

SPRING 2024

UC SANTA BARBARA

THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF HISTORY

Vol. 4 | No. 1



© **The UCSB Undergraduate Journal of History**
3236 Humanities and Social Sciences Building
The Department of History, Division of Humanities and Fine Arts
The University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, California
93106-9410

Website

<https://undergradjournal.history.ucsb.edu/>

Submissions

Papers can be submitted for publication anytime through our submission portal on our website. Manuscripts must be between 3,500 and 7,500 words long and completed as part of a student's undergraduate coursework at an accredited degree-granting institution. Recent graduates may submit their work so long as it is within 12 months of receiving their degree. The Journal is published twice yearly in Spring and Fall. See the Journal website for more information.

Cover Image:

Sunset Surfer at Campus Point. UCSB Digital Asset Collection. Matt Perko.

Editorial Board

Zoe Benink
Andreas Brey
Anna Friedman
Gigi Griffin
Cole Grissom
Valerie Holland
Atmika Iyer

Hanna Kawamoto
Danika Kerner
Benjamin Ortiz
Jacqueline Pucillo
Jessica Novoa
Ela Schulz
Chynna Walker
Sophia Yu

Faculty Director

Jarett Henderson

Changing Conceptions of Nature and U.S. Economic Interests in Mexican California

*Jared Allinson*¹

In 1844, a man whose *nom de plume* was the direct but unimaginative “A Pioneer” provided a full-page account of Mexico’s “Upper California” in *The Farmer’s Monthly Visitor*. He presented to the readers of this New Hampshire periodical a land of “inexhaustible and spontaneous vegetation” and “innumerable herds.”² According to him, California possessed impressive harbors, a “perpetual spring” climate, and the “greatest abundance of game.” As he further put it, “There is no country in the world that offers as flattering inducements to emigrants as Upper California; nor is there a country...on the face of the globe, so eminently calculated by Nature herself to promote the prosperity and happiness of civilized and enlightened men.” According to this “pioneer,” the only people in the region were a few thousand Natives and a “motley assortment” of mostly non-white people who lived in a “deplorable state of ignorance.”³ In his view, the land was ripe for the taking.

This paper uses a broad array of primary accounts and secondary sources to re-examine U.S. perceptions of Mexican California’s resources, economy, and people with the goal of better contextualizing U.S. expansionism. From the 1810s to the 1840s, travel writers and commercial interests used new forms of scientific racism that began circulating through the English-speaking world based on changing conceptions of nature, technology, and resources used to justify conquest. Furthermore, the motivations of the involved Americans focused most specifically on agricultural wealth and potential, the abundance of livestock, and maritime possibilities.

The introduction of a European-centered economic system occurred primarily during the Spanish colonial period and was thus shaped extensively by Catholic missionaries. While the settlement of the region was first centered around providing a landing base for Spanish galleons that crossed the northern Pacific Ocean on their return voyage from the Philippines, the first settlements in Upper California were also meant to provide a buffer zone that protected the mineral resources in what is now northern Mexico from encroaching imperial adversaries.⁴ Spanish officials developed a colonization scheme spearheaded by Franciscans, but that also included soldiers and a variety of

¹ Jared Allinson is a first year graduate student at Arkansas State University whose research focuses on United States borderlands history.

² A Pioneer, “Upper California,” *The Farmer’s Monthly Visitor*, (1844), p. 66.

³ A Pioneer, “Upper California,” p. 66.

⁴ Mardith K. Scheutz-Miller, *Buildings and Builders in Hispanic California, 1769-1850*, (Tucson: Southwestern Mission Research Center, 1994), pp. 1-5. The classic historical account of the Manila galleons is William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, (Boston: E.P. Dutton, 1939).

settlers.⁵ The missionaries implemented systems of irrigation, orchards, and limited but important transportation and economic infrastructure that allowed the mission system to sustain itself. Missionaries participated in this economy themselves but also relied on an array of laborers. Some of these workers were settlers from Mexico, but most were local Indigenous peoples forced or enticed into working for the missions. While there were instances of forced labor, archaeologist Tsim Schneider contextualizes this labor by stating, “There is ample archaeological evidence that Indigenous people negotiated missionization through small, quotidian acts of opposition.”⁶ Most laborers worked as field hands and farmers, while others worked as skilled blacksmiths, masons, weavers, and leatherworkers.⁷

