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The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/33b2865j>

Journal

The Undergraduate Historical Journal at UC Merced, 3(1)

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Publication Date

2016

DOI

10.5070/H331033418

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Peer reviewed|Undergraduate

Politics and Newspapers: Race Relations and its Influence on Gold Rush San Francisco

Victor Toste

During and immediately after the American Gold Rush, the city of San Francisco became the largest city in the American West. This growth was fueled by the consistent migration of easterners travelling west in hopes of hitting it rich with gold, or gaining steady work that the new industry of gold mining had created. This idea of “going out west” created a distinct difference in what people considered to be the culture of the American North and South vs. that of the West. The term “Wild West” is used to describe the lack of structure and general unknown of the west compared to the rest of the United States. The rapid growth of the city of San Francisco and the surrounding area led to the first instances of consistent economy and infrastructure that near to the Pacific. One of these infrastructures was journalism, and in October of 1855, James King of William published the first issue of the “Daily Evening Bulletin.” By the New Year, it had become one of the more popular newspapers in the area. In the final issues of its inaugural year, sections and stories focused on the selling of meats and pastries for the holidays, but it is stories discussing the appointment of local officials that stands out amongst all other advertisements. Like The American West, California, and specifically large cities like San Francisco were still trying to form an identity in a country that was already being divided over issues of slavery and labor. In the early nineteenth century, most of the North had abolished slavery, but it was still strong in the South. With the Gold Rush making California economically viable for a large population to settle in, it became a point of contestation among pro and anti-abolitionists.¹ One of the men that opposed slavery in California was the former state senator and rising political figure, David C. Broderick. His rapid advance through the California political system, and his political views created friends, but also enemies and doubters. Soon, the California State Senator was being accused of using his power to influence elections in and around the city. King, the editor of the “Daily Evening Bulletin,” felt this was an abuse of his power and thus he began to run articles against Broderick; accusing him of stuffing ballots and other political offences. In a time where the city of San Francisco was growing, like an infant child, it absorbed what it learned from those around it. Thus, King and Broderick fell on two sides of the growth of California. Broderick wanted to use the lessons learned in his birthplace of Washington D.C. and eventually made the party system of San Francisco irrelevant. “It was Broderick and anti-Broderick.”²

The relationship between David C. Broderick and James King of William is a representation of the questions being asked of slavery not only in the North and South, but also in the West, as well as the struggle for identity of the people within California and the state as a whole during the Gold Rush and prior to the American Civil War.

¹ Junius P. Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia of Emancipation and Abolition in the Transatlantic World*, (Armoek: Sharpe Reference, 2007), XLVIII.

² Jeremiah Lynch, *A Senator of the Fifties: David C. Broderick, of California*, (San Francisco: A.M. Robertson, 2011), 73.

Broderick vs. James

David C. Broderick originally from New York, began his political career by running for the House of Representatives. After that failed attempt, he decided to move to San Francisco and was a player in the smelting of gold. Using the profits, he was able to return to politics and eventually became a state senator and Lieutenant Governor. His autobiographer describes his political style:

In San Francisco he became the dictator of the municipality. His political lessons and observations in New York were priceless. He introduced a modification of the same organization in San Francisco with which Tammany has controlled New York for lo! these many years. It was briefly this. At a forthcoming election a number of offices were to be filled; those of sheriff, district attorney, alderman, and places in the legislature. Several of these positions were very lucrative, notably that of the sheriff, tax-collector, and assessor...Possibly this candidate dissented, but then someone else consented, and as the town was hugely Democratic, his selections were usually victorious...When he came there was chaos, and he created order. There was no party system in the town, and he created one.³

This rapid rise to power led to the creation of enemies. When James King of William began publishing his newspaper in 1855, he immediately began criticizing and attacking Broderick's actions. While Broderick was not directly running for any position in offices in San Francisco at the time, King felt that Broderick and his associates were using their power to influence elections in and around the city. In between his time as between State Senator and Lieutenant Governor, and his eventual election as a US Congressman, Broderick decided to focus on his actions on influencing his new home of San Francisco. Here are other examples where King felt Broderick abused his power.

He also accused Broderick of arranging the deal whereby the city purchased the old Jenny Lind Theatre at an exorbitant price, and of complicity in many other raids upon the public funds. "If we can only escape David C. Broderick's hiring bullies a little longer," wrote King, "we will turn this city inside out, but what we will expose the corruption and malfeasance of her officary."⁴

King used the Daily Evening Bulletin as his platform to attack Broderick. This was very evident at the end of the newspapers inaugural year when positions were being filled within the infrastructure of the city. King encouraged people of the city to vote, but at the same time was sure to tell the people to doubt anyone he considered to be "Broderickian." Even if they felt that they may not be corrupt, and had a clear record, King felt any connection with Broderick showed a clear bias to Broderick's ideals:

In the Seventh Ward, the candidates are Mr. Henry B. Janes, *Know Nothing*, and Peter Campbell, *Democrat*. Both, as far as we know can we learn, are honest men, and either, according to all accounts, would serve faithfully...Since writing the above we learn that

³ Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast; an Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1933), 78.

