children?" Collins asked. "Upon what terms are they taken? What is the cost of board and other necessary expenses?" His family must have been Catholic, for he continued, "Are there any Catholic Schools in which colored children are admitted?" Anderson printed the letter in the *Pacific Appeal* with his answer: "There are two schools for colored children in San Francisco," he said. One was a public school, "under the control of the Board of Education of San Francisco," taught by Sanderson. The other was a private school,

[125] Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson," 329.
[126] Counties in which there were black children but no school for them were: Alameda, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Los Angeles, Marin, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Placer, San Mateo, Shasta, Siskiyou, Stanislaus, Solano, Sonoma, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Tuolumne, and Yolo.

"known as the Academy, conducted by Miss Jennings." For twenty dollars, children could board at the Academy as well. At present, Anderson added, there was no Catholic school that would admit colored children, "though no prohibitory rule has been adopted by the managers."[127]

By 1863, the San Francisco black public school had seventy-six students in regular attendance.[128] The next year Sanderson became the first black principal of a public school in California. A year later, however, Sanderson was demoted to the position of a teacher when a white female assistant was hired to work under him. In 1865, it was not socially acceptable for black men to supervise white women.[129] At about this time, Charlotte Brown also opened a school for young black children on 10 Scotland Street, San Francisco. Offering "all the Branches of a Primary Education" as well as lessons in piano and embroidery, she charged $1.50 per month in 1866 and $2.00 per month in 1867 for primary instruction.[130] In 1868, Sanderson left the San Francisco school and moved to Stockton to teach at a black public school there. He would stay here for seven years until his death in 1875 by a train accident.[131] Sanderson gained prestige in Stockton as the "father of schools for colored children" in California, and parents from as far away as San

---

[127] Common School Reports by County Superintendent for 1863, California State Archives. Correspondence from 11 October 1862, *The Pacific Appeal*. Collins's inquiry is also briefly mentioned in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 181.

[128] Common School Reports by County Superintendents for 1863, California State Archives.

[129] Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson," 329-330; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 160.

[130] 10 December 1866; 21 June 1867, *The Elevator*. While Brown's private school was notable because of its offerings in primary instruction, various other skilled black men and women offered lessons in music, art, and embroidery. Advertisements for musical and artistic lessons can be seen in almost every issue of the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal*. Some examples include: Mrs. Anna P. W. Pindell's school on "Music, Embroidery, And All kinds of FANCY NEEDLE-WORK, […] HAIRWORK […], Lessons in the Spanish language […] superior Pianos," advertised in 13 October 1865 issue of the *Elevator*; Mrs. A. E. Hyer's school for music, embroidery, wax work, needle work, leather work, etc., in Sacramento, advertised in 3 July 1868, *The Elevator*; and Mr. R. C. Ferguson's "SCHOOL FOR INSTRUCTION IN RUDIMENTAL MUSIC" in Siloam Baptist Church, Sacramento, advertised in 3 July, 1868, *The Elevator*.

[131] Details of his death in letter from Catherine E. Sanderson to Thomas M. D. Ward, 19[or 12] November 1875, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

Bernardino and Los Angeles would send their children up to be taught by him. The *Stockton Independent*, a white newspaper, noted that "many professional teachers might be benefited by paying a short visit" to the "colored school on Elk street," and observing "the thoroughness of instruction given to the colored pupils by Mr. Sanderson, the colored teacher. We hazard nothing in saying that he is one of the best teachers in the county." Its editors went so far as to say that "there are few men if any in the County who can excel him."[132]

In 1868, Sanderson's eldest daughter, Mary Jane Sanderson, became a teacher at a public school for black children in Brooklyn, Alameda County. [133] This was probably the one black school in Alameda County recorded in the 1867-68 Common School Reports with twelve children in attendance. The 1868-69 Reports again tell of one black school in Alameda County, with fifteen regular students.[134] On October 17, 1868, Mary wrote her father that she was "getting along quite well in school matters." She had recently attended "The Teacher's Institute" in Oakland, at which about forty teachers from "all districts of the County" were present. She proudly sent her teacher's certificate up to Stockton for her father to see, adding that "you can send it [back] down sometime when you write."[135]

As early as in 1861 and 1862, black leaders in various parts of California decided to establish statewide organizations devoted to the improvement of black education. These were the Livingstone Institute, aimed at black higher education, and the Phoenixonian Institute, seeking to secure quality education for black children. On

---

[132] Beasley, *Negro Trail Blazers*, 164. The newspaper quote she gives from the *Stockton Independent* is undated.

[133] 17 October 1868, Mary Jane Sanderson to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson. JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library. Brooklyn is now part of Oakland, Alameda County.

[134] Common School Reports 1867-68, 1868-69, California State Archives.

[135] 17 October 1868, Mary Jane Sanderson to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson. JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

January 11, 1861, the Livingstone Institute held a meeting in San Francisco to draw up a constitution and appoint a board of trustees. Its purpose was to raise ten thousand dollars to build an institution of higher education for African American children. Twenty-one men, from six different counties, comprised its board of trustees. Reverend J. W. Brier was appointed the traveling agent, who would make rounds of every county in California to spread the news and take subscriptions.[136] Five months later in June 11, 1861, the *Marysville Daily Appeal* reported that "the colored people of this State are actively engaged … in raising the means to establish a first class collegiate institution for the exclusive benefit of themselves." Thirty thousand dollars was the starter goal, "a large portion of which amount is already paid in." Stocks were to be issued to contributing black citizens at ten dollars per share, while white contributions were to be taken as donations only. The week before, the *Marysville Daily Appeal* noted, the financial agent had made rounds of Nevada City and Grass Valley, raising a total of $630 from black residents alone.[137]

Meanwhile the Phoenixonian Institute, organized on December 2, 1862 for the purpose of securing a good education for black children, successfully founded a creditable and trustworthy school for secondary education. Located in San Jose, Reverend Peter W. Cassey, the principal, operated the establishment steadfastly for over a decade.[138] The 1863 Common School Reports show that in Santa Clara County, where San Jose was located, there were twenty-one black children regularly attending a school

---

[136] "Livingstone Institute: Report by Its Secretary, Rev. J. J. Moore," 9 July, 1867, *The Pacific Appeal*; Minute Book of the Trustees of Livingstone Institute, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[137] 11 June 1861, *Marysville Daily Appeal*.
[138] For a brief history of the Phoenixonian Institute, see 21 June 1867, *The Elevator*.

for colored children, which likely was Cassey's institution.[139] Men and women from both San Francisco and San Jose contributed to the funds that supported the Phoenixonian school. From the beginning, Cassey sought to attract children from outside the city of San Jose by operating the school as a boarding school. Board and tuition were sixteen to twenty dollars a month, and scholars were required to bring their own sheets, pillows, and towels when they came to San Jose. Cassey offered classes in English, vocal music, and instrumental music. In 1865, Cassey proudly advertised that the school buildings were "thoroughly repaired, and present an appearance creditable to us as a people"; as a "High School for colored children," the school was "a public good, and one in which every lover of humanity, and of his race, should be deeply interested."[140] By August, 1865, the Phoenixonian Institute had acquired a well renowned reputation. Reverend J. J. Moore, writing for the *Elevator* after his visit to San Jose, praised that the school "far surpass[ed] the Colored Sabbath Schools of San Francisco in orderly deportment, biblical knowledge and promptness in recitations," and that it "exhibit[ed] some as bright intellects as we can meet with in the State." The school was also recognized by the white school commissioners "to be among the best regulated of the town."[141] The school was so promising, in fact, that several members of the board of trustees of the Livingstone Institute even considered using the Livingstone funds to support the Phoenixonian school.[142] The suggestion was not unanimously supported, however, and the two institutions remained separate until the Livingstone Institute disintegrated in 1874

---

[139] Common School Reports by County Superintendent for 1863, California State Archives.
[140] 5 May 1865, *The Elevator.*
[141] 4 August 1865, *The Elevator*.
[142] Suggestion by John J. Moore and John T. Jenifer on supporting the Phoenixonian Institute with Livingstone funds, in 4 August, 11 August 1865, *The Elevator*.

without realizing the dream of raising a black college on the Pacific coast.[143]

Despite such strenuous efforts to procure adequate education for black children in California, public school conditions remained extremely dire for African American children in most counties, including even San Francisco, until 1875, when California schools were finally desegregated by law. In 1870, the year when black Californians gained the elective franchise along with other African Americans across the nation, they had turned all their attention and resources to righting the racially skewed school systems. While the law provided that separate schools be established for black children in districts where there were more than ten such pupils, few districts actually followed that guide. As late as in 1873, there were only twenty-one public schools for black children in the entire state, as opposed to 1,841 schools for white children. There were two colored schools in San Francisco, Nevada County, and Solano County, respectively; and one each in the counties of Sacramento, San Joaquin, Sonoma, Yuba, Siskiyou, Napa, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara, Santa Barbara, Tehama, Merced, and Los Angeles. Even in San Francisco, where school conditions for black children were most favorable among all other counties in California, there was only one colored school for every twenty-one square miles, while there was one white school every 625 acres. Because the two San Francisco colored schools were located respectively on Vallejo Street and Fifth Street, children living in districts far away had to travel up to six to eight miles a day to just to get to and fro their schools.[144]

---

[143] Correspondent "Semper Fidelis," or Mrs. Jennie Carter, severely criticized the decision of the trustees of the Livingstone Institute for their decision to forego its purpose in the 7 March 1875 issue of the *Elevator.*
[144] J. F. Cowdery, *The Word "White" in the California School Laws: Speech of Hon. J. F. Cowdery, of San Francisco, in the House of Assembly, Sacramento, Cal., Jan 30, 1874*. [Printed for the Executive Committee of the California State Convention of Colored Citizens], California Historical Society. Cowdery's data on different counties is also corroborated by Common School Reports, 1873-74, California State Archives.

On November 20, 1871, African American citizens across California gathered in Stockton to hold a State Educational Convention to discuss "the best means by which colored children … might obtain school facilities, equal to those of white children." At this meeting, black Californians resolved to petition the legislature to have the discriminatory words prohibiting "children of African descent" from attending schools for white children stricken from section 53 of the school laws of California. If the legislature should ignore the request, they declared, they would then "appeal from an unjust public sentiment to the highest judicial tribunal in the land." To effectively collect signatures for the petition, the convention appointed State Educational Committees in twenty different counties, with one or more representative comprising each committee. The members of the Executive Committee subsequently "printed and circulated throughout the State a large number of petitions, which were numerously signed by all classes, white and black, rich and poor." Despite enlisting Republican senators in their cause, the black and white people who gave their signatures to the petition, and the speech of Seldon J. Finney, Republican senator from San Mateo, agitators for integrated education ultimately failed to move the Democratic Senate.[145]

Having been rebuffed of legislative means, the Executive Committee decided to tackle the law in the courts for justice. On the evening of April 22, 1872, the committee called an Educational Public Meeting in Bethel AME Church, San Francisco, to plan out a judicial battle to end segregation in the public school system. By bringing a test case to the Supreme Court of California, they would "break down the prejudice, and to obtain

[145] Counties in which State Educational Committees were established include: San Francisco, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Santa Clara, Yuba, Sierra, El Dorado, Merced, Mariposa, Nevada, Tuolumne, Amador, Colusa, Tehama, Santa Cruz, Napa, Solano, Sonoma, Yolo, and Shasta. The proceedings of the 1871 convention and the ensuing petition movement are described in 27 April 1872, *The Elevator*.

what was refused at the last Legislature." Declaring that "the Amended Constitution of the United States and the Civil Rights Bill gives us full educational privileges which we cannot obtain in the caste schools," they said that it was indeed time to "appeal … to the highest judicial tribunal in the land." To wage the battle, the committee consulted the most renowned lawyers in San Francisco. Having obtained the "universal opinion" that the Supreme Court would undoubtedly be in favor of declaring the segregation law unconstitutional, they then chose John W. Dwinelle to act as their attorney for the test case. Representatives from the counties of El Dorado, Nevada, Santa Clara, Yuba, Sierra, Tuolumne, Amador, Colusa, Tehama, Santa Cruz, Yolo, Napa, Solano, Sonoma, Shasta, Butte, Sutter, Placer, Los Angeles, and Alameda were appointed to act and raise funds in conjunction with the State Committee as it prepared and launched the case.[146]

On July 1, 1872, Harriet A. Ward, the mother of Mary Frances Ward, took her eleven-year-old daughter to the nearest school to their home: the Broadway Grammar School. It was the beginning of the "test case," one which black Californians hoped would end segregation in public education. Ward found the principal, Noah F. Flood, and requested for her daughter to be admitted to the white school. Flood, without bothering to make inquiries regarding Mary Frances Ward's "residence, citizenship, or in any other respect, or examining her as to her proficiency," immediately declined to consider her for an applicant. The only reason he gave for the refusal was "that she was a colored person, and that the said Board of Education had established and assigned separate schools for

[146] The work of raising the funds to carry the case, as usual, fell on the women. William H. Hall, the "silver-tongued orator of the Pacific," believed that "present [male] leaders could do but little good toward getting funds." "20 women should be taken to start," he proposed, "whilst others who are interested will act as auxiliaries." He believed that black women had the resources to raise the necessary starting funds, which the committee estimated at five hundred dollars, within six months. A committee of five women and five men were then appointed to canvass people around the state and obtain the funds. The entire record of the proceedings of this meeting is published in 27 April 1872, *The Elevator*.

such colored persons." He was sorry to be compelled to turn the Wards away, but it was definitive.[147]

The short interview, in fact, had gone just as the Executive Committee had wished it to. After two months of careful preparation, the committee put their case into action. Harriet visited the notary public of the city and county of San Francisco to document her experience on September 21, 1872. On September 23, 1872, Dwinelle, the attorney for the plaintiff, had a mandate issued to Flood to appear before the California Supreme Court in Sacramento on the second Monday of October. Once the trial began, Flood admitted to every charge that the Wards brought against him, but maintained that his actions were under the legitimate policy of the Board of Education of California. Dwinelle then argued that the school law prohibiting black children from entering public schools designated for white children were unconstitutional under the Thirteenth and the Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution. On these grounds, he demanded a writ of mandamus be issued to compel Flood to accept the application of Ward as a pupil in his white public school. So far, everything was going as the Executive Committee and Dwinelle had planned. But not for long. Upon review of the arguments of the defendant and the plaintiff, the justices of the Supreme Court declared that since two black schools, "with able and efficient teachers," existed in the city of San Francisco, refusing to accept Ward into a white public school was "evidently a sufficient authority for the … rule of the Board." As for the argument that "the exclusion of the petitioner … is contrary to the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments," they were "unable to perceive … that the State law or the action of the respondent … are in contravention [of either

[147] Mary Frances Ward v. Noah F. Flood, California Supreme Court, WPA#3826, 1872. California State Archives.

amendment.]" While they acquiesced that in districts where there were no school for colored children, "the exclusion of colored children … cannot be supported," it was not so in the case of San Francisco. The writ of mandamus was denied.[148]

Although the test case itself did not lead to a victory in court, the years of agitation for integration ultimately paid off in 1875, when the Board of Education of San Francisco declared that it would integrate its schools. As Flood's case was inching through the courts, black newspapers such as the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* had continually put the issue of school integration before the public. "Public schools are but public charities, supported by all tax-paying citizens alike, colored and white," the *Appeal* argued in its January 10, 1874 issue, "and no set of men, no City or State Board of Education, according to the Fourteenth Amendment, have the right to deprive any child, in consequence of color, from the equal privileges of such charitable public schools or public institutions."[149] When the San Francisco Board of Education finally integrated its schools in 1875, it maintained, at least superficially, that its motivation was to reduce the financial burden of having to support extra schools for colored children, a statement probably intended to deflect racism from the white electorate. Nevertheless, black Californians saw the true meaning of the event. Likening the separate school system to the institution of slavery, the *Pacific Appeal* declared on August 7, 1875 that the practice was finally "abolished." Even though integration had come as a result of financial and political calculations, "both white and colored citizens" should nevertheless "rejoice that this last relic of slavery has at last disappeared from our great Metropolitan City of the Pacific Coast." The *Appeal* went further, listing "the cities of San Francisco, Oakland,

---

[148] Mary Frances Ward v. Noah F. Flood, California State Archives. Details of the case are also briefly summarized in Catterall, *Judicial Cases*, 338-339.
[149] 10 January 1874, *The Pacific Appeal*.

Vallejo, and other localities, if not the entire State" as those standing "erect in the line of progression." In an obvious attempt at shaming those counties in California that still did not integrate their schools, Anderson did not forget to add that the citizens of "Oregon and Nevada … have not been for several years so short-sighted as to keep up an enormous expense to maintain useless separate schools to satiate foolish and vulgar prejudices."[150] The last legal case for integration appears to have happened in Visalia, San Joaquin County, from 1888 to 1890, when Arthur Wysinger applied to be admitted to a white public graded district school in the Visalia School District. The Supreme Court of California ruled for integration of the Visalia school system, and the Visalia Colored School, the separate school for black children, closed in 1890.[151]

As the African American citizens of San Francisco and the Bay Area waged their battles for first-class citizenship, they diligently used their networks running through the whole state of California. Indeed, they had even reached beyond their own state and had brought the entire Pacific Coast into the bounds of their community. Amidst the flurry of activism and movement, the black community and leadership in San Francisco stood as the central hub of communication and transportation.

The myriad webs of communication spun by the black residents of the Bay Area could not be contained just in the Far West. As they strove to make California a more equal place to live, they began to weave the East Coast into the fabric of the West. By energetically using the circulation of the steamers and the newspapers, nineteenth-century black Californians reached out to the East Coast, interwove their battles with those of the

[150] 7 August 1875, *The Pacific Appeal*. Schools in Oakland, California, had actually been integrated in 1872, ahead of San Francisco. See 6 January 1872, *The Pacific Appeal.*

[151] Mervyn G. Shippey, "A Short History of the Visalia Colored School in Two Parts," n. d., typescript in California State Library, Sacramento, CA.

rest of the nation, and ultimately embedded the fledgling state of the very far west into the tissue of the entire nation.

CHAPTER 3. FROM THE PACIFIC TO THE ATLANTIC

"Late numbers of *Zion's Standard*, of New York, and the *People's Journal*, of Brooklyn. Price 10 cents." The *Elevator* was advertising eastern black newspapers to its black Californian clientele in its July, 1868 issue. Not only could African Americans on the Pacific coast buy individual copies of these eastern papers at the office of the *Elevator*, they were also welcome to subscribe regularly to the *Colored Citizen* of Cincinnati, the *Zion's Standard* of New York, the *Christian Recorder* of Philadelphia, and the *People's Journal* of Brooklyn, New York, for three dollars per year through the office of the *Elevator*. If readers were willing to pay ten dollars annually, the editors of the *Elevator* would also be happy to "send The ELEVATOR and either two of the above papers" to them every week.[1] In December, 1870, editor Philip A. Bell also proposed to open an "Elevator Reading Room" if he could find fifty supporters willing to pay two dollars per quarter to maintain it. Should the library be organized, he offered, readers would get to enjoy "all the City Papers" as well as a "large number of Papers of this and adjoining States, besides the principal periodicals from the Eastern and Southern States."[2]

In February, 1870, the *Elevator* printed a list of "the colored papers we exchange with." The list included the *Colored Citizen* of Cincinnati, Ohio; the *Tribune* of

[1] 3 July 1868, *The Elevator*.
[2] 2 December 1870, *The Elevator*.

Richmond, Virginia; the *Christian Recorder* of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; the *New Era* of St. Louis, Missouri; the *New Orleans Standard*, of New Orleans, Louisiana; the *Missionary Record* of Charleston, South Carolina; and the *New Era* of Washington, D. C. It also made note of the *Colored Citizens' Monthly*, of Jackson, Mississippi, and the *Freedmen's Standard* of Savannah, Georgia, which had been exchanging numbers with the *Elevator* but no longer did so.[3] On November 1, 1867, the editors of the black Californian newspaper remarked that they had received "by last mail five copies of the *People's Journal*, and find it all alive, as usual." They were delighted to see that "they have not forgotten us," judging by the "copious extracts from THE ELEVATOR" in the *People's Journal*.[4]

Although physically thousands of miles away, African Americans on the Pacific coast did not consider themselves as having been cut off from the old eastern communities that they had left years ago. The majority of the adult black population of California from the 1850s to the 1870s were comprised of migrants, primarily from the states of the eastern seaboard. They continued to communicate with family and friends on the East coast even after they settled in California. During these early decades, the correspondence between people, institutions, and newspapers of the two opposite coasts of the continent took on a role greater than simply communicating information. The network created and sustained a consciousness of dual membership in black communities on both coasts. From the 1850s to the 1870s, black Californians paid keen attention to the events occurring across the continent in their old home communities. They also sought to keep California and black Californians prominent in the minds of the family members

[3] 11 February 1870, *The Elevator*.
[4] 1 November 1867, *The Elevator*.

and friends that they had left behind in the eastern communities. In the process, the black Californian newspapers played a role more crucial than any other medium in linking the black Pacific communities to those around the nation. As they did so, they fostered a strong consciousness among black Californians of being active participants in a larger black national community.[5]

When African American goldseekers began arriving in California in the late 1840s and the 1850s, a stream of letters began to flow between the Pacific and the Atlantic coasts as husbands, sons, and brothers corresponded with family members back in eastern communities. Even in cases where one or both parties could not read or write, African Americans sought out the assistance of those who could to communicate with their beloved family members and friends. One example can be found in the letter of John Billings, a friend of Jeremiah Sanderson, who sent a letter in 1864 from Virginia City, Nevada Territory, to San Francisco, California, despite the fact that he could not compose it himself. Although the inability to write his own letters forced him to exchange fewer letters than he would have liked, he insisted that he "would have rote to You again if I had been as Capiable [in writing] as you." He also felt "slighted that we had not a letter

---

[5] An argument for the role of circulation of print matter in creating a nationalistic black community consciousness can be found in Robert S. Levine, "Circulating the Nation: David Walker, the Missouri Compromise and the Rise of the Black Press," in Todd Vogel ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 21-32; Erid Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), xviii. For a discussion of the types and characteristics of black American communities and how the members, despite coming from diverse economic and social backgrounds, communicated with those in communities in distant regions to create a joint consciousness to carry out common battles for equality, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), x-xii; James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African-American Community* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). For a discussion of the definition of African American migration, and the different kinds of black American migration during the nineteenth century, see Howard Dodson and Sylviane A. Diouf eds., *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience* (Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2004).

from you before. as the principle part of Your family can rite."[6] Those who could read and write their own letters often tried to do so as often as possible. The rhythm of correspondence, then, followed that of the steamboat schedule. On October 18, 1852, Rachel Ann Brown of Lancaster, Ohio wrote to her husband, David Brown, who had recently struck out for gold mines in California, to "write me a letter as soon as you received this." She wanted to make sure that from then on she "will get a letter every month," in accordance with the arrivals of Pacific mails on the Atlantic coast.[7] By 1856, the mails between the two coasts travelled twice a month. The post office notice for San Francisco announced that "The Mails for the Atlantic States and Foreign countries depart on the 5th and 20th of every month, except when the date comes on Sunday, in which case they go on the day previous."[8] Jeremiah Sanderson, who in 1857 was the lone pioneer of the family in California, became alarmed when he missed a mail departure. He knew that his wife Catherine and their children, who were still in New Bedford, Massachusetts, expected a letter from him with each arrival of the Pacific mail. "It was too late to send by the last Mail," Sanderson apologized in a February 27, 1857 correspondence. "This gave me great uneasiness because I knew you would expect a letter."[9]

These kinds of intimate personal correspondence often continued for decades, keeping members of both communities up to date on what was happening in each others' lives. Thirty-five years after leaving Ohio, David Brown wrote to his nephew George H.

---

[6] John Billings to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 8 March 1864, Jeremiah Burke Sanderson Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.
[7] Rachel Ann Brown to David Brown, 18 October 1852, in David Brown Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[8] JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[9] Jeremiah Burke Sanderson to Catherine E. Sanderson, 27 February 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library. The fact that African American family and friends sent by travelers as well as by the U. S. mail is shown in the letter of William Cooper Nell to Sanderson, 18 February 1857, in which he mentions "Peter Cassey" will "take some California letters for me on his return route."

Gardner in Columbus, Ohio, on February 5, 1887. The contents of the letter were mundane, explaining Brown's daily routine and giving advice on his nephew's matters. "I am about and attending to business as usual," Brown told Gardner. "Last September, my near Neighbor's House Caught a fire, … Ruined my fruit and fruit Trees, Spoiled a lot of my Vegetables." Lauding Gardner's choice in selecting a house to buy, Brown advised that it would "be the best thing you Can do, If you Can find a place not too high, and on conditions so that you Can pay In payments to Suit." He ended by promising a "Picture In the Spring." The picture was probably of himself, or if his wife ever joined him in California, then of his family.[10] In early 1875, Sanderson likewise received a letter from his sister, E. W. Ray in New Bedford, informing him that she was "still living in the house where you left me" twenty-one years ago. "Arabella is well," she wrote to update Sanderson on his old friends in the New Bedford black community. "Her husband died one year and a half ago. her oldest daughter is married and has two Children." Ray concluded her letter by reminding Sanderson that "I often think of you Kattie [Catherine Sanderson] and the children," and that she "should be much pleased to hear from you by letter."[11]

The intimacy that many black Californians felt toward their old East coast communities was well evidenced in the case of a murder of an African American woman in Sacramento, California, on February 24, 1872. In the early dark hours of the 24th, flames shot up from a house in Sacramento. When firemen extinguished the fire and left the scene, neighbors found a charred woman dead in her bed. It was Elizabeth Thompson, an African American woman who had been working as a maid. Her skull had been

---

[10] David Brown to George H. Gardner, 5 February 1887, David Brown Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[11] E. W. Roy to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 1 January 1875, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

fractured by violent blows and her throat was "cut from ear to ear." When the telegraph bearing the news of the gruesome murder buzzed across the state that morning, Peter Anderson, the editor of the *Pacific Appeal*, rushed to write to Bishop Jabez P. Campbell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Campbell had visited California in late 1864 to organize the first African Episcopal Methodist (AME) conference of the Pacific coast, and had stayed for some time, at least until April, 1865. Anderson's choice of recipient thus reflected the fact that Campbell was not only an influential religious figure, but was personally acquainted with many prominent African Americans in California and would therefore be directly interested in what happened there.[12]

Campbell's position and his prior stay in California, however, were not the only reasons that Anderson chose Campbell to relay the urgent information. Thompson, the murdered young woman in Sacramento, was "the daughter of a well known member of the Bethel Church in Philadelphia." As such, Anderson was certain that the details of her death were of direct concern to "the members of the Bethel Church and the colored citizens at large in Philadelphia." It is telling that the writer himself was a native of Philadelphia, and therefore felt responsible for informing his old community of the murder of one of their own. Anderson had in fact met Thompson and her elderly mother in his home city back in 1853 or 1854, before either party had migrated to the Pacific coast. Even more disturbing was the identity of the arrested suspect: James Williams, a

[12] In an address to "the Ministers and Members of the Indiana, Missouri, California, and Louisiana Conferences," Campbell mentions that he had been in California in December, 1864. The address is published in 27 January 1866, *The Christian Recorder*. Campbell was still in California by April, 1865, for in its April 15, 1865 issue, *The Christian Recorder* reports that *The Pacific Appeal* had just published an account of Campbell's accident "while crossing the Sierra Nevada Mountains, which resulted in a severe sprain of the ankle." It predicts that by the time *The Recorder* published this incident, which was likely a month after the report of *The Pacific Appeal*, Campbell was probably back in San Francisco to wait recovery. William Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising…* (Cleveland: G. M. Rewell & Co., 1887), 1031-2 also contains a brief autobiography of Jabez P. Campbell.

black man also from Philadelphia, who had likely brought Thompson out to California himself. By the time of her death in 1872, he had been appearing as "her gallant on every public occasion." Upon receiving the letter from Anderson, Bishop Campbell became instantly alarmed. Personally acquainted with members of the Sacramento, San Francisco, and Philadelphia black communities, Campbell quickly dispatched correspondence to Reverend B. T. Tanner, the editor of the *Christian Recorder* of Philadelphia. Tanner printed the entire correspondence in the next issue.[13]

Besides exchanging correspondence, registering membership in national African American institutions also played a vital role in extending the black Californian consciousness of communal membership beyond the limits of local terrain. Of special influence were organizations that played prominent roles in black community life, such as the AME Church and the Freemasonry. Because clergymen were transferred between states in accordance to the decisions of regional AME conferences, pastors from other states came to fill positions in California, while those in California from time to time migrated elsewhere. Nationwide General Conferences were also held periodically, to which regional conferences sent delegates for representation. In both 1860 and 1864, Reverent T. M. D. Ward travelled to the East coast to represent California at the General Conference.[14] Such national circulation of persons, especially those who played prominent roles as religious and social leaders in local black communities, created a network of intimate and personal friendships and relationships across the nation. It also helped link geographically disparate black churches under the greater frame of AME

[13] 30 March 1872, *The Christian Recorder*.
[14] *Journal of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Ministers and Lay Delegates of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Bethel Church, San Francisco…* (San Francisco: B. F. Sterett, 1863),16-19, 22-24.

membership, enabling them to share information and resources and foster a greater communal consciousness. When important or critical events occurred to black Californians, they were thus quick to write to religious leaders who had once worked in California, just as Peter Anderson had written to Bishop Campbell regarding the murder of Elizabeth Thompson.[15]

The Freemason, another institution with a nationwide, even global, organization, also served to boost the sense of unity among African American communities in different parts of the country. On December 27, 1866, members of the Olive Branch and the Washington Lodges of San Francisco celebrated a "social Masonic reunion." A banquet was prepared, likely by a committee of African American women as was customary, and the male members and their friends came together to eat, drink, give short speeches, and make merry with "songs and glees." Various toasts were given during the dinner, and the *Elevator* took special note of one in particular: "the name of the Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New York, Brother Patrick H. Reason." One member took the opportunity to thank the brethren for toasting to Reason, remarking that they had been old friends back in New York. Peter K. Cole, a black merchant visiting San Francisco from Yokohama, Japan, also expressed his hopes that "this event was typical of the union of all colored Masons."[16]

Not stopping at holding meetings with just local members, these regional branches of nationwide institutions often sent correspondence to major black newspapers of the East coast, publishing reports, resolutions, and minutes from important meetings for a nationwide readership. On February 12, 1870, for example, the *Christian Recorder*

---

[15] 30 March 1872, *The Christian Recorder*.
[16] 11 January 1867, *The Elevator*.

gave a summary of the California Conference of the AME Church, held in March, 1869, the courtesy of Bishop T. M. D. Ward who delivered the minutes of the meeting when he visited Philadelphia.[17] The minutes of the Sixth California Annual Conference of the AME Church were sent in a much more timely manner to the office of the *Recorder*, arriving in Philadelphia in less than two weeks' time from the day it adjourned in San Francisco on May 21, 1873 and appearing in the national newspaper on June 5, 1873.[18] A more concise account drawn up by Jeremiah Sanderson, who had served as secretary to the conference, arrived at the office of the *Recorder* a few days later. More brief and well organized to deliver the important points of the meeting, it also conveyed a representative welcome message from the collective body of Californian members to the new clergymen scheduled to be transferred to the California Conference from Missouri.[19]

While personal correspondence and membership in national organizations allowed black Californians to participate in and give voice to events occurring in the eastern side of the continent, it was the African American newspapers that really boosted community connections across the nation. Even before black Californians had their own journal, individual African Americans on the Pacific coast sought to join in discussions of national interest and relay information on events in California to the rest of the nation by sending written work to eastern newspapers. By creating such a communication network, they sought to remind both themselves and their friends on the other coast that black California was very much part of the national fabric. John Jamison Moore, pastor of the Zion AME Church in San Francisco and the teacher of the school for black children in the basement of the St. Cyprian Church, sent a letter to Frederick Douglass for

[17] 12 February 1870, *The Christian Recorder*.
[18] 5 June 1873; 19 June 1873, *The Christian Recorder*.
[19] 19 June 1873, *The Christian Recorder*.

publication in *The Frederick Douglass Paper* in October, 1854. In the letter, Moore informed Douglass's readers that African American children and parents in San Francisco had led the celebration of the West Indian Emancipation at his school, and many among the "some sixteen hundred colored people in San Francisco" had joined in the procession.[20] In July, 1857, William C. Nell wrote to Sanderson of having noticed his friend's contribution in the *Boston Traveller*. Although Sanderson had only signed himself as "J. B. S." and concealed his identity as a black man, Nell had easily recognized Sanderson's piece from similarities in style with other written work that Sanderson had contributed to various newspapers. "I have Just read a letter in the Boston Traveller dated San Francisco June 2, 1857. on the Isthmus Transit via Panama," Nell wrote. "Some matters led me to attribute its authorship to You and right?"[21] In 1863, T. M. D. Ward, the elder and later bishop of the AME Church in California, also sent a letter to the *Christian Recorder* of Philadelphia. In it, he detailed the condition of the churches in the Far West: the number of church members, state of finances, and expectations for the future of the AME Church in the young state. As he concluded the letter, Ward did not forget to request the readers around the nation to "remember me and my people" in California.[22]

Besides sending direct individual correspondence to eastern journals, African Americans on both coasts also sent each other copies of local newspapers in hopes of sharing not just their own private and personal lives, but of community interests more broadly. Before she and her children moved out to California, Catherine Sanderson in New Bedford, Massachusetts, regularly sent issues of the *Anti-Slavery Standard* to her

---

[20] 20 October 1854, *The Frederick Douglass Paper*.
[21] Nell to Sanderson, 1 July 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[22] 29 August 1863, *The Christian Recorder*.

husband Jeremiah in California. As a woman who followed political developments closely, Catherine wanted to keep her husband on the other side of the continent up-to-date on the issues of race and slavery. Several years later in 1868, by which time Catherine and her children had migrated to California, her nineteen-year-old son William Nell Sanderson told Jeremiah in the aftermath of the presidential election that "Mother and the girls … are half frantic over the Great Republican Victory" and that "Mother you know what a politician she is why she has not been able to do anything for these two days she is so stirred up about the election. this city gives a Democratic Majority of 1200 which show that the democracy is on the decrease 3 or 4,000 since last year in this state."[23] In his letter of April 20, 1859, then, when Catherine was still in New Bedford sending him eastern newspapers, Jeremiah thankfully notified his wife for the receipt of the *Standard* together with her letter.[24] The *Standard* was not the only eastern newspaper that Sanderson read regularly. He also kept up with the *Liberator*, the well renowned Garrisonian journal, and his friend Nell was well aware of his habit: "As You see in the Liberator I have been to Ohio and engaged myself [in antislavery work]," he remarked to Sanderson in a letter dated December 17, 1856.[25] In fact, as early as in 1849, James P. Dyer, a black soap maker in San Francisco, subscribed to Frederick Douglass's *North Star*. Three years later, James Rylander Starkey, an ex-slave in San Francisco, also subscribed to Douglass's paper, now renamed the *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.[26] By 1854, many black male activists of San Francisco had subscribed to Douglass's weekly,

---

[23] William Nell Sanderson to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 4 November 1868, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[24] Jeremiah Burke Sanderson to Catherine E. Sanderson, 20 April 1859, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[25] William Cooper Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 17 December 1856, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[26] 30 November 1849, *North Star*; 6 November 1851, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, both cited in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 188.

including H. M. Collins, George Washington Dennis, John Lewis, William M. Yates, Fielding Smithea, Abner and Jacob Francis, Peter Lester, and Mifflin Wistar Gibbs.[27]

Besides subscribing to eastern newspapers, black Californians sent out their own copies of the African American newspapers in San Francisco to their family and friends on the Atlantic side in hopes of keeping them attuned to the distant Golden State. Nell acknowledged several friends on the Pacific coast who sent him copies of the California newspapers. He mentioned the *Mirror*, the first black newspaper of the Pacific coast, more than once in his correspondence with Jeremiah Sanderson. On December 10, 1856, less than four months after the first publication meeting of the paper in August, 1856, Nell wrote Sanderson that he had "seen some copies of the Mirror – published by Colored Men in California It appears well – Does it flourish at home? Why have You not been a correspondent? The Paper will be noticed in the Liberator."[28] Half a year later in July, 1857, Nell took note of the journal again: "Letters from Gibbs, together with Your conference reports, … and an occasional sight of the Mirror all tend to keep me interested in California matters and my circle of friends there."[29] Besides the *Mirror*, Sanderson also sent Nell white Californian newspapers that contained bits of interest for his eastern friend. On February 18, 1857, Nell thanked Sanderson for sending him various "Newspapers, especially that containing Your communication."[30]

Although the *Mirror* was short-lived, and its circulation beyond the Pacific coast irregular and dependent on the individual decisions of black Californians who

---

[27] 24 June, 1 July, 22 October, 10 December 1852, 21 January, 22 May, 9 September 1853, 30 June, 6 October, 1, 15 December 1854, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, cited in Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 188.