Spanish rule in California was in some ways creative and productive, but mercantilist policies and distance from Spanish centers of trade and power also restricted it. While the Spanish Crown claimed dominion over the Californias, it prohibited trade with foreigners, and foreigners were often restricted from taking residence in the territory. In addition to a strict foreign policy, manufacturing and diversity in agriculture were also discouraged.⁸ Agricultural policies of colonial Spanish California primarily focused on creating self-sufficiency. While largely done to cut imperial costs, missionaries were also interested in becoming sustainable. As a result, what missions and secular communities could produce was theoretically, and sometimes genuinely, restricted by Spanish mercantilism. By artificially limiting the region’s access to resources, the Crown attempted to create a form of dependency on outside resources that would arrive from Spain itself. In this way, the Spanish system of mercantilism significantly impacted the ability of missionaries and other Californios to produce essential goods, especially luxuries. In the eyes of a growing number of British intellectuals and business leaders, this view of the economy and, in turn, nature became seen as “backward.” Philosophers such as Adam

⁵ One of the most cited histories on the Spanish borderlands and the influence of the encroachment of other European powers is David J. Weber, *The Spanish Frontier in North America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.) See his chapter on California: pp. 236-270. For more on missionary settlements and the interaction of missionaries and Indigenous peoples, see James A. Sandos, *Converting California: Indians and Franciscans in the Missions*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁶ Panich Lee and Tsim D. Schneider, *Indigenous Landscapes and Spanish Missions New Perspectives from Archaeology and Ethnohistory*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press 2014), p. 11.

⁷ Steven W. Hackel, “Land, Labor, and Production: The Colonial Economy of Spanish and Mexican California,” in *Contested Eden: California before the Gold Rush*, ed. by Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Richard J. Orsi, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 111-46.

⁸ Doyce B. Nunis, “Alta California’s Trojan Horse: Foreign Immigration,” in *Contested Eden: California before the Gold Rush*, ed. by Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Richard J. Orsi, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 299-330.

Smith began to argue that wealth was not finite and did not depend solely on the possession of precious metals but could be created by new modes of production and more liberal trade policies.⁹

Stemming from Western European philosophers and scientists of both the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution, new intellectual currents about technology, energy, and rationalization fueled new forms of racism that officials in European empires used to justify colonization and conquest. Thus, scientific models became retooled to further perpetuate racial superiority, especially in the British Empire and the United States. Civilization, in the words of historian Michael Adas, became something that could be “empirically demonstrated.” Machines became the measure of men.¹⁰ So, too, was an understanding of nature that was no longer based solely on religious or environmental factors but focused more on human consumption, technical sophistication, and industrial production. This trend only increased during the first half of the nineteenth century as Western scientists developed new branches of science that dealt with energy and the natural world, such as thermodynamics. After the development of thermodynamics, words like “efficiency,” “waste,” and “conservation” became more common in popular culture.¹¹

Meanwhile, the Bourbon Reforms of the late 1700s and the wars of independence in the early 1800s had already broken down the limited communications between officials and traders in Mexico and residents in Alta California. During the early period of Mexican independence, the state faced internal conflicts that consumed the attention of politicians and military leaders in central Mexico.¹² Northern roads and those that went into what is now the United States fell into disrepair. Indigenous groups who had for centuries combatted the presence of Europeans, mainly Spaniards, made land travel between Mexico City and Alta California nearly impossible. Communication was reduced to annual or biannual ships from ports such as Acapulco. In some years, Mexican ships failed to arrive at all.¹³ As a result, the salaries of *padres* and soldiers were compromised.¹⁴ Due to the economic issues that emerged in the 1830s, state officials in California secularized the missions. While sold as a

⁹ A noteworthy documentary that discusses this shift in economic thinking is *Why the Industrial Revolution Happened Here* (2019), which was presented by and mostly written by historian Jeremy Black for the BBC, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pz9d6>.

¹⁰ Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technologies, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 7.

¹¹ See: Cara New Daggett, *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, & Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

¹² See: Timothy J. Henderson, *The Mexican Wars for Independence*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009); Will Fowler, *Santa Anna of Mexico*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

¹³ See: Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886).

¹⁴ Hackel, “Land, Labor, and Production,” p. 129.

modernizing transition, the change proved to be a chaotic land grab by officials and ranchers who were mostly the same people.