⁴ Herbert Asbury, 79.

the whole Broderick force, including the County Recorder and County Treasurer, are in the field as in favor of Mr. Campbell, and opposed to Mr. Janes. Whether Mr. Campbell is a Broderick man, we do not know. We hope he is not. The cause of the Broderick opposition to Mr. Janes is the school question, and this is the issue they make of it. If we thought Mr. Campbell could be influenced after his election by Mr. Broderick, we should obviously oppose him. As it is, we leave the matter with the voters of that Ward, who will judge for themselves.⁵

Like the Red Scare in the United States during the Cold War, those even possibly connected to Broderick could be seen as corrupt. King used this fear many times in his papers. He indirectly made those who were indifferent doubt their vote and could have moved the needle in the other way towards Henry Janes in this election. This is represented by the eventual results by which Henry Jane won the election. “*Seventh Ward*—Henry B. Janes, (K. N.,) 564; Peter Campbell, (Dem.,) 551. Majority for James, 13.”⁶ It is clear that there was some worry behind Broderick and his goals in the world of politics. Broderick was known for having many friends in many different subjects and areas around the city. In this excerpt from “The Barbary Coast,” Broderick’s expansive crew is named.

One of Broderick’s principal lieutenants was Charles P. Duene, better known as Dutch Charley, who for a brief period was Chief Engineer of the San Francisco Fire Department... Scarcely less prominent in Broderick’s political ménage were such worthies as Bill Carr, Reuben Maloney, Mart Gallagher, Bill Lewis, Yankee Sullivan, a prize-fighter...; Woolley Kearney, equally notorious as a bar-room brawler and as the ugliest man in California; and Bill Mulligan, whom Warden Sutton of the Tombs called “a professional blackleg” and “as desperate a character as could be found among the rowdy element of New York.”⁷

This does not include banks and other allies that King accused him of befriending in issues of his newspaper. The crew contains a variety of characters from different backgrounds and different skills. Some have power within the city and some could be considered to be enforcers. It is clear that Broderick was thought of as some kind of military commander as his right-hand man is named as his “lieutenant.” Broderick seemed to react to politics and the world around it as war and did what he needed to win. This gives some credence to how King believed that Broderick was trying to control the city in and out of politics.

Slavery in California

The Civil War was and is still looked at as a war between the Union and The Confederacy over the institution of slavery. The West is often seen as a separate organism independent of the rest of the United States, yet the West and specifically California were still using slaves and indentured labor. This meant people in California knew of and saw the lifestyle as either positive or negative based on where they migrated from originally. This created a divide even between different racial groups and even Democrats. The difference in the slavery between

⁵ James King of William. *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco: Whitton, Towne & Co., December 27, 1855), 2.

⁶ James King of William, 3.

⁷ Herbert Asbury, *The Barbary Coast; an Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1933), 80

the American south and states like California was in who was being enslaved, and the work they did. Slavery in the south consisted of white Americans enslaving African-Americans who had been brought to the US for that purpose, but slavery in California was far murkier. Stacey L. Smith shines a light on the multiple layers of slavery and indentured servitude throughout her book, *Freedom's Frontier California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction*. White and Californios or Rancheros enslaved Native Americans, Mexicans, and various other peoples.⁸ These dynamics did not allow for slavery in California to be debated like slavery in the South. One relationship that was common at the time was the capture of Native American children and their inclusion into the families of Ranchero's and Californio's. This was allowed as long as the kids were set free when they had reached adulthood. Although this was part of the law, often these kids were forced to marry within the family, thus making them a permanent part of the family. This system was left from the remnants of the Franciscan model of Catholic Conversion that occurred in California in the 19th Century as explained here: "Californio's also bound Indians into the rancho system through captivity and slavery... Californios justified these transactions by claiming that they had adopted the poor waifs into their families and educated them in the Catholic faith."⁹ As seen here, Ranchero's may not have specifically seen these Native American children as their property, but saw them as students that they were teaching. Not only were Native-Americans taken advantage of, but also people from East Asia and Pacific Islanders. The ticket to travel across the Pacific cost in the range of 30-40 dollars. When arriving on American soil, they were expected to pay off their ticket through labor. After expenses like food, shelter and clothing, these workers were left with cents to pay off their debt and thus were forced to work for many years in hope of one day paying off their debt.¹⁰ David Broderick and James King of William were on both sides of this debate. Broderick was very openly against slavery. He was very adamant about this, often arguing with some of his best friends over the matter, and eventually leading to a duel between him and his friend and fellow politician David S. Terry. This duel ended in Broderick's death but shows how significant the debate was even before the beginning of the Civil War. Questions about slavery and this type of work are not considered to be a problem facing the people of California at the time, but as with Broderick, people were continuing to see slavery in the state and felt the need to question it. Edward Dickinson Baker, a former Illinois Congressman and friend of Senator Abraham Lincoln spoke at Broderick's funeral and stated that his opposition of slavery clearly led to his death.¹¹