[28] William Cooper Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 17 December 1856, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

[29] William Cooper Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 1 July 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

[30] William Cooper Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 18 February 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

occasionally sent extra copies to their friends in the East, the exchange between far western and the eastern black communities took on a much larger scale and regularity with the appearance of the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* during the 1860s. In 1862, when Peter Anderson from Philadelphia and Philip A. Bell from New York City launched the *Pacific Appeal* in San Francisco, they were keen on shaping the image of their journal as the voice representing the colored population of the Pacific coast. Not only did they want it to circulate among Pacific migrants, but they wanted to make sure the entire nation paid attention to the contents it carried. Relegating the circulation of their paper to the agency of random individuals sending sporadic issues to friends in the East was simply not good enough. Instead of relying on haphazard methods, Anderson and Bell decided to send copies directly to the offices of prominent African American journals around the nation. By doing so, they joined the web of correspondence between black editors and stepped up to the national journalistic stage. As Anderson and Bell hoped, renowned black newspapers soon began acknowledging and conversing with the Californian weekly, copying the contents of the San Franciscan newspaper for a nationwide clientele. Just two months after the *Pacific Appeal* made its debut, the *Christian Recorder* reported the birth of "A paper from San Francisco, Cal., called The PACIFIC APPEAL, devoted to the interests of the colored people." "We are truly glad to find our friends in the Pacific State doing what they can for the elevation of our people," the *Recorder* announced. "We hope that they will be able to keep it going, and continue to grow larger as it is published."[31]

In April, 1865, when Bell launched his own *Elevator* after dissolving partnership with Anderson, the national audience was again one of the uppermost concerns in his

[31] 21 June 1862, *The Christian Recorder*.

mind. Announcing with confidence in January, 1866 that "the colored population on this coast can ably support two papers, and more," Bell sent the issue to the office of the *Christian Recorder* for the nation to see.[32] The Philadelphia-based journal responded by spreading Bell's conviction to its own readership. "There are nine thousand colored people on the Pacific coast, and they publish two newspapers," the *Recorder* reported, and the editor of the newly born *Elevator* asserts that "both can be *easily sustained*." The editors of the *Recorder* recommended the *Elevator* as "a *live* journal." They believed "our eastern friends should take it, especially those who have friends or relations in California."[33]

After 1865, the *Recorder* copied articles from both the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* to convey information from black Pacific communities to those on the Atlantic seaboard. After Anderson's paper began to falter and print irregularly after 1865, the *Elevator* soon surpassed the *Pacific Appeal* in reaching the black national readership through the *Recorder*. From news of travelers departing and arriving in California, debates around black education and equal rights in the Golden State, reports of finances and resolutions of the California AME churches, to descriptions of the celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, select contents of the *Elevator* and the *Appeal* found their way to the widespread clientele of the *Christian Recorder*.[34] They sent copies to offices of prominent black journals around the nation and receiving their copies in return, including not just the *Christian Recorder* but also regional black newspapers such as the *Colored Citizen* in Ohio, the *Tribune* in

---

[32] 19 January 1866, *The Elevator*.
[33] 3 March 1866, *The Christian Recorder*. All emphases as in original.
[34] For some examples of reference to *The Elevator* in *The Christian Recorder*, see: 3 March 1866, 10 March 1866, 16 June 1866, 7 July 1866, 20 October 1866, 9 February 1867, 18 May 1867, 19 November 1870, *The Christian Recorder*.

Virginia, the *New Era* in Missouri, the *New Orleans Standard* in Louisiana, the *Missionary Record* in South Carolina, the *New Era* in Washington, D. C., the *Colored Citizens' Monthly* in Mississippi, and the *Freedmen's Standard* in Georgia. The editors of the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* thus created and sustained efficient information channels through which important news from the black community of the Pacific coast flowed quickly and regularly to those in geographically distant communities, and vice versa.[35]

As the *Elevator* gained a national reputation, Bell decided reach eastern black communities even more directly by recruiting subscribers for the Californian paper in several large metropolises. Promising to "send *Elevator* to subscribers at five dollars per year" and to "send regularly by every steamer mail," the *Elevator* posted the names and addresses of its official agents in New York City and Brooklyn, New York, and Washington D. C. on October 4, 1867.[36] In New York City were stationed Philip A. White, a druggist at 102 Gold Street, and J. J. Spellman, at 37 Park Row. In Brooklyn, New York, Peter A. Williams sold copies of the black Californian weekly and recruited subscribers at 124 Putnam Avenue, while Charles Datcher and Solomon G. Brown acted as agents for the *Elevator* in Washington, D. C.[37] Because Bell did not print the names of subscription agents in his newspaper before October, 1867, these men may have been working for the journal before this time. Until August 3, 1872, then, the names of agents for New York City and Washington, D. C. were never omitted from the list of subscription agents in the *Elevator*.[38] After 1872 the eastern cities disappeared from the

---

[35] List of exchanges with other newspapers in 1 November 1867, *The Elevator*.
[36] 11 January 1867; 21 June 1867; 4 October 1867, *The Elevator*.
[37] 4 October 1867, *The Elevator*.
[38] 3 August 1872, *The Elevator*.

list for several years, but on March 17, 1877, the category "EASTERN STATES" was back with Right Reverent T. M. D. Ward serving as agent "At Large," and F. G. Barbadoes working for the paper in Washington, D. C.[39] It is impossible to tell how many copies of the Californian journal were actually distributed in the eastern cities. There is, however, acknowledgment in the January 8, 1869 issue for remittances sent from a J. Nichols from "Springfield," the state not specified, and a Mrs. Ford from Washington, D. C., who paid via W. H. Harper of Sacramento.[40] Such efforts at national distribution testified to the desire of many black Californians to establish direct connection with members of eastern black communities, to share the details of their lives in California and to express interest in issues and events occurring elsewhere in the nation. In this process, the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal*, the journals that served as important tools in sustaining and defining the boundaries of a black Pacific community, also helped black Californians to identify with the larger national African American community in the struggle for freedom and equality.

Just as the *Elevator* became a channel through which black Californians made their concerns national, the office of the Californian journal also became a center at which African Americans in California could gain access to other black newspapers from different parts of the nation. Not only did the office sell the copies of various eastern newspapers, it also actively exhorted African Americans on the Pacific coast to read black papers from outside the region. "Support Your Papers," Bell urged his clients in the January 26, 1866 issue. "The *Anglo African* is our national organ," he touted, and "Every

---

[39] 17 March 1877, *The Elevator*. The newspaper published a list of subscription agents until April 7, 1877, sometime after which it abandoned the custom. Agents for *The Elevator* may have been reinstalled for the eastern states before March 17, 1877, because currently existent 1870s issues are not many.
[40] 8 January 1869, *The Elevator*.

colored person should subscribe." In fact, he went on, "it should have at least five hundred subscribers on the Pacific coast." The *Elevator* also recommended papers such as the *Communicator* of Baltimore, the *Colored Citizen* of Cincinnati, and the *Christian Recorder* of Philadelphia.[41] Besides newspapers published by black men, the editors of the *Elevator* also approved of the *Standard* of Carollton, Louisiana, the *Union* of Houston, Texas, and the *Radical* of Jefferson, Texas, which came regularly to the office and were "sterling Republican papers of the right stripe."[42]

This national exchange of African American newspapers built upon the infrastructure created by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC), which allowed regular shipment of mails between San Francisco and New York after 1848.[43] Before the establishment of the government subsidized steamship company, the flow of goods and persons between the Pacific and the Atlantic coasts had been haphazard, difficult, and uncertain. There were three main routes: overland by the central plains, overseas around Cape Horn, or a difficult mixture of overseas and overland travel through the Isthmus of Panama. In a letter dated May 31, 1850, a correspondent to the *National Era* of Washington, D. C. who signed as "H," recalled that "three years ago," the only way to get letters or parcels to the Atlantic side from the Pacific was to trust "to a stray ship that found its way into the then untenanted port of San Francisco to bear my letters round the rugged Cape," or have "them packed safely among the beef and flour of some returning emigrant, or courier," and "convey them over the more rugged steeps of the Rocky

---

[41] 26 January 1866, *The Elevator*. Concerning this article, the editors of the *Christian Recorder* published the following rejoinder: "we would remind The Elevator that we have a secular department in the "Christian Recorder," as well as religious, which our contemporary seems to have forgotten." 3 March 1866, *The Christian Recorder*.

[42] 11 February 1870, *The Elevator*.

[43] John Haskell Kemble, "The Genesis of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Sep., 1934), 241-50.

Mountains." Now in 1850, "the age of progress and improvement" was indeed manifest: "on the day before the sailing of a magnificent steamer, I sit down to indite an epistle which in a month's time will be carried to the home I left so long ago."[44]

While southern Californians used the overland route for mail delivery after 1857, the bulk of mail from San Francisco traveled the Panama route for New York. Operated by the PMSC, the company boasted of "making the through trip in 20 days" after the completion of the Panama Railroad, a trip shorter by ten or more days compared to the time it took using the overland trail from southern California to Texas or Mississippi. On August 21, 1857, the *National Era* of Washington, D. C. had reported that the first overland mail from California to Mississippi had arrived "after a journey of only thirty four days."[45] Although travel over the Isthmus of Panama had initially involved journeys over difficult roads with swarming insects, dangerous fevers and diseases, hot temperatures, humid air, and ruthless outlaws, the Panama Railroad Company had finished the five-year railroad construction across the fifty-mile isthmus by 1855. Passengers and cargo could now ride swiftly and safely over what had been the most difficult part of the San Francisco-New York passage. In 1859, the PMSC and the Panama Railroad Company made a joint offer to carry the U. S. mail from New York to San Francisco via the Isthmus of Panama. They successfully outbid their competitors, who offered to deliver the mail from San Francisco to New Orleans or New York via Nicaragua.[46] The PMSC vessels "Leave Wharf corner of First and Brannan Streets at Eleven o'clock AM," their advertisements announced proudly, "connecting via Panama

---

[44] 11 July 1850, *The National Era*.
[45] 29 October 1857, *The National Era*.
[46] 15 September 1859, *The National Era*. The competitors were Mr. Vanderbilt and Mr. Johnson, who respectively owned several steamers that they hoped to operate in contract with the Postmaster General.

Railroad with one of the Company's splendid steamers from Aspinwall for New York."[47]

For black Californians, steamers offered more than simple infrastructure for travel and shipping. They also provided employment for many African Americans. More than ten percent of the black population in San Francisco reported an occupation aboard a steamer by the time of the census in 1870. While the majority of black steamship employees were male, several women in San Francisco also acknowledged holding jobs as stewardesses aboard steamers.[48] These workers helped strengthen a sense of racial solidarity and common identity among spatially separated black communities by transferring materials such as correspondence and newspapers, helping travelers feel welcome as they journeyed from their old community to the new, and circulating news by word to friends among different communities. As historian Jeffrey W. Bolster illustrates in *Black Jacks*, the role of early nineteenth century black sailors in creating an "Atlantic community of color" was not limited to the Atlantic coast, nor to the early nineteenth century.[49] Although the names of steamers are not recorded in the manuscript state census of 1852, the 1860 census for the state of California gives some insight into the employment of black workers aboard vessels servicing the line between San Francisco and Panama. Among the steamers named in the 1860 manuscript census is the *Pacific*, a steamer fitted out in 1851 and used make runs between San Francisco and Panama. In August 1860, when the census taker surveyed the vessel, the *Pacific* was floating in the

---

[47] 3 July 1868, *The Elevator*.
[48] Federal Census, 1870, City and County of San Francisco, State of California. Transcription provided by the USGenWeb Project. Out of 1,330 black Californians, including children, 113 black men and women reported a job aboard a steamer. The number is incomplete, because some did not mention that they were employed a steamer, but simply told the census taker that they were cooks, barbers, etc. A good example is Charles S. Bundy, who is mentioned in the *Elevator* as a barber aboard a transpacific steamer, but who reported his occupation simply as a “barber” in the 1870 census.
[49] Jeffrey W. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 230-231.

wharves of San Francisco with forty-two workers on board. Among these, there were twelve "mulatto" personnel among them: one female stewardess, four male stewards, and seven male waiters.[50]

A letter dated November 27, 1863, written by a correspondent who signed herself as "Pocahontas," aptly shows the role of steamship employees aboard San Francisco-Panama steamers in providing a sense of continuity and community for black travelers on the Pacific coast. Writing from the steamer *St. Louis*, which was then floating "near Panama," Pocahontas gave a brief description of the ship and the workers she found aboard. The *St. Louis* was "very clean, and, for her [relatively small] dimensions, remarkably comfortable," she noted. But the ship was not the main reason she found the journey so comforting. Robert Cowes, "the Steward," had bestowed such "kind and assiduous attentions" throughout the journey to Pocahontas's party of travelers, so much so that they literally "forg[o]t" that they were "stranger[s] on a strange sea" and felt as if they were right at home. Cowes was not the only worker who provided a sense of community for the African American travelers on board *St. Louis*. Mr. Gibson, who seems to have been another steward, and Mrs. Wright, "the Stewardess," also offered them services with "untiring efforts" as to make their stay "as light and pleasant as possible."[51]

The majority of black employees aboard Pacific steamers had shared an Atlantic background before they came out to live in San Francisco. In the manuscript state census of 1852, one "mulatto" man reported his job as a sailor in Monterey County, while 105

[50] Federal Census, 1860, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.
[51] Pocahontas, "For the Pacific Appeal. STEAMER ST. LOUIS, near Panama, Nov. 27, 1863," in 26 December 1863, *The Pacific Appeal*.

men marked as "black," "mulatto," or "colored" reported working aboard a ship in the capacity of seamen, mariners, sailors, cooks, or stewards. Among those in San Francisco, twelve men noted as "black" may have actually been Indians instead of men of African origin, for their places of birth or previous residence were recorded as "Bengal," "Bombay," "Calcutta," or "Hindoostan," all regions in India. Besides these twelve, fourteen more men had been born outside of the United States and had never previously resided in it. Out of the 105, then, eighty black shipworkers were African Americans who had either been born in the Atlantic states, or had previously resided there. There may have been a larger number of black steamer employees in San Francisco in the summer of 1852, for those aboard ships that were traveling at the time of the census may have not been counted properly. It is also likely that several of the people who reported their jobs simply as "cooks" or "stewards" while residing in a seaside boardinghouse had actually been employed on a steamer. Of the eighty clearly marked African American steamer workers, the majority came from the free states of the North, such as Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island. Others came from the South, from states such as Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D. C.[52]

While some shipworkers were able to accumulate property, and experienced black sailors were sometimes given more pay than their lesser skilled white counterparts, the experience of employment aboard a steamer in California usually involved racial discrimination. It was true that Robert Shorter, a black sailor aboard the *Decatur*, a U. S. Navy sloop of war cruising the Pacific Ocean as it visited Honolulu, Puget Sound, San Francisco, Panama, Nicaragua, and Peru, received eighteen dollars per month as opposed

[52] State Census, 1852, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.

to the Irishman John Ryan's fourteen, the salary of an "ordinary seaman."[53] William H. Yates, who worked as the chief steward on a San Francisco steamer, a man of "energetic character and strong common sense and general intelligence," by 1865 was successful enough to purchase real estate become a "heavy tax payer."[54] Nevertheless, just as racial segregation had been on the rise on ships cruising the Atlantic coast since the 1850s, the trend of discrimination had caught up with California steamers by 1860 as black male sailors were relegated to less "masculine" roles aboard the ship, and their salaries slipped lower and lower.[55] In the 1860 census for the city and county of San Francisco, African American male shipworkers were almost always assigned to positions that were believed to be less important and sometimes less masculine, such as cooks, pantrymen, waiters, porters, and stewards. White male workers, on the other hand, were more likely to gain employment as deck hands, coal laborers, clerks, firemen, engineers, and carpenters, although some did serve as cooks, waiters, stewards, or porters along with their black counterparts.[56]

Even with discrimination, black Californian employment aboard steamers servicing the San Francisco-Panama-New York line provided a valuable opportunity for the black leaders of San Francisco who sought to extend the communication network of their community. The chance was not lost on the editors of the *Elevator*, who recruited an agent in Panama to distribute the paper to travelers and to the African American settlers of the isthmus. From October 18, 1867, when an agent for Panama, Central America first

---

[53] Lorraine Mcconaghy, "The Old Navy in the Pacific West: Naval Discipline in Seattle, 1855-1856," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 98, no. 1 (Winter, 2006/2007), 24.
[54] 1 December 1865, *The Elevator*.
[55] Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 215-232.
[56] Federal Census, 1860, City and County of San Francisco, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.

appeared on the list of subscription agents for the *Elevator*, the location never disappeared from the list for as long as can be ascertained from existent issues of the journal.[57] By setting up distribution agents in various important cities on both coasts, the black Californian journal thus used the steamers to weave not only the entire North American side of the Pacific coast, but also that of the Atlantic into one large communication network through which news from California flowed regularly and efficiently. The agents who coursed the waterways in timely fashion, delivering issues of the journal to various locations on the coast, providing a sense of community to black travelers, and making friends among various black communities where their ships docked, then, were the black Californian employees aboard the steamers.

While the PMSC held its position as the most reliable means of transport between the two coasts throughout the 1850s and the 1860s, in 1869 the completion of the Pacific Railroad opened a new era of travel and communication for Californians, offering faster, safer, and more stable access to the other side of the continent. A joint enterprise of the Union Railroad Company and the Central Railroad Company, which were incorporated following the Pacific Railroad Act of 1862, the last tracks of the transcontinental railroad were laid on May 10, 1869. With the tracks of the Union Railroad expanding from Omaha, Nebraska, and those of the Central from Sacramento, California, the two railroads met at Promontory Summit, Utah.[58] It was a long awaited moment for the people of California. They had been chanting about the transcontinental railroad and the

---

[57] 18 October 1867, *The Elevator*. Before *The Elevator* stopped listing its subscription agents, the 7 April 1877 issue records J. C. Smith as its agent in Panama, Central America.

[58] Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 341-355. For debates around the building of a transpacific railroad during the first half of the nineteenth century, see: Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World*; Eugene V. Smalley, *History of the Northern Pacific Railroad* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883).

effect it would have on the economic prosperity of the state and the United States as a whole since the early 1850s. When the dream finally became a reality, Californians were eager to celebrate. On May 8, 1869, the original date set for the completion of the tracks, San Franciscans poured out into the streets, carrying on "a grand procession, literary exercises in the pavilion, illuminations, fireworks, etc., embellished with the ardor and enthusiasm with which Californians only celebrated such events, and which Californians alone can appreciate." Bell, the editor of the *Elevator*, exclaimed that "months of preparations could not have made it much better. The procession was gorgeous in the extreme."[59]

African Americans were no less jubilant about the completion of the railroad. Joining in the parade were the Brannan Guards under Captain A. G. Dennison and the Lincoln Zouaves under Captain James A. Phillips, the well trained black militia companies of San Francisco, who marched in uniform with practiced steps. To the pride of African American communities of California and around the nation, the black division excelled in display on the day of the celebration. The *Elevator* reported that "the Brannan Guards and Lincoln Zouaves looked well, and marched well; both companies showed a soldierly bearing, and exhibited an admirable perfection of drill." Despite the successful exhibit, nevertheless, the *Elevator* criticized the white organizing committee of San Francisco for relegating African Americans to the rear position right behind "the wake of beer wagons, and all manner of vehicles." The black companies had agreed to march in the designated place because "time was too short … for any other arrangements to be

---

[59] 7 May 1869; 14 May 1869, *The Elevator*. Californians celebrated the completion of the Pacific Railroad two days before the actual completion on May 10, 1869, because the companies had originally announced May 8, 1869 as the date of completion. The actual completion was delayed two days because of an accident near Promontory Summit just before the completion. For details, see Ambrose, *Nothing Like It in the World*, 360-61.

made," but it was not without "a mental protest against the position assigned us."[60]

With the advent of the Pacific Railroad, the trip from San Francisco to the East, which had previously taken nearly a month, was now shortened to a mere week. It was true, of course, that most black individuals could not afford the train fare easily. Nevertheless, the Pacific Railroad meant that the newspapers from black communities around the nation that used to arrive with a time lapse of an entire month, now came in just a week's time. Indeed, black California had become closer than ever before to its sister communities of the East.

Identification with the black communities beyond the Bay Area, then, allowed black Californians to involve themselves attentively in the topics and themes that occupied the minds of African Americans in the eastern states. Because the majority of black Californians originated from the free states of New England, New York, or Pennsylvania, many had come to California already well trained in African American activism against slavery and agitation for the rights of first-class citizenship. It was not surprising, therefore, that the transplanted activists would seek to continue their work in their newly adopted state as well as in the one they had left behind. "My dear Jerry," William C. Nell told Sanderson in his letter of July 1, 1857, "I have heard from those who have returned [from California]. the continued zeal and ability evinced by You in the various departments of elevating Colored Americans." Nell was delighted to hear of his friend's persistence in the work of freedom on the other coast, but had obviously expected no less of the New England abolitionist agitator. "Of course it is just the report I was expecting – it could be no other and be Jeremiah Sanderson. Well go on while there."[61]

---

[60] 7 May 1869; 14 May 1869, *The Elevator*.
[61] William C. Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 1 July 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

While carrying on the battle for freedom in the Golden State, black Californians never stopped participating earnestly and actively in nationwide political and racial matters. In late 1856, when Nell was spearheading a movement to raise funds for a suitable housing for William Lloyd Garrison, the well renowned abolitionist, he sought to garner support from his friends in California. In December, 1856, Nell sent his Californian friends pamphlets for the Garrison Homestead Fund. Attaching a pamphlet with his letter to Sanderson, Nell urged his friend to "Do what You can for the Garrison Homestead" in the Golden State.[62] In response, Sanderson printed an announcement in the *Mirror of the Times*, a copy of which he forwarded to Nell. On July 1, 1857, Nell happily replied, "You done the thing up very handsomely in the Mirror Many thanks for that Characteristic promptness." The black community in California must have arranged to deliver the homestead collection to Nell through a traveling friend, for Nell continued, "I shall hail the reception of Garrison Homestead funds by Mr Young with grateful satisfaction and will report the same promptly."[63] Although the specific amount is not known, it appears that Nell's friends succeeded in collecting a sum to send him before October 1, 1857.[64]

During the 1850s, the majority of white Californians refused to openly express an opinion on the problem of slavery and the mounting sectional tension in the eastern states. "Few [white] people in California … gave more than a passing thought to the inevitable end to which the discussion of it [the slavery question] was leading," recalled Zoeth Skinner Eldredge, a white man who published the multi-volume *History of California* in

---

[62] William C. Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 17 December 1856, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[63] William C. Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 17 December 1856; 1 July 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.
[64] William C. Nell to Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, 1 October 1857, JBS Papers, The Bancroft Library.

1915.[65] D. F. Crowder, another white man who published memoirs of his life in Chico, California, in 1918, remembered a similar atmosphere. "In the fifties the slavery issue was pretty general all over the country; but it seemed that we pioneers got away out here [in California] by ourselves, and we had too much to do, and our community interest was so large, that we sort of let the slavery question slide and did not take sides." Or so, at least, it seemed by outer appearances. Crowder admitted that inside, "I guess all of us had decided views on the subject one way or another," because "the people hereabouts all came from the states, some from those which were in sympathy with the Northern cause, and some from those on the opposite side." Most white Californians, nevertheless, refused to broach the subject and cause contention among themselves, preferring to remain aloof and distant in a pretense of harmony and peace while the rest of the nation writhed in turmoil. Until the presidential election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, then, white Californians kept their beliefs inside themselves and pretended to be interested in less controversial matters.[66]

Black Californians, by contrast, refused to distance themselves from the questions of slavery and freedom, both in California and in the eastern states. In 1858, just a year after Justice Roger Taney of the U. S. Supreme Court gave his opinion on the *Dred Scott* decision, the black communities of California hauled all their resources together to launch a massive battle against enslavers in their state in the Archy Lee case. Continually holding fundraising meetings to see the case through and scheduling vigilance teams to guard the Bay around the clock, the black men and women of California were determined to reclaim the rights of African Americans to freedom and citizenship and to force white

---

[65] Quoted in George C. Mansfield, *History of Butte County, California with Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County…* (Los Angeles, California: Historic Record Company, 1918), 226.
[66] Quoted in Mansfield, *History of Butte County*, 226.

citizens to respect them in the process. The convoluted progress of Lee's case, the scale of organized fundraising, legal assistance, and vigilance orchestrated by black communities of the various cities in California, and the similarities of Lee's situation to that of Dred Scott's a year before, garnered nationwide attention as newspapers in the eastern states began reporting the details of the case. By the time Lee walked the streets of San Francisco as a free man, he had become well known in the eastern states as "the famous 'Dred Scott' of California."[67]

A year later in 1859, a black Californian woman, with the support of black Californian communities, undertook an even more daring attempt to overthrow the institution of slavery in the South. Mary Ellen Pleasant, labeled by white contemporaries as "a mammy, madam, voodoo queen, and sorceress" - names that showed white fear of her extraordinary success as a shrewd businesswoman and an avid activist for equal rights - not only played a prominent role in the fundraising campaign for Archy Lee, but in 1858 traveled to Chatham, Ontario, to attend a meeting of abolitionists to discuss ways to terminate slavery in the United States.[68] Home to approximately 800 black residents and the renowned abolitionist newspaper the *Provincial Freeman*, Chatham was an important center for abolitionist activity during the 1850s. While Mary Pleasant and her husband John were visiting the city in 1858, abolitionist John Brown, who would later gain fame by raiding the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, held a "provisional constitutional convention" there in May. It is likely that the Pleasants were present at this

---

[67] Quoted from the *Boston Courier* in 22 July 1858, *The National Era*; also see 27 May 1858, *The National Era*.

[68] Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 1; Lawrence de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 5.

meeting, discussing plans to liberate enslaved African Americans in the American South with other radical abolitionists. Later that year, the Pleasants also joined the Chatham Vigilance Committee, which coordinated concerted legal and rescue efforts to secure freedom for African Americans whose liberty was in danger. One of the people the organization rescued was Sylvanus Demerest, who was threatened by a white New Yorker W. R. Merwin who attempted to kidnap and enslave him.[69]

Mary Pleasant's zeal to abolish slavery in the South went even further when she allegedly advanced a large sum of money to support John Brown in his raid on Harpers Ferry. Although Pleasant initially kept silent about her actions, near the end of her life in 1901 she consented to an interview with Samuel P. Davis, the editor of the magazine *Pandex of the Press*.[70] The interview was later published in the *Comfort Magazine* in 1903. In it, Pleasant told Davis that she now "wish[ed] to clear the identity of the party who furnished John Brown with most of his money to start the fight at Harpers Ferry and who signed the letter found on him when he was arrested." Pleasant claimed that the paper found on Brown's person when he was captured had been her own letter. The initials, which investigators mistakenly interpreted to be "W. E. P.," had actually spelled "M. E. P. (Mary Ellen Pleasant)." Pleasant recalled that when she "read in the paper that the detectives were on track of W. E. P. who wrote the letter," she "had a quiet laugh

---

[69] Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant*," 38-39. On the process of John Brown's planning the raid on Harpers Ferry, see Paul Finkelman ed., *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1995). For legal and population conditions in Chatham, also see Fred Landon, "Canadian Negroes and the John Brown Raid," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Apr., 1921), 174-182; Robert W. Winks, *Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
[70] An short autobiography of Pleasant, which does not include the contents of this interview, can be found in Samuel P. Davis, "'Mammy Pleasant': Memoirs and Autobiography," *The Pandex of the Press*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Jan., 1902), 1-6, The Bancroft Library.

when I saw that my poor handwriting had given them a false trail."[71] Although the exact amount is not clear, Sue Bailey Thurman, who wrote a history of black Californian pioneers in 1952, gave the estimate as $30,000. Thurman surmised that the money had come from the property of her late first husband Alexander Smith.[72] During the interview with Davis in 1901, Davis asked Pleasant if she could prove that it was really she who had provided Brown with the funds. Pleasant replied: "John Brown has some children still living in California and they would be likely to know about the money I advanced to John Brown." Davis later questioned John Brown's children, Susan and Jason Brown, to verify Pleasant's testimony. Both Susan Brown and Jason Brown, who by that time was eighty years old and living in Santa Cruz, California, individually confirmed that although they did not know the exact name of the benefactor, John Brown had gone to Chatham in 1858 and had met "a colored woman" who had advanced him "considerable money."[73]

Although it is difficult to verify Pleasant's story, the testimony of black Californians whose parents lived in San Francisco at the time of Mary Pleasant not only confirm the narrative, but add a community angle to her radical abolitionist activity. There is, of course, always the possibility that memories may have been significantly altered, for these descendants were recalling the past eighty years afterward, and even then remembering just the words of their parents, and not the actual event. Speaking in

---

[71] Samuel P. Davis, "How a Colored Woman Aided John Brown," *Comfort Magazine*, 1903; same article was also published in Nantucket in 26 December 1903, *The Inquirer and Mirror*. Cited in Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant,"* 40-41.
[72] Sue Bailey Thurman, *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California* (San Francisco: Acme Publishing Co., [1952]), 47.
[73] Quotes from Davis, "How a Colored Woman Aided John Brown," in Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant,"* 40-41. For more variants of the story of the transaction between Mary Ellen Pleasant and John Brown, see also: J. Lloyd Conrich, "The Mammy Pleasant Legend," n. d., California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA.

the late 1930s, David W. Ruggles Jr., the son of David W. Ruggles who had sold stoves, beds, and general merchandise in San Francisco during the 1850s and the 1860s, testified that he heard his parents say that Pleasant did give Brown monetary support. Not only that, "The money Mammy took East to John Brown *was given to her by San Francisco negroes.*" "I heard my father say that she got the money to give John Brown from people here in San Francisco," Ruggles insisted. "Very little of the money was her own and it wasn't anything like the amount that she said."[74] In a separate interview, William Willmore Jr., another descendant of a black Californian pioneer, confirmed that he had heard his father talking about Pleasant and Brown. "Mammy made great preparations for her meeting with John Brown. She was very exultant, very uplifted, according to my father." Like Ruggles, Willmore also claimed that "she turned the money she *had collected from negroes [in San Francisco]* into a bank draft before she set forth for Canada."[75] While it is uncertain whether these claims were historically true, they do show that there at least had been a popular rumor among black Californians during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century concerning Pleasant, the African American community of San Francisco, and the raid on Harpers Ferry. According to that story, Pleasant's support of Brown was not just about the heroic bravery of one woman who chose to act on her abolitionist beliefs. It had actually been a concerted effort of the entire community of African Americans in San Francisco who chose to stand up behind John Brown and radical abolitionism at a time of mounting sectional tension, in a state where whites cowed behind a veneer of harmony and silence. Whether or not it actually took

[74] Interview with David Ruggles Jr., #24, n. d., SFHR, in Hudson, *The Making of Mammy Pleasant*, 42. Emphasis mine.
[75] Interview with William Willmore Jr., #26, March 1938, SFHR, in Hudson, *The Making of Mammy Pleasant*, 42. Emphasis added.

place, then, black Californians and their descendants chose to believe and spread the story, fashioning their community identity as a vanguard in the fight for freedom not just in California, but in the entire nation.