The end of some of Spain's mercantilist policies during the early Mexican period opened up much of the Spanish Americas to those from the United States for the first time, bringing about a wave of new travelers and immigrants. Through legal and illegal means, Californios expanded their trade, as limited as it still was, with British, U.S., French, and Russian agents.¹⁵ These foreign powers had already become more active in the region, and this trend would only continue to increase. This shift brought much more attention from U.S. business leaders, politicians, and the general public. The U.S. population had expanded significantly during the late 1700s and early 1800s and was relatively literate. As a result, settlers and business interests increasingly moved west, often justifying their invasion on rationalizations formed around racism, and increasingly a form of scientific and environmental racism that argued that non-white, non-Anglo peoples failed to use nature appropriately. As historian Reginald Horsman describes, Americans were willing to accept new scientific interpretations that gave "justification for the seemingly ruthless appropriation of both Indian and Mexican land."¹⁶

Americans had little understanding of California until reports, visits, and immigration became more common during the "Mexican Era" from 1822 to 1846. The opening of what was previously the Spanish Americas to foreigners sparked a significant increase in foreign visitation, mainly from scientists and travel writers, but in what is now the United States, also from whalers and emigrants. This uptick in foreign traffic increased U.S. reports on the region. In turn, interest began to peak in regards to the economic potential of California and specifically about how the region would be in better hands with the U.S. government controlling it. As Andrea Wulf mentions in *The Invention of Nature*, control of nature had begun to take hold around the rise of industrialism. With innovations such as the steam engine and vaccinations against diseases like smallpox, humankind began to lose their inherent fear of nature, thus creating new outlooks on the fundamental idea of what nature is as an entity.¹⁷

Humboldt's ideas on resource acquisition would play into how the American thought processes of expansion and colonialism worked. As described by Wulf, colonialism became interwoven with man's relationship with nature and the exploitation of natural resources.¹⁸ Not only did conquest act as a measure of exploiting natural resources, but also as a way of civilizing the land and its inhabitants to fit a perceived idea of what nature should be. This is explored by Donald Worster, who notes that by 1860, a fierce determination was created to ensure this "civilizing" process stuck

¹⁵ Hackel, "Land, Labor, and Production," pp. 129-31.

¹⁶ Reginald Horsman, "Scientific Racism and the American Indian in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Quarterly*, 27:2 (1975): p. 153.

¹⁷ Andrea Wulf, *The Invention of Nature*, (New York Vintage, 2016), p. 17.

¹⁸ Wulf, *The Invention of Nature*, pp. 123-124.

permanently. This resulted in increasingly violent and predatory actions that could be seen developing during the start of the nineteenth century and even before. Through the explorations of men like Charles Darwin, who described groups of people as “savages,” a new perspective of civilizing the uncivilized emerged that went hand in hand with the Enlightenment.¹⁹

The popularization of scientific expeditions during this period increased public attention to Western expansion, allowing for an increased desire to acquire land in pursuit of material and scientific gain. These thought patterns were driven by key scientific moments like the Scientific Revolution. Through these accounts, the popularization of science emerged, allowing the language of science to bleed into everyday life. These progressions in linear thought emerged from the new scientific classifications of the eighteenth century. As stated by Horsman, “those interested in the science of man were able by comparative methods to establish reasons for superiority and inferiority; an essential shift in emphasis occurred when arguments about the inferiority of other ‘races’ assumed an importance as great or even greater than arguments about the excellence of Caucasians or elite groups within the Caucasian race.”²⁰ Through this assessment, scientific racism emerged out of a desire to categorize and justify European conquest. This was a byproduct of Enlightenment secularization that allowed for flourishing scientific modeling to occur that promoted classification. This system of classification eventually bled into the question of race.²¹ By using this mode of thought, American expansion would justify itself as a byproduct of its superiority backed by this new model of scientific standards. This model influenced everything from the machines that propelled expansion to the philosophy behind it. As mentioned by Antonia I. Castañeda, concepts such as Social Darwinism “used scientific theory to rationalize Nordic racial superiority and male sexual supremacy,” which also illustrated that “a society’s degree could be judged by the status and character of its women.”²² Writers who focused on California thus also zoomed in on the “negative qualities” of Mexicans, with prominent historian Hubert Howe Bancroft himself labeling them as mongrels and especially attacking Mexican women with increasingly contradictory statements that summarized them as “dunces and drudges.”²³

When examining and discussing California, most American writers focused on a mixture of the perceived natural resources in the region and traits of the people, which easily played into newer forms of scientific racism that were also a sort of environmental racism. Writer Winslow Florence discussed the traits by describing the land as “vast systems of irrigation to his hills, with cattle, his

¹⁹ Wulf, *The Invention of Nature*, pp. 170-172.

