



The War and Westward Expansion

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With Federal resources focused on waging the war farther east, both native tribes and the Confederacy attempted to claim or reclaim lands west of the Mississippi. The Federal government responded with measures (Homestead Act, transcontinental railroad) and military campaigns designed to encourage settlement, solidify Union control of the trans-Mississippi West, and further marginalize the physical and cultural presence of tribes native to the West.

Although advanced under the mantle of protection, the nation's American Indian population in the West bore the cost of the westward-looking military and political undertakings.

On February 13, 1861, word of secession and the specter of civil war troubled a young U.S. Army captain. "I myself come from a Union loving State," Virginia's George Pickett wrote his commander on February 13 from San Juan Island, a remote Washington Territory encampment in the extreme northwestern corner of the United States, "but matters are taking such phase at present that she and the other border territory States . . . can not make their voices heard. . . . On the other hand, I do not like to be bullied nor dragged out of the Union by the precipitory [sic] and indecent haste of South Carolina. Write me what you think the best course to pursue in case of a break up. . . . What will we do with the public property and funds[?] In some cases there might be a general scramble."



Detail from Emmanuel Leutze's mural study Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way which celebrates the idea of Manifest Destiny just when the Civil War threatened the republic.
Architect of the Capitol

Two days later, in remote New Mexico Territory, Manuelito, Armijo, Ganado Mucho, and other Navajo chieftains ended a gathering with U.S. Army officers near Fort Fauntleroy.. Recognizing the "reduced and impoverished condition of the [Navajo] Nation", Col. Edward R.S. Canby wrote of concluding a treaty that pledged support and protection but "required the Chiefs to collect their people and establish them in designated localities where they will be under the observation and control not only of the chiefs but of the troops." Canby eschewed the "most extensive conditions" directed by instructions with an eye "to place the affairs of this people in a condition that will lead as speedily as possible to the permanent settlement of all questions with them."

Across the continent, Emanuel Leutze, an artist and German immigrant, labored in his New York City studio on the final stages of a mural study commissioned by the U.S. Congress Entitled Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way, his triumphant vision featured rugged, white, rifle-carrying pioneers

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guiding covered wagon trains of American settlers across a perilous mountain ridge, away from the dark and death of the East toward the heralding light of the West. Consciously, Leutze was crafting his work to embody the popular perception of what he termed the "grand peaceful conquest of the great West."

Viewed independently, these concurrent, geographically disparate episodes provide a glimpse into the regional zeitgeist - the spirit of the time - on the eve of the outbreak of war. Viewed collectively, they speak to a broader, core concern of the era: the desire for protection and security. Exacerbated by the country's crumbling harmony, concern for safety and stability flooded all corners of the fledgling nation in early 1861. As war erupted, oft-conflicting interpretations of protection presented distinctive challenges to those living, working, or with interests in what was then known as the Far West. Spurred by a desire to retain the western states and territories within the Union, the federal government's responses to these perceptions helped redefine the Western Movement and shaped the area's future for decades to come.

Until the eve of the Civil War, the Westward Movement was Manifest Destiny incarnate; as such, it was consistently popularized as an East-to-West phenomenon. As unabashedly romanticized in Leutze's 1861 mural study, established routes -including the Oregon, California and Santa Fe Trails - siphoned settlers and miners westward . In response to calls for their protection from the American Indians, the federal government responded by establishing frontier and coastal forts garrisoned by Regular Army soldiers. By 1861, almost 75% of the Army's soldiers served at dozens of posts west of the Mississippi River, ranging from Pickett's post in Washington Territory to Fort Point in California's San Francisco Bay to forts scattered throughout the Southwest. The civil war brought dramatic change to these outposts. Shortly before the bombardment of Fort Sumter, U.S. Army responsibility for national protection and security set in motion an unprecedented eastward movement of soldiers and equipment.