It was only when Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1860 and the states of the Deep South began seceding, that the majority of white Californians woke up and finally faced the reality. "Strife and dissension immediately sprang up," Crowder recalled. "Prejudice and intolerance reared their heads; and the first thing we knew, we were, figuratively at least, pretty much at each other's throats."[76] Even then, as with many white Northerners in the free states of the East, most of the attention was focused not on the institution of slavery itself, but on the act of secession and the preservation of the Union. Although California never dispatched units to the battles of the Civil War, volunteers were mustered to guard against seditious activities of pro-secessionists within the state. In places such as Oroville, Chico, and Bangor, of Butte County, Unionists formed companies of home guards to keep watch against disloyal persons in their midst. When secessionists stirred up trouble, Union guards captured and punished them by what was known as "packing sand." The punishment involved filling a sack with as much sand as the troublemaker could lift, and forcing the man to walk to a beat while carrying the sack. If the level of seditious activity was deemed more serious, they would send the prisoner down to Alcatraz, where there was a government jail.[77]

African American citizens of California, while second to none in vigilance for the Union cause, preferred much more to strike at the heart of the problem: the existence of the institution of slavery in the nation. On September 6, 1863, during the third day of the

---

[76] Mansfield, *History of Butte County*, 226.
[77] Mansfield, *History of Butte County*, 229.

Third Annual Convention of the Ministers and Lay Delegates of the California Conference of the AME Church in San Francisco, the committee on "The State of Our Country" read their resolutions concerning the raging Civil War. Although black Californians had hoped for a peaceable means to abolish slavery, they declared, they now "welcome[d] the glad event [the Civil War], for it has come in a manner that Providence appears to have decreed." Defining the central meaning of the war as a blow to American slavery, they rejoiced "in the prospect of its final result": the extermination of human bondage. To this end, the AME Church of California resolved to "lend every assistance to suppress this unholy rebellion." The members of the committee especially cheered the enlistment of colored soldiers to fight for the Union.[78] With a clear purpose for the Civil War in mind, black Californians were on guard to correct any who voiced opinions otherwise, be they opponents in California or elsewhere. To them, it was not just seditious activity against the Union that was threatening, but all activity against the death blow to the institution of slavery. On October 1, 1862, the *Marysville Daily Appeal*, a white newspaper, noticed that the editors of the *Pacific Appeal* had become indignant against the editors of the *New York Herald*. "The PACIFIC APPEAL, an organ of the colored people of San Francisco," the Marysville paper reported, "complains that the New York Herald takes a wrong view of its [Emancipation Proclamation's] effects as to the revolutionizing of the labor in the Northern and Western States, and of the opposition of those States to the emancipation scheme as a war measure." Peter Anderson and Philip A. Bell, editors of the *Pacific Appeal* at the time, argued against the *Herald* that the "policy of the President" was completely "statesmanlike, as well as patriotic and humane." Not only was the measure "the harbinger of so much that is gratifying" - the

[78] *Journals of the Proceedings of the ...the African Methodist Episcopal Church…1863*, 20-22.

final termination of the institution of slavery - Anderson and Bell argued that it would surely "help immensely in crushing out the rebellion, and saving the Union." Ultimately, in the course of world history, the Proclamation would "put the nation immeasurably forward of its former self in the path of civilization and progress."[79]

Nevertheless, although black Californians rallied behind the Union cause and endorsed the creation of colored regiments with enthusiasm, black soldiers were never mustered into the army in the Golden State. Instead, only several African American men were allowed into the army as cooks in white regiments, positions of less prestige and pay than gun-carrying soldiers, and even then only near the end of the war. The *Record of California Men in the War of the Rebellion*, compiled by Richard H. Orton, the adjutant-general of California, lists twenty-four African American men who served as cooks in the various companies of the Second Cavalry, Sixth Infantry, and Eighth Infantry regiments. Four men, Josiah C. Jackson, Samuel Jones, William H. Lambert, and George Williams, enlisted in December, 1864, in Sacramento, for service in Company D of the Second Regiment of the Cavalry. The others enlisted during the first three months of 1865 in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Placerville. The term of service for these men was usually three years; in the manuscript records for Company H of the Second Regiment of the Cavalry, drawn up on February 28, 1865 at Camp Union, show that the four black cooks in the company had all enlisted for that length of time. Although the twenty-four men had enlisted for three years, ten chose to desert their companies when the Civil War officially ended in May, 1865. The others waited to be properly discharged, near the end of 1865.

---

[79] 1 October 1862, *Marysville Daily Appeal*, in the Richard N. Schellens Collection, California Historical Society. There were, of course, black Californians who wished that the President had adopted a more radical language and showed more willingness to abolish slavery. James H. Hudson, a correspondent in Suisun City, California, voiced such an opinion in a letter to the *Pacific Appeal*, which was published in the 7 March 1863 issue, criticizing the Proclamation as a "half-way measure."

These cooks stayed in the various forts of California with their companies, guarding against seditious activity in the state.[80]

When President Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865, black Californians joined in the sorrow and the shock that spread among African American communities from the East coast to the West. A correspondent for the *Pacific Appeal* wrote a poem for the late president, lamenting the passing of a "MIGHTY CHAMPION! FREEDOM'S SON!" "Nations shall mourn his sad, untimely flight from earth," the poet sang, as "sad archangels guide Reviver of a nation home!" Published in the April 23, 1865 issue of the *Pacific Appeal* in the immediate aftermath of Lincoln's death, the poem gained a national audience when the *Christian Recorder* printed the verses in entirety on June 3, 1865. It was a moment of union for black communities across the United States, to see the words of the Californian muse floating from the pages of the Philadelphian journal to encourage the hearts of those sharing the sorrow for the late president and predicament for the future of the race:

> And now, Oh, ye sons of darker hue - most loyal hearts -
> Droop ye, alarmed, for fear His loss has spent your legal part?
> No, no; look up to HIM whose spangled lights adorn
> Yon vaulted heavens above: He will surely break a brighter morn,
> To crown the triumph of His love.[81]

With Lincoln gone and Union victory secured, black Californian activists grew more attentive than ever to the welfare of the newly freed men and women of the South. Despite the distance, African Americans in California refused to lag in the background in

---

[80] Richard H. Orton comp., *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion* (Sacramento: State Office, J. D. Young, Supt. State Printing, 1890), 208, 810-825; see also California Volunteers, 2nd Cavalry, Co. H. Muster Roll & Description Lists, 1865, Military Records, California State Archives.
[81] 3 June 1865, *The Christian Recorder*.

the fight for complete freedom for the ex-slaves of the South. Plying their knowledge and experience of the living and laboring conditions of the Far West, black Californians actively tried to secure jobs for the southern freedpeople in the West as a way to initiate them into the free labor economy. From their own experience, they believed that migration to California offered ex-slaves a real chance to accumulate capital and property through mining, industry, and agriculture. Outraged against the efforts of white legislators such as William S. Long to try banning the immigration of the newly freed African Americans into the state, the *Elevator* lambasted the bill and argued that California was actually in need of the "honest, industrious race" of southern freedpeople. California "now wants able-bodied men to build her railroads, work her quartz mines," the *Elevator* explained. Why block the immigration of skilled farmers and miners, its editors asked, when the problem with the vast state of California was a lack of laborers? "Her fields are untilled for the want of farming hands!" If the newly freed people of the South could be induced to come to California, the newspaper pointed out, California could truly grow into "the granary of the world." All of the produce of the South – cotton, rice, sugar, tobacco – could be grown in the fertile soil of the Golden State, and no one was more "competent as those who are inured to toil, and accustomed to that kind of labor." Such a class of laborers was none other than the massive number of African Americans of the South, newly freed by the war.[82]

The construction sites of the transcontinental Pacific Railroad, black Californians thought, could also provide jobs for the newly freed laborers of the South. Not only were the southern freedpeople already adapted to the kind of hard physical labor the construction of railroads required, but they were in need of good paying jobs that could

[82] 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.

initiate them into the system of free labor. Black Californians were therefore strongly convinced that it must be the freedpeople, and no other class of laborers, who should be hired to build the railroads. During the 1865 Colored Convention of the State of California, where representatives from counties throughout the state congregated to discuss matters of most pressing importance, delegates created a special committee dedicated to the interests of the southern ex-slave laborers. The committee was specifically appointed to carry out the task of directly contacting and petitioning the railroad construction companies to consider employing "twenty to forty thousand freedmen to complete this great National enterprise."[83]

Unfortunately, these efforts on the part of black Californian representatives were largely ignored by the white managers of the railroad construction companies. Railroad companies found the less expensive labor of Chinese immigrants, and the ways in which they could liberally exploit the Chinese with more impunity than other classes of laborers, ultimately more profitable than employing African Americans. Although black Californians persistently agitated for the employment of freedpeople on the railroads, urging the railroad companies to "contract with the Freedmen's Bureau for any number" of African American laborers from the South, the railroad companies nevertheless continued to use Chinese labor in preference to that of the African American.[84]

Securing jobs for the ex-slaves in the free labor economy was not the only concern for black Californians who were eager to advance the cause of freedom across the continent. Education was another prominent issue in the minds of those who sought full freedom and equal rights for the freedpeople. One way to participate in the

---

[83] 29 December 1865, *The Elevator*.
[84] 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

movement to educate the newly freed men and women of the South was to support the California branch of the American Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission (FAUC), which opened in January, 1866. A preliminary meeting for the organization of the institution was held in the parlor of the Occidental Hotel, San Francisco, on January 11, 1866, followed by an Inaugural Ratification Meeting at Platt's Hall, San Francisco, on January 29. Hundreds of people attended the event, including prominent politicians, religious leaders, and antislavery activists. At the request of the John Currey, chief justice of the Supreme Court of California serving as chair of the inaugural meeting, O. C. Wheeler, the general agent of the Commission for the Pacific coast, announced the objectives of the meeting: the branch would raise funds toward establishing schools and paying teachers in the South for the education of the freedpeople, Wheeler explained. If anyone contributed more than $500, which was equal to a year's wages for one teacher, the contributor could give a name to a school, and have the institution "particularly and peculiarly their own." The benefactor would have direct communication with the teachers of the school and receive monthly reports from the same. If contributors wished to send funds to a specific locality, or to an individual laborer or a certain department of labor, Wheeler promised that such wishes would be "in all cases adhered to."[85]

Many black Californians expressed warm welcome and hearty support of the installation of the California branch of the FAUC. "I am, heart and soul, in the deepest sympathy with this glorious and God-instituted work," wrote Reverend John Jamison Moore to O. C. Wheeler upon receiving news of the planned inauguration of the Commission. Its work, he believed, would help "lift the colored race … out of

---

[85] "The Work Begun for the American Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission," n. p., n. d., California Historical Society.

debasement and crown them with true manhood." Furthermore, Moore pledged to "render any practical service to this great national scheme of philanthropy that is within my reach."[86] On June 18, 1867, an earnest and attentive audience gathered in the Zion AME Church on Stockton Street, San Francisco, to hear Reverend D. C. Haynes, the secretary of the FAUC, who was visiting California for the purposes of raising funds for the institution. He had been in the Golden State three years ago in 1864, when he had succeeded in raising $30,000 toward the education of southern freedpeople. Of that sum, Haynes explained, $880 was contributed by the African Americans of California. They had subscribed $3,000 more, of which $515 had been paid up so far. It would help the cause greatly, Haynes urged, if each black Californian could give at least "one dollar, or at least fifty cents" for the education of the freedpeople of the South. The audience proved eager enough, for on that night alone, $83 were collected in cash for the cause, and $23 more pledged. Following the speech, black activists also immediately acted upon the exhortations of the FAUC secretary by publishing a notice in the *Elevator* for a "PUBLIC MEETING in aid of the Freedmen's Commission," to be held the following week on the 26th at the Bethel AME Church on Powell Street in San Francisco.[87]

While black Californians kept themselves closely attuned to issues of national importance, they were also apt in enlisting the aid of national politics in areas where state politics alone would not yield desired results in their fight for equal rights. Black Californians had been agitating for the right to vote since 1863, when they had finally

---

[86] "The Work Begun for the American Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission."
[87] 21 June 1867, *The Elevator*. The next issue, of the 28 June 1867, is unfortunately lost, and with it the information on the amount collected from the meeting held on the 26th. Haynes was mistaken in his count of the black population on the Pacific coast, which he estimated at 20,000. The editors of *The Elevator* remarked in parenthesis that "on the whole Pacific coast, from California to Stika, inclusive, there are not ten thousand."

gained the right to testify in cases in court where white persons were a party. Throughout the decade, however, their petitions had been repeatedly denied in the California state legislature, where Democrats stirred up the fear of the rule of "inferior" races that included not only the African American but the largest minority in the state: the Chinese American. When the right of black American citizens to the elective franchise became the focus of national attention toward the end of the 1860s, therefore, African Americans in California sought to redress their situation by urging California to join the ranks of those states that had ratified the Fifteenth Amendment. It would "redound to the honor and credit of the State to be among those who were willing to award justice to a loyal and much abused class of citizens," the *Elevator* exhorted.[88] Nevertheless, the Democratic Party was just as zealous to keep the amendment from passing the legislative halls of California. In August, 1869, the Democrats of the state circulated pamphlets decrying the effects of the Fifteenth Amendment should it be ratified. The new amendment would "immediately … confer the right to vote upon the negroes *in the States of the Union*," it wailed. In fact, "the direct result will be that the negroes will vote in the State of California at the next election after its adoption," and "NO ACT OF THE STATE CAN EXCLUDE ALL NEGROES FROM THE RIGHT TO VOTE." Because "the Amendment *must* receive the approval of some one of the States of Ohio, California and Oregon," the pamphlet argued, the decision of California was truly crucial. Upon it hinged the future of not just the nation, but the quality of everyday lives of all white Californians who wanted a continued reign of white supremacy.[89]

Although rankled by the vicious racialized rhetoric of the Democratic pamphlets,

---

[88] 20 August 1869, *The Elevator*.
[89] Joseph Hoge, *Shall Negroes and Chinamen Vote in California? Read! An Address by the Democratic State Central Committee to the Voters of California* (California: 1869).

black Californians remained optimistic in their calculations of national politics. The right to vote was a long awaited prize, and this time, they would get it through the agency of other states around the nation - no matter how the Democratic Party of California bawled. It would be honorable for California to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, they offered, but "the final adoption of this amendment does not depend on California, although the Democratic organs claim that it does." It was, therefore, foolish of the Democratic Party of the state to make "opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment the principal plank of its platform."[90] The calculations of black Californians and the Republican Party of California proved correct. The Democratic state legislature did reject the amendment in January, 1870, but just a few weeks later when Iowa ratified the amendment, it became evident that the Fifteenth Amendment would become law of the land anyway.

Black Californians were ready to celebrate. "*Gloria Triumphe!* We are free!" cried the *Elevator* on February 11, 1870, as news of the ratification of the amendment in Iowa came through. "We announced last week that Georgia had ratified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments," it rejoiced. "Since then, Iowa has ratified the Fifteenth, which completes the number … Two more States will undoubtedly ratify it, namely: Texas and Nebraska, which will make thirty, being two more than the required number." Now that the new addition to the United States Constitution was finalized, black Californian activists immediately began making preparations "to commemorate the event with due observance of joy, praise and thanksgiving." "A public meeting will be held for that purpose on Wednesday evening next, 16th inst," the Executive Committee in San Francisco announced.[91] On February 26, 1870, F. G. Barbadoes, who had represented

---

[90] 20 August 1869, *The Elevator*.
[91] 11 February 1870, *The Elevator*.

California at the National Labor Convention held in Washington, D. C. on July 20, 1869, informed the Executive Committee in San Francisco that "we are momentarily looking for the official announcement of the linch pin of the reconstruction – the Fifteenth Amendment." He added that he expected to see black Californians preparing a truly memorable demonstration. From his memory, Barbadoes wrote, Californian festivities were excelled "by none of the other states …, on such occasions; it is seldom equaled even here, at the National Capital [sic]." Although white Californians had rejected the amendment, he had no doubt that black Californian celebrations would eclipse the discontented elements of the state and outshine the celebrations of all the other states of the East in grandeur.[92]

During March, 1870, black communities across the United States bustled with preparations for the upcoming official ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. The National Executive Committee had issued a circular for the "colored people of every State and Territory throughout the length and breadth of the land" to prepare suitable displays of thanksgiving to God and appreciation of their fellow citizens who had made the righteous choice. African Americans in every town and village of California were eager to comply. The *Elevator* enthusiastically predicted that the celebrations across California would go on simultaneously with those of black communities across the nation. "The Eastern States will be alive with enthusiasm," it prophesied. "In New York," the editors continued, news had come that "Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips and Senator Revels, are to be the leading speakers." From Philadelphia had also arrived a letter from "an old friend" James Needham, informing the editors of the Californian journal that "Our folks here are making preparations to celebrate the 15th Amendment, when the

---

[92] 18 March 1870, *The Elevator*.

Proclamation is issued. It will be a great jubilee, and I hope it will be duly observed throughout the country. We anticipate having a fine time here."[93] On April 22, 1870, the *Elevator* indeed painted a most colorful map of the United States as it filled column after column with descriptions of the celebrations of the past few weeks in different towns and counties not only within California, but across the country. There had been processions, speeches, and jubilation in Stockton, Placerville, Sacramento, El Dorado, San Jose, Santa Cruz, Los Angeles, and Nevada City, California, the newspaper chanted. Then the paper attended to the festivities in Virginia and Elko, Nevada; Portland, Oregon; Terra Haute, Indiana; New York City, Albany, and Brooklyn, New York; New Haven, Connecticut; and Scranton and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[94] It was a moment of solidarity for African Americans of California and of the Pacific coast to read the pages of the *Elevator* that day, teeming with descriptions of rejoicing black communities around the nation. The newspaper wove the nation into black Californian consciousness, embedding black California securely in the greater national African American community.

To the end of the nineteenth century and beyond, black Californians continued to integrate themselves into the interests of African Americans in various parts of the country, and also to incorporate the struggles of black citizens of the eastern states into their own battle for equality in California. From sending representatives, proposals and letters to the National Labor Convention held in Washington, D. C. in 1869, to holding events decrying lynching in the South and fundraising money to help support the families of lynch victims, African American Californians meshed national problems into the

---

[93] 11 March 1870, *The Elevator*.
[94] 22 April 1870, *The Elevator*.

fabric of their everyday lives and struggles.[95] As they did so, they created and sustained a vibrant network of communications that stretched over not just the vertical length of the Pacific coast, but all the way across the continent to the states of the eastern seaboard. Black Californian usage of the steamers and the press did not end there, however. By boarding the great steamers crossing the wide Pacific Ocean with the U. S. mail to destinations in Asia and Australia, black Californians soon expanded the limits of their community consciousness beyond just the boundaries of the nation. They were ready to create a truly cosmopolitan identity, soundly based on their daring ventures and exciting experiences overseas.

---

[95] Concerning the National Labor Convention of the Colored Men and black Californian participation and representation, and the debates around importing Chinese laborers into the southern states, see 8 January 1869; 15 October 1869; 29 October 1869; 12 November 1869; 19 November 1869; 26 November 1869; 3 December 1869; 17 December 1869; 24 December 1869; and 18 March 1870, *The Elevator*.
For black Californian activities against lynching in the South, see *A Crime Against Civilization. A National Disgrace. A Grand Mass Meeting Will Be Held in the Zion A. M. E. Church… Sept. 4.* (San Francisco: Brunt & Co., [1899?]).

CHAPTER 4. THE BLACK PACIFIC

It was late February of 1865 in San Francisco, and the atmosphere was humming with excitement. Newspapers editors stood at the ready to learn the outcome of a vote in Congress that would change the future of the city. For weeks San Franciscans had been anticipating the outcome of a bill in Congress concerning the creation of a new steam line from San Francisco to China. Finally, on the 16th of February, the long awaited telegraph came from Washington, D. C.: John Conness, the Republican senator from California, had sent a message to James De Fremery, President of the Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco. "The China Mail Steamer Bill passed the House to-day, and is now a law."[1] The new act authorized the Postmaster General to accept proposals for mail steamship service between San Francisco and China, offering $500,000 as a government subsidy. "First-class American sea-going steamships" should be culled for service, it dictated, and operated on a monthly basis.[2]

By the 29th of August, the Postmaster General had accepted the offer of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company (PMSC) to deliver the U. S. mail across the Pacific Ocean.[3] The PMSC would operate the transpacific mail line for ten years from the date of

---

[1] 21 February 1865, *Sacramento Daily Union*; 21 February 1865, *Marysville Daily Appeal*. The act was finalized on February 18, 1865.
[2] 22 March 1865, *Daily Alta California*.
[3] "Steamship Line for China-San Francisco Bay," 24 February 1865, *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*; "Steam Connection with China," 1 April 1865, *Sacramento Daily Union*; "Steam Around the World," 28 July 1865, *Daily Alta California;* 30 July 1865, *Daily Alta California*; "The China Mail

its first run, the contract read, and the first date should be no later than the 1st of January, 1867. On the way to China, PMSC steamers were required to touch at Honolulu, Sandwich Islands, and Kanagawa, Japan.[4] Californians broke out in ebullient expectations as they followed these developments. "San Francisco Bay is destined to be as famous … as is the river Thames," one journalist exclaimed on February 24, 1865, "for the number of national flags that shall be seen upon … her waters." With a new direct line from San Francisco to Asian nations of the Far East, he prophesied, "twenty-five years will not pass away before San Francisco will rival New York in wealth and business, and no city in the Union exceed her in her commercial enterprises."[5] The editors of the *Daily Alta California* went even further, speculating on the effect of the act on world history. The nation that monopolized the trade with Asia had always grown most prosperous and powerful in the history of the world, they asserted. The prestige had first been held by Genoa and Florence, the Italian cities of Venice, and most recently by London. Now with the opening of a direct line between San Francisco and China, the great wealth of the "Asiatic trade" was about to "pour" straight into San Francisco across

---

Line - Propellers vs. Sidewheelers," 4 September 1865, *Daily Alta California*; "How a Great City Grows," 7 May 1866, *Daily Alta California*. As it turned out, the PMSC was the only company with the financial strength and organization willing to meet the requirements for transpacific operations, and it was consequently the only company that submitted an offer to the Postmaster General.

[4] 31 August 1865, *Sacramento Daily Union*; 31 August 1865, *Daily Alta California*; 1 September 1865, *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*; 1 September 1865, *Marysville Daily Appeal*; 8 September 1865, *The Elevator*. For the history of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company and related legislation in Congress, see: Robert J. Chandler and Stephen J. Potash, *Gold, Silk, Pioneers and Mail: The Story of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company* (El Cerrito, CA: Glencannon Press/Friends of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Library, 2007); John Haskell Kemble, "The Genesis of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company," *California Historical Society Quarterly,* vol. 13, no. 3 and 4 (Sep. and Oct., 1934); Timothy G. Lynch, "Crucible of California Capitalism," *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 4 (Winter, 2012); Robert A. Weinstein, "North from Panama, West to the Orient: The Pacific Mail Steamship Company, as Photographed by Carleton E. Watkins," *California History*, vol. 57, no. 1, The Chinese in California (Spring, 1978).

[5] "Steamship Line for China-San Francisco Bay," 24 February 1865, *California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences*.

the Pacific Ocean, and then into New York over the transcontinental railroad.[6]

Black Californians were especially interested in these developments. The *Elevator*, the leading black newspaper of San Francisco, had anxiously watched for word about the line. On July 28, 1865, two weeks before the Postmaster General accepted proposals from steamship companies and owners, the newspaper correctly predicted that the PMSC would obtain the contract. It also told readers that a mere twenty-one day journey was all that would be needed to take the mail from San Francisco to Shanghai through the straits of Matsmai, Japan.[7] When the transpacific line opened in 1867, African American shipworkers, merchants, entrepreneurs, and journalists participated actively in the burgeoning transpacific commercial trade, accumulating profit and creating a vibrant network of black merchant communities in Japan, China, Australia, and New Zealand as they did so. Fully aware of the economic, diplomatic, and political impacts of the commercial relationship between the United States and the Asian empires, black San Franciscans sought to use the transpacific trade not just for economic profit but racial egalitarianism. Specifically, they expected that strengthening the connections between the U. S. and the Pacific would erode white Americans' race prejudice.

Black Californian investment in U. S.-Pacific relations, both economic and cultural, is a crucial chapter in African American history, as well as the history of the U. S. in world affairs and Pacific commerce. The story, nevertheless, has been largely

---

[6] 15 August 1865, *Daily Alta California.* At the time of this article, the Pacific Railroad was not yet completed. The transcontinental railroad would finish construction in May, 1869. For pre-1867 trade between China and the United States, see: Raymond A. Rydell, *Cape Horn to the Pacific: The Rise and Decline of an Ocean Highway* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952); Robert J. Schwendinger, *Ocean of Bitter Dreams: Maritime Relations between China and the United States, 1850-1915 (*Tucson, Arizona: Westernlore Press, 1988); and Elizabeth Sinn, *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).
[7] 28 July 1865, *The Elevator*.

overlooked.[8] Historians who study nineteenth-century black Californians have focused primarily on the statistical makeup of the African American population in the state, the organization of black institutions during the formative years of settlement, and the political agitation for equal rights, including desegregation in the public areas of San Francisco.[9] While many historians have certainly noticed black marine engagement upon steamers, no connection has been made between black Californian maritime activity and the growth of international Pacific commerce during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Occasionally, black seamen like William T. Shorey, an African American

---

[8] For the history of the development of Pacific commerce, see: Chuck Dangler, *The Pacific Rim Region: Pacific and Pacific Rim History since the Sixteenth Century* (London and New York, Routledge, 1999); Rydell, *Cape Horn to the Pacific*; Schwendinger, *Ocean of Bitter Dreams*; Sinn, *Pacific Crossing*; James P. Delgado, *Gold Rush Port: The Maritime Archaeology of San Francisco's Waterfront* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Pekka Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1996); Ernest A. Wiltsee, "The City of New York of the Pacific," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Mar., 1933).

[9] For the history of the formation of black communities in California, detailed descriptions of the ratio of sex, residences, and occupations of African Americans in San Francisco, and agitation for first-class citizenship, see: Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (University of California Press, 1991); Willi Coleman, "African American Women and Community Development in California, 1848-1900," in Lawrence de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African-Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001), 98-125; Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977); Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Quintard Taylor, *In Search of a Racial Frontier: African Americans in the West, 1528-1990* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998); Charles M. Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (University of California Press, 1978); Delilah Leontium Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California: A Compilation of Records…* (Los Angeles, 1919); Robert J. Chandler, "Friends in Time of Need: Republicans and Black Civil Rights in California during the Civil War Era," *Arizona and the West*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter, 1982); James A. Fisher, "The Struggle for Negro Testimony in California, 1851-1863," *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec., 1969); Jeanette Davis Mantilla, "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte': A Quarter-Century of Civil Rights Activism by the Black Community of San Francisco, 1850-1875," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000); Delores Nason McBroome, "Parallel Communities: African-Americans in California's East Bay, 1850-1963," (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1991); Stacey L. Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 1 (Feb., 2011). For publications on the lives of individual nineteenth-century black Californians, see: Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Erid Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007); Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, *Shadows and Light: An Autobiography with Reminiscences of the Last and Present Century* (General Books LLC, 2010); Rudolph M. Lapp, "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Early California Negro Leader," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 53, no. 4 (Oct., 1968).

captain of a whaling vessel in the waters of the Pacific Ocean during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, have received scholarly attention.[10] For the most part, however, the black mariners, entrepreneurs, merchants, and journalists of San Francisco, who created a lively transpacific community, have remained invisible in historiography.

Black Californian maritime activity, and African American contribution to the rise of a black Pacific as early as in the mid nineteenth century, deserve an important chapter in the history of African Americans in the Far West. As they participated in Pacific commerce, black shipworkers, merchants, and journalists together extended the networks of black American community beyond the borders of the nation, broadening the scope of African American history into global history not just on the Atlantic side, but on the Pacific side as well. In the process, they exhibited a unique pattern of voluntary black American migration into Asia in pursuit of profit and racial elevation, generating discourse on racial and cultural identities among black San Franciscans both at home and abroad. The creation of a black Pacific in the mid-nineteenth century provides a fascinating counterpoint to the more widely discussed creation of a black Atlantic.[11]

---

[10] E. Berkeley Tompkins, "Black Ahab: William T. Shorey, Whaling Master," *California Historical Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring, 1972).

[11] For detailed discussion of the concept of the "black Atlantic," see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). For black culture in light of the black Atlantic, see Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum Books, 2003). Heidi Carolyn Feldman uses the term "black Pacific" to describe the black Peruvian experience, referring to an African diasporic experience in countries on the American Pacific coast. See Heidi Feldman, *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific* (Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006). I use the term to describe African American engagement in transpacific activity, which was largely voluntary and motivated by self-interest. A similar definition can be found in studies of black Pacific engagement in the twentieth century. See Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Gerald Horne, *Race War: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004); Reginald Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Ernest Allen Jr., "When Japan Was 'Champion of the Darker Races': Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 24, no. 1 Black Cultural History - 1994 (Winter, 1994); Yuichiro

Just one month after the PMSC signed the contract with the U. S. Postmaster General, an African American merchant named Peter K. Cole made a timely arrival in the port of San Francisco aboard the vessel *Uncona*. An "old resident of California," Cole was disembarking from a thirty-five day voyage from Japan after an absence of seven years, during which he had travelled various "memorable places" of the world. While his travels included regions as far as Egypt and Palestine, Cole had spent the majority of his time in Japan and China. Here he had learned various details of the Japanese and Chinese cultures, as well as the Japanese language. He had also picked up a dabbling of spoken Chinese. More importantly, Cole had accumulated a considerable amount of valuable and specific data concerning the economic perspectives of an American merchant in these newly rising Asian trading fields. On October 27, 1865, he published an announcement in the *Elevator* with the intention of delivering public lectures on the subject. He would open the Asian treasure chest, acquired by years of direct experience in China and Japan, to the black entrepreneurs of San Francisco.[12]

In November and December, 1865, Cole successfully delivered several public lectures to a black San Franciscan audience. With the exception of one or two digressions on Japanese history and culture, Cole's speeches were almost exclusively tuned to the exciting new possibilities awaiting entrepreneurial black merchants in the Japanese Empire. The first lecture, given on November 15, 1865 in Powell Street Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, promised the "opportunity for commencing commercial

---

Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922," *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 92, no. 2 (Spring, 2007).

[12] Announcement of Peter K. Cole's arrival in 27 October 1865, *The Elevator*. Cole's announcement for public lectures is advertised in the same issue. The fact that Cole had spent more time in Japan and China than in other places during the seven-year absence is induced from a letter he sent to *The Elevator* in 1872. This letter is reproduced in 23 November 1872, *The Elevator*.

relations with the Empire of Japan." Cole repeatedly emphasized the profitability of participating in the trade with the Asian countries, recommending the formation of "a company of colored men to trade with Japan" for maximum profit. Let the black merchants become the "prime movers in the great work," Cole urged. Such a company might buy or charter steamers to exchange goods with Japan. "With those mighty ocean horses" at the service of black San Franciscan entrepreneurs, Cole explained, "in less than six months from the starting point it will pay 500 per cent. on the whole cost and outlay." When the great transcontinental Pacific Railroad was completed, Cole predicted, San Francisco would indeed become the most important hub of world commerce. Prescient black merchants should organize now, and become forerunners in the competition.[13]

For many African Americans, however, more than economic profits were at stake as they considered the future of Pacific relations. Black Californians saw in the future of Pacific commerce a promise of readjusted racial relations, both inside and outside of the United States. If San Francisco became enmeshed in the web of the Pacific, black leaders hoped, ideas of modern cosmopolitanism would force prejudiced whites to forego their parochial ways and adopt more racially egalitarian attitudes. "When considered in connection with the intercourse soon to be established with the copper-colored nations of China and Japan," boomed William H. Hall to the representatives gathered at the 1865 Colored Convention movement, "the word white … in the Constitution of California" was both "anti-republican" and "unwise." Limiting suffrage on the basis of skin color, Hall declared, would become utterly "inconsistent with the present age."[14] Many black Californians believed that establishing diplomatic relations with Asian countries and

[13] 27 October 1865; 24 November 1865; 1 December 1865; 8 December 1865; 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.
[14] 10 November 1865, *The Elevator*.

interacting with "copper-colored" merchants on an equal footing would have profound repercussions on the idea of the hierarchy of "races." In the age of Pacific commerce, they hoped, prejudices based on ideas of white supremacy would no longer be tenable.