²⁰ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 44-47.

²¹ Horsman, “*Race and Manifest Destiny*,” pp. 44-47.

²² Antonia Castañeda, “Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women In the Historiography of Frontier California,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 11:1 (1990): p. 9.

²³ Castañeda, “Gender, Race, and Culture,” p. 10.

vineyards with grapes and his field with bread to the native uncivilized but gentle California Indian.”²⁴ While taking place well after the Mexican-American War, Florence’s writings characterize the century-spanning rhetoric that played off racist assumptions about the inhabitants of the region. Reports during this period established claims that the Mexican authorities were not capable of developing California, stating that “the Mexicans will never muster enterprise and industry enough to settle and subdue the country.”²⁵ While noting the vast economic potential from the soil to the peltries, many different U.S. outlets reported that unless a more “Industrious and thrifty race” takes over the region, no real progress could be made in California.²⁶ Another essay stated that “[the] Californian will not work if he can avoid it.”²⁷ This language ignored the very real labor and talents of Californio people by claiming it was less valuable because it was less technical and standardized than the U.S. work habits increasingly shaped by the regimentation of the Industrial Revolution. This line of thought born out of the standardization of the Industrial Revolution altered how progress came to be viewed and thus allowed specific narratives to emerge. Categorization along the lines of efficiency and superiority increasingly became used to justify resource takeover, justifying it as a good outcome for the world’s prosperity. These systems were thus instrumental in creating a system of belief that most people lacked the innate abilities to take advantage of free institutions and were destined to be permanently inferior to the “Anglo-Saxon race.”²⁸

By molding a narrative that the Mexican government was not using the resources of California correctly, reports of this nature allowed for the spread of newer forms of racism based less solely on religious justifications and increasingly on technological development and land use. Americans began to combine both forms of prejudice. Constantly stating that land was used inefficiently was code for scientific racism. These blanket statements that land was not being used as productively as possible came from European thoughts about control over nature and, as Adas states, provided Western justifications for dominance by using new developments in science and technology that supposedly “proved that European mode of thought and social organization corresponded much more closely to the underlying realities of the Universe.”²⁹

Most reports on California’s bounty not surprisingly spent time and space emphasizing the region’s horticultural potential. Travelers brought California wheat kernels back to Vermont, where some growers reported better yields.³⁰ A variety of reporters also emphasized the productive nature of

²⁴ Winslow Florence, “Bits of Alta California,” *Outlook* (1900): p. 792.

²⁵ “California,” *Family Magazine* (1840): p. 559.

²⁶ “Picture of California,” *New York Organ & Temperance Safeguard* (1849): p. 274.

²⁷ “California,” *Times & Seasons*, (1845): p. 1070.

²⁸ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, pp. 229-230.

²⁹ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, p. 7.

³⁰ “California Wheat,” *Yankee Farmer* (1841): p. 331.

the soil of the region as well with the land producing “wheat even to one hundredfold.”³¹ The fertility of California’s soil became a highlight in many reporters’ narratives about the region, giving the perception that the region had great agricultural potential that U.S. citizens could take advantage of in the long term. Early travelers in California, such as Edwin Bryant, a newspaper editor who called the area “a country of great fertility and beauty,” described a variety of crops heralded as far superior to other varieties found in the United States.³² Many reports, for example, talked about the perceived superiority of California wheat. Other crops received praise as well. Corn was a crop that reports such as the article written by *The Farmer & Gardner* mentioned. This particular essay noted that the California corn kernel “is well worth the attention of our agriculturists” and that “the yield is good and the stalks one or two feet higher than our common corn.”³³

Other travelers made a note of the rich vineyards first established by missionaries. One writer argued that the “[California] grape flourishes in unequalled luxuriousness...California resembles the wine country of Europe.”³⁴ This language, too, played into racist notions based on productivity. In this track of thought, the land in California was inherently compatible with Europeans because of its European-like characteristics. The issue for many American authors was that the region was not full of “productive” Europeans and was instead left to languish in the hands of Indigenous peoples and mixed-race people who, to them, were “inherently inferior” in organization and technical abilities.