Originally meant to protect the interests of a minority of settlers and miners, these soldiers were ill-positioned for guaranteeing the well being of nearly 97% of the U.S. population that resided east of the Missouri River. These regular soldiers were spirited east as quickly as possible. With more than 10,000 soldiers serving in the western posts, this eastward movement triggered concerns over security for those left behind. President Abraham Lincoln soon authorized raising of volunteers within the states and territories "to aid in enforcing the laws and protecting public property," to replace many of the departing Regular Army soldiers and established additional forts to protect new interests. California, for example, quickly raised an infantry regiment and five cavalry companies "for the protection of the Overland Mail Route between California and the Eastern States, by way of Salt Lake City."

Such concern for security was warranted, particularly in areas with populations sympathetic to the Confederacy or with interests in forging an independent Pacific Republic. Caches of U.S. arms and ammunition in western arsenals attracted special attention. In Oregon and Washington Territory, pro-Union citizens exposed a plot hatched by "conspiring traitors" to capture the arsenal at Fort Vancouver. . On February 16, faced with a hostile state militia, Gen. David Twiggs agreed to evacuate all federal troops from Texas, and surrendered federal buildings, the arsenal, and military stores valued at \$1 million to the state. Confederate forces seized several other arsenals in Arkansas, and Louisiana as well.

The Confederacy was quick to realize the value of the Southwest . Using Texas as a base, the Confederate plan focused on dislodging Union forces from the Southwest and continuing north to the resource-rich mines of Colorado, and possibly on to the California gold fields. Wending across Texas and then north along the Rio Grande, forces under the newly-minted Confederate Gen. Henry Hopkins Sibley outmaneuvered Canby's Anglo and Native New Mexican volunteers at Valverde, occupying both Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Only Fort Union in front and an isolated Fort Craig behind challenged Sibley's plan; that was, until the swift winter march of volunteers - known as Pike's Peakers - from Colorado Territory, commanded by Col. John P. Slough came to the rescue. Alarmed by word of Sibley's progress, Slough's men raced southward. At Fort Union, they gained additional strength from the garrison and followed the Santa Fe Trail toward the occupied cities. At the same time, Confederate forces under Col. William R. Scurry followed the trail east from Santa Fe, setting the two armies on a collision course.

While the fighting in the subsequent battle - known as Glorieta Pass and heralded since as the "Gettysburg of the West" - was fierce but inconclusive, it was the actions of a detachment under Maj. John Chivington, guided by Lt. Col. Manuel Chaves and his native New Mexico Volunteers, that

ended the threat of a Confederate West. Chaves led Chivington's troops west across mountainous terrain in an effort to flank the Confederates. Reaching a 200-foot cliff and finding the enemy supply train below lightly guarded, Chivington's men scrambled down and destroyed everything - more than 80 wagons and 500 mules and horses. The Confederate Army left New Mexico, retreating south and east to San Antonio. Weeks later, the California Column of Union troops moved eastward from the Pacific to Tucson along the overland stagecoach route, skirmishing with Confederates at Pichaco Pass (in present day Arizona), the war's westernmost battle. After other western campaigns, culminating in the Confederate defeat at the Arkansas battle of Pea Ridge in 1862, the Confederacy was never again to provide a viable risk to the southwest.

Military action was but one tool of the federal government's wartime strategy in the West. Secession initiated much change, including the elimination of Southern Congressional opposition to Republican supported "internal improvement" projects aimed at more tightly binding western states and territories to the Union. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 allotted 30,000 acres of land for the establishment of land grant colleges in each state remaining in the Union. While focused on agriculture and mechanical arts, inclusion of the teaching of military tactics buttressed the final act. The Homestead Act of 1862 - designed, in part, to free eastern families from poverty and overcrowding - allowed any citizen or citizenship-seeker who had not borne arms against the government to lay claim to 160 acres of available public land, provided he lived on it for five years or paid \$1.25 per acre after a six month residency. The Pacific Railway Act of 1862 and subsequent amendments provided aid for construction of a transcontinental railroad and telegraph line - aid in the form of generous land grants (in some instances, up to ten miles for every mile of track laid) and government bonds to the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroad companies. "The proposition is a plain one," exclaimed John R. Barret, a U.S. representative from Missouri, "and any business man must see how, by this great measure, our brethren on the Pacific slope can be protected and accommodated, our nation furnished with a necessary defense; our commerce promoted, and the most economical means provided for transportation of mails, munitions of war."