As Pacific networks tempered white racism, they would create new opportunities for black improvement as well. Reverend T. M. D. Ward, the elder of the California Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, believed that successful African American participation in the great Pacific enterprise was another important venue for demonstrating black ability and industry. He proclaimed at the annual commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1866 that in the coming age, the "long despised and forgotten Africo-American, shall be a competitor in the great American mart." "Our black merchant princes will be known and acknowledged even to the uttermost parts of the earth," he thundered, and "the white wings of our ships shall sweep every sea." When "all Asia shall help swell the tide of commerce," Ward concluded, "the name negro shall be the synonym of everything that is good, great and powerful."[15]

On January 1, 1867, the PMSC launched the *Colorado*, the first transpacific steamer under the China Mail Bill. All throughout December, 1866, advertisements had riddled newspapers across California announcing the great first trip bound for China. Yokohama, a port city in the prefecture of Kanagawa, had been selected as the Japanese midpoint during the voyage. The final destination was Hong Kong, China. If passengers wished to travel to Shanghai instead, a steamer would be ready in Yokohama to take passengers and freight to the other destination.[16] Patrons could deal directly with the

[15] 5 January 1866, *The Elevator*.
[16] For examples, see 1, 3, 11, 13 December 1866, *Daily Alta California*; 1, 4, 13 December 1866,

PMSC agents, or employ intermediary firms, such as Koopmanschap and Company or Wells, Fargo and Company, which also offered to send freight by "our pioneer express for Yokohama and Hongkong" through the services of the PMSC.[17] On December 31, 1866, the eve of the great launch, a grand banquet was held at the Occidental Hotel in San Francisco to celebrate "the pioneer steamship in the San Francisco, China and Japan Mail Steamship Line." Two hundred and fifty "merchants, military, naval, State, county and city civil officers, and foreign representatives" attended to commemorate the upcoming sail of the "magnificent steamship Colorado." Both Frederick Ferdinand Low, the governor of the state of California, and ex-governor Leland Stanford were present to make speeches, as well as Richard Cunning McCormick, governor of the Arizona Territory. Standing up to present his opening speech, Low articulated that "it has been the custom in all ages, and in all parts of the civilized world, to celebrate by appropriate ceremonies great achievements." Now, he proclaimed, they would celebrate the launch of the great 4,000-ton steamer *Colorado*, which signified the "indomitable energy of the American people." Tomorrow at noon, after nearly two years of patient waiting, the magnificent machine would finally carry "the hopes and prayers of a civilized nation" over the great Pacific Ocean to the empires of Asia.[18]

By the summer of 1867, the PMSC was operating regular monthly lines between San Francisco, Japan, and China.[19] Cole, who had returned to trade in Japan sometime

---

Marysville Daily Appeal.

[17] For advertisements by Koopmanschap and Company, see 1, 11, 13 December 1866, *Daily Alta California*; for advertisements by Wells, Fargo & Co., see 11, 13 December 1866, *Daily Alta California*. Original text in Wells, Fargo & Co.'s advertisements was in all capitalized letters.

[18] 3 January 1867, *Sacramento Daily Union*.

[19] 7 January 1867, *Sacramento Daily Union*. It appears that the PMSC may not have succeeded immediately in sending a transpacific steamer every month after this initial launch, for on January 7th, 1867, an advertisement for the company announced that the next date for the transpacific voyage was set not for February, but for April 1st, 1867.

between December, 1865 and July, 1867, wrote from Yokohama, Japan on August 23, 1867 that "the July arrival at this port of P. M. S. S. Co.'s steamship 'Colorado' was as usual welcomed by all with great pleasure."[20] In August advertisements, the PMSC schedule for the transpacific crossings listed September 3, 1867 as the departure date for the *Great Republic* for Yokohama, Japan. The *China*, another massive 4,000-ton steamer built in the winter of 1866 specifically for San Francisco-China trips, would launch the next month on October 14, 1867. While the *Great Republic* would stop and return once it reached Yokohama, the *China* would go on to Hong Kong. Passengers whose final destination was Shanghai could connect at Yokohama with another PMSC steamer, the *Costa Rica*.[21]

One example of what a transpacific voyage was like on these great steam vessels appeared in the form of a memoranda from the steamship *China*, published in both the *Daily Alta California* and the *Sacramento Daily Union* in January, 1868. Departing at noon from San Francisco on October 14, 1867, the ship carried 953 passengers, 790 tons of merchandise freight, $1,076,070.84 in treasure, and the U. S. mails. The voyage was smooth until the 30th of October, when "a severe northeast gale," lasting "about 24 hours," hit the ship. No damage was suffered by either passenger or freight, and the steamer pulled into the wharves of Yokohama on November 6, 1868, at 11 A. M. Having unloaded and reloaded, the *China* left for Hong Kong on the 8th, arriving at its final destination on the 14th. During this part of the voyage three Chinese steerage passengers had died, and their embalmed bodies were delivered to Hong Kong for interment. On the return trip the *China* was loaded with 218 passengers, 2,090 tons of merchandise freight,

---

[20] Peter K. Cole, "Letter No. 2 from Japan," 23 August 1867, in 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*.
[21] 16 August 1867, *The Elevator*. List of PMSC's individual ship histories can be found online at TheShip'sList, http://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/pacificmail.shtml.

$5,000 in treasure, and the U. S. mails, bound for either Yokohama or San Francisco. Leaving Hong Kong on the 26th, the *China* arrived at Yokohama on the 4th of December, unloaded and reloaded, and finally launched out for San Francisco on the 6th of December with 230 passengers, 2,092 tons of merchandise freight, 1,200 tons of coal, and the U. S. mails. The massive steamer pulled into dock in the wharves of San Francisco by the last day of the year, its engines having "admirably" overcome "almost continuous heavy head gales and seas" during the return voyage across the Pacific. No deaths or sicknesses had occurred.[22]

Vessels like the *Colorado* and the *China* must have carried a number of African Americans on each crossing, for in less than a year from the opening of the transpacific line, a vibrant "colored society" had sprung up in Yokohama, Japan. As of January 1868, it was not yet big: "there are some ten or twelve colored persons here," wrote Cole to the *Elevator*. Small as it was, and predominantly male, Cole nevertheless found it sufficiently functional in social intercourse to be described as a "colored society."[23] The group of African American men in Yokohama actively integrated themselves into not only the economic activities of the commercial city, but also into the fabric of its political and cultural activities. By the end of 1867, Cole had become a reporter for the Japan *Times*, a weekly newspaper published in the English language in Yokohama. As he wrote for the journal, Cole recommended the creation of a "Benevolent Association in Yokohama," the plan of which would be modeled on that of the San Francisco Benevolent Society.[24] Sometime in the early summer of 1868, several men from the black community in Yokohama lighted on a day of "recreation and scientific enjoyment" at Haramachida, a

---

[22] 1 January 1868, *Daily Alta California*; 4 January 1868, *Sacramento Daily Union*.
[23] Cole, "Letter No. 7 from Japan," January 186[8], in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*.
[24] 22 November 1867, *The Elevator*.

town "containing about five or six hundred silkworm and silk producers, general producers, etc." Starting out at six o'clock in the morning from Yokohama, they amused themselves by looking upon not just the economic prospects that silkworm farms in Haramachida offered, but also on the "beautiful open country" and the architectural merits of the village.[25] Besides carrying information on economic prospects in Japan, Cole's letters brimmed with news of Japanese political developments, descriptions of cultural characteristics, and the events and excursions of the community of merchants in Yokohama. Some of the intelligence likely came from his African American friend J. P. Johnson Howard, who worked as a clerk in the office of the American Consul in Yokohama.[26]

Cole's reflections on the political and cultural developments in Japan were, nevertheless, often less than sanguine. Later on, as historians of the twentieth century have described, some African Americans in the aftermath of the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 sought to form a racial alliance with the Japanese, with the idea of creating a coalition of non-white nations against imperialist white Western supremacy.[27] At this point in the mid-nineteenth century, however, the future of relations between these peoples was uncertain, and African Americans in Asia were as likely as white Americans to adopt a colonialist perspective. Cole, the black Californian merchant, saw

---

[25] 31 July 1868, *The Elevator*.

[26] 31 August 1872, *The Elevator*. In 1870 Howard had been studying law in Yokohama. – Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*.

[27] For arguments concerning the idea of a racial alliance between African Americans and Japan in the early twentieth century, see: Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*; Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China*; Marc Gallicchio ed., *The Unpredictability of the Past: Memories of the Asia-Pacific War in U. S.-East Asian Relations* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Horne, *Race War*; Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese*; Allen, "When Japan Was 'Champion of the Darker Races'"; George Lipsitz, "'Frantic to Join… the Japanese Army': The Asia Pacific War in the Lives of African American Soldiers and Civilians," in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd eds., *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Onishi, "The New Negro of the Pacific."

in traditional government and culture sometimes awesome and admirable characters, but nevertheless viewed them primarily as heathen institutions ultimately destined for enlightenment through contact with European Christian civilization. "The native [Japanese] here," mused Cole in his letter of August 23, 1867, "like the poor Indian of America, must leave the spot of his childhood and the land his forefathers tilled from time immemorial, to make room for that European civilization which while it enriches at the same time impoverishes."[28]

Like many imperialists who regarded themselves as enlightened, Cole regarded the exotic civilization he saw not as permanently inferior, but rather capable of improvement with proper influence from Europeans and Americans. "The Japanese," he predicted, "in a very short space of time … will become scientific and artistic (Europeanly), and so in a very high degree they will become a great trading nation, great merchants and very heavy speculators."[29] European notions of science, art, and economics were not, however, the only improvements to be found in the developing Japan. The "Asian" system of despotic government must also be affected, for the influx of Americans had been accompanied by the republican idea of equality of men. Already telltale signs were appearing of such an influence, for although the "lord of this land may look with a frowning brow upon the loss of his command over the minor classes, a loss daily exhibiting itself in the careless of the latter class to obey to the very letter the long established rules and usages, customs and manners of their ancestors, inherent by birth," Cole wrote with a hint of smug approval, "the European has brought no remedy from the civilized West equal to the task of counteracting the disease with which the lordly ruler is

[28] Peter K. Cole, "Letter No. 2 from Japan," 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*.
[29] Peter K. Cole, "Letter No. 2 from Japan," 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*.

infected."[30] The republican ideals would also help make the servile Japanese men more "manly," Cole believed, for while he currently found many Japanese men in charge of the "Usivarro, or houses of ill-fame," he was certain that imbibing the ideals of European and American men would soon make Japanese men see "a sure failure in their unmanly trade" and "seek some more respectable vocation."[31]

The first African Americans to inhabit Asian trading posts in Yokohama, Shanghai, and Hong Kong were middle-class propertied entrepreneurs such as Cole, John C. Plummer, Charles B. Benjamin, and William Everson, along with about a dozen working-class laborers whose names Cole failed to enumerate in his letters to the *Elevator*.[32] When Cole called on black Californians to organize a company to initiate international trade with Japan in 1865, he had specifically directed his message to "the few wealthy and enlightened portion of the enterprising class among us."[33] It was probably this small group of literate and propertied middle-class black men that Cole himself identified with. In his letters, he carefully drew a line of respectability around Plummer, Benjamin, Everson, and himself, distinguishing the group from the other unnamed African American workers in the early Yokohama settlement.[34] Cole lamented

---

[30] Peter K. Cole, "Letter No. 4 from Japan," 10 January 1868, *The Elevator*.
[31] Peter K. Cole, "Letter No. 2 from Japan," 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*.
[32] Cole, "Letter No. 7 from Kanagawa, Yokohama," January 186[8], in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*.
[33] "Lecture by P. K. Cole," 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.
Although in nineteenth-century United States the distinction of class had more to do with ideology than actual economic status, in the Asian settlements it seems that economic status played a prominent role in distinguishing who was respectable and who was not. For a discussion of black class distinction, see Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1823* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8.
[34] On black engagement with nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas of middle-class respectability, see Victoria W. Walcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14-15, 185-229; Jane E. Dabel, *A Respectable Woman: The Public Roles of African American Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago and London:

that he and his friends, the "literary" black men, "despair[ed] of finding any place to while away an evening" because "intelligent correspondence" in the entertaining activities of the other working-class African Americans was so "sparse."[35]

Despite Cole's disdain for the greater portion of his black companions in Yokohama, Cole's class distinction sheds light, albeit but a dim glow, on the undocumented lives of the lesser propertied black workers living in the Asian trading settlements. Uneducated and mostly illiterate, these laborers nevertheless scraped together enough to purchase a transpacific fare in the hopes of making a fortune in the newly opened trading cities of Japan and China. They toiled in the port cities during the day, probably as laborers in the wharves and in the employ of wealthier merchants. In the evenings they came together, perhaps tired from a day of hard work but still retaining hopes of a merrier night, to enjoy their own forms of entertainment. Their more "literary" friends declined to participate, but there is no evidence that the lack of middle-class presence made their frolics less enjoyable.[36]

Wealthier black entrepreneurs sailed out of San Francisco with dreams of a fortune on a much larger scale. These were the "black merchant princes" that Reverend T. M. D. Ward had envisioned in 1866, sweeping the oceans as they rose as "a competitor in the great American mart."[37] In Yokohama, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, these pioneer merchants launched international trading companies, joined large international firms, and opened up local businesses targeting other American and European settlers in Asian cities. By January 1868, Cole had entered into partnership with Yochida, likely a Japanese

---

The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 112-115.

[35] Cole, "Letter No. 7 from Japan," January 186[8], in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*.

[36] Cole, "Letter No. 7 from Japan," January 186[8], in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*.

[37] 5 January 1866, *The Elevator*.

merchant in Yokohama. Together, Yochida and Cole advertised in the *Elevator* for Californians to submit orders for shipments of Japanese mulberry seeds, as well as "all … Japanese goods."[38] It is also possible that when E. Frank, the owner of a popular clothing shop in San Francisco, boasted in 1867 of having in supply "a large stock of READY MADE CLOTHING, Suitable for China and Japan markets," he had made arrangements with Cole or another black merchant to try exporting his merchandise to overseas destinations.[39] Charles B. Benjamin, an employee of the PMSC, had apparently established his abode on both sides of the Pacific and doubled himself as a merchant when in the Yokohama society.[40] Meanwhile, "Professor" William Everson opened up a popular barbershop in Yokohama, frequented by both the black and white clientele. Unlike Cole, Benjamin or Plummer, who "despair[ed]" of finding any way to spend an evening in respectable entertainment other than to sit in the parlor of Everson's establishment, Everson quickly became "a part and parcel of the literary white population of Yokohama." Using his occupation, he found "ample amusement and good pay" when middle-class whites fashioned their hair at his place on "nights of amateur performances." Not only did he see to their "tonsorial wants," he even mingled right in with his patrons and joined in their performances himself.[41]

Although separated by a distance of more than four thousand miles, the black communities that cropped up along the vast Pacific rim kept up an intimate correspondence with the black community in San Francisco. The monthly visits of the

---

[38] For some of Cole's advertisements, see: 17 January 1868; 3 July 1868, *The Elevator*. Apparently they only advertised in *The Elevator*, for other Californian papers did not carry the advertisement.
[39] 23 August 1867, *The Elevator*. It is also possible that Frank had simply put in the phrase to attract more attention from the already excited San Franciscans.
[40] 10 January 1868, *The Elevator*; Cole, "Letter No. 7 from Japan," January 186[8], in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*.
[41] For Everson's job, see Cole, "Letter No. 7," January 186[8], in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*; for information on Butler, see 23 November 1872 and 31 May 1873, *The Elevator*.

PMSC steamers, together with the outreach of a large number of African American crew members aboard the transpacific vessels, provided valuable channels through which these newly created black societies communicated with black Californians back in their home country. It is misleading, then, perhaps even ahistorical, to discuss a black community in nineteenth-century San Francisco that was contained within the city or even the larger Bay area. Indeed, African Americans in the city themselves increasingly saw their community as one that stretched across the largest ocean on the globe.

More than any other medium, one newspaper allowed for such an extended community: the *Elevator*. The newspaper helped connect the Far Eastern black communities of Yokohama, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand to the city of San Francisco. As the most successful black periodical of the Golden City, the *Elevator* boasted of being the only black American newspaper that had official distributors in Asia and a clientele spread over the entire Pacific. As a result, black residents of Japan, China, Australia and New Zealand learned the news and the gossip from San Francisco more quickly than from anywhere in the United States, the country of their origin. Also, not only were the majority of the black laborers and merchants who had settled in overseas port cities directly from northern California, but all of them had, at least, stayed for a brief period in San Francisco in order to board a PMSC steamer across the Pacific. The black crew members aboard PMSC vessels, the very agents who brought valuable news, letters, parcels, and newspapers from their home country month after month, were all from the port of San Francisco, the place of origin for the majority of Asia-bound vessels from the United States after 1867. These people published their accounts of the Far East in the *Elevator*, read the newspaper for news of San Francisco

and of the nation, and anticipated - correctly - that African Americans in the U. S. West and perhaps in the country as a whole would rely on the *Elevator* to sustain and strengthen the networks spanning the Pacific.

The success of the newspaper is amply borne out by the testimony of black settlers in Asia in the mid-nineteenth century. On August 23, 1867, Cole wrote that there was "nothing more agreeable than to receive tidings from the Western World" with every steamer that arrived from the United States. These "tidings" included more than general political news from his old home. Black employees aboard the PMSC steamers passed on private letters, newspapers, and information by mouth to their friends in Japan and China.[42] By April 1868, these "tidings" took on a concrete and regular format: the placement of official staff members of the *Elevator* in Yokohama. The first agent for China and Japan was John C. Plummer, whose main occupation is not known but who was most likely a black Californian merchant conducting international trade in Yokohama.[43] Plummer reported that the well-edited black Californian newspaper was an instant success in Asia. When two months later in June, 1868 Plummer broke his leg in an accident and had to temporarily return to San Francisco, he told editor Philip A. Bell that "THE ELEVATOR is very popular in Japan and China, and but for his unfortunate accident he would have obtained many more subscribers."[44] Plummer's accident did not dampen the popularity of the newspaper, however. William Everson, the black barber in Japan, took over Plummer's task as agent for the *Elevator*. When Plummer returned to

---

[42] Cole, "Letter No. 2," 23 August 1867, the first part in 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*, and the latter part in 27 September, 1867, *The Elevator*.
[43] 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*.
[44] 23 October 1868, *The Elevator*.

Yokohama early in 1869, both were listed as agents.[45]

By August 1873, a Mrs. William M. Thomas had also joined the crew as distributor to subscribers in Yokohama.[46] Described as an "upright" lady who won "the esteem and admiration of all her friends" with her "urbanity, hospitality and public spirit," Thomas was well suited for the work of expanding the readership of the San Francisco newspaper in Asia. The previous year in November 1872, the *Elevator* had printed a notice of departure for Thomas, whose husband was already settled in the Japanese city. Several days earlier on November 22nd, a Friday, she had given "a social entertainment" for her friends as a good-bye party, where she received many wishes for "health, happiness and safe and speedy passage across the Pacific Ocean." A resident of San Francisco for six years, the *Elevator* explained that Thomas had won "the esteem and admiration of all her friends." Now, on November 30th, she would sail out of San Francisco on the *Japan*, a PMSC vessel, to join her husband in Yokohama. Once across the sea in the Japanese port city, the woman of "public spirit" quickly put her talents to use. Associating herself with every black family and merchant in the Japanese commercial city, she soon became a leader in the Yokohama black society. By August, 1873, Thomas had become an official distributor of the *Elevator* in Japan, a position usually assigned to the most prominent, active, and well-connected members of the black community.[47]

The arrival of the *Elevator* quickly became a vital part of the lives of African Americans in China and Japan. "The coming year, try to keep us alive here in the East, by

---

[45] 26 February 1869, *The Elevator*. In the 25 June 1869 issue of *The Elevator*, acknowledgment is made for receipt of subscription fees from Wm H. Everson for "Messrs. Burton, Ragon, and Clark."
[46] 23 August 1873, *The Elevator*.
[47] Details of her departure in 30 November 1872, *The Elevator*. Notice of Mrs. Thomas as being an agent for the newspaper in Yokohama in 23 August 1873, *The Elevator*.

the regularity of your God send paper," pleaded Cole in his letter to Philip A. Bell, the editor of the *Elevator*, in December 31, 1872. "We look so foolish standing on the jetty anxiously straining our eyes after the ELEVATOR … Another friend begs me to say to you that whether it blows, rains or storms, don't let a steamer leave for Japan minus an ELEVATOR."[48] Although the papers they received were generally a month late, the belated receipt did not dampen the earnestness of the black Asian residents waiting restlessly on the foreign docks. The *Elevator* had indeed become the "Organ of the Pacific" – on both sides of the great ocean.[49] It brought news from "my own land, my home, [and] my friends and all that makes friendly connections and relationship sweet to memory and its hope," and this relationship would not change even if there was a temporal disconnect between the communities on the opposite sides of the Pacific.[50]

While black Californians living in Asia reported that "nothing [was] more agreeable than to receive tidings from the Western World," they were also eager to have the people of San Francisco tuned in to the details of their own lives overseas.[51] Black emigrants continually dispatched local newspaper issues such as the Japan *Times,* the *Herald*, the *Evening Gazette*, the Shanghai *Friend*, the Sandwich Islands *Overland Mail*, and sometimes even papers from India to the office of the *Elevator* in San Francisco.[52]

---

[48] Cole, "Letter from Japan," 23 December 1872, in 25 January 1873, *The Elevator*.
[49] Term employed by its own editors, 26 February 1869, *The Elevator*.
[50] Quote from Cole, "Letter No. 9," April 1868, in 29 May 1868, *The Elevator*.
For a discussion of the role of black newspapers in helping to create, foster, and represent a community identity, see Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 98-100.
[51] 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*.
[52] Henry Smith sent several copies of the *Herald* from Yokohama, 16 March 1866; Thomas Pell sent the *Friend*, from Shanghai, 30 March 1866; Peter K. Cole sent various newspapers from Japan, 22 November 1867; Charles B. Benjamin, deliverer of papers from Japan sent by Cole, 10 January 1868; Cole, the Japan *Times*, 24 July 1868; Cole, several Japanese newspapers, 21 August 1868; Captain A. G. Dennison and Cole, papers from China, Japan, and India, 25 December 1868; William Thomas, papers from Japan and China, 29 October 1869; Z. F. Purnell, Australian and New Zealand newspapers, 15 June 1872, *The Elevator*, are just some of the announcements in *The Elevator* acknowledging the receipt of such overseas

Not stopping at informing black Californians of the general news from the Far East, African Americans on the other side of the Pacific also tried to publish the events of their private lives in the *Elevator*. In August 1868, Plummer sent word of his knee injury, hoping for sympathy from the Californian community he still considered himself a part of. He must have rejoiced to read in the arrival of the next issue of the newspaper that his friends in San Francisco "regret[ted] to learn" of his accident, and that they "sincerely hope[d] it will not be as bad as he anticipates."[53] Far Eastern black settlers also relayed information on their New Year entertainments, recreational excursions, notices of funerals, and even invitations to weddings.[54] When N. F. Butt, a native of Virginia, married Senora Selina Maria Francisco, a Portuguese woman from Macao, in the home of a wealthy black resident William P. Moore in Hong Kong on February 17, 1874, Butt apparently forwarded an invitation to the office of the *Elevator*. The editors of the black San Francisco newspaper apologized for their inability to attend, but did not forget to report that the wedding was "largely attended by the most respectable ladies and gentlemen of Hong Kong, and was a splendid affair."[55]

If Plummer, Everson, and Thomas were official distributors of the *Elevator*, the people who actually brought over the weekly issues, together with personal correspondence from the people of San Francisco, were the black employees aboard the PMSC steamers. Charles S. Bundy, a black barber aboard one of the transpacific steamers, was one of the many agents who helped deliver the *Elevator* and other personal material for African American communities on both sides of the Pacific ocean. Employed by the

---

newspapers sent by black Californian emigrants.

[53] 21 August 1868, *The Elevator*.

[54] 30 March 1866; 24 July 1868; 31 July 1868; 30 July 1859; 29 October 1869; 25 April 1874, *The Elevator*.

[55] 25 April 1874, *The Elevator*.

PMSC sometime around 1868, he worked on the steamer until his death on July 9, 1873.[56] In December, 1872, when Cole asked Bell to send the *Elevator* with every steamer, he mentioned the despair that he and his friends felt when "Mr. Bundy or some other friend lands with nothing for [us]."[57] Besides Bundy, many others also contributed to the maintenance of a vibrant communication network between San Francisco and the Asian cities. Charles B. Benjamin and Z. J. Purnell were also among the workers who served aboard the transpacific steamers of the PMSC, who were acknowledged in the *Elevator* for delivering papers and parcels to either side of the Pacific.[58] The January 1868 announcement in the *Elevator* of the receipt of the "complete files of the Japan *Herald, Times, Chronicle*, and *Overland Mail*," sent by Cole from Yokohama through the hands of Benjamin, is just one example among many that were published in the columns of the black Californian paper.[59]

Black shipworkers, nevertheless, played a role more complex than acting as simple delivery persons. When Captain Alexander Ferguson sailed out of San Francisco aboard the *Alaska* on October 1, 1873, armed with "letters of introduction and

---

[56] A brief obituary in 19 July 1873, *The Elevator*. Bundy committed suicide in his own barbershop aboard the steamer, presumably for "financial difficulties." The steamer on which he served faithfully for five years is not named.
[57] Cole, "Letter from Japan," 23 December 1872, in 25 January 1873, *The Elevator*.
[58] Charles B. Benjamin, delivery of the Japan *Herald, Times, Chronicle*, and the *Overland Mail*, 10 January 1868; Z. J. Purnell, of steamer *Colorado*, "late Japanese papers," 25 October 1873, *The Elevator*. Sometimes the announcements of the receipt of these transpacific packages do not give the name of the delivering agent; at times it is also unclear whether the persons named were senders or carriers. Aside from Charles S. Bundy, Charles B. Benjamin and Z. J. Purnell, whose occupations aboard the steamers are certain, the following names are given for the delivery of Asian documents: Henry Smith, delivery of the Japan *Herald* to the office of *The Elevator*, 16 March 1866; Thomas Pell, delivery of the *Friend*, of Shanghai, to *The Elevator* office, 30 March 1866;; William Thomas, delivery of the Japan *Times* and "other interesting papers," 29 October 1869; and Captain Alexander G. Dennison, for "late Oriental papers, among which are the Hong Kong Daily *Press*, the Calcutta *Englishman* and the Japan *Gazette*," 26 April 1873. For more examples, with agents named and unnamed, and for announcements of receipt of personal correspondence see: 25 December 1868; 22 January 1869; 25 June 1869; 17 June 1870; 23 November 1872; 6 September 1873; 4 October 1873, *The Elevator*.
[59] 10 January 1868, *The Elevator*.

recommendation to merchants, officials and others" in hopes of prospecting the transpacific trading economy, he felt instantly at home and welcomed in his temporary abode in the "bosom of the deep." Not only was the *Alaska* one of the "cleanest and most comfortable ships afloat," it was staffed by several able African American employees who provided excellent service for all, plus an added sense of continuity and community for black overseas travelers. In his letter written aboard the *Alaska*, Ferguson gave brief descriptions of each of the African American employees he met aboard. "*Our* John Rankin is *chef de cuisine*," Ferguson wrote, "and it is putting it mild to say he is equaled by few and excelled by none in his department." Louis Styes was Rankin's "second," and David Parsman was in charge of the desserts. William Bowman was a praiseworthy "ship's cook." In the steward's department shone John Martin, who as the second man showed a character that was "a marvel of coolness, kindness and patient forbearance." Mrs. Agnes Peterson, also a stewardess, was a "Sister of Mercy in affliction's hour," who with her "very small" stature watched over her clients with "a very big heart, generous impulses, and ever obliging and attentive" service. Valuables on board were watched by Mark Matthewson, "son of our old fellow citizen" - presumably a black friend in San Francisco - who worked as a security guard, while Augustus Bell took care of the various lamps inside the ship and also served as a porter. Ferguson also found himself enjoying the friendship of another African American traveler, Ira H. Chapman, who was heading for Yokohama to introduce the "Amoskeag Fire Engine" to Japan.[60] In a voyage on

---

[60] Alexander Ferguson, "On the Deep – Across the Sea," 23 October 1873, in 29 November 1873, *The Elevator*. It is possible that some of the crew members listed may not be African American, although the overall content of the letter strongly implies that Ferguson only described colored workers. Ferguson generally does not indicate the color of the persons he mentions in the letter, unless he wants to make a specific point. For example, although he does not mention that William Bowman, the ship's cook, was a black man in the first description, he later expresses regret at the fact that the only African American small pox victim on the trip was Bowman. The persons Ferguson clearly and specifically identified as black

strange waters destined for strange lands, Ferguson found that the company of these people kept him attached to the community that he was leaving behind, providing him with a sense of connection, continuity, and familiarity.

It was not unusual for a steamer to have multiple African American employees in its crew. When the census was taken in San Francisco in the summer of 1860, for example, the steamer *Antelope* had twenty crew members in total, among whom were three African Americans: Henry Nugent, a thirty-year-old "male mulatto" cook; James Butler, thirty-four years old, a "male black" cook; and Joshua Lufus, twenty-eight, a "male mulatto" steward. The steamer *Eclipse*, a larger vessel, had eight black male employees and one black female worker on board in the capacity of stewards, porters, cooks, waiters, a pantryman, and a chambermaid. The *Cornelia*, operated by the California Steam Navigation Company (CSNC), had only two black workers: Alfred Hamilton, a forty-year-old "male black" pantryman, and Anna Cook, a twenty-four-year-old "female black" stewardess. The *Chrysopolis,* a luxury CSNC vessel that serviced the steam line from San Francisco to Sacramento and Stockton, had on board twelve black male employees and one black female employee: one cook, two pastry cooks, nine waiters, and one chambermaid. The *USS Active* of the U. S. Navy, which at the time of the census was also anchored in the San Francisco wharves, boasted of one black cook and six black waiters, all male.[61]

---

persons are: Rankin, Bowman, Matthewson, and the passenger Chapman. Nevertheless, although it is possible that the unspecified persons were non-black, when compared to the lists of colored workers aboard the various steamers in the San Francisco wharves in the 1852, 1860 and 1880 Census, it would not be surprising if all the workers Ferguson described were indeed African American.

[61] 1860 manuscript census, California State Archives. In the manuscripts, the steamer *Chrysopolis* was spelled "*Chrysofilis,*" and the *USS Active,* "*USS Activo.*" Because the PMSC did not operate transpacific steam lines at this time, the vessels docked in the wharves were not as large as the 4,000-ton *Great Republic* or the *China*. Besides the above named vessels, the steamer *Pacific* had twelve black workers; the steamer the *Bragdon*, four; the *Sophie M. Lane*, four. Also on unnamed steamers: unit numbered "28xx

The 1870 federal census also provides valuable information on a large number of black San Franciscans in marine service in the summer of 1870. Although the name of the steamer is unknown, eight black male employees were counted upon a "Steamboat" that had a total of thirty-one workers on board. Three of them were porters, three waiters, and two cooks. The white employees held jobs such as deck hands, steamboat hands, and waiters; there were also one white oiler and one white baker. Besides those found on steamships, many other African Americans living in the city reported their occupations as related to steamers. Among the 1,330 African Americans in San Francisco counted in the summer of 1870, 113 black men and women reported that they were employed aboard a ship. Of those who specified the position they held on the steamer, there were thirty male stewards, three female stewardesses, twenty-eight male cooks, four male porters, three male waiters, three male ship caulkers, one male baker, one male ship smith, and one male barber. This number is not accurate, for some people neglected to mention that they were employed aboard a steamer. Bundy, for example, the barber aboard the PMSC transpacific steamer since 1868, reported his occupation only as "barber" - not as "barber aboard steamer." In the census he simply appears as Charles Bundy, a black barber from Pennsylvania with $1,000 in real estate and $100 in personal property.[62]

Because shipworkers were so vital to the maintenance of personal ties across both sides of the Pacific, and because they stayed for extended periods of time not only in San Francisco but also in Asian cities in between their services on transpacific steamers, their

---

[last two letters are illegible]," nine black employees; another unnamed steamer, seven; unit "1168," forty; unit "1169," fourteen; unit "1206," twenty-one; unit "1208," nineteen; unit "1315," two; and unit "1327," twenty-one black employees.