Another interest of U.S. authors was California’s rich history of animal husbandry, particularly with cattle and horses. In 1773, Spanish explorers Juan Bautista de Anza and Gaspar de Portola brought the first cattle to California, having brought approximately 200 Spanish longhorns to help supply missions.³⁵ There were hundreds of thousands of head of cattle by the time of the U.S. conquest in the 1840s. These established cattle populations were discovered and widely discussed as reports mentioned a great variety of both tame and wild animals as early as 1778 when the economic potential of the region was just beginning to be discovered by Americans.³⁶ From these reports, it can be established that widespread economic interest along the western coast had begun to develop before westward expansion had, with reports of animal husbandry fueling this. While earlier reports focused

³¹ “Remarkable Country,” *Harbinger* (1845): p. 336.

³² Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 277. The book was originally published in 1848 by D. Appleton & Company.

³³ “California Corn,” *The Farmer & Gardner* (1838): p. 250.

³⁴ “Picture of California,” *New-York Organ & Temperance Safeguard* (1849): p. 274.

³⁵ California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, “Cattle in California History” (2014), https://cdn.agclassroom.org/ca/resources/lesson/bon_lesson1.pdf

³⁶ “Spanish Dominions in North America, New Mexico, Including California,” *Lady’s Magazine*, (1778): p. 97.

less on California and provided more insight into the western coast overall, they clearly indicate American economic interest in expanding westward.

Americans obtained and distributed wildly varied accounts of what type of cattle existed in California. One 1835 article called the increase in “black cattle” to be “prodigious.” Its author claimed that in 1827, there were 210,000 branded cattle and upwards of 310,000 unbranded cattle and that 60,000 cattle had to be slaughtered each year just to keep down their numbers.³⁷ In 1844, a writer for *The Farmer’s Monthly Visitor* stated:

I need not remark that, as a grazing country, it cannot be surpassed...the whole country is literally covered with immense herds of cattle and horses. The farmers have generally from 1,000 to 20,000 head of cattle, and usually as many horses. Cattle are usually worth 1 to 2 dollars per head, horses from 2 to 10 dollars per head. In many parts of the country, any person who has no cattle, wishing to procure beef, is at liberty to kill as many cattle as he pleases, without regard to owners, provided he delivers the hide to the owner.³⁸

Most U.S. writers noted that the Californios based much of their economy on cattle hides and tallow. Often, cattle were slaughtered solely for the hides. The hides had become such a dominant and stable form of exchange that traders frequently referred to them as “California banknotes.”³⁹ British and U.S. traders sold California hides and the tallow along the Pacific coast of Latin America, the Hawaiian Islands, and China. They also brought them back to their own Atlantic ports.⁴⁰ In doing so, U.S. traders found ample sources to exploit further and expand the economic markets of the eastern United States.

Many of the same U.S. writers who praised California’s real and potential wealth also denigrated Californios. While they used various forms of racism, one of the most common was focused on their “inefficient” use of the land. Periodicals and newspapers regularly referred to California as non-white, a land of “Indians, mixed breeds, and negroes” — a “mixture of every color, description, and grade.”⁴¹ While many Americans today appreciate and celebrate racial, ethnic, and other forms of diversity, the “coloring” of California was a derogatory practice among white U.S. reporters at the time. These conceptions of land use and racist rhetoric were directly tied to the aforementioned changing

³⁷ “California,” *Army & Navy Chronicle*, (1835): p. 171.

³⁸ A Pioneer, “Upper California,” (1844): p. 66.

³⁹ Bruno Fritzsche, “‘On Liberal Terms’: The Boston Hide-Merchants in California,” *The Business History Review* 42:4 (1968): p. 479.

⁴⁰ Bruno Fritzsche, “‘On Liberal Terms’: The Boston Hide-Merchants in California,” p. 479. Also see Hackel, “Land, Labor, and Production,” pp. 129-36; Adele Ogden, “Hide and Tallow: McCulloch, Hartnell, and Company, 1822-1828,” *California Historical Society* 6:3 (1927): pp. 254-64.

⁴¹ A Pioneer, “Upper California,” p. 66.

ideas on the “right way” to use resources. California’s resources thus acted as a catalyst for the economic takeover of the region. The United States justified this expansion by accusing Mexican officials of corruption, claiming that with the United States in charge of the land, it would “rapidly advance and improve, both in agriculture and commerce, as revenue laws will be the same in California as in all other parts of the United States..affording them all manufactures and produce of the United States.”⁴² Justifications for imperial expansion were thus centered around the ideas of productivity and the proper use of nature. This itself was fueled by new modes of thought that justified U.S. policymakers’ expansion into foreign lands to pursue more land for themselves. This created an environment where further expeditions into the region were supported, whether economic, military, or scientific ventures.