Struggle for Identity

Even prior to California gaining its statehood, the native people of the territory and migrants tried to find an identity as people of the state. Both Broderick and King were trying to exploit this confusion in order to create the foundation for what they believed the state of California needed to become. Broderick and his ideals represented those of the north east, where he grew up and learned the game of politics. King, although also from the same area prior to moving to San Francisco, saw California as a unique entity. The eastern United States was the

⁸ Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 1-22.

⁹ Stacey L. Smith, 22.

¹⁰ Stacey L. Smith, 95.

¹¹ Leonard Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 4.

hub of white male society, and states like California created questions for the white men who travelled there looking for work. This meant these men needed to find new ways to see themselves as white men in this new environment. Susan Lee Johnson describes this in her book, *Roaring Camp*. “In California ‘whiteness’ was defined in opposition to a variety of ‘nonwhite’ peoples, but for a southern man like Dart, black slaves were the first point of reference.”¹² Identifying and finding ones whiteness was hard as things like the slavery of African-Americans was not as common, and groups like Mexicans and Native Americans were able to find work in places like the mines as well. Men who travelled west looking for work left their family and the world they knew behind. This meant that they often participated in things like gambling, binge drinking, having sex with prostitutes and women of other races, and at times even homosexuality.¹³ This was not the extent of the new lives of men though. Because when these men did eventually wander home from the bars, casinos and fandangos, they arrived to barracks and tents where they took on the roles of women in the care of their clothes, food and other necessities. Susan Lee Johnson describes this lifestyle in her book, *Roaring Camp*.

What most found in the diggings was no shortcut to middle-class manliness but rather a bewildering array of humanity that confounded whatever sense of a natural order of things they could find in mid nineteenth-century western Europe or eastern North America...the woman whose love California lacked was white. For men such as these, the more things changed, the more things stayed the same.¹⁴

Like Broderick and King, a struggle of the old vs. the new and the black vs the white is being fought. San Francisco was the first instance of a city that was large growing in the west coast. The mass introduction of women and family life was jarring to the men who had left so much of that behind. In the matter of years, the lifestyle of the mines and barracks became the nature of many of these men and the political growth of men like Broderick meant the introduction of many of the ideals many men like King left behind. Broderick saw a future of California like that of the states of the north east, but used political practices he saw performed in Washington and New York. Some often thought of him as the “Dictator of San Francisco”¹⁵ The city was looking internally at things like the School Question,¹⁶ and whether or not schools should be built as the population continued to rise. These were fight fought daily that saw men like Broderick and King on opposite sides.

Conclusion

The mid-19th century marked the rapid growth for the biggest city in the West at the time, San Francisco. This made it the center of many issues that were occurring not only in the Union, but also amongst the new territories. Amongst these issues was how the west should grow, as well as how people migrating to California saw themselves as men and specifically as white men. Territories like California were trying to find a balance between the local ideas and the

¹² Susan Lee Johnson. *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 71

¹³ Susan Lee Johnson. *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 127-138.

¹⁴ Susan Lee Johnson, 137-138.

¹⁵ Jeremiah Lynch. *A Senator of the Fifties: David C. Broderick, of California*. (San Francisco: A. M. Robertson, 1911), 68-69.

¹⁶ James King of William. *Daily Evening Bulletin*, (San Francisco: Whitton, Towne & Co., December 29, 1855), 3.

ideas of the nation as a whole. The state of California was in its infancy and able to be morphed into the vision of those with power within the state. The rivalry between David C. Broderick and James King of William is representative of these problems that people in California faced. Both men faced similar fates. Broderick's life ended in a duel with a friend over political issues over slavery, while King saw his life end to a gunshot as well. Kings death led to the reformation of the Vigilance Committee that would eventually lynch multiple people in response to the corruption they felt was occurring in the city. Their formation eventually led to Broderick leaving the city and travelling across California creating more footholds.¹⁷ The lives these two men lived led to many changes during and even after their deaths. The political scene, as well as general life and race within California lives with the finger prints of these two men and those around them.

¹⁷ Herbert Ashbury. *The Barbary Coast; an Informal History of the San Francisco Underworld*, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1933), 89

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