[62] Federal Census, 1870, City and County of San Francisco, State of California. Transcription provided by the USGenWeb Project. Information on the employment of Charles S. Bundy from 19 July 1873, *The Elevator*.

fortunes, troubles, and deaths were keenly watched by friends on both coasts. When Bundy, the PMSC barber who had faithfully delivered the *Elevator* and other packages to the black residents of Yokohama committed suicide in 1873, his death was lamented by his friends in both Asia and California. The *Elevator* printed a lengthy obituary in his honor, noting that Bundy had been "remarkable for his mild, even temper, his gentlemanly deportment and suavity of manner." Although he had cut his own throat inside his shop aboard the PMSC steamer, the *Elevator* explained that it must surely have been an act of temporary insanity caused by supposed financial difficulties, for "a man of his even temperament and high moral character would not have committed such a deed in his sane moments."[63] When the black ship cook William Bowman died of smallpox aboard the *Alaska* in 1874, Alexander Ferguson, the black merchant who had been on board, mourned his death as "one of the saddest incidents of the passage." "It really seems sadder [to die] when one is compelled to receive the last sad rites of burial so far away, even from the bosom from whence he came," Ferguson lamented. To those living on the great rim of the Pacific Ocean, where their lives were so closely entwined to the rhythm of the steamship, the watery grave consigned for those who died at sea reminded them of the ever real dangers of the ocean voyage – and made thoughts of home and the agents who made the connection even dearer.[64]

The large number of African Americans employed by the steamship companies made firsthand accounts of overseas experience a readily accessible resource for black Californians who considered emigrating abroad. One rich source for this kind of

---

[63] 19 July 1873, *The Elevator*. Another death noted in *The Elevator* is that of Commodore Watkins, a worker aboard the *Great Republic*, who died during service on the San Francisco-Yokohama voyage in 1868. Cole informed *The Elevator* of the sad news. Cole, "Letter No. 6," 23 January 1867, in 21 February 1867, *The Elevator*.

[64] Alexander Ferguson, "On the Deep – Across the Sea," second letter, in 17 January 1874, *The Elevator*.

information was the black boardinghouse, frequented by seafaring African Americans whose steamers were in port. Unlike the raucous boardinghouses on the Atlantic seaboard in the early nineteenth century, where owners lured "black jacks" returning "full of money" from long voyages with "hot food, lots of booze, and willing girls," residency in a San Francisco boardinghouse was more of a regular arrangement than just a temporary stay in between irregular voyages.[65] Unlike the early Atlantic "black jacks," most black San Franciscan shipworkers held steady employment with local steamship owners or companies and served on a specific steam line on a regular basis. They were less likely to be as famished for "hot food, lots of booze, and willing girls," or to be as stock "full of money" as were their early nineteenth-century Atlantic counterparts. Rather, African American marine laborers in San Francisco during the latter half of the nineteenth century were more likely to consider boardinghouses as a place of residence that they sought regularly every couple of days, or perhaps even every night.

Instead of seeking accommodations at white-operated boardinghouses, many African American seafarers chose to lodge at all-black establishments, where they could enjoy a better sense of affinity in the company of those who shared their racial experience and background. In July of 1860 the boardinghouse "Golden Gate," operated by William and Sarah Mutter from Massachusetts, housed twenty-eight black "mariners." Another unnamed boardinghouse run by Richard Turner, a forty-six-year-old "mulatto" man from Illinois, likewise accommodated sixteen "male mulatto" mariners who sought lodging and entertainment during their off-schedule term in San Francisco.[66] In the federal census

---

[65] Reference to Atlantic black jacks from W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 182-86; quote from page 183.
[66] Federal Census, 1860, City and County of San Francisco, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.

of 1870 for the San Francisco County, there appear four such establishments where the majority of its boarders were persons of color. While most boardinghouse keepers were themselves African American, there were exceptions. One rare case was the establishment operated by a thirty-five-year-old "white" man named Frank Drew.[67] Of his ten patrons, only one was a white ship clerk. Nine others were "black" or "mulatto" men, six of whom reported their occupations as "seamen." More common, of course, were boardinghouses for black seafarers kept by African American proprietors. Benjamin Davis, a thirty-two-year-old black man, operated such a place in cooperation with eighteen-year-old James Harris. At their building lodged fourteen black men, all of whom worked aboard steamers as cooks, stewards, or "seamen." The family of John T. Callender, a thirty-three-year-old man from the West Indies, also kept a boardinghouse for black mariners. Together with his wife Mary and their year-old child Cordelia, they accommodated eight black men, seven of whom identified themselves as seamen. Finally, Mary F. Cook, a thirty-eight-year-old black woman from Maryland, kept a smaller lodging house that housed three black men, one of whom was a steamer steward.[68] The census does not record the names of the steamers upon which these workers were employed. While some of these persons may have worked aboard a transpacific steamer, others may have been employed on an intra-California line. A prime pastime for these young bachelors must have been to narrate the stories of their exciting experiences on board, and, if they were employed aboard a transpacific vessel, what they saw and heard overseas.

[67] Drew, who came from West Indies originally, may have been a light-skinned black man. It was not uncommon for census-takers to mark African Americans as "white" if they looked light enough. Federal Census, 1870, City and County of San Francisco, State of California.
[68] Federal Census, 1870, City and County of San Francisco, State of California.

But one did not necessarily have to travel down to the seaside boardinghouses to hear what it was like on the other side of the Pacific. San Francisco as a whole was filled with family homes that harbored of one or more shipworkers inside their walls. Single seafaring men and women often chose to rent furnished rooms in houses owned by African Americans rather than staying in a crowded boardinghouse. When John Somers, a forty-year-old ship steward, found himself in want of a room more private than that provided by a boardinghouse, he rented a furnished unit from Elizabeth Scott, a forty-year-old black woman whose property was valued at 2,000 dollars. Likewise, Thomas Dorsey, a ship carpenter, and Isaac Heiner, a ship porter, sought accommodation in furnished rooms provided by a forty-two-year-old black woman named Frances Blake. Even if the primary job of the host was not listed as "Furnished Rooms," many black families in San Francisco also provided accommodation for African American shipworkers. Edward and Rachael Quinn, for example, who were themselves working as a bootblack and keeping house with two little children, welcomed William Marshall, a black "mariner," to stay with their family. Likewise, Samuel Davis, a black janitor with 200 dollars in personal property, had Francis Dickenson, a ship cook, and John Johnson, a ship steward, live in his home with his family.[69]

While unmarried or otherwise single mariners chose to stay in boardinghouses or rent rooms, many steamer employees boasted of having their own families and houses in San Francisco. When John Jones, a thirty-year-old steamer steward, found himself off duty in the summer of 1860, he did not bother checking in at a boardinghouse. Instead, he sought the company of his wife, twenty-two-year-old Rebecca Jones, in their home in the Second District of San Francisco. Ten years later in 1870, still employed as a ship

[69] Federal Census, 1870, City and County of San Francisco, State of California.

steward and now forty-one years old, he found comfort in the home of his wife Rebecca and their five children. Likewise, ship cook James Boom hurried to his wife Caroline, who worked as a laundress, and their four little children whenever he got off his steamship. Meanwhile, Mary C. Thurl, a fifty-year-old "mulatto" woman who worked as a stewardess aboard a steamer, lived with twenty-eight-year-old Hannah Thurl, likely her own daughter, who did not have an occupation. Bundy, the barber aboard the PMSC transpacific steamer, enjoyed the embrace of his wife Caroline and their four sons when he returned home from his trips to Japan. When he died on July 9, 1873, he left behind Caroline and three sons – one had perhaps died before him sometime between 1870 and 1873 – in San Francisco.[70] Having a father, mother, husband or wife who traveled overseas every month or so, visiting home for short periods in between voyages, meant that there was a continual influx of fresh news and materials from the Asian countries into the families that lived in San Francisco. Because black families were woven in an intricate web of connections through churches, social and political organizations, various work relations, proximity of homes, and friendship, there was almost a constant update of information in the black circles of San Francisco. The great mobility of black Californians within the state also meant that this information spread out from San Francisco into every region of northern California.

The *Elevator*, the most widely read newspaper in black communities up and down the American Pacific coast, likewise continually published new information on the economic prospects, political developments, and cultural characteristics of Japan and China, as well as news of events from the merchant communities in Yokohama, Shanghai,

[70] Federal Census, 1860, City and County of San Francisco, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives; Federal Census, 1870, City and County of San Francisco, State of California. Obituary for Bundy in 19 July 1873, *The Elevator*.

and Hong Kong. On the same day that it announced the PMSC as the carrier of U. S. mail to Japan and China, the *Elevator* reported of an ongoing rebellion in China, with rebels advancing toward Peking.[71] While much of the more generic information on Asian countries could also be found in other white Californian newspapers, the fact that the *Elevator* had its own correspondent in Yokohama added a unique and more detailed depth to the news it conveyed to its largely black clientele. Through the letters and the newspapers sent from Japan by Cole, the *Elevator* informed black Californians of the move of Florence to open commercial trade with the Japanese Tycoon, the detailed attire of Japanese princes, the attitude of the Japanese and Chinese people toward foreign merchants on their land, the improvement of the infrastructure in Yokohama, the price of goods in the Asian markets, the living climate overseas, the lifestyles of black Californians who were working in Yokohama or Shanghai, and myriad other data that would have been invaluable to an entrepreneur considering Asian emigration.[72]

While early in 1868 the initial "colored society" in Yokohama had been small, by 1870 it had grown much larger. Cole still refused to enumerate the names or occupations of those he did not consider part of the "decent portion of our community," but the details he did give of those he included in the respectable circle show a society comprised of more variegated persons than two years before. William H. Everson still kept his shop in 1870, while James B. McCauly, Esq., G. Cornelius, and G. Goodman, retired merchants, enjoyed their rest in the beautiful Asian harbor. McCauly, who had come from humble origins, had by 1870 become the richest black man in Yokohama. R. Clark served the

---

[71] 8 September 1865, *The Elevator*. It may be referring to the Taiping Rebellion, 1860-1865, a large-scale civil war against the ruling Qing Dynasty of Manchu origin.

[72] 20 October 1865; 16 March 1866; 30 March 1866; 20 September 1867; 4 October 1867; 22 November 1867; 10 January 1868; 17 January 1868; 21 February 1868; 3 April 1868; 10 April 1868; and many more after April 1868, *The Elevator*.

community as a baker, while J. P. Johnson Howard studied law under Francis W. Marks, "Barrister at Law, Yokohama, Japan." Two years later in 1872, Howard had become a clerk in the office of the American Consul in Yokohama. There was also a veterinary surgeon, J. Wickers, and Lieutenant J. Brown, in service of the PMSC. Finally, there were John C. Plummer and a Major H. Burton, whose occupations Cole did not list.[73]

Across the sea in Shanghai, George A. Butler, originally born enslaved to Commodore Rogers in Washington, D. C., rose in rank in Russell and Company, a large American steam navigation company in China, as the master "[g]odownkeeper" – or, the superintendent of the warehouses.[74] Created in 1862 by Russell and Company, the Shanghai Steam Navigation Company had monopolized the steam lines on the Yangtze River by 1866. Holding "the best wharf positions and command[ing] throughout the choice of the Chinese trade," the company operated eighteen steamers without rivalry during its heyday from 1867 to 1872.[75] Butler, an "equally modest and intelligent" man who had worked in Russell and Company since 1860, had acquired "great influence" over the years. By 1873, Butler had been "charged with the entire freighting business of the Shanghai Steam Navigation, receiving for his services a salary of $4,000." When the former U. S. Secretary of State William H. Seward saw him at an entertainment ball given in his honor by a Mrs. Warden in Shanghai, Seward noticed that Butler "was

---

[73] A Mr. Stephen Massett had made a derisive mention of James B. McCauly in his sketch of the Yokohama society in the *Harper's* or the *Frank Leslie's Weekly* in 1869, concerning his rise to wealth; Cole angrily remarks that "it is no disgrace to have been poor, when one has the dimes to be rich." Also, the name "G. Cornelius" is later referred to by Philip A. Bell as "Cornelius George"; it is not clear which is the first name and which the last. Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*. For reference to G. Cornelius as Cornelius George, see announcement of arrivals in 18 May 1872, *The Elevator*. For J. P. Johnson Howard's occupation in 1873, see 31 August 1872, *The Elevator*.

[74] Cole, "Our Japan Correspondent," 18 October 1872, in 23 November 1872, *The Elevator*; also see "Who Is He," 31 May 1873, *The Elevator*.

[75] Kwang-Ching Liu, "Administering a Steam-Navigation Company in China, 1862-1867," *The Business History Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Jun., 1955), 157-58.

received on a footing with other guests." Seward later recalled that "It is pleasing here [in Shanghai] to meet 'John Brown's soul marching on.'" Cole, who had taken over Butler's previous position with a Mr. Burlingame in Tien Sin, China, when Butler left to join Russell and Company in 1860, told Bell in 1872 that Butler had now "become wealthy and is one of your [the *Elevator*'s] constant subscribers."[76]

When William N. Armstrong, an attorney-general to King Kalakua's Cabinet of Hawaii, accompanied the king on a trip to China and Japan in 1888, he also recalled an African American man in charge of a large steamship company in Shanghai. In his 1904 memoir, Armstrong recalled that when the king's group visited Shanghai they found "a fine American Negro" acting as manager of the China Merchants' Steamship Company, which at that time was operating thirty-six large steamers and was serving the Hawaiian king's entourage with steamers free of charge. During the king's stay in Shanghai, this black manager appointed the services of a large steamer, the *Pautah*, exclusively at the disposal of the king's suite, making it practically "the private yacht for the royal party." The costs incurred by removing this steamer from regular service were indeed great, Armstrong remembered, as were the luxurious meals provided aboard each day. Nevertheless, Armstrong judged that this apparent generosity of the black businessman had actually been "shrewd," for he "no doubt expected favours in their future trade with Hawaii."[77] This African American manager may have actually been George A. Butler, for in 1877 Russell and Company sold its entire fleet, sixteen steamers at the time, to the China Merchants' Steam Navigation Company, which was then rising on the funds of the Chinese government. Butler may have been able to keep his job overseeing the fleet on

---

[76] 23 November 1872; 31 May 1873, *The Elevator*.
[77] William N. Armstrong, *Around the World with a King* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1904), 90.

the Yangtze, and elevated to the position of manager in the Chinese company.[78] Armstrong remembered that this was the same man "who had shown much ability when employed by the American legation in Pekin [that is, Peking]." The black manager, Armstrong continued, was the son of a black preacher in Washington, D. C. He "was not only well educated but spoke several languages, including Chinese," and had married "a handsome English girl in Shanghai, who was an artist." Armstrong added that while "his marriage to a white person had much incensed the Americans living in Shanghai, … it was cordially approved by the English, German and French residents."[79]

Just as many black men had left their families in the East to scout the prospects and find places to settle in California in the early 1850s, many black Californians who struck out for Asia after the Gold Rush were male heads of families. Once they found lucrative jobs on the other side of the ocean, some men called out to their wives and children to join them. This meant that as time passed, black settlements in Asian trading cities underwent a transformation similar to those in the days of Gold Rush California. From temporary settlements whose main purpose was effective generation of economic profit, black Asian societies slowly changed into family based communities whose members sought to make more permanent homes in their newly adopted cities. The number of newspaper announcements for the departures and arrivals of black Californians to and from Asia continued to increase after 1868, and after 1870, also to and from Australia and New Zealand.

In tandem with the trend for male pioneers calling for the rest of their families to

---

[78] Kwang-Ching Liu, "Financing a Steam-Navigation Company in China, 1861-62," *The Business History Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Jun., 1954), 155.

[79] Armstrong, *Around the World with a King,* 89-90. Horne also briefly mentions Armstrong's memoir in Gerald Horne, *The White Pacific: U. S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 132-33.

come out to join them, notices began appearing for female travelers as well as male after 1870. On May 18, 1872, the *Elevator* announced the arrival of Cornelius George and his wife aboard the *Japan* from Japan.[80] The next month, a Susan Myzelle also stepped out onto the docks of San Francisco after a long voyage from Yokohama.[81] Four months later in October, the *Elevator* again reported the arrival of Mrs. Tally and her child, Cornelius Innis, from Japan.[82] After 1870, the volume of traffic between San Francisco and Australia and New Zealand also increased. In 1869, the *Elevator* informed black Californians that the "Island" was actually "larger than the United States," exceeding the area of their own country by "about one hundred thousand square miles." "It is more properly a continent than an Island," the editors wrote.[83] In May 1872, the newspaper announced the arrivals of Frank Charlton, aboard the *Nebraska*, from New Zealand, and Mrs. Thornton from Melbourne, Australia.[84] The next month, Z. F. Purnell sent them various newspapers from Australia and New Zealand, which the editors of the *Elevator* found to be "the best foreign papers we receive."[85] In March 1874, John C. Jones arrived from Sydney, Australia, and several weeks later, Mr. J. C. Williamson and Mrs. Williamson, otherwise famous as "Miss Maggie Moore" in the California theaters as an "amiable and versatile actress," departed amidst many farewells from her San Franciscan fans and friends for Australia to carry on her career across the ocean.[86] Indeed, in just a matter of years after the opening of the U. S. mail transpacific steam line in 1867, black

[80] 18 May 1872, *The Elevator*. In his 1870 letter, Cole referred to Cornelius George as "G. Cornelius." See Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*.
[81] 15 June 1872, *The Elevator*.
[82] 5 October 1872, *The Elevator*.
[83] 29 January 1869, *The Elevator*.
[84] 4 May 1872, *The Elevator*.
[85] Among those Purnell sent Bell are the Melbourne *Leader*, the Sydney *Mail*, the Auckland *Southern Cross*, and the New Zealand *Herald* and others. 15 June 1872, *The Elevator*.
[86] Arrival of John C. Jones, 21 March 1874; on the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Williamson, 4 April 1874, and 2 May 1874, *The Elevator*.

families and communities had begun to flower on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Although the sizes of the black communities in Yokohama, Shanghai, and Hong Kong were initially small in 1867 and 1868 when transpacific lines had just opened, the volume of black travelers and emigrants steadily increased over time. New anticipants like Alexander Ferguson, carrying "letters of introduction and recommendation to merchants, officials and others," glided out of the San Francisco harbor to test their fortunes in Japan and China. Overjoyed at the sight of a beautiful Yokohama coastline after twenty-five days at sea, Ferguson was further excited to find that "there is but little doubt that the future of Yokohama in a commercial point of view will be brilliant and enterprising." "Young men going there now and making themselves familiar with the language and the customs," Ferguson recommended enthusiastically, "will find ample reward" in the near future. While in Yokohama, Mrs. Thomas, the warmhearted social queen who had integrated herself into the burgeoning community the year before, welcomed Ferguson with a warm and attentive reception. "I am under many obligations to the numerous courtesies and hospitalities [of the Thomases] extended to me while there," Ferguson remembered.[87]

Besides prospects for Asian-American trade and finding employment with international companies, gold also lured Californians to overseas destinations. On September 18, 1868, the *Elevator* informed its patrons that "GOLD deposits have been found in China, near Cheefoo." Already "large numbers of miners have congregated there."[88] The glittering temptation that drew Americans and the people of other nations from all over the world to San Francisco, now enticed adventurers out of San Francisco

---

[87] For Ferguson's trip to Asia and back, see: 29 November 1873; 20 December 1873; and 17 January 1874, *The Elevator*.
[88] 18 September 1868, *The Elevator*.

into Asia and also into Australia. In 1855, even before the opening of the official U. S. mail transpacific steam lines, Robert Caldwell remarked that in Melbourne could be seen "the swart Briton … walk[ing] shoulder to shoulder with the flat-faced Chinaman, the tall and stately Armenian, the lithe New Zealander [Maori] or South Sea Islander, the merry African from the United States, the grave Spaniard, … the tall, sharp-visaged Yankee, and the lively Frenchman."[89] In 1851 John Jacobs, the brother of the famous activist Harriet Jacobs, also sailed across the Pacific with his nephew Joseph, Jacobs's son, for the gold mines in Australia. The two had come to California during the Gold Rush in 1850, but had soon caught wind of more lucrative ventures across the ocean. John apparently kept up correspondence with Jacobs for the twenty-odd years he lived in Australia. He returned to California in 1873, and went back to New England to live with his sister. Harriet Jacobs's son, Joseph, however, seems to have died in Australia.[90]

Although their primary motive for settling in a port city on the other side of the Pacific was largely economic, black communities in Asia and Australia took care to keep themselves carefully up to date with the political developments and the struggle for black first-class citizenship in California and in the United States. Despite the fact that they were bodily away from their geographical home, they still considered themselves part of the community that they had left behind. In May 1870, Cole sent his hearty congratulations at the "unexpected success of the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment" in his home country. The "intelligent portion" of the colored society in Japan, Cole wrote,

---

[89] Robert Caldwell, *The Gold Era of Victoria* (London and Melbourne, 1855), 41, quoted in E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, "The Negro and the Australian Gold Rushes, 1852-1857," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Nov., 1968), 381-82.

[90] Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 108-113, 225. For more information concerning the Australian Gold Rush and Californians, see Jay Monaghan, *Australians and the Gold Rush: California and Down Under, 1849-1854* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966); E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Young America and Australian Gold: Americans and the Gold Rush of the 1850s* (St. Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1974).

"desire to present our best wishes for the bright and glorious looking future of the Hon. Hiram R. Revels, the newly elected colored Senator in Mississippi … Let him be assured that the best wishes of the colored Americans in the East [that is, Asia], are for his successful career in the important position to which he has acceded." Cole could not contain his mirth at the thought that "the highly inflated craniums" of the "know-nothing Democracy" had finally been "baffled." Now "very nearly something new under the sun" was about to dawn in the United States, and the hearts of the global Pacific black community were swelling alike with those of their American counterparts in hope of a more equal future.[91]

Reacting to home progress from afar was just one way that the black Pacific settlers kept themselves linked to their home community. Even more striking was their powerful desire for active participation in home politics itself, not just as someone who had once lived in America, but as a person who had now become more than that. They had seen a broader world, experienced the rule of different governments, had mingled with the people of different continents. When they returned to California, they would rejoin the fray of the fight for freedom not just as black Americans, but as globalized, cosmopolitan black Americans who had acquired a broader and a more variegated perspective through overseas experience. They hoped to apply what they had learned in Asia to the fight for racial equality in the United States. When Cole wrote to Bell in May 1870, this was precisely what he implied. Cole stated that "several of us colored men here, think of turning our steps ere long to the prolific land of labor in the United States." "We feel that we cannot sit, tamely looking on and see you preparing to reap the benefits to be

[91] In referring to "very nearly something new under the sun," Cole is likely referring to Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 9, which declares that there is "nothing new under the sun." Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*.

derived from the great cause of freedom," he continued, "without lending a hand in the good work."[92]

Indeed, after Cole penned his letter in 1870, several prominent African Americans would return to San Francisco from Japan and take up the cause of racial equality. In May 1872, Cornelius George, the retired merchant in Yokohama, made the homeward voyage with his wife.[93] Three months later J. P. Johnson Howard, the clerk in the American Consul in Yokohama, returned to San Francisco on a six month leave from his vocation. He went on to visit New York, and although it is not clear when he returned to San Francisco, it is certain that wherever he stayed on either side of the American coasts, Howard shared the experiences he had enjoyed and the thoughts he formed during the years he lived abroad to the people he met during his six-month sojourn.[94] In July 1873, Cole himself returned to live in San Francisco to work as a writer and a professional translator.[95]

Although it is difficult to track the exact ways in which the homecoming black emigrants from Asia influenced the thoughts and actions of black San Franciscans who never left home, there is clear evidence that they understood themselves to be empowered with a broader knowledge of global governments and racial relations, and hoped to apply their wisdom to help advance the cause of liberty in the United States. Writing three years before his actual return, Cole declared confidently that the struggle for equality in the United States would benefit greatly when black Californians with global perspectives came back to rejoin the friends in the fight in San Francisco, armed with "a knowledge of

---

[92] Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*.
[93] 18 May 1872, *The Elevator*. Cornelius George is also referred to as G. Cornelius by Peter K. Cole in Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*.
[94] 31 August 1872, *The Elevator*.
[95] 5 July 1873, *The Elevator*.

how mankind is ruled in other spheres." "In being where we have been and being where we are in this wide world," Cole announced, upon their return "we will help you [to] deduce facts for important legislation – facts to be gathered from other demonstrations of the great peculiarities of the Eastern world." "Till our return to our now rejoicing land, America," Cole bid his readers on the other side of the Pacific, "remember us."[96]

With the opening of the transpacific steam lines in 1867 and the completion of the Pacific Railroad in 1869, San Francisco had truly become, in the words of the circular distributed by the Mechanics' Institution in March 1869, the great "*entrep[ô]t* of commercial exchange between Europe and Asia." Located at a distance of just thirty days from China and, by the cross-continental railroad and the Atlantic steamers, only seventeen days from Europe, the Golden City now occupied "geographically, the most important commercial position in the world."[97] Here in the commercial hub of the Pacific, black Californian shipworkers, merchants, entrepreneurs, and journalists rushed to join the swelling tide of Pacific commerce. Gliding out of the wharves of San Francisco aboard massive iron steamers headed for Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, African American merchants dreamed of the wonderful profitability of international trade. But economic profit was not the only thing in the minds of black entrepreneurs. In their ears rang the cry of Reverend T. M. D. Ward, who on the first anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation in California had envisioned a day when "black merchant princes" will make "the name negro shall be the synonym of everything that is good, great and powerful."[98] As they built up black settlements in Asia, Australia, and New Zealand, their hearts throbbed for a day when African Americans would no longer be

---

[96] Cole, "Letter No. 16," 22 May 1870, in 24 June 1870, *The Elevator*.
[97] 9 April 1869, *The Elevator*.
[98] 5 January 1866, *The Elevator*.

discriminated against for the color of their skin. Accumulating not just money but the priceless experience of engaging with foreign governments and racial relations overseas, they extended the battle for racial equality beyond the limits of the Golden State to African American communities across the Pacific Ocean. As they did so, black merchants, shipworkers, and journalists wove a vibrant network of African American communities around the entire coastline of the Pacific Rim, generating valuable material and intellectual resources for entrepreneurial black Californians as well as for activists in the struggle for first-class citizenship in the Golden State. They had indeed created the black Pacific of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 5. AN EXCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

"We do not profess to be the official organ of all the colored people on the Pacific coast."[1] The editors of the *Elevator* were not trying to sound modest. It was January 26, 1866, and the renowned black Californian newspaper was actually drawing a boundary, a distinctly racial boundary, around the community of people they claimed to represent.[2] Coming from a journal that had, from its first issue in April of 1865, consistently insisted that it "will advocate the largest political and civil liberty to all American citizens, irrespective of creed or color," it was indeed a head-turning statement.[3] The *Elevator*'s campaign to shape its own image as the number one periodical representing the voices of all the colored people on the Pacific Coast had, in fact, been chiefly successful. In just a matter of months from its debut, the people of California, both black and white, had recognized the newly born paper as "the principal mouth-piece of the colored people on the Pacific coast."[4] Reverend John Jamison Moore, one of the most devoted activists for black education and political rights, had praised the weekly journal in 1867 as "our battle

[1] 26 January 1866, *The Elevator*.
[2] In this chapter, I do not put quotation marks around the word "race." While race is not a valid scientific category, in this chapter it is used to express the meaning conveyed when the word was used by nineteenth-century subjects.
[3] 13 October 1865, *The Elevator*.
[4] Letter dated 12 July 1865, sent from a correspondent from Stockton and printed in the 21 July 1865 issue of *The Elevator*.

ax and political censor of the Pacific coast."[5] Again in May, 1868, the white editors of the *Mariposa Mail* labeled the *Elevator* as "the organ of the colored people of the Pacific Coast."[6] By 1869, few doubted that the *Elevator* was "the acknowledged organ of the colored citizens of the Pacific Coast."[7]

In less than a year from launching the African American weekly, however, editor Philip A. Bell felt the necessity to deny the liberty his clientele took of consigning his paper the position of advocating equal rights for "*all* the colored people on the Pacific coast." The *Elevator* will not act as an official organ for "*all* the colored people," he sought to clarify in January, 1866. The community of people his paper represented, Bell declared, would *not* include any of the "Kanakers, Japanese, Chinese, and Digger Indians."[8] The *Elevator* was the official organ only of African Americans of the Pacific Coast, and its aim was to elevate the status of this selective racial group to all the rights and privileges of first-class United States citizenship. As for the social and political struggles of the others, Bell decided it sufficed to comment: "let them 'paddle their own canoe.'" Only when "our rights involves theirs," Bell declared, would the *Elevator* take the side of other racially marginalized groups in San Francisco.[9]

Even this declaration of minimal support for the rights of other "colored" people of the Pacific Coast later gave way to generic racial prejudice and stereotyping, especially when certain black male leaders of California believed it to be the best way to advocate for black political interests. Less than a year after its founding, the *Elevator* garnered the sarcastic derision from the *Alta California* for endorsing oppressive measures against

---

[5] 27 December 1867, *The Elevator*.
[6] 22 May 1868, *The Elevator*.
[7] 9 April 1869, *The Elevator*.
[8] 26 January 1866, *The Elevator*. Emphasis mine.
[9] Bell, concerning Chinese political rights. 19 January 1866, *The Elevator*.

other racial minorities. "THE ELEVATOR, an organ of the colored men," the *Alta* snorted in March, 1866, "demands the prohibition of Chinese immigration. As there is but one step from the sublime to the ridiculous, the slave need not travel far to become a tyrant."[10] In April 1882, the *Christian Recorder*, the organ of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church circulated nationwide from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, lamented that they "were in error in the remark that all the colored papers of the country were opposed to the Chinese [Exclusion] bill. The one exception is The *Elevator*, of San Francisco."[11]

The reason that many black male activists of the Pacific Coast sought to promote a racial image of African Americans as distinctly different from other non-whites lay primarily in the unique racialized landscape of the San Francisco Bay area in the nineteenth century. One of the most racially diverse areas in the world, it was also the only place in the United States where African Americans were not the largest non-white racial minority. The compiled analysis of the state census presented to the 1853 California Legislature put the percentage of black population in San Francisco County in 1852 at 1.3 percent. The Chinese, on the other hand, comprised 4.8 percent of the entire population. [12] In 1860, the U. S. Census showed that although the proportion of black Americans in San Francisco had increased to 2.0 percent, the Chinese still accounted for over twice that percentage at 4.8 percent.[13] Whereas the proportion of black San Franciscans to the entire population decreased to 0.9 percent in 1870, that of the Chinese

---

[10] Quote in the issue of 30 March 1866, *The Elevator*.
[11] 6 April 1882, *The Christian Recorder*.
[12] Statistics accumulated from the *Senate Journal,* 4th sess., 1853, appendix, document no. 14, p. 41, quoted in Leigh Dana Johnsen, "Equal Rights and the 'Heathen "Chinee"': Black Activism in San Francisco, 1865-1875," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jan., 1980), 58.
[13] Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), 28.

soared to 8.0 percent.[14] As the third, not second, racial group in the city of San Francisco and the state of California, black Californians – specifically the men – had to wage a unique battle for equality in the multiracial region. Whereas in the eastern states, many nineteenth-century African American activists sought to gain the rights of first-class citizenship by promoting the image of themselves as equal to white citizens in intelligence, respectability, morality, and manliness, in California they pursued the same goal along two different channels. The first concerned proving themselves equal to white Californians, similar to the task of eastern black activists. The second, unique to California, involved positioning themselves in relation to the more significant minority racial group, the Chinese and Chinese Americans. As it turned out, the majority of black Californian activists found it easier to assert black rights by undermining those of the Chinese, elevating the image of African Americans by negating that of the "yellow" race. Although black Californian activists were not consistently hostile toward the Chinese, they often resorted to racial prejudice and discrimination against Chinese Americans when they felt that African American rights were endangered by the Chinese presence.[15]

---

[14] Francis A. Walker, Superintendent of Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States…Compiled, from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870,) …* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 15-16. The proportion of black San Franciscans is probably a bit off, and may have been as high as 1.0 percent, if the article in the *Elevator* decrying the inaccuracy of the census records for the City and County of San Francisco is taken into account. See 2 December 1872, *The Elevator*.

[15] Although historians of nineteenth-century black California have generally acknowledged, at least in passing, the presence of the large population of Chinese immigrants that intermingled with African Americans, a meaningful analysis of the more complex interactions between the two groups of people is yet lacking. Leigh Dana Johnsen's "Equal Rights and the "Heathen 'Chinee'" is the most extensive analysis that exists of the interactions between two races. Although focused primarily on black activism for black male suffrage and desegregation of schools in San Francisco, Johnsen examines the differences in population statistics between black and Chinese San Franciscans, and black perception of the Chinese as a nuisance in their agitation for equal rights for themselves. Johnsen attributes the fundamental problem to black activists' view of the Chinese as a political, economic, and "foreign" threat. A recognition of the population of Chinese immigrants in San Francisco can be found in Erid Garnder ed., *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), xiv. Most often, the Chinese are only mentioned briefly in studies of black Californians, usually to only give the population ratio, or in just one or two examples of harmonious relationship in everyday interactions. See Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer*

Standing in opposition to Chinese American rights rather than in support of them, and distancing themselves from Chinese Americans rather than cooperating with them, were neither the natural nor the obvious strategies for black Californian activists.[16] Their choices actually put off many African American leaders elsewhere in the United States. In 1882, the *Christian Recorder* openly expressed its shock and sorrow at the more expedient but morally degraded course that black male agitators of San Francisco took. The *Recorder* preferred adhering more strictly to the principles of universal freedom and equality. "We exceedingly regret [the choice of the *Elevator* in supporting the Chinese Exclusion Bill]," the *Recorder* wrote, "for of all the American people we [the African Americans] should be foremost in standing up for equal rights." Flabbergasted at the way the Californian newspaper brazenly exhibited anti-Chinese racial prejudice by wishing that black Californians had been invited to the grand meeting held in support of the Chinese Exclusion Bill in San Francisco, the *Recorder* exclaimed, "In all such may we be

---

Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 97. Or they are discussed in quick comparison to the legal oppression faced by African Americans in California. See Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (Yale University Press, 1995), 197. A slightly more analytical discussion of Chinese-African American relationships in California appear in a book written by a historian of Chinese immigration. In it, Jean Pfaelzer notices that while some black Americans disapproved of anti-Chinese agitation, many in California reinforced negative Chinese stereotypes in order to "establish their own legitimacy as American citizens": that is, adhering to what the white mainstream was saying, in order to achieve a firmer grip on their "vulnerable" "new freedom." The argument would have been more effective if African American elsewhere in the country, especially in the South where black men and women had indeed just gained "new freedom," also joined in criticizing the Chinese. It was only the black Californians who complained about the Chinese, however, while most black leaders of other locations did not. Because the majority of black Californians had never been subject to slavery, and had lived in a state that had always been, at least nominally, free, the argument needs more refinement to offer an effective explanation. See Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans* (New York: Random House, 2007), 79-81; quote from page 80.