American writers also praised the bays and harbors of Alta California. The ports, they discovered, were large and provided contact and trade with foreign entities, fueling U.S. interest in the region. The bays of California, in many reports, were described as fine and “capacious.”⁴³ Reports of San Francisco’s bay especially proved to garner interest. The bay was reported to be “one of the largest and most splendid in the world.”⁴⁴ A writer for the *New York Evangelist*, an abolitionist-focused periodical, stated, “The entrance is between two highlands and about the width of the Narrows at Staten Island. The bay is more than 100 miles in length and I should judge from 6 to 8 in width it is protected in every direction from the winds, has a good bottom for anchorage, and is capable of containing with perfect safety all the navies of the world.”⁴⁵ Many accounts detailed the beneficial nature of the ports commercially, but notably also for the sake of bolstering the naval power of the United States, a foreshadowing of the larger discussions about U.S. empire and sea power that fueled U.S. expansionism in the last decades of the nineteenth century and first decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ The periodical *Times & Seasons*, for example, noted that “words cannot express the advantage and importance of San Francisco to a naval power.”⁴⁷ U.S. interests began to extend past purely commercial interests and into military ones. Again, the argument was that Californios were not taking advantage of these ports to build a sea fleet and extend their power because it was against their very nature. Americans began to argue that it was their duty to make sure that the ports and maritime

⁴² *War With Mexico*, *Niles’ National Register*, 21:6 (1846): p. 87.

⁴³ “California,” *Sailor’s Magazine & Naval Journal*, (1840): p. 307.

⁴⁴ “The Bay of California,” *New York Evangelist*, (1841): p. 108.

⁴⁵ “The Bay of California,” *New York Evangelist*, (1841): p. 108.

⁴⁶ The most popular and influential work on the topic from this era is Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1898).

⁴⁷ “California,” *Times & Seasons*, (1845): p. 1069.

resources were in the hands of people who could exploit them better; In other words, their hands.⁴⁸ Many reports mentioned the vast ports as a critical component of future U.S. business ventures in the region. As Commodore John Drake Sloat wrote in 1846, the region was inherently necessary for “our extensive whaling interest in that quarter.”⁴⁹ Statements such as these proved a longstanding desire for economic expansion that spilled over into the Mexican-American War.

In many ways, this began a new systematic approach to expanding the U.S. empire throughout the Pacific. The need for ports became a priority as U.S. officials expanded Manifest Destiny to a global scale. The acquisition of ports was the catalyst for rapid expansion from a continental empire to a new form of sea empire in the early twentieth century.⁵⁰ Places such as Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and the Philippines became the next landing zones for American officials attempting to expand U.S. power while carrying out the “white man’s burden.” Concepts that emerged during the takeover of California would later be used as a model for U.S. imperial expansion with lasting consequences into modernity.

U.S. travelers, business leaders, and government agents discovering the economic potential of California began to use new forms of scientific racism based on the productivity of land use as a contributing factor to enact a more aggressive form of expansionism in the following decades in an attempt to gain control of California. This new line of scientific racism not only affected Mexican California but went on to be the justification for the introduction of a new form of global imperialism led primarily by countries such as the United States. To spread their influence to gain resources under the guise of moral and technological superiority, the United States used thought processes that emerged from the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution to justify a crusade of civilizing those outside considered “inferior” in the light of its aforementioned Western thought patterns.

⁴⁸ Americans also displayed interest in Baja California and its pearling industry, viewing it as a potential trade opportunity with China. See “Western Trade with Asia,” *National Recorder*, (1819): p. 324. For more on early pearl fisheries, see Micheline Cariño and Mario Monteforte, “An Environmental History of Nacre and Pearls: Fisheries, Cultivation and Commerce,” *Global Environment* vol. 3 (2009): pp. 48-71.

⁴⁹ Merchant of New York, *Naval and Mercantile Biography: Commodore John Drake Sloate*, *The Merchants’ Magazine and Commercial Review*, 15:5 (1846): p. 446.

⁵⁰ For more information, see Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion*, (New York: Random House Inc, 2008), pp. 305-317. Also see Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).