The benefit of a supportive political atmosphere was not lost on President Lincoln; he played an active role in propagating an environment where the Union would be sustained, his supporters would be rewarded, and, where possible, Republican political views could be advanced. Territorial patronage was a vital tool for Lincoln. The ability to appoint men of his choice to key territorial roles - such as governors, secretaries, federal district judgeships, land office commissioners, and territorial marshals - served not only to recognize those who had lent support to him but also to institutionalize support for the issues he valued. With seven western territories ripe for patronage appointments in 1861, Lincoln predominantly named Republican supporters - known pejoratively as "The Tribe of Abraham" - to the territories' thirty-five prime positions and dozens of others. These included gubernatorial nominees William Gilpin of Colorado Territory and William Jayne of Dakota Territory, who both supported federal financing of the transcontinental railroad.

Although advanced under the mantle of protection, the nation's American Indian population in the West bore the cost of these military and political undertakings, which accelerated the dispossession of American Indians and threatened the security of their lands, property, culture, and core existence. American Indian tribal response was as complex as it was individualized. Few actively sought war, but concerns for safety often led to conflict, while some saw the war as an opportunity to protect or reclaim traditional lands and reassert sovereignty. The Indian Territory's Five Civilized Nations, for example, raised over 5,000 soldiers who fought for the Confederacy at battles including Pea Ridge. Forced northward into Kansas, after refusing to align with the Confederacy, other Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, and Creeks fought Confederates - including their own tribal members - as the Union Indian Brigade.

With the enactment of political initiatives aimed at encouraging white settlement, the role of implementation often fell to the volunteer units who had replaced soldiers of the Regular Army. Although far from advocates of preserving American Indian culture, prior to the war Regular Army units had occasionally served a moderating role between settler and American Indian interests.. The western volunteers filling in behind the Regular Army soldiers were of a distinctly different mettle. As one officer noted, they were men "made of stern stuff. . . inured to mountain life. . . pioneers and miners; men self-reliant and enduring" but also prone to have "advocated the extermination of the Indians." Although overwhelmingly white, including some from the western Jewish population, many were Hispanic, others were African American, and still others were American Indian. A number-known as "galvanized Yankees" - were former Confederates who swore allegiance to the Union. As residents of the West, they possessed a more vested interest in issues that encouraged settlement and internal improvements, and many took an active, aggressive role in protecting these interests.

Examples of the resulting aggressions are rife. In addition to the Bear River Massacre inflicted by California Volunteers on Shoshones in Washington Territory in 1863, in 1864, Col. Chivington led Colorado and New Mexico Volunteers in "a foul and dastardly massacre" of Arapahos and Cheyennes, primarily women and children. Later investigators found that he had, "surprised and murdered, in cold blood, the unsuspecting men, women, and children on Sand Creek, who had every reason to believe they were under the protection of the United States authorities," and then "returned to Denver and boasted of the brave deed he and the men under his command had performed." Other actions were more complex. Despite Canby's efforts in 1861, a "permanent peace" with the Navajo did not occur. Three years later, his replacement sent Kit Carson and his native New Mexico Volunteers on a scorched earth campaign against the Navajo that resulted in their relocation via the tragic Long Walk to Bosque Redondo.

By war's end, federal actions to encourage white settlement in the West and more tightly bind the western territories to the Union were institutionalized and gathering momentum. The Morrill Act, the Homestead Act, and the Pacific Railroad Act, aimed at fomenting and sustaining access to the West's vast acreage, as well as President Lincoln's use of territorial appointments preserved the Union, and - in many cases - placed like-minded supporters in positions to uphold and continue these programs. Initially, the vacuum created by Regular Army troops relocating eastward lessened the government's ability to shield westward expansion, but volunteer units soon filled, sometimes aggressively, the military's role and presence in the West.

This all came at an extraordinary cost - the dispossession of the West's American Indians. In the expansionist Civil War-era, Federal American Indian policies often resulted in violated treaties, violence, and