[16] In a study of non-white racial interaction/coalition, historian Neil Foley studies the struggle for economic and education rights of Mexicans and black Americans in Texas and California during the 1940s and the 1950s. Foley finds that the two groups, "brown" and "black," also refused forming a racial coalition, instead using the other group to advance their own agenda. African Americans portrayed Mexicans as foreigners, while Mexicans tried to assimilate themselves into the "white" race. See Neil Foley, *Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

counted out."[17]

The choice of black Californian activists to distinguish themselves from the Chinese and to refuse any kind of racial alliance was in a large part a reactive measure to the viciously racialized rhetoric of prejudiced white Californians and the Democratic Party of California. One of the pet hobbies of Henry Huntly Haight, the Democratic governor of California from 1867 to 1871, was to frighten his white audience whenever he gave a speech with the dual specters of black suffrage and Chinese citizenship. Instead of denouncing such racism in its entirety, however, the editors of the *Elevator* sought to exploit it for their own ends by tacitly approving what Haight said about the Chinese, while denying only the derogatory comments that concerned African Americans. The *Elevator* noted in August 1867 that "the great apostle of the Democracy" Governor Haight had once again "intermingle[d] the question of negro suffrage with Chinese immigration." In a disgraceful comparison between the two "races," the *Elevator* remarked in disgust, Haight had designated both as intellectually inferior to the white man. Yet instead of striking at the foundation of racism, the editors of the black newspaper chose instead to remark that "there is no analogy between the cases [of the two races]." Countering that even the "most ignorant plantation slave" was as intelligent as any European immigrant, the editors indifferently agreed to the supposition that the "heathen" Chinese did not merit citizenship.[18] It was not just the prominent politicians who tried to conflate the racial stereotypes of Chinese immigrants and African Americans. In December 1861, an article in the *Sacramento Daily Union* mused that although "the Chinese and negroes are as distinctive in features to people of their own race as the

---

[17] 6 April 1882, *The Christian Recorder*.
[18] 23 August 1867, *The Elevator*.

Caucasian to us," "to *our* [white] general observation they are blended and confused." "It puzzles us to discriminate between them," the writer continued, but then again, whites shrugged at the so-called differences between the two races as one would "glance carelessly over a drove of mustangs." The *Sacramento Daily Union* concluded that both the Chinese and the African American were "too much beneath us."[19]

Intermingling the racialized images of the Chinese and African Americans to pronounce both groups as a grave threat to the future of white superiority was also the official tactic of the Democratic Party in California in 1869, when the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment was the nationwide topic of the day. The Democratic Party of California had made opposition to the constitutional amendment the principal plank in its platform. According to the *Solano Herald*, "the Democrats of this State have chosen to go before the people upon the single issue of opposition to … fifteenth amendment," and "their whole argument … is a demogoguic [sic] appeal to the prejudices of the ignorant against Chinese suffrage and negro office-holding."[20] In the summer of 1869, the Democrats distributed pamphlets decrying the impending doom of black and Chinese suffrage in California if the Fifteenth Amendment were to be ratified. The Fifteenth Amendment, it advised, would not only "*confer upon negroes the right to vote and to hold office in this State*," but would actually "confer upon Congress the power to make voters of Chinamen *in spite of any regulation existing in this State to prevent it*." In a state where "three-fourths of the people … are opposed to negroes being allowed to vote," and "four-fifths … are opposed to Chinese being allowed to vote," the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment would surely engender an outrage beyond reparation. Only

[19] 28 December 1861, *Sacramento Daily Union*.
[20] Quoted in 27 August 1869, *The Elevator*.

the election of honest Democrats to the state legislature, the pamphlet coaxed, would prevent this catastrophe and secure continued white superiority in California.[21]

The *Elevator* aptly condemned these arguments as "the most dishonorable and false subterfuges imaginable."[22] What the *Elevator* did not do in this rebuttal, however, was to keep true to its original principal, to "advocate the largest political and civil liberty to all American citizens, irrespective of creed or color."[23] The black newspaper was certainly correct when it pointed out that despite the howls of the Democrats, the Fifteenth Amendment would not allow for Chinese suffrage.[24] It was also correct when it calmly calculated the number of states required for the amendment to be ratified, and declared that the decision of California was not as crucial as Democrats made it seem. Nevertheless, when addressing the racialized rhetoric of the pamphlet itself, instead of chastising the Democrats for promoting erroneous ideas of racial distinction, the majority of the black activists of San Francisco chose the easy way out. Instead of arguing that all people should be treated equally, black Californians chose to stigmatize the Chinese as a race so undesirable and inassimilable to the ideals of American citizenship that they were unfit for even the slightest comparison with African Americans. Repeatedly, black Californian activists sought to accentuate and often exaggerate the undesirable habits and lifestyles of Chinese laborers in their midst.[25] "We have enough, and more, of them [the

---

[21] Joseph Hoge, *Shall Negroes and Chinamen Vote in California? Read! An Address by the Democratic State Central Committee to the Voters of California* (California, 1869).
[22] 20 August 1869, *The Elevator.*
[23] 13 October 1865, *The Elevator*.
[24] For debates that went on in the Congress and even among Republicans concerning the wording of the Fifteenth Amendment to make sure that the Chinese were not included among those who benefited, and the ways in which the Democratic Party still stirred up fear among constituents in western states of the possible effects of the Fifteenth Amendment on Chinese suffrage, see Xi Wang, *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 39-50.
[25] Racial stereotyping of Chinese Americans was, of course, not limited to black Californians. The people

Chinese workers] here now," the *Elevator* cried in 1865, "eating out our substance, polluting the atmosphere with their filth, and the mind with their licentiousness."[26] "Their traits, their mode of living, necessitates the disgust which is universally bestowed upon them," derided "C. P.," a correspondent for the *Elevator* in 1873. "They are a people who are peculiarly adapted to sordid, insolubrious [sic] localities and places of abode," C. P. went on, and a tourist would find no place "more filthy, - a more disgraceful locality … than the *Chinese quarter* in San Francisco."[27] It was true that in the early stages of immigration, Chinese laborers struggled to cut down their living expenses by boarding together in cheaper areas of the city and cooking their own meals that consisted more of grains and vegetables than meat.[28] These efforts at thrifty living, however, only garnered the criticism of prejudiced native-born Americans, who saw in the cramped living quarters and different dietary preferences only the triggers to condemn them as an inferior "race." The Chinese "live principally upon rice," the *San Francisco Herald*

---

who generated most of the Chinese racial stereotypes and prejudices were white Californians, and many black activists chose to repeat the discriminatory and exaggerated rhetoric instead of challenging them. For the ways in which white Californians generated undesirable stereotypes of the Chinese Americans, and discriminated and persecuted them up to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, see Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana, Chicago, and London: University of Illinois Press, 1973 [1939]); Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*; Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Mark Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California," *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 65, no. 3 (Sept., 2005), 779-805; and Martha Mabie Gardner, "Working on White Womanhood: White Working Women in the San Francisco Anti-Chinese Movement, 1877-1890," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Autumn, 1999), 73-95.

[26] 21 July 1865, *The Elevator*.

[27] 29 March 1873, *The Elevator*.

[28] On Chinese American migration patterns, population ratio, lifestyles, and the development of community institutions during the early days of Chinese migration to California, see Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986 [1972]), 13-124; George Anthony Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 12-27; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995), 15-51; Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 45-144; Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 3-120.

sniggered, and "when they wish to indulge in animal food, all they have to do is to catch a few rats."[29] Given the choice between the black and Chinese laborer, Philip A. Bell interjected, would not the honorable "gentlemen" in the legislative halls of California prefer "a clean, honest female contraband" to serve as a cook and maid in their own houses, than a "filthy, dishonest, infidel Chinaman?" Would not they like "a little black 'Topsy' to nurse his babies … and teach them plantation lullabys, than a disgusting Chinaboy?"[30] These were, after all, a people who showed no respect for Christian morals or values, could not keep themselves clean, and ate "nasty-looking eatables."[31]

Besides offering exaggerated accusations against undesirable styles of living, black activists also highlighted Chinese proclivity for "gambling, theft and prostitution."[32] The complaint was in large part an unjustified recapitulation of the rhetoric of the white politicians and newspapers around the state, which continually lamented that the Chinese were especially given to immoral practices. Bayard Taylor, a white traveler who published memoirs of his "Journey to Marysville - a California Garden" in the *New York Mercury,* copied by the *Sacramento Daily Union* on March 19, 1860, described the "Chinamen" he met in California as "greasy, filthy," with "yellow, libidinous face and sickening smell of stale opium," of the "lowest moral platform - rather, indeed, or none at all."[33] In an editorial filled with vicious racial stereotypes, white editors of the *Visalia Weekly Delta* also complained that the Chinese were "sensualists by nature," "A people … entirely void of virtue."[34] Up north in Marysville, on Christmas day

---

[29] Quoted in Charles C. Dobie, *San Francisco's Chinatown* (San Francisco: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936), 42. The exact date of the *Herald* article is not cited.
[30] 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*.
[31] Dobie, *Chinatown*, 42. Dobie gives no citation for his quotation from a California newspaper.
[32] 19 November 1869, *The Elevator*.
[33] 19 March 1960, *Sacramento Daily Union*.
[34] 2 February 1861, *Visalia Weekly Delta*.

in 1860, the *Marysville Daily Appeal* railed against Chinese prostitutes for defiling the state. "Sold into slavery, by their parents," it wrote, these women had worked "immeasurable evil" in California by polluting the "moral health" of "thousands of white men."[35] A year later in November, 1861, editors of the *Marysville Daily Appeal* again snarled that the Chinese were "terrible, filthy-eating, disease-engendering, morals-lacking."[36] In Mariposa County, editors of the *Mariposa Gazette* likewise grumbled against the "filthy [Chinese] race, destitute of principle, charity or decency."[37]

At a time when nearly the entire population of San Francisco was famous for its extravagance, lawlessness and profligacy, it was a rather preposterous attempt to single out one group for indulging in such activities. The dubious outcry against supposedly large numbers of Chinese "courtezan [sic] companions" who accompanied the "filthy" Chinese laborers in the uncontrollable influx of immigrants into San Francisco, was also parroted by black activists who sought to place the Chinese in a category far beneath their own in terms of morality.[38] Licentiousness, a characteristic that critics claimed was flaunted by both male and female Chinese immigrants, was supposed to be especially threatening to native citizens because the vice was not contained within the boundaries of its own people, but was actually degrading the American men who had previously been so virtuous. If "the great evil of African slavery is concubinage," both black and white newspapers cried, then the Chinese had brought with them an even more disastrous plague: "the horrible system of this indiscriminate prostitution practiced by the Chinese slave women in this State," polluting the "moral sentiment of their country … with their

---

[35] 25 December 1860, *Marysville Daily Appeal*.
[36] 17 November 1861, *Marysville Daily Appeal*.
[37] 3 December 1861, *Mariposa Gazette*.
[38] 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.

dens and brothels."[39] It was true that many of the female Chinese immigrants during the 1850s, 1860s, and the 1870s were abductees from the port cities of China, forced to prostitute themselves as sex slaves at brothels owned by male Chinese merchants in San Francisco. In 1860, an estimated eighty-five to ninety-seven percent of all Chinese women in San Francisco worked in brothels; in 1870, sixty to seventy percent were counted as prostitutes. By 1880, the proportion had dropped to twenty-one to fifty percent of the female Chinese population.[40] Despite the high proportion of those held under prostitution, however, there simply weren't enough Chinese women to singlehandedly establish "the horrible system of this indiscriminate prostitution" throughout California. Looking back at the census records of the heady days of newborn California, Historian Charles C. Dobie pointed out in amusement that it was "hard to figure out … the opportunity for indulging too strenuously in this last named delinquency [that is, licentiousness of the Chinese men]" when in 1850, there were only seven Chinese women to 4,018 Chinese men.[41] By 1870, the ratio of Chinese women to men was still extremely low at 78 to 1,000. By the time of the 1880 census, the ratio had dropped down even further to 47 to 1,000, a result of the Page Act of 1875 prohibiting the immigration of those who came for a "term of service within the United States for lewd and immoral purposes" and "women for the purposes of prostitution."[42] Actual numbers, however,

---

[39] 30 June 1865; 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.

[40] Based on the manuscript census schedules of 1860, 1870, and 1880, the numbers were often influenced by the prejudices and political intentions of white male census takers, who often automatically consigned Chinese women the role of prostitute, or sought to inflate or deflate the number in accordance to political purposes. For a more detailed study of Chinese female immigrants before the Exclusion, see Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 5, 96-105; Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 7, 16-29; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, 13, 17; Peffer, "From Under the Sojourner's Shadow," 41-67.

[41] Dobie, *San Francisco's Chinatown*, 41-42; also Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 18.

[42] Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 104-105. The Page Act, more than just a measure against immigrant prostitutes, was targeted to prevent Chinese women - even those who were not enslaved sex workers - from entering the United States. Further, through the prevention of female Chinese immigration, it also sought to disrupt

figured little in the minds of black and white anti-Chinese agitators whose purpose was to create a stereotype of the Chinese as irreparably immoral and absolutely undesirable.

Another rhetorical strategy that African Americans used to distinguish the image of the black from the Chinese Californian was the native-foreigner contrast. "The negro is a native American," the leaders of the black community in California emphasized. Unlike the Chinese, who were born and reared in the Chinese Empire in an alien culture and religion, African Americans were "sons of the soil," "native and to the manor born." Instead of employing the foreign Chinese, black activists argued, employers should prefer free black labor because "they are American by birth and habits."[43] African American workers were "loyal to the Government, … American in all his ideas; a Christian by education, and a believer of the truths of Christianity from principle."[44] White patriarchs and entrepreneurs need not fear the intrusion of foreign and "heathen" customs into their homes and workplaces, the argument went, because black workers were, unlike the Chinese laborers, "accustomed to the habits of their employers, eating the same kind of food, and wearing like clothing." By contrast, the Chinese laborers were "alien to our customs, habits and language, [and] heathen in their worship."[45] Did not the respectable white gentlemen and ladies of California wish their children to be "reared in Christian principles and civilized habits," services which "idolatrous" Chinese servants and maids could never provide?[46]

More than just a place of birth, the United States was also the only country of

---

the formation of Chinese families and community institutions. Further discussion of the effects of the Page Act of 1875 can be found in Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 104-105; Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 23, 32; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, 13, 81; Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 47, and Peffer, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here*, 28-58, 80-86, 102-117.

[43] 30 June 1865; 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.

[44] 30 June 1865, *The Elevator*.

[45] 15 December 1865, *The Elevator*.

[46] 15 December 1865; 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

allegiance for black Americans. Prior to the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, which granted citizenship to those born on U. S. soil, attaining citizenship in the United States required not just birthright but a show of allegiance to the nation and actions that benefited the country.[47] "From the revolution to the rebellion," black activists remarked, African Americans had "borne a prominent part" in every battle and pioneering effort occurring in the timeline of the nation.[48] "They are loyal citizens," they repeatedly pointed out, who had shed their blood and sacrificed both their selves and their children to advance the cause of freedom in the United States.[49] Unlike the Chinese Californians, who still paid homage to their own Asian empire back home, the black American "has his all at stake in his *own* country … he is interested in the growth and prosperity of America; the associations of home, wife, children, friends, brothers, sons, kindred, have freely shed their blood in defence of that country." The Chinese by contrast had "no interest in the country; he labors to arrive at a fixed point [in savings], and then leaves to spend the profits of his toil in his native land [China]."[50] By the right of "our loyalty, as well as our nativity," leaders of the black community in California stressed, the black American had an inherent claim to first-class citizenship as much justified as their white counterparts. Their advantage did not even compare to the Chinese, who were mere "foreigners, unacquainted with our system of government, … of heathen or idolatrous faith," having "never raised a sword or fired a gun in defence [sic] of the country which gives them

---

[47] For a discussion of citizenship laws in the United States prior to the Fourteenth Amendment, the language of the Constitution, debate around the boundaries of citizenship, and the use of common law emphasis on birthright and allegiance for consideration of citizenship by American judges, see Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U. S. History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997). For a study of black American citizenship specifically, see pages 243-285.
[48] 23 August 1867, *The Elevator*.
[49] 21 July 1865, *The Elevator*.
[50] 29 December 1865, *The Elevator*.

protection."[51]

As further proof of Chinese Americans' lack of national allegiance, the *Elevator* claimed that few of them actually desired naturalization or the benefits of American citizenship. Throughout the nineteenth century, naturalization had actually been off limits to Chinese migrants in the United States. *In re Ah Yup*, an 1878 federal district court case in California on racial prerequisite to naturalization, the judge denied citizenship to the Chinese applicant because only "white persons" could become naturalized. The racial restriction, placed in 1790 by Congress just a few months after the ratification of the U. S. Constitution, remained effective for over 150 years until 1952. The Congress did make an exception for "persons of African nativity, or African descent" in 1870, allowing black persons to become naturalized citizens along with the whites. Asians, however, were not included until the mid-twentieth century.[52] Regardless of whether or not they could become citizens, Bell argued that the Chinese "do not wish citizenship by naturalization even if he *could* obtain it."[53] Black leaders insisted that the fact that the Chinese harbored no admiration for the prided republican system of government, nor respect for Christian traditions or Victorian ideals. These black activists sought to refute Democratic threats that Chinese citizenship would follow on the heels of African American suffrage. During the 1860s, when both blacks and Chinese were still banned from naturalization, black Californian leaders continually tried to disparage the Chinese by playing up the native-foreigner divide. The Chinese were only "sojourners here," Bell asserted, who exhibited

[51] 19 January 1866; 23 August 1867, *The Elevator*.
[52] Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), 5-6; 43-44. Also on the historical construction of U. S. citizenship and immigration laws, see Kunal M. Parker, "State, Citizenship, and Territory: The Legal Construction of Immigrants in Antebellum Massachusetts," *Law and History Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 2001), 583-643.
[53] 23 August 1867, *The Elevator*.

not an inkling of desire for Americanization. They still thought themselves lifelong subjects of their own "Flowery land." "They do not come here to make this their home and abiding place," for "they are too fond of the institutions and customs of their own celestial kingdom."[54] Unlike European immigrants, who were "Christians, with language and customs but little differing from our own, and with an aptitude conform to our habits and customs, and a willingness to learn our language," the Chinese by choice "will do neither," for to them the ideals and Christian tradition of the Americans were but "manners and habits of barbarians."[55]

Immoral habits, alien customs, and refusal to demonstrate allegiance to the country of their new residence were not the only reasons that African American activists found the Chinese an undesirable people. Many Californians, black and white, believed – or at least, pretended to believe when it involved their interests – that the employment of Chinese laborers was seriously detrimental to the economy of California and the United States.[56] The Chinese depleted the wealth of the state by exporting nearly all of their earnings to their "celestial kingdom," argued anti-Chinese activists again and again, "impoverishing the State and decreasing the circulating medium."[57] By 1873, Chinese laborers were blamed as the cause behind every economic difficulty, both real and imagined, in the Golden State. In a contribution to the *Elevator* in March, 1873, the correspondent "C. P." blamed the Chinese for the "hard times" in California. The "welfare and prosperity of our city or State" were being "annihilated," C. P. announced, but not because of absconding capitalists, insufficient amount of money in circulation,

[54] 15 December 1865; 19 January 1866; 23 August 1867, *The Elevator*.
[55] 21 July 1865; 19 January 1866, *The Elevator*.
[56] See Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, 29-39.
[57] 15 December 1865; 9 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

lack of entrepreneurial genius, or an overpopulation of San Francisco. Instead, it was brought on singlehandedly by the Chinese migrants, who came "in vast numbers" for the purpose of "do[ing] us a grevious [sic] wrong." Although Chinese laborers had initially been welcomed to save "a few dollars by supporting cheap servile labor," C. P. concluded, the state was suffering losses a thousand times greater as the Chinese depleted its wealth by exporting massive amounts of their earnings out of California and into the Chinese empire.[58]

A simple native-foreigner contrast, however, had too many weak links to be an effective argument against the Democratic tirade on the inherent unfitness of all non-white races to American citizenship. If African Americans had a right to first-class citizenship because they were born on American soil and had imbibed Christian ideals and Victorian habits, then the Chinese, in time, could also bear children on American soil who would grow up to believe in the same ideals and adopt American lifestyles. In fact, people who were sympathetic to the plight of the Chinese laborers in California argued that the Chinese, with all their foreign customs and habits, could be "Americanized" just as easily as Europeans and Africans could be, if only they were given enough time and were allowed to live without so much oppression. "What will prevent the sons and daughters of the Chinese immigrant who shall be reared in this country from becoming in opinions and manners as good Americans as the children of the Irish or German, French or Italian immigrants," asked "E. T.," a correspondent for the *Elevator* from San Francisco, in 1873. Give them a proper education to teach them good English and American ideas, E. T. argued, and the Chinese youths would soon "care but little for the authority of their forefathers' customs and opinions, and be as independent as any of our

[58] 29 March 1873, *The Elevator*.

young mechanics."[59] Such predictions played into the Democrats' invective by suggesting that the racially inferior Chinese could, in the near future, actually bypass the hurdle of naturalization through birth and step within in the pale of U. S. citizenship. This racist fear actually seemed to come true in 1898, when the U. S. Supreme Court ruled in *U. S. v. Wong Kim Ark* that all children born on American soil, even those of alien parents who could not become naturalized citizens, were indeed birthright citizens of the United States.[60]

To compensate for this logical weakness, some black Californian activists went so far as to add to the native-foreigner contrast the essentialist argument that the Chinese were inherently and forever inassimilable. Not only were the Chinese permanent aliens by the learned habits and customs of their youth, the argument went, but they were, by inherent racial characteristics, inassimilable to American ideas, traditions, and religion. Instead of maintaining their moral integrity on the issue of race, many black Californian activists accepted the fundamental basis of the platform of the Democratic Party and simply tried to redeem the racial image of the African American from that of the Chinese. The "Mongolian race" were now "naturally" licentious, black activists proclaimed in overlapping voices with their Democratic opponents. These immoral Mongolians were supposedly possessed with "knavish cunning," "inhuman in their traits, most scurrilous when their feelings were irritated," and were "clanish, avaricious, and … antagonistic in their social intercourse." They could not speak perfect English - not simply because they were unaccustomed to the new tongue and did not feel the necessity to master it, but because, unlike other immigrants, they lacked the intelligence to learn it. Moreover,

[59] 31 March 1873, *The Elevator*.
[60] Excluded still were the children of Native Americans, until the Congress finally passed an act to confer citizenship on all Native Americans in 1929. See López, *White by Law*, 39-41.

"incapable" of understanding the system of republican government, the Chinese race were "of that docile and humble nature that makes them fit subjects for that class who persistently adhere to the doctrine of the inferiority of races," "wholly incompetent to become true citizens." Even admitting that the class of Chinese laborers who were in California were not "the very best portion of their society," argued correspondent C. P. in 1873, "we must naturally be prejudiced against the whole race." Ancient Chinese people may have shown some talent in astronomy and mathematics, the writer asserted, but "these were rare – very rare instances." As regards morality, C. P. concluded, "no one will confute that they are an inferior race, and can never become equal – much less *superior* to our [black] people."[61]

There were other motivations, besides the Democratic campaign against both racial groups, that drove black Californian activists to take a stance against the immigration of Chinese laborers. Another important impetus was the belief of some black activists in the existence of an occupational competition between the Chinese and African American laborers. These people argued that whites should employ clean, Christian, American black servants in preference to a "disgusting Chinaboy." The African American made much better employee material, they would point out, because they were "accustomed to the habits of their employers, eating the same kind of food, and wearing like clothing." The Chinese laborer by contrast was "filthy, dishonest, infidel," impossible to trust and degrading the value of free labor with their cheap wages and low standards of living.[62] Calling the proposals to employ Chinese workers on the construction of the Pacific Railroad a "ridiculous idea," Bell recommended instead the employment of

---

[61] 15 December 1865; 29 December 1865; 19 November 1869; 29 March 1873, *The Elevator*. Emphasis as in original.
[62] 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

African American freedpeople, who were "more laborious, loyal, capable, and deserving" than any other class of laborers.[63] If anything, they could "perform double the work of Chinamen, and are accustomed to that kind of labor."[64] Correspondent "Osceola" went further: "one Negro will do more work than three Chinamen, and a little more, and a good deal better than 'any other man.'"[65]

There was, however, less actual competition between the black and Chinese Californians in reality than the agitators made it seem. Even as Phillip Bell admitted, white employers often preferred to employ white or black workers first, seeking Chinese laborers only if they found no one else suitable to fill the space. "If there were one thousand [more] colored women in this State," Bell speculated in 1865, "they could all procure situations in a few weeks." As it was, there were "so few colored servants in this State that families are compelled to employ Chinese."[66]

The main concern of black activists, then, was not a real rivalry that was going on in California between black and Chinese laborers for the same occupations. For if black Californians had not attuned themselves so closely to the interests of black communities in other parts of the country, they might not have worried as much about the economic competition that Chinese laborers presented. What black activists of California worried about most was what they perceived as possible competition between the freedpeople in the South and the Chinese laborers in the West. The "Contrabands," or the newly freed African Americans of the South, *should* be coming to California to find work as servants and laborers, black Californians chanted. They *should* be employed in the construction of

[63] 21 July 1865, *The Elevator*.
[64] 22 September 1865, *The Elevator*.
[65] 29 December 1865, *The Elevator*.
[66] 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

the transcontinental railroad in the West. The problem was, the Chinese had already occupied, or were in the process of occupying, all those jobs that freedpeople should have a proper chance at - *if* they came out West. Due to the "effects of generations of servitude," the occupations that the majority of freedpeople could obtain were usually those that white laborers disdained, Bell admitted. This was not necessarily a problem at this early stage of freedom, he believed, if only the freedpeople could secure jobs from whence they could work upward. The Chinese laborers, however, disrupted this natural course of economic elevation by swarming into every occupation that might have offered the freedpeople a chance in the West.[67]

Based on their own experiences of success in the Golden State, black activists really believed in the benefits that awaited the freedpeople if they came to work in California or found a job in the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad. In the blueprint that they had laid out for the elevation of the freedpeople, Chinese immigrants posed a serious and seemingly palpable threat. The newly emancipated African Americans were far superior to the "filthy" and "licentious" Chinese, black Californian activists such as William H. Hall and Philip A. Bell insisted. They, not the foreign and heathen Asians who rejected the ideals of republicanism, should be the ones being employed in the construction of the important railway. "Laborious, loyal, capable, and [more] deserving" than any other class of laborers, the government "owes them

[67] 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*. On this phenomenon, historian Douglas Henry Daniels blames Chinese employment on the Pacific Railroad as the reason the black San Francisco community "remained small in number, unorganized, and politically powerless." Although Chinese employment *might* have kept the community smaller than it could have been after 1865 if the southern freedpeople had come out to the West, it would be anachronistic to argue that the freedpeople *would have* come out West if there had not been Chinese laborers. The other two claims are hardly correct - the nineteenth century San Francisco black community was not unorganized, nor politically powerless. Chinese laborers could hardly be to blame for any of these defects, if indeed they existed. See Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites*, 32-33.

employment, not charity."[68] The arguments that black Californian activists used to highlight the differences between the freedpeople and the Chinese "coolies" were reminiscent of the free labor theory of the white Republican Party before the Civil War, when Republicans contrasted the free labor of the North to the slave labor of the South.[69] Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, both the black and white people in California and around the nation held a popular but erroneous belief that all Chinese laborers in California were coolies. Coolie was a term for indentured servants bound to contracts to live under slave-like conditions for a term of years. Coolies were usually sent to destinations in the West Indies or South America. In California, however, most Chinese laborers denied that they had been kidnapped or tricked into a coolie contract. It was true that many had incurred heavy debts to secure the passage to California, but they had come of their own free will, with a dream of striking it rich in the "Gold Mountain." While it is true that a small percentage may have come under a coolie contract during the very early years of Chinese migration, most Chinese American historians agree that Chinese Californians during the nineteenth century, while perhaps heavily in debt, were not actually coolies.[70] Some Californians were cognizant of the error, as the editors of the *Marysville Daily Appeal* demonstrated in December, 1860. "By some unexplainable process," the white editors mused, "the word, spelled 'coolie,' is applied in California to the immigrant Chinese." They quickly shrugged, though, that "if they [the Chinese laborers] object to the appellative, why, let them file their demurrer." Even while pointing

---

[68] 21 July 1865, *The Elevator*.

[69] For a more detailed discussion of the free labor arguments of the antebellum Republican Party, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 11-76.

[70] For more information on Chinese coolie labor, and discussion on the nature of Chinese labor in nineteenth century California, see Gyory, *Closing the Gate*, 32-36, 53-66; Pfaelzer, *Driven Out*, 25-29; Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 16-18; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, 26-28.

out the mistake, the editors nevertheless concurred that Chinese laborers in California were still "virtually slaves."[71] The popular image of Chinese laborers as coolies, then, was an effective tool in the hands of black Californian activists, who contrasted coolie labor with the free labor now offered by African American men and women in the South. Give the jobs on the railroad to worthy freedpeople rather than to servile Chinese laborers, Bell argued, and they would finish the grand transcontinental project "within the present lustrum" – or, in just five years.[72]

If the worries concerning the competition between the Chinese and the freed African American laborers tended to be more speculative than real, the problem of the effect of Chinese labor on driving down wages was a more palpable problem that black and white Californians often complained about. The Chinese, argued Bell, were "a class of beings whose expenses of living are so small, and whose habits and customs are so different from ours, that it enables them to work for less than white men can support themselves with."[73] This complaint may have had a ring of truth in it, because many Chinese laborers, especially in the early stage of immigration, consented to work for lower wages than was the norm for American laborers, if only because nobody was willing to pay them as much. The problem arose when many Chinese immigrants proved to be excellent workers in nearly every occupation in which they were employed. In 1866, the *Elevator* complained that "a large woolen manufactory in which all the laborers employed except the overseers are Chinese" was proving to be "enormously profitable." The Chinese were "very apt in learning to attend the machines" - Bell was not saying this

---

[71] 25 December 1860, *Marysville Daily Appeal*.
[72] 21 July 1865, *The Elevator*. The Chinese workers actually managed to finish it in four, by May of 1869.
[73] 9 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

in praise of them - "and very diligent and faithful in the performance of their labor."[74] If excellence in common labor wasn't threatening enough, the Democratic Senator from California Eugene Casserly bewailed in 1866 that the "splendid granite building occupied by the Wells, Fargo & Co. … was built by Chinamen," who were proving to be "the most frugal, ingenious and industrious people on the face of the earth." These people could actually "do such work for less than half the price paid white mechanics" – a hideous "injury to the State!"[75]

The fact that employers sometimes used Chinese laborers as strikebreakers made the tension even worse. When the shoemakers of San Francisco organized a wide scale strike, demanding a raise of 15 to 18 per cent from their wages of $20 to $28 a week in 1869, the *Elevator* noted that "five or six of the leading boot and shoe firms have combined together and refuse to accede to the demand." To break the strike, "they are making arrangements to employ Chinamen."[76] The cheap wages for which Chinese laborers were willing to work was "offensive to the exalted American idea of the dignity of labor, detrimental to the prosperity and happiness of our own laboring classes, and an evil that ought to be abated," growled the official platfrom of the Republican Party of California in 1871.[77] It was an outrage to let "the poor laboring white man," who had a "large family of small children about his heels, depending only upon his small pecuniary earnings for their maintenance of life," compete with such "ignominous people," C. P. complained.[78] That many of the poor laboring Chinese young men also had families and dependents of their own in China who hung on their "small pecuniary earnings" in San

---

[74] 23 March 1866, *The Elevator.*
[75] 11 June 1869, *The Elevator*.
[76] 9 April 1869, *The Elevator.*
[77] 29 November 1871, *The Elevator.*
[78] 29 March 1873, *The Elevator*.

Francisco, was apparently irrelevant in the romantic good versus evil imagery.[79] Often in complete agreement with the arguments of their white counterparts, many black Californians urged white employers to hire black laborers instead, for "white laborers or servants need not fear that the blacks will undermine them by working for less wages."[80]

Many black activists went beyond merely highlighting the undesirability of the foreign customs of Chinese laborers, actively demanding the exclusion and even deportation of these immigrants. "Mr. Long had better endeavor to stop the immigration of Chinese into this State, than the Negro," Bell recommended to the California Assembly in the winter of 1865 and spring of 1866. The Assembly was considering a bill presented by W. S. Long, the Democratic representative from Colusa and Tehama, prohibiting the immigration of African Americans into California.[81] When Horace M. Hawes, a member of the California Senate, proposed a bill to suppress "Chinese houses of ill fame" in 1866, the editors of the *Elevator* counseled that "it would be better to strike at the root of the evil, and prevent Chinese immigration."[82] Not only was new immigration to be prevented, but as a correspondent for the *Elevator* recommended, active deportation was a fine idea to rid the state of Chinese laborers in 1866. "It would be better for the people of this State to expel the Chinese from it at a cost of ten millions of dollars," the writer proposed, "than to allow them to stay and increase and extend even to the Atlantic States."[83] To set right the damages to the economy and to the society caused by Chinese immigration, the correspondent C. P. asserted, Chinese labor must

---

[79] For the reasons that propelled young men from China to venture across the Pacific Ocean to California, see Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 16-18.
[80] 16 March 1866, *The Elevator*.
[81] 15 Decemeber 1865; 23 March 1866, *The Elevator*.
[82] 23 March 1866, *The Elevator*.
[83] 9 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

ultimately be "exterminat[ed]" - totally driven out of the United States.[84] W. H. Hillery, the principal speaker in San Francisco for the celebrations on the third anniversary of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, urged the people of California to draw "swift winged petitions thunder charged and armed with a hundred thousand signatures" to both the state legislature and the Congress at Washington asking for measures to stop Chinese immigration.[85] In 1882, the editors of the *Elevators* genuinely lamented the fact that black Californians were not invited to the statewide meeting held in San Francisco to support the Chinese Exclusion Bill. "Among six or seven hundred Vice Presidents of the meeting," they deplored, "there was not one single colored citizen. … We are as much interested [in Chinese exclusion] as any in the community."[86]

Besides proposing to decimate the Chinese population in California through direct legislation on the immigration or deportation of the undesirable race, several black male activists suggested ways to make the lives of Chinese Californians might be made miserable enough to discourage additional immigration, or, even better, to convince them to leave their newly adopted country altogether. Under "the imperious law of *self defense*," the *Elevator* declared, the national, state, and municipal governments should legislate to "so contract their revenue that the monyed [sic] inducements which now bring them here, would cease and with it their continued influx." Ironically, the black newspaper recommended that the legislators should do this "under the sanction of statutes and the guiding hand of kindness and humanity."[87] Admitting that levying a "burdensome tax" on Chinese laborers alone in an attempt to curb Chinese immigration was both

---

[84] 29 March 1873, *The Elevator*.
[85] 5 April 1873, *The Elevator*.
[86] 6 April 1882, *The Christian Recorder*.
[87] 12 April 1873, *The Elevator*.

unconstitutional and contrary to the 1868 Burlingame Treaty between China and the United States, which granted China the status of "an equal among the nations" and Chinese individuals the right to migrate to the United States freely, the *Elevator* proposed a "remedy" to this frustrating problem.[88] "Impose *that burdensome tax on all foreigners*," it advised, "and then instruct our tax collectors to discriminate, and collect only from the offensive element." The legislators should also "impose a tax on all persons who *employ* Chinese, or buy fish from them, or have their clothes washed by them."[89] The *Elevator* even suggested extraordinary measures: "Let our Legislature at its next session pass a law prohibiting the exportation of Chinese dead [bodies]," it urged in 1873. "The Chinese have an instinctive love of their native land … their ultimate wish that their bones may rest in their own flowery kingdom." Since the importance of the body returning to China had not just patriotic but religious overtones, "if they could not return to China, living or dead, but few would ever come here."[90] Besides legislation, editors of the newspaper also touted efforts on the community level: "Let our citizens agree not to employ the Chinese nor purchase goods made by them," it insisted, and "there will be no inducement for them to remain here."[91]

Amidst these mainstream cries against Chinese immigration and labor, there were still a number of black Californians who refused to succumb to racial prejudice or discrimination. On the third day of the California State Convention of Colored Citizens held in Sacramento in October, 1865, a discussion started concerning the position of the California black community on the ongoing Fenian movement to liberate Ireland from

---

[88] For more detail on the discussions and the ratification of the Burlingame Treaty in July, 1868, and protests of white Californians against its contents in the 1870s, see Gyory, *Closing the Gate*, 26-28, 78-86.
[89] 3 May 1873, *The Elevator*.
[90] 24 May 1873, *The Elevator*.
[91] 14 June 1873, *The Elevator*.

England. Although some delegates showed hostile sentiments toward the Irish, others, such as Mr. Hoyt, spoke up in favor of lending help to the oppressed under the principle of "broad, universal freedom." Stressing the importance of showing support for minority and immigrant groups, Hoyt asserted that "the Chinese and Indians in our very midst stand in need of our sympathy and encouragement."[92] In 1873, the correspondent E. T. from San Francisco wrote in stronger language to the *Elevator* to lambast the racialized premises behind Chinese discrimination and to suggest ways to help "americanize the Chinese." Pointing out that it was vile oppression to "treat the Asiatic immigrant … as a man with whom we have no sympathy, and for whose rights we have no respect," E. T. castigated those who voiced the preposterous opinion that "a race of men, like a species of trees – must age after age preserve the same characteristics." Such ideas were mere "absurdities taken for granted by those who make the Chinese Question an occasion to air self-regarding and narrow-minded prejudices," he asserted. No "men who can afford to lie on a feather bed; to dress decently; to eat wholesome food; and to dwell in well-ventilated rooms," E. T. pointed out, "will choose rather; to lie on a hard bunk; to wear the same coat and pants half a life time; to feed on garbage and to breathe stinking air." The only reason Chinese laborers were leading poor lifestyles in California was because they lacked the means or motivation for better quarters here – not because they by nature were fitted to live on meager foodstuffs and in cramped unsanitary spaces. "The importance of these ethnological considerations has been overrated," E. T. remarked. "Educated in the same way and same place," he concluded, any person will soon "feel the same national sentiment, join in the same worship, advocate together the same political creed, do business together as partners, and enjoy social intercourse together." To

[92] 10 November 1865, *The Elevator*.

accomplish this feat, the state should establish schools for the children and the young men and women of foreign origin as quickly as possible, and provide them a proper English education.[93]

On the ground level, behind the sometimes inflammatory and racist rhetoric by African Americans against the Chinese, was also actually a quite different reality. Everyday interactions between black and Chinese Californians were in fact far from hostile. In the 1860 manuscript census for the city and county of San Francisco, there appear a number of black Californians who shared their living quarters with Chinese Americans. William Cobbs, a musician from Louisiana, Martha Landers, a twenty-five-year-old woman from Massachusetts, and Alex Smith, a sixteen-year-old Jamaican laborer from Illinois, all marked as "mulatto," lived together with thirty-two-year-old Sing Cheng and twenty-one-year-old Ah Lung, Chinese "washmen." Down the street from Cheng and Lung's residence was the house of the bricklayer John Robinson and laborer John Kent, both black men, whose home was adjacent to several buildings occupied by Chinese Americans. In another part of the city, Ah Fai, a twenty-five year old "female mongolian" from China, lived in the house of Joshua and Rosina Jones, a mulatto couple. Besides Fai, the Joneses also boarded James Fuller, a "mulatto handcartman" from New York. In still another district, William Rek, a thirty-three-year-old "mulatto" barkeeper from New York and his wife Margaret, lived together with "John Rek," a "male mongolian" from China. John's occupation was not specified, but the Reks

[93] 31 May 1873, *The Elevator*. Although the main cry against Chinese immigrants was that they were not interested in being Americanized, this was not always true in reality. In 1869, there was a Chinese Sunday School operating in Stockton; in February, 1870, the *Elevator* noted that a free night school in Carson was "largely attended by the Chinese." In 1874, William P. Powell, a black resident of San Francisco, describes his visit to a "Mongolian Methodist Mission," where he found Chinese pastors and congregation singing Christian hymns and preaching the Gospel. See 29 January 1869; 25 February 1870; 25 April 1874, *The Elevator*.

may have had him employed as a servant, for William had a property of 1,000 dollars and lived on a street that had some wealthy white residents. The status of Ah Ying Marcier, a thirteen-year-old boy from China, was more clearly marked. Charles Marcier, a twenty-eight-year-old mulatto barber from Louisiana who lived with his wife Susan and three children, reported that Ah Ying's job in the household was a "servant." Likewise, James and Susan Sullivan, a young mulatto couple from Virginia with a property of 3,200 dollars, hired twenty-two-year-old Yon Lee as a servant in their household.[94] Up north in Napa County, Sam Brannan, a black man who had a farm at Calistoga, also leased space on his estate to a Chinese family in 1870 so they could cultivate tea on his land.[95]

While for the most part the *Elevator* endorsed the measures to prevent or discourage Chinese immigration, the editors were not dogmatic on the issue. When the *Alta California* derided the *Elevator*'s writers as becoming "tyrants" so soon after the end of slavery, the newspaper defended its actions as being "in favor of foreign immigration when foreigners come here to live, … and benefit the country; but when they are of no benefit whatever, and drain the country of its specie to enrich their native land, then, as AMERICANS, we are opposed to such immigrants – be they white, black, or yellow."[96] Nevertheless, often it was apparent that the editors of the *Elevator* did not really have a rigid, well-formed principle regarding Chinese laborers. Their derisions of Chinese customs, prejudiced rhetoric on Chinese inferiority, and recommendations for Chinese exclusion were in fact more or less reactive measures to contemporary events, such as Democratic campaigns, the construction of the Pacific Railroad, and the outcry against

---

[94] Federal Census, 1860, City and County of San Francisco, State of California, Manuscript Records, California State Archives.
[95] 27 May 1870, *The Elevator*.
[96] 30 March 1866, *The Elevator*.

the wage competition between Chinese and non-Chinese Californians. The stance of the *Elevator* may be better seen in its response to the article in the *Morning Call* on January 19, 1866, where it defended the rights of African Americans to citizenship and suffrage while brushing off the Chinese aspect of the question by saying, "We make no issue on their Chinese question … but if asserting our rights involves theirs, why let it come."[97] As it turned out, it seemed easier to assert black rights by undermining those of the Chinese, at least in the opinions of the editors of the *Elevator*. Hence the oppressive and discriminatory policies advocated by the newspaper in the years to come. But when black rights were not endangered, the *Elevator* sometimes appeared less hostile to Chinese rights. In May 1869, when San Franciscans celebrated the completion of the Pacific Railroad with a "grand procession," African Americans were accorded the position of the "tenth Division, as usual, bringing up the rear." Surprisingly, especially in light of how the newspaper had continually berated the employment of Chinese laborers in the construction of the great railroad, the *Elevator* commented:

> We missed one of the principal adjuncts of the building of the Central Pacific Railroad, without whose aid the road would not have been completed in two years. We allude to the Chinamen. They should, of course, have been represented in the celebration of the completion of a work on which they have been a prominent feature.[98]

Chinese immigration into the South for agricultural labor, one of the most hotly debated topics in 1869 nationwide, also garnered unanticipated support from the editors of the *Elevator*. On October 22, 1869, William H. Hall, a prominent black activist who had moved to Hamilton, Nevada from California by 1869, wrote a letter to the *Elevator*

---

[97] 19 January 1866, *The Elevator*.
[98] 14 May 1869, *The Elevator*.

disapproving Chinese immigration into the southern states for the reason that they would disrupt the lives of "millions of [black] laborers" whose "subsistence through life … depends upon the chances now offered."[99] A month later in November, Hall wrote again, this time to the president and the assembly of the National Labor Convention of Colored Men of teh United States in Washington, D. C. In it, he bitterly criticized "the scheme to import thousands of these heathen people among the religious and confiding Freedmen." It was a wicked plot, Hall argued, that sought to squash the efforts of the freedpeople at economic elevation by letting "Chinese Coolie labor to control all the industrial resources of the South, and keep up the distinction of caste."[100] Hall's arguments were familiar, for all his points – foreign customs, heathen religion, conflicting economic interests – were those that the *Elevator* had already been decrying for decades. Surprisingly, the *Elevator* chose to go at odds with Hall in this debate. It had copied the November issue of the *Overland Monthly* magazine, which contemplated that the influx of Chinese laborers into the South, no matter how great, would never be able to supersede the freedpeople as principal source of agricultural labor.[101] On November 26, 1869, the *Elevator* also copied the arguments from the *Missionary Board* of Charleston, South Carolina, which flaunted that "the negro does not care a fig how many [Chinese immigrants] they bring." South Carolina alone had nineteen million acres of land, the article pointed out, and "only about four and a half millions of this in cultivation." Even if a hundred thousand Chinese laborers were brought in, the *Board* asserted, it would cause "no detriment to the people who are here."[102] These arguments apparently had assured the editors of the *Elevator* of

[99] 29 October 1869, *The Elevator*.
[100] 19 November 1869, *The Elevator*.
[101] 12 November 1869, *The Elevator*.
[102] 26 November 1869, *The Elevator*.

the fact that Chinese immigration to the South would not endanger black rights there. The principal worry over political and economic interests thus out of the way, Bell now conveniently forgot his fears for the ill effects of the inherent immorality and barbaric customs of the "Mongolian race." He even decided to take Hall to task publicly in the December 17, 1869 issue of the *Elevator*. "We will refer him [Hall] first to an article … copied from the *Missionary Record* of Charleston, South Carolina," he wrote with confidence. The Civil War had diminished the male population of the South, and freedom had reduced the laboring population because children and women were no longer forced to work in the fields. Even though he still opposed Chinese immigration, "either here or elsewhere," for the sake of the necessity of more laborers in the South, Bell asserted, he actually supported Chinese immigration into the southern states.[103]

While it was true that black Californian activists were complicit in the racial oppression of Chinese Californians, they did try to distance themseves from certain forms of oppressive practices that they deemed unacceptable. Their criteria for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable forms of racial oppression is not entirely clear, but apparently nineteenth-century black male activists who made the distinction believed themselves to be adhering to higher moral principles compared to the basely prejudiced whites who did not. It was an unacceptable form of discrimination, for example, for non-Chinese individuals to physically or verbally harass unoffending Chinese passersby on the streets of San Francisco. In September 1867, the editors of the *Elevator* witnessed a "drunken Irishman on Sunday pitching 'onto' every Chinaman he met." When the man failed to enlist the help of "any of his own race or color" to torment Chinese pedestrians, he "very affectionately invited a negro to help him in 'cleaning out the infernal

[103] 17 December 1869, *The Elevator*.

Chinaman.'" The *Elevator* noted approvingly that the disgraceful invitation was "respectfully declined."[104] It is possible that this incident was unacceptable particularly for Bell because it was committed by an Irish man. Bell had been steadfast through the decades in his prejudice against the Irish as a "race," and in an article deriding the Irish as a "race of serfs" and a people who "made less progress than any other race" in 1869, he had also criticized the ways in which the Irish, "just fleeing from oppression in their own country, maltreat and abuse the Chinese for seeking labor."[105]

The *Elevator* was also critical of the "sensationalist" stories of the San Francisco *Chronicle* and the *Post*, whose editors jokingly recommended in 1873 that Chinese steamers be "burned at wharfs, and captains, agents and officers and others, hung by the workingmen of San Francisco."[106] In February 1873, the *Marysville Daily Appeal* had also reported the contents of a speech by Frank M. Pixley in San Francisco, reiterating "his old assertion" that "it is the duty of good citizens to burn their steamers at the wharves," going down to the docks to "burn this fleet of Chinese steamers and hang to the yardarm every ship's officer, commander and stockholder who supports the damnable traffic."[107] Another charge against the Chinese that white Californians indulged in, and which black activists disapproved of, was Chinese-spread diseases. In November 1861, the *Marysville Daily Appeal* reported that at the meeting of the San Francisco Anti-Coolie Association, a member had decried the Chinese immigrants for spreading deadly diseases such as "Asiatic cholera" and "leprosy."[108] The rumor persisted for over a decade and flared up from time to time, for in 1873, the *Elevator* shook its head at the "the last

[104] 20 September 1867, *The Elevator*.
[105] 2 July 1869, *The Elevator*.
[106] 14 June 1873, *The Elevator*.
[107] 20 February 1873, *Marysville Daily Appeal*.
[108] 17 November 1861, *Marysville Daily Appeal*.

anti-Chinese sensation which the *Chronicle* has started" again: "leprosy." Contrary its threats of contagion, the *Elevator* countered, "medical men [say] that this loathsome disease is confined wholly to dark-skinned races" and therefore not contagious to white Americans.[109]

Bell also approved when William Alvord, the mayor of San Francisco in 1873, vetoed the ordinances passed by the Board of Supervisors of the city to cut off the pigtails of incarcerated Chinese convicts and to tax laundrys that did not employ animal drawn carts for service. "We hope this will stop the persecutions against the Chinamen by the Board of Supervisors," he applauded. Apparently unaware of the paradox, he continued in the same breath: "Let our citizens agree not to employ the Chinese nor purchase goods made by them."[110]

During a time when the mainstream opinion of black male Californians was against Chinese immigration, several female black Californian activists sought to correct the racialized perspectives of their peers by reminding them of the universal principle of equality. "California," declared Jennie Carter, who contributed regularly to the *Elevator* under the pen name "Semper Fidelis," "is a truly important part" of "Uncle Sam's domains" not just because it was the rising star of Pacific commerce, but because it would "furnish homes for thousands of Europe's poor, Asia's industrious and Africa's once despised."[111] Refusing to acknowledge any racial differences between the three categories of people whom she distinguished only by their continents of origin, she

---

[109] 14 June 1873, *The Elevator*.
[110] 14 June 1873, *The Elevator*. The tax on laundrys who did not use animal drawn vehicles was mainly directed at Chinese laundrys, who used carts drawn by people to pick up and deliver their laundry. The specific grounds for which Bell disapproved of the tax was that it was "oppressive to others engaged in the laundry business besides the Chinamen, who cannot afford to employ vehicles drawn by animal power."
[111] 25 June 1869, *The Elevator*.

announced that she refused to endorse any "anti-Chinese plank" in the platforms of either the Republican or the Democratic parties in California. Having been oppressed under the yoke of slavery themselves, African Americans had a "duty" to "remember those in bonds as being bound with them."[112] When she recorded the details of her visit to the State Capitol in December, 1873, she remembered being "filled with a great desire to present … a bill compelling all white men to marry" the non-white women who bore the children of those who had forced or seduced into having sexual intercourse with them. Among the non-white women Carter also included the "squaws and even China-women."[113]

"Clarendale," another female contributor to the *Elevator*, was even more straightforward in her commitment to universal equality. The Chinese were their "fellow country men – our fellow-citizens," she declared firmly. Brushing off the racialized rhetoric on Chinese mental and physical inferiority as mere obsolete "clamour," she strongly condemned the social and legal outrages committed against a people whose only vice was being "ready, willing and able to work." "Alas! for the ideal dream of liberty and equality," she lamented, for the proud American land fostered a " plague spot" in its very heart, a "leperous [sic] defilement" upon its face. Those who have oppressed the Chinese in the streets, in the legislative halls, and in the workplaces must pay their price and right the wrong, Clarendale declared. All the hubbub concerning the economic competition caused by Chinese immigration was more humbug than reality, she argued, for the white and black workers could move on to "a higher plane in the industry" when Chinese laborers occupied those jobs that neither groups desired. Clarendale warned the people of California to give justice to the oppressed race, or "he will no longer submit to

---

[112] 30 August 1873, *The Elevator*. Her reference is from the Bible, Hebrews chapter 13 verse 3.
[113] 6 December 1873, *The Elevator*.

oppression, and he may rise in arms against us, and the result will be another war." Instead of trying so hard to degrade the Chinese immigrants, she urged, let the American people, black and white, "open to them our public schools and our colleges, our sabbath schools and our churches, even our homes," and help in the process of their Americanization. In time, she predicted, the Chinese people would "form one more link in the strong chain which binds our nation together … possessing all the elements that make the perfect man and citizen."[114]

Bell, nevertheless, wrote off Clarendale's arguments as mere "philanthropic sentiments" of the gentler sex who did not have enough clarity in her perception of the reality.[115] The "lady correspondent" has a "heart … no less generous than her pen is gifted," he wrote in response to her contribution, but she should really open her eyes to the real world and admit that the Chinese were "swarming upon us like the locust" and becoming a "thorn festering in [our] vitals." It may be all right for women, who had no real understanding of the complex political issues, to sing in favor of "nobler impulses" and idealistic morality, Bell mused, but the "imperious law of self-defense" compelled intelligent black men like himself to stand firm on the ground of reason. As it was, he

---

[114] 8 March 1873, *The Elevator*.

[115] For discussions on the ideology of separate spheres during the nineteenth century and the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, as well as criticisms of the ideology, see: Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer, 1966), 151-174; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1985); Caroline Field Levander, *Voices of the Nation: Women and Public Speech in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher eds., *No More Separate Spheres!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Mary Ann Tétreault, "Frontier Politics: Sex, Gender, and the Deconstruction of the Public Sphere," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political,* vol. 26, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 2001), 53-72. For a discussion of the ways in which middle-class African Americans of the nineteenth century sought to incorporate and use the separate spheres ideology for their own political purposes, see Laurie Kaiser, "The Black Madonna: Notions of True Womanhood from Jacobs to Hurston," *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 60, no. 1 (Jan., 1995), 97-109; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979).

sincerely regretted that there was no legal means to "discriminate between them [the Chinese] and other foreigners" because of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. "John," the generic nineteenth-century term for the male Chinese laborer, was not the "bottom dog" to be pitied, but actually the "elephant on our hands" who would "reap while we sow." Not to sound too harsh against a "lady," however, Bell concluded on a more jovial note: he hoped the "fair author" would not become discouraged in her "philanthropic" endeavors by his harsh realistic answer, and continue to "indulge" in her "generous sentiments."[116]

Why, at a moment in history when black Californians could have formed a coalition with the Chinese based on the shared reality of racial oppression, did most of the African American male leaders choose instead to adopt a negative and critical position against them? In part, their stance was born of economic competition. In larger part, however, the language that African Americans used against the Chinese stemmed from nineteenth-century middle-class notions of respectability. Nineteenth-century California was a place where prejudiced white Californians and the Democratic Party of the state constantly evoked the fear of political empowerment of the "inferior" races, races which were supposedly characterized by ignorance, immorality, and low standards of living. In such a prevalent oppressive climate, black male Californian activists too often found it more politically expedient to distance themselves from the stigmatized image of "filthy" and "heathen" Chinese immigrants while touting themselves as the more "respectable," "native," and thoroughly Americanized race. Even if the real reasons behind the anti-Chinese campaigns were largely political and economic, the rhetoric that glossed over these mundane interests focused on the uncleanliness, immorality, lack of

[116] 8 March 1873, *The Elevator*.

refined lifestyle, and foreignness of the Chinese laboring classes. The delicate sensibilities of middle-class men and women in nineteenth-century California dictated that their peers live in clean and well-kept living quarters, wear neat and fashionable attire, participate in Christian and philanthropic organizations, use refined language, enjoy classical literary and artistic entertainment, and adhere to Christian virtues and morals.[117] Many African Americans, especially the self-appointed leaders of the community, believed that flaunting a middle-class lifestyle was a way to prove their capacity for American citizenship. These activists sought to think, speak, and act like middle-class men and women, even if their monetary situation did not allow actual middle-class luxuries.

When African American male leaders to distance themselves from the "undesirable" Chinese immigrants in the eyes of white critics, therefore, they did so by evoking the criteria of middle-class ideals. The Chinese laboring immigrants were an element of blatant offense to the ideals of Victorian America, black activists stressed repeatedly. A predominantly male population that worked outside all day long with no visibly dependent wives or children in their homes, cramped units of residence full of men and ragged furniture in the cheapest and the most unsanitary neighborhoods of the city, foreign-looking foodstuffs, unfamiliar hairstyles and fashion, and incomprehensible tools and gadgets were all signs of a class of people who failed to reach the standards of white American middle-class respectability. The fact that the scale of immigration was

[117] For a discussion of nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas of middle-class respectability, see Victoria W. Walcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14-15, 185-229; Jane E. Dabel, *A Respectable Woman: The Public Roles of African American Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 112-115.

large enough that some Chinese Californians did not feel the need to master the English language or to emulate American habits and customs to conduct trade and carry on a livelihood only worsened the "problem." While for Chinese immigrants it was merely a matter of convenience, to black Californian activists this became a signifier of a lack of intelligence to recognize a superior culture. African Americans had successfully assimilated to the American mores, they pointed out, but the Chinese had not – and, apparently, had no interest in ever so doing.

There was an interesting exception to the criticism that African American activists of California heaped on other non-white groups, an exception that perhaps proved the rule of their criteria. In contrast to their tirades against the Chinese, black activists fully approved of the small Japanese community in the Bay Area.[118] The Japanese had never come to California in numbers significant enough to offer any meaningful political or economic competition during the nineteenth century, and white newspapers and the Democratic Party did not bother to disparage the tiny Japanese population in their midst. Not feeling the necessity to defend themselves against any efforts to group them racially with the Japanese, nor fearing an economic impact from Japanese immigration, black Californian activists took on a more lenient attitude as well. The language the *Elevator* used to endorse Japanese immigrants, though, was still cloaked in the rhetoric of middle-class respectability. Instead of giving straightforward commentary on the non-threatening nature of Japanese immigration, the editors of the *Elevator* praised how the Japanese men

[118] It is not likely that this difference of attitude toward the two racial groups stemmed from an actual interaction of black Californians with the Japanese in overseas Asian cities, since black Asian settlers interacted with both the Chinese and the Japanese in Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Yokohama. As historian Stuart Creighton Miller points out, the negative stereotypes used against the Chinese were not necessarily a result of actual direct interaction with the Chinese people, but likely had their roots in the racist images created and forwarded to the United States by American merchants, diplomats, and missionaries in Asian countries during the first half of the nineteenth century. See Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant*.

were "well-dressed," "clean" and "intelligent," unlike their "filthy" and "dishonest" Chinese counterparts. In January 1873, the editors of the *Elevator* copied an article from the *Hearth and Home*. The story described "three well-dressed Japanese gentlemen (one had kid gloves on!) on the ferry-boat the other day." "The world does indeed move, and in the right direction, after all," the writers remarked happily, lavishing praise not only on their impeccably American dress, but also on the fact that they were "discussing the merits of the East River Bridge" with "intelligence, and … earnest gestures."[119] In August 1873, the *Elevator* again noted with approval that there were "some three hundred Japanese in this country," not working as laborers but "engaged in study." Instead of clustering together like the Chinese, the Japanese were spread out in different localities "so as to avoid using their own language too frequently among themselves." Surely such an aptitude to learn the language and the culture of the United States was a sign of superior intelligence, especially in comparison to that of their Chinese counterparts. Thinly veiled under the rhetoric of middle-class ideals was the agreeable fact that these students proposed "to remain [just] several years longer," after which they would promptly return to their own country without offering competition in either the political or the economic battlefield.[120]

Such standards of respectability were not entirely a rhetorical device. Many activists, in seeking to gain the rights of first-class citizenship through an adherence to the ideals of white middle-class respectability, actually used these ideals to draw boundaries around the community of people that they defined as desirable and acceptable. When the *Elevator* announced on January 26, 1866 that it would "not profess to be the

[119] 4 January 1873, *The Elevator*.
[120] 16 August 1873, *The Elevator*.

official organ of all the colored people on the Pacific coast," it also declared that it did "not look to the colored people alone for our support." Although the *Elevator* played a prominent role in reality, creating and sustaining a greater network of black communities up and down the Pacific Coast, it boasted that "at least one-third of our city [San Francisco] subscribers [were] white persons."[121] This statement was not an innocuous expression boasting of a larger clientele than just African American readers.

By clearly excluding from its realm of advocacy the "Kanakers, Japanese, Chinese, and Digger Indians" and expressly including a certain number of "white persons," while intimating that it cared less for those black Californians who had no interest in its columns or disagreed with its content, the *Elevator* was actually spelling out the boundaries of the community that it would represent. The black Pacific community that the most renowned black newspaper of the Pacific coast imagined, then, was actually a highly exclusive community. In its ranks no "Mongolian" or "Indian" were to be found, for besides provoking unwanted comparison and/or competition in the political, social, and economic realms, they were supposedly "unrespectable." Even African Americans who showed no concern for a display of respectability were not deemed a part of this refined, purpose-driven group. Respectable white Americans who advocated the principle of equal rights, or at least showed interest for the sake of philanthropy, were. Peter K. Cole, the regular black correspondent for the paper in Yokohama, Japan, made it clear that he did not find it necessary to report the activities and the thoughts of black residents in Japan who were not "intelligent." "Nothing like a literary man in the whole [black] settlement," Cole had sighed. Ignoring the greater part of the black laboring class in Yokohama, Cole callously commented that "This is the most lonely place for anything

[121] 26 January 1866, *The Elevator*.

like company among *intelligent* colored people."[122]

There were leaders in the community who questioned such an exclusive path to racial "elevation" narrowly focused on men who held middle-class ideals. Several times in 1865, Peter Anderson, the editor of the *Pacific Appeal*, openly criticized the self-appointed male leaders of the California black community for forming a clique that promoted the interests of only a handful activists, while recommending a method of elevation that few could adhere to.[123] In 1873, Anderson made a pointed speech at a public meeting held to plan the annual celebration of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, expressing his wishes that the event would "partake of the expression of the *whole* people - not a select few as heretofore."[124] Those who belonged to the mainstream, however, criticized Anderson himself for being "unrespectable." In response to Anderson's attacks in 1865, a writer who signed simply as a "responsible source" jeered that while the men Anderson criticized were respectable taxpayers, owned property, and spent money on philanthropic causes, Anderson was merely "a man of no family, owns no property, pays no taxes, no other interest at stake in the community, save a vanity to be considered somebody." Instead of discussing point by point the veracity of Anderson's criticism, the "responsible source" who failed to give a real responsible name simply used the rhetoric of middle-class respectability to render Anderson's character dishonorable. The correspondent, together with Bell who found the logic satisfactory enough to publish it in his paper, intimated that any argument made by a man who didn't have family or

---

[122] Peter K. Cole, "Letter No. 7 from Japan," January 1867, in 10 April 1868, *The Elevator*. Emphasis mine.
[123] 10 November 1865, *The Elevator*. Anderson seems to have made his opinions public in the *Pacific Appeal* and at various public meetings. The corresponding issues of the *Pacific Appeal*, in which Anderson printed the criticisms against the male leaders of the black community in California, however, could not be found. According to the *Elevator*, one such editorial that Anderson wrote should have been in the issue of 25 October 1865, *The Pacific Appeal*.
[124] 10 February 1873, *The Elevator*.

property could be dismissed as contemptible – especially if directed against men more "respectable" than he.[125]

Nineteenth-century California, then, was a time and a place where African American activists, male and female, respectable and unrespectable, found themselves caught between universalist ideas of common personhood and aspirations to belong to the ascriptive boundaries of citizenship. Trying to maximize their opportunities in a unique constellation of geography, technology, and international policy, black Californians aptly orchestrated the strategies for creating politically effective community networks, the ideals of a cosmopolitan identity created by international trade, and the struggle to elevate their own racial status within California and the United States. In the process, the *Elevator* and the *Pacific Appeal*, together with the agents aboard steamers that funneled the newspapers to distant parts of the country and to overseas destinations, created a vibrant extended network of black communities not just along the Pacific coast, but around the nation and also across the Pacific Ocean in the African American settlements in Asian, Australian, and New Zealand cities. Forming an image of themselves as soldiers at the forefront of the battle for equal rights, black Californians strove to change racially oppressive laws and practices through the community webs that they had spun extensively.

It was true that many leaders of the community, especially those who thought they should adhere to a respectable middle-class lifestyle, chose a more exclusive strategy that often ignored or belittled the activities and ideas of women who stepped outside of their assigned sphere, dismissed and sometimes accused working-class African Americans who did not try attain the standards of respectability, and resorted to racist stereotyping of

[125] 10 November 1865, *The Elevator*.

the Chinese immigrants for the sake of black elevation. Nevertheless, the struggle for civil rights in nineteenth-century California was not so narrowly limited to the activities of self-appointed black middle-class leaders alone. There were women such as Sarah Carroll, who may have been a prostitute, who challenged the white court to accept her testimony against a white thief as early as in 1850. Catherine E. Sanderson, a washerwoman in San Francisco, coached her husband not just on matters of home but of politics, education, and religion. Mary Ellen Pleasant, a shrewd businesswoman whom contemporary black male activists did not like to praise because she was reputed to own a brothel, funded fugitive slave court cases in California and supported John Brown. Charlotte Brown, a young teacher, challenged segregation in the streetcars of San Francisco. Jennie Carter, wife of a musician in Nevada County, California, was not shy to overstep the boundaries of the domestic sphere to voice poignant political counsel and criticism in the pages of the *Elevator*. Elizabeth Thompson, the maid murdered in 1872 in Sacramento, was helping to sell tickets to a lecture on the "Freedmen in the South" just three days before her death. "Clarendale," the female correspondent to the *Elevator*, sharply condemned elite black male activists for using racist rhetoric against the Chinese.[126] There were the male and female employees aboard steamships, such as the workers aboard the transpacific steamer *Alaska* - chief cook John Rankin, stewardess Agnes Peterson, and security guard Mark Matthewson, to name just a few - who helped

---

[126] Carroll's case in the manuscript court records in the Sacramento History Center, in *People v. William Potter*, December 12, 1850. Correspondence between Catherine and Jeremiah Sanderson among the letters in the Jeremiah Burke Sanderson Collection, The Bancroft Library. For a full biography of Mary Ellen Pleasant, see Lynn M. Hudson, *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Ninteenth-Century San Francisco* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Charlotte Brown advertised as a teacher for a "School for young children" at terms of $1.50 per month in San Francisco, in 10 January 1867, *The Elevator*. The collection of contributions by Jennie Carter to the *Elevator* can be found in Erid Gardner ed., *Jennie Carter*. Thompson's story in 27 February 1872, *The Christian Recorder*; Clarendale's contribution in 8 March 1873, *The Elevator*.

travelers make transitions between one community to another and delivered correspondence and newspapers to black communities spread across widely separated regions.[127] There were the hundreds and thousands of unnamed African Americans, who contributed nearly four thousand dollars in cash and pledges when D. C. Haynes, the secretary of the Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission, visited California to raise funds for the education of the freedpeople of the South in 1864 and 1867.[128] The list would be endless.

In a uniquely multiracial terrain, through the heady days of the Gold Rush and the 1860s and the 1870s when expectations ran high for the newly opened international trade with China and Japan, black Californians carried out the struggle for civil rights that was uniquely local, broadly national, and daringly international. Despite the smaller size of the black community in California compared to those in concentrated centers of the East and the South such as in Philadelphia or New Orleans, black Californians kept up constant communication and active agitation through a consciously crafted, vibrant network. Although their attempts and strategies may not always have been successful or heroic, the remarkable lives and struggles spun by thousands of black Californians during the nineteenth century tell stories of a people that refused to succumb in the face of oppression. Stories that are, with their laughs and tears, successes and failures, triumphs and mistakes, ultimately memorable.

[127] 29 November 1873, *The Elevator*.
[128] 21 June 1867, *The Elevator*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

California State Archives, Sacramento, CA.

Adjutant General George S. Evans. Letters Received (May 1, 1864-November 30, 1865).

Articles of Incorporation.

African Methodist Episcopal Church. Sacramento. 1874.

California Cocoanut Pulverizing Company. San Francisco. 1874.

Colored Colonization Association. Fresno. 1891.

Elevator Silver Mining Co. San Francisco. 1869.

Ladies Pacific Accumulating and Benevolent Association of San Francisco. 1863.

Ladies Union Beneficial Society. San Francisco. 1861.

Oakland Literary Aid Society. Oakland. 1876.

Rare Ripe Gold and Silver Mining Company. Marysville. 1864.

United Sons of Friendship. Sacramento. 1868.

West Indian Benevolent Association. San Francisco. 1867.

California Supreme Court Files.

Emma Jane Turner v. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company. WPA#15360. 1867.

John J. Pleasants, and Mary E. (his wife) v. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company. WPA#16249. 1867.

In the Matter of Carter Perkins on Habeas Corpus. WPA#3285. 1852.

Mary Frances Ward v. Noah F. Flood. WPA#3826. 1872.

The People of the State of California v. George Washington. WPA#1569. 1867.

The People v. James Howard. WPA#12783. 1860.

Common School Reports, by County.

1861-63; 1863-64; 1864-65; 1865-66; 1866-67; 1867-68; 1868-69; 1869-

70; 1870-71; 1871-72; 1872-73; 1873-74; 1874-85; 1875-76; 1876-77; 1877-78; 1878-79; 1879-80; 1880-81; 1881-82; 1882-83; 1883-84.

Hospital Registers.

Agnews State Hospital, 1876-1917. Admissions and Indexes. MF.

Board of Medical Examiners. Register of Licensed Physicians. 1876-1901. MF.

Stockton State Hospital. Commitment Registers. 1856-1862. MF.

Stockton State Hospital. Dr. Robert Reid's Journals. 1852-1856. MF.

Manuscript Census.

State Census, 1852 by County. MF.

Eighth Census of the United States, 1860. MF.

Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. MF.

Military Records.

California Volunteers, 2nd Cavalry.

Petitions to Legislature.

1852 Legislature.

1857 Legislature.

Prison Registers.

Dept. of Corrections. San Quentin Daily Log Book, 1857-1861. MF.

Folsom Prison Registers, 1880-1896. MF.

Taylor, David. Letter to Governor Haight. 24 May 1868.

California State Library, Sacramento, CA.

City and County Directories.

Grass Valley, 1865.

Marysville, 1855.

Nevada County, 1867.

Placerville, 1862.

Stockton, 1856.

Sacramento, 1851, 1853-54, 1855, 1856, 1857-58, 1858, 1859-60, 1861-62, 1863-64, 1866, 1868, 1869, 1870, 1871, 1872

San Francisco, 1850, 1852, 1852-53, 1854, 1856, 1856-57, 1858, 1859, 1860, 1861, 1868-69, 1870, 1876

San Jose, 1870.

Virginia City, 1864-65.

Jeremiah Burke Sanderson Collection, 1859-1915.

Hittell, Theodore H. *General Laws of California, 1850-1864.* San Francisco, H. H. Bancroft & Company, 1870.

Prince Hall Grand Lodge Minutes. 1855-1875.
Shippey, Mervyn G. "A Short History of the Visalia Colored School in Two Parts," n. d., typescript.

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

Brown, David. David Brown Papers, 1853-1887.
Colored Citizens of the State of California. State Executive Committee. *Address of the State Executive Committee, to the Colored People of the State of California*. Sacramento, Printed for the Committee, 1859.
Cowdery, J. F. *The Word "White" in the California School Laws. Speech of Hon. J. F. Cowdery of San Francisco, in the House of Assembly…* [Sacramento, s. n., 1874?].
Davis, Samuel Post. "'Mammy' Pleasant; Memoirs and Autobiography," *Pandex of the Press*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 1902): 1-6.
Hager, John Sharpenstein. *Fifteenth Amendment to Constitution. Speech of Hon. John S. Hager, of San Francisco, in the Senate of California, January 28, 1870,* ... [n. p., 1870.]
Home for Aged and Infirm Colored People of California (Oakland, Calif.), *Constitution and By-Laws*. [Oakland?, Calif. Jordan Print Co., 189-?].
Independent Order of Odd Fellows. *Constitution, By-Laws, Rules of Order and Order of Business of Fountain Lodge, No. 198, ... of the State of California… Jan. 10th, 1872*. Oakland, Pacific Press Publishing House, 1879.
Minutes of a Baptist Convention Held with the First Baptist Church, San Francisco, Feb. 2d, 3d, and 4th, 1860. San Francisco, Towne and Bacon, printer, 1860.
Pleasant, Mary Ellen. Letters to James Grases: and a calling card: San Francisco, 1896.
Sanderson, Jeremiah B. Jeremiah Burke Sanderson Papers, [ca. 1857-1912].
Swett, John. *Have Negroes Been Taught and Classed on Terms of Equality in a Public School under the Charge of Mr. John Swett?* [San Francisco?, 1862].

California Historical Society, San Francisco, CA.

A Crime Against Civilization. A National Disgrace. A Grand Mass Meeting Will Be Held in the Zion A. M. E. Church… Sept. 4. San Francisco, Brunt &

Co., [1899?].
Charlotte L. Brown vs. The Omnibus Rail Road Company. 12th District Court, City and County of San Francisco. MS.
American Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission. *The Work Begun for the American Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission*. 1866.
Bell, James Madison. *A Poem Entitled The Day and the War, Delivered January 1, 1864, at Platt's Hall, by J. Madison Bell, ...* San Francisco, Agnew & Deffebach, 1864.
Biography Collection.
Anne Fuller File.
Callie Bradley File.
Edward P. Duplex File.
Edmonia Mary Lewis File.
George W. Bush File.
John R. Landeway File.
Louden Nelson File.
Pierson James Beckwourth File.
Sidney Hurd File.
Vallejo Cantner File.
Burnett, W. C. *In the Supreme Court of the State of California. Emma Jane Turner, vs. The North Beach and Mission Railroad Company*. San Francisco, Towne & Bacon, 1867.
Colored Citizens' Independent Club. "Declaration of Principles of the Colored Citizens' Independent Club of the City and County of San Francisco." [18??]
Daniels, Helen Adrienna Knitscheer. Translation of California Letters.
Delano, A. *Life on the Plains and among the Diggings; Being Scenes and Adventures of an Overland Journey to California…* Auburn and Buffalo, Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1854.
Democratic Party, San Francisco. Election Ticket for 8th Ward Stating "No Negro or Chinese Suffrage." N. p., [1867]
Dwinelle, John Whipple. *Supreme Court of California. Argument of Mr. John W. Dwinelle, on the Right of Colored Children to Be Admitted to the Public Schools…* San Francisco, Bacon & co., ca. 1870.
Cole, Peter K. *Cole's War with Ignorance and Deceit and His Lecture on Education…* San Francisco, J. H. Udell & R. P. Locke, 1857.
Coleman, William Tell "Reminiscence of W. T. C." N. p., n. d.
Conrich, J. Lloyd. "The Mammy Pleasant Legend." N. p., n. d.
Cosad, David. Journal of a Trip to California by the Overland Route and Life in the Gold Diggings during 1849-1850.

De Ferrari, Carlo M. ed. *Gold Spring Diary: The Journal of John Jolly*. Sonora, Calif., Tuolumne County Historical Society, 1966.

First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. *The Centennial Year, 1852-1952. The First A. M. E. Zion Church…* [San Francisco, 1952?].

Freemasons-Prince Hall Grand Lodge File.

Hannibal Lodge No. 1, San Francisco. *Grand Masonic Entertainment, in Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Patron of the Fraternity…* San Francisco, Elevator Print., 1865.

Haynes, Rev. Frederick D. (Third Baptist Church and Congregation) File.

Higby, William. *Remarks of Hon. William Higby, of California, in the House of Representatives*. 1869.

History of Tulare County California. Vol 2. Chicago, The S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1926.

Hoge, Joseph. *Shall Negroes and Chinamen Vote in California? Read! An Address by the Democratic State Central Committee to the Voters of California*. California, 1869.

Gardiner, Howard C. *In Pursuit of the Golden Dream: Reminiscences of San Francisco and the Northern and Southern Mines, 1849-1857*. Dale L. Morgan ed. Stoughton, Mass., Western Hemisphere, Inc., 1970.

Giffen, Helen S. ed., *The Diaries of Peter Decker: Overland to California in 1849 and Life in the Mines, 1850-1851*. Georgetown, Calif., The Talisman Press, 1966.

Johnson, Ezra R. *Emancipation Oration, by Dr. Ezra R. Johnson, and Poem by James M. Whitfield…* San Francisco, published at Elevator Office, 1867.

Journals of the Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Ministers and Lay Delegates of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Bethel Church… San Francisco, B. F. Sterett, 1863.

King, Thomas Starr, 1824-1864 File.

Ladies' Union Beneficial Society, San Francisco. …*Constitution, By-Laws and Act of Incorporation. Organized September 1860, Incorporated February 1861*. San Francisco, B. F. Sterett, [1861].

Morgan, Dale L., and James R. Scobie eds. *William Perkins' Journal of Life at Sonora, 1849-1852*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1964.

Mount Olivet Baptist Church Minutes and Other Records, 1881-1926.

Northern Light Gold and Silver Mining Co., San Francisco. Stock certificates, 1878, lith. by G. T. Brown & co., San Francisco.

Petition for Legal Recognition by Black Californians. MS. [1862?]

Rasmussen, Louis J. *San Francisco Ship Passenger Lists*. Vol. 1. Colma, Calif., San Francisco Historic Record & Genealogy Bulletin, 1965.

Richard N. Schellens Papers.
Stokes, Darius. *A Lecture, upon the Moral and Religious Elevation of the People of California, Delivered before the Congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church…* San Francisco, printed at the office of the Evening Journal, 1853.
Souvenir & Directory of Prominent Afro-Americans on the Pacific Coast. n. d.
Swett, John. *History of the Public School System of California*. San Francisco, A. L. Bancroft and Company, 1876.
The Illustrated Atlas and History of Yolo County, California. San Francisco: De Pue & Co., 1879.
Theresa Bell File.
Worley, Judge Albert E. T. Papers.

National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

C. A. Stovall v. Archy Lee case file (13-2480).
Pension Files, 1861-1934.

Sacramento History Center, Sacramento, CA.

Benjamin Bean v. Charles. Sacramento Court of First Instance - Civil Cases. 1849.
People v. Dutch Louis. Sacramento Justice Court. July, 1850.
People v. William H. Potter. Sacramento Justice Court. December, 1850.

The Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco, CA.

Coffey, Alvin Aaron. *Autobiography and Reminiscences of Alvin Aaron Coffey.* Mills Seminary P. O., 1901.
Emmanuel Quivers File.
Henry Hall File.
Moses Rodgers File.
Thomas Starr King Collection.

San Francisco Public Library, San Francisco, CA.

Helen Holdredge Collection (Mary Ellen Pleasant Collection).

The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

Borthwick, John David. *Three Years in California*. Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons, 1857.

Bristol, Sherlock. *The Pioneer Preacher: Incidents of Interest, and Experiences in the Author's Life*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1989 [Original: 1887].

Delaney, Martin Robison. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States…* Philadelphia, Privately printed, 1852.

Dietrich, Dr. *The German Emmigrants, or Frederick Wohlgemuth's Voyage…* Leopold Wray trans. Guben, F. Fechner [1852?].

Downie, Major William. *Hunting for Gold: Reminiscences of Personal Experience and Research in the Early Days of the Pacific Coast from Alaska to Panama*. San Francisco, The California Publishing Co., 1893.

Gillis, William R. *The Nevada Directory, for 1868-9: Containing a Full List of the Residents…* San Francisco, M. D. Carr & Co., 1868.

Marryat, Frank. *Mountains and Molehills, or Recollections of a Burnt Journal*. London, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855. Reprint. Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, [c1952].

Minutes of the Pacific Annual Conference M. E. Church South, Sixth Session, Held in Sacramento, November 5th-11th, 1856. San Francisco, Whitton, Towne & Co.'s Excelsior Steam Presses, 1856.

Perkins, William. *Three Years in California; William Perkins' Journal of Life at Sonora, 1849-1852.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California. Held in the City of Sacramento, Dec. 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th. San Francisco, J. H. Udell and W. Randall, Printers, 1856.

Simmons, Rev. William J. *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising*. Cleveland, OH, and Baltimore, MD, Geo. M. Rewell & Co., 1890.

Townsend, J. Holland. "American Caste, and Common Schools," *The Anglo-African Magazine*, vol. 1 (Mar., 1859): 80-83.

Williams, James. *Life and Adventures of James Williams, a Fugitive Slave, with a Full Description of the Underground Railroad*. Fourth ed. San Francisco, Women's Union Book and Job Printing Office, 1874.

Government Publications

DeBow, J. D. B., Superintendent of the United States Census. *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850.* Washington, D. C., Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853.

Kennedy, Joseph C. G., Superintendent of Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior.* Washington, D. C., Government Printing Office, 1864.

Walker, Francis A., Superintendent of Census, *The Statistics of the Population of the United States…Compiled, from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census, (June 1, 1870,) …* Washington, D. C., Government Printing Office, 1872.

United States Census Office, *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census (June 1, 1880)…* Washington, Government Printing Office, 1883.

U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915*. New York, Arno Press, 1968.

Orton, Richard H. comp. *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion*. Sacramento, State Office, J. D. Young, Supt. State Printing, 1890.

Periodicals

California Farmer and Journal of Useful Science, San Francisco, CA.

Christian Recorder, Philadelphia, PA.

Daily Alta California, San Francisco, CA.

Elevator, San Francisco, CA.

Frederick Douglass' Paper, Rochester, NY.

Lunar Visitor, San Francisco, CA.

Marysville Daily Appeal, Marysville, CA.

Mirror of the Times, San Francisco, CA.

National Era, Washington, D. C.

New Orleans Tribute, New Orleans, LA.

North Star, Rochester, NY.

Pacific Appeal, San Francisco, CA.

Sacramento Daily Union, Sacramento, CA.

San Francisco Examiner, San Francisco, CA.

San Francisco Chronicle, San Francisco, CA.

Other

Armstrong, William N. *Around the World with a King.* New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1904.

Eterovich, Adam S. ed. *Proceedings of the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California, 1855, 1856, 1865.* Saratoga, Calif., R & E Research Associates, 1969.

Gibbs, Mifflin Wistar. *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography.* New York, Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968.

Harris, Benjamin Butler. *The Gila Trail: The Texas Argonauts and the California Gold Rush*. Richard H. Dillon ed. Norman, Okl., University of Oklahoma Press, 1960.

II. SECONDARY WORKS

A. Books

Abajian, James de T. *Blacks and Their Contributions to the American West; A Bibliography and Union List of Library Holdings through 1970*. Boston, Mass., G. K. Hall & Co., 1974.

Abbot, Willis J. *The Story of Our Merchant Marine; Its Period of Glory, Its Prolonged Decadence…* New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1919.

A History of the Counties of Fresno, Tulare, and Kern, California. Illustrated. Containing a History of this Important Section of the Pacific Coast… Chicago, The Lewis Publishing Company, [1892?]. Reprint. N. p., California Traveler, Inc., 1974.

Allen Temple Baptist Church, *Thus Far by Faith*. Oakland, Calif., Color Art Press, 1973.

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Nothing Like It in the World: The Men Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad, 1863-1869*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

A Memorial and Biographical History of Northern California. Illustrated. Containing a History of this Important Section of the Pacific Coast… Chicago, The Lewis Publishing Company, 1891.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York, Verso, 1991.

Aptheker, H. *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States.* Secaucus, NJ, Citadel Press, 1973.

Beasley, Delilah Leontium. *The Negro Trail Blazers of California Archive in the Bancroft Library at the University of California, in Berkeley; and from the Diaries, Old Papers, and Conversations of Old Pioneers in the State of California.*

Los Angeles, California, 1919.
Berwanger, Eugene H. *The Frontier Against Slavery; Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967.
Bolster, Jeffrey W. *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1997.
Bonadio, Felice A. *North of Reconstruction: Ohio Politics, 1865-1870*. New York: New York University Press, 1970.
Brawley, Benjamin. *The Negro Genius: A New Appraisal of the Achievement of the American Negro in Literature and the Fine Arts*. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1969.
Broussard, Albert S. *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954*. Lawrence, Kan., University Press of Kansas, 1993.
Buckbee, Edna Bryan. *The Saga of Old Tuolumne…* New York, Press of the Pioneers, 1935.
Catterall, Helen Tunicliff. *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*. Mrs. Ralph C. H. Catterall ed. New York, Octagon Books, 1968 [Origin. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution, 1926-1937. 5 v. Publication no. 374 of the Carnegie Institution].
Chandler, Robert J., and Stephen J. Potash. *Gold, Silk, Pioneers and Mail: The Story of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company*. El Cerrito, CA, Glencannon Press/Friends of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Library, 2007.
Chen, Yong. *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community.* Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 2000.
Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835.* New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977.
Dabel, Jane E. *A Respectable Woman: The Public Roles of African American Women in Nineteenth-Century New York.* New York: New York University Press, 2008.
Daniels, Douglas Henry. *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980.
Dangler, Chuck. *The Pacific Rim Region: Pacific and Pacific Rim History since the Sixteenth Century.* London and New York, Routledge, 1999.
Davidson, Cathy N., and Jessamyn Hatcher eds. *No More Separate Spheres!* Durham, Duke University Press, 2002.
De Graaf, Lawrence, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California*. Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001.
Delay, Peter Joseph. *History of Yuba and Sutter Counties, California, with Biographical Sketches*… Los Angeles, Historic Record Company, 1924.
Delgado, James P. *Gold Rush Port: The Maritime Archaeology of San Francisco's Waterfront.* Berkeley, Calif. University of California Press, 2009.

Dobie, Charles Caldwell. *San Francisco, A Pageant*. New York, D. Appleton-Century Co., 1939.

Dobie, Charles Caldwell. *San Francisco's Chinatown*. San Francisco, D. Appleton-Century Company, 1936.

Dodson, Howard, and Sylviane A. Diouf eds. *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience.* Washington, D. C.: National Geographic Society, 2004.

Eaves, Lucile. *A History of California Labor Legislation: With an Introductory Sketch of the San Francisco Labor Movement.* Berkeley: The University Press, 1910.

Feldman, Heidi. *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific.* Middleton, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006.

Field, Phyllis F. *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982.

Finkelman, Paul ed., *His Soul Goes Marching On: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid.* Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1995.

Foley, Neil. *Quest for Equality: The Failed Promise of Black-Brown Solidarity.* Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2010.

Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War.* London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1971.

Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877.* New York, Harper & Row, 1988.

Gallicchio, Marc. *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism in Asia, 1895-1945.* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Gallicchio, Marc ed. *The Unpredictability of the Past: Memories of the Asia-Pacific War in U. S.-East Asian Relations*. Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007.

Gardner, Erid ed. *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007.

Gibson, Andrew, and Arthur Donovan. *The Abandoned Ocean: A History of United States Maritime Policy*. Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Glaude, Eddie S. Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Goodwin, Cardinal. *The Establishment of State Government in California, 1846-1850.* New York, The MacMillan Company, 1914.

Green Michael Cullen. *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of American Military Empire after World War II*. Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University Press, 2010.

Gyory, Andrew. *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act.* Chapel Hill and London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Harris, Leslie M. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-*

1863. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hodges, Graham Russell. *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*. Chapel Hill, Unversity of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Holdredge, Helen. *Mammy Pleasant's Cookbook*. San Francisco, 101 Productions, 1970.

Horne, Gerald. *Race War: White Supremacy and the Japanese Attack on the British Empire.* New York and London: New York University Press, 2004.

Horne, Gerald. *The White Pacific: U. S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War*. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Horton, James Oliver. *Free People of Color: Inside the African-American Community.* Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.

Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North.* New York, Holmes & Meier, 1979.

Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton. *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860.* New York and Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hudson, Lynn M. *The Making of "Mammy Pleasant": A Black Entrepreneur in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Hutton, Frankie. *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*. Westport, Greenwood Press, 1993.

Kearney, Reginald. *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* Albany, State University of New York Press, 1998.

Lapp, Rudolph M. *Archy Lee: A California Fugitive Slave Case*. [San Francisco], Book Club of California, 1969.

Lapp, Rudolph M. *Blacks in Gold Rush California*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1977.

Levander, Caroline Field. *Voices of the Nation: Women and Public Speech in Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998

Litwack, Leon F. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.

López, Ian F. Haney. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race.* New York and London, New York University Press, 1996.

Mansfield, George C. *History of Butte County California with Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women…* Los Angeles, Calif., Historic Record Company, 1918.

Marks, Paula Mitchell. *Precious Dust: The American Gold Rush Era: 1848-1900.* New

York, William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994.
Marvin, Winthrop L. *The American Merchant Marine: Its History and Reomance from 1620 to 1902*. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902.
Masur, Kate. *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, D. C.* Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
McCurry, Stephanie. *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
Miller, Stuart Creighton. *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1969.
Monaghan, Jay, *Australians and the Gold Rush: California and Down Under, 1849-1854.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966.
Morris, Thomas D. *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860.* Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
Nee, Victor G., and Brett de Bary Nee. *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown.* Stanford, Calif., Stanford University Press, 1986 [Orig. 1972].
Oakes, James Oakes. *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders.* New York: Knopf, 1982.
Peffer, George Anthony. *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration before Exclusion.* Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1999.
Penningroth, Dylan C. *Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South.* University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
Pfaelzer, Jean. *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans.* New York, Random House, 2007.
Potts, Daniel, and Annette Potts. *Young America and Australian Gold: Americans and the Gold Rush of the 1850s.* St. Lucia, Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 1974.
Pride, Armistead S., and Clint C. Wilson, II. *A History of the Black Press*. Washington, D. C., Howard University Press, 1997.
Quigley, David. *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy.* New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.
Reed, Harry. *Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865*. East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1994.
Rhodes, Jane. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998.
Rice, Alan. *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic*. London, Continuum Books, 2003.
Richardson, Heather Cox. *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of America After the Civil War.* Yale University Press, 2008.

Rydell, Raymond A. *Cape Horn to the Pacific: The Rise and Decline of an Ocean Highway.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952.

Sandmeyer, Elmer Clarence. *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California.* Urbana, Chicago, and London, University of Illinois Press, 1973 [Original: 1939].

Saxton, Alexander. *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California.* Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971.

Schwalm, Leslie A. *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest.* Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Schwendinger, Robert J. *Ocean of Bitter Dreams: Maritime Relations between China and the United States, 1850-1915.* Tucson, Arizona, Westernlore Press, 1988.

Sinn, Elizabeth. *Pacific Crossing: California Gold, Chinese Migration, and the Making of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2013.

Smalley, Eugene V. *History of the Northern Pacific Railroad*. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883.

Smith, Alfred. *Thus Far by Faith*. Oakland, Calif., Color Art Press, 1973.

Smith, Rogers M. *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U. S. History.* New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1997.

Smith, Stacey L. *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction.* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America.* New York, A. A. Knopf, 1985.

Snyder, David L. *Negro Civil Rights in California: 1850*. Sacramento Book Collectors Club, 1969.

Spears, John R. *The Story of the American Merchant Marine.* New York, The MacMillan Company, 1915.

Still, William. *The Underground Railroad*. New York, Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968.

Taylor, Quintard. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990.* New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998.

Tinkham, George Henry. *California Men and Events; Time, 1769-1890…* Stockton, Record Publishing Co., 1915.

Thompson, Warren Simpson. *Growth and Changes in California's Population*. Los Angeles, Haynes Foundation, 1955.

Thurman, Sue Bailey. *Pioneers of Negro Origin in California*. San Francisco, Acme Publishing Company, [1952].

Vogel, Todd ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*. New Brunswick, N. J., Rutgers University Press, 2001.

Von Eschen, Penny M. *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Walcott, Victoria W. *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
Wang, Xi. *The Trial of Democracy: Black Suffrage and Northern Republicans, 1860-1910.* Athens and London, The University of Georgia Press, 1997.
Whitman, T. Stephen. *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland*. Lexington, Ky., University Press of Kentucky, 1997.
Willis, William Ladd. *History of Sacramento County, California with Biographical Sketches…* Los Angeles, Historic Record Company, 1913.
Winks, Robert W. *Blacks in Canada: A History.* Montreal; Buffalo, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.
Wollenberg, Charles M. *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975*. University of California Press, 1978.
Yung, Judy. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco.* Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 1995.

B. Articles

Allen, Ernest Jr. "When Japan Was 'Champion of the Darker Races': Satokata Takahashi and the Flowering of Black Messianic Nationalism," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 24, no. 1 Black Cultural History - 1994 (Winter, 1994).
Bell, Howard H. "Negroes in California, 1849-1859," *Phylon (1960-),* vol. 28, no. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1967).
Brown, Martin, and Peter Phillips. "Competition, Racism, and Hiring Practices among California Manufacturers, 1860-1882," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, vol. 40, no. 1 (Oct., 1986).
Butler, Anne M. "Still in Chains: Black Women in Western Prisons, 1865-1910," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 1 (Feb., 1989).
Chandler, Robert J. "Friends in Time of Need: Republicans and Black Civil Rights in California during the Civil War Era," *Arizona and the West*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter, 1982).
Coleman, Willi. "African American Women and Community Development in California, 1848-1900," in Lawrence de Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, and Quintard Taylor eds., *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (Los Angeles: Autry Museum of Western Heritage, 2001).
Fagan, Benjamin. "'Americans as They Really Are': The 'Colored American' and the Illustration of National Identity," *American Periodicals*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2011).
Finkelman, Paul. "Slavery and the Northwest Ordinance: A Study in Ambiguity," *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Winter, 1986).
Fisher, James A. "The Struggle for Negro Testimony in California, 1851-1863," *Southern*

California Quarterly, vol. 51, no. 4 (Dec., 1969).
Franklin, William E. "The Archy Case: The California Supreme Court Refuses to Free a Slave," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 32, no. 2 (May, 1963).
F. W. Howay. "The Negro Immigration into Vancouver Island in 1858," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 2 (May, 1935).
Gardner, Martha Mabie. "Working on White Womanhood: White Working Women in the San Francisco Anti-Chinese Movement, 1877-1890," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Autumn, 1999).
Goodyear, Frank H. "'Beneath the Shadow of Her Flag': Philip A. Bell's 'The Elevator' and the Struggle for Enfranchisement, 1865-1870," *California History*, vol. 78, no. 1 (Spring, 1999).
Johnsen, Leigh Dana. "Equal Rights and the "Heathen 'Chinee'": Black Activism in San Francisco, 1865-1875," *The Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Jan., 1980).
Kaiser, Laurie. "The Black Madonna: Notions of True Womanhood from Jacobs to Hurston," *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 60, no. 1 (Jan., 1995).
Kanazawa, Mark. "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California," *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 65, no. 3 (Sept., 2005).
Kemble, John Haskell. "The Genesis of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company," *California Historical Society Quarterly,* vol. 13, no. 3 (Sep., 1934).
Korhonen, Pekka. "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History*, vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1996).
Landon, Fred. "Canadian Negroes and the John Brown Raid," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Apr., 1921).
Lapp, Rudolph M. "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Early California Negro Leader," *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 53, no. 4 (Oct., 1969).
Levine, Robert S. "Circulating the Nation: David Walker, the Missouri Compromise and the Rise of the Black Press," in Todd Vogel ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, N. J., Rutgers University Press, 2001).
Lipsitz, George. "'Frantic to Join… the Japanese Army': The Asia Pacific War in the Lives of African American Soldiers and Civilians," in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd eds. *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital.* Durham, Duke University Press, 1997.
Liu, Kwang-Ching. "Administering a Steam-Navigation Company in China, 1862-1867," *The Business History Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (Jun., 1955).
Liu, Kwang-Ching. "Financing a Steam-Navigation Company in China, 1861-62," *The Business History Review*, vol. 28, no. 2 (Jun., 1954).
Lynch, Timothy G. "Crucible of California Capitalism," *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 4 (Winter, 2012).

McCurry, Stephanie. "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina," *Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 4 (Mar., 1992).

Mcconaghy, Lorraine. "The Old Navy in the Pacific West: Naval Discipline in Seattle, 1855-1856," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 98, no. 1 (Winter, 2006/2007).

Mills, Crystal S., Debra Usher, Emily Jean McFadden. "Kinship in the African American Community," *Michigan Sociological Review*, vol. 31 (Fall, 1999).

Montesano, Philip M. "San Francisco Black Churches in the Early 1860's: Political Pressure Group," *California Historical Quarterly*, vol. 52, no. 2 (Summer, 1973).

Noel, Jana. "Jeremiah B. Sanderson: Educator and Organizer for the Rights of 'Colored Children' in Early California," *The Journal of Negro Education*, vol. 74, no. 2 (Spring, 2005).

Onishi, Yuichiro. "The New Negro of the Pacific: How African Americans Forged Cross-Racial Solidarity with Japan, 1917-1922," *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 92, no. 2 (Spring, 2007).

Parker, Kunal M. "State, Citizenship, and Territory: The Legal Construction of Immigrants in Antebellum Massachusetts," *Law and History Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Autumn, 2001).

Peffer, George Anthony. "From under the Sojourner's Shadow: A Historiographical Study of Chinese Female Immigration to America, 1852-1882," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, vol. 11, no. 3 (Spring, 1992).

Potts, E. Daniel and Annette Potts. "The Negro and the Australian Gold Rushes, 1852-1857," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Nov., 1968).

Phifer, Edward W. "Saga of a Burke County Family: Part II," *The North Carolina Historical Review* vol. 39, no. 2 (April, 1962).

Schwendinger, Robert J. "Chinese Sailors: America's Invisible Merchant Marine 1876-1905," *California History* 57, no. 1, The Chinese in California (Spring, 1978).

Skinner, Elliott P. "Transcending Traditions: African, African-American and African Diaspora Studies in the 21st Century - The Past Must Be the Prologue," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, Transcending Traditions (Fall-Winter 2000).

Smith, Stacey L. "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 1 (Feb., 2011).

Snorgrass, J. William. "The Black Press in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1856-1900," *California History*, vol. 60, no. 4 (Winter, 1981/1982).

Tétreault, Mary Ann. "Frontier Politics: Sex, Gender, and the Deconstruction of the Public Sphere," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political,* vol. 26, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 2001).

Tompkins, E. Berkeley. "Black Ahab: William T. Shorey, Whaling Master," *California Historical Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring, 1972).

Weinstein, Robert A. "North from Panama, West to the Orient: The Pacific Mail

Steamship Company, as Photographed by Carleton E. Watkins," *California History*, vol. 57, no. 1, The Chinese in California (Spring, 1978).
Welter, Barbara Welter. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer, 1966).
Wiltsee, Ernest A. "The City of New York of the Pacific," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Mar., 1933).

C. Unpublished Theses

Mantilla, Jeanette Davis. "'Hush, Hush, Miss Charlotte': A Quarter-century of Civil Rights Activism by the Black Community of San Francisco, 1850-1875." PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000.
McBroome, Delores Nason. "Parallel Communities: African-Americans in California's East Bay, 1850-1963." PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1991.
Thurman, A. Odell. "The Negro in California Before 1890." Thesis, College of the Pacific, 1945.
Zhu, Limin. "The Images of China and the Chinese in the Overland Monthly 1868-1875, 1884-1935." PhD diss., Duke University, 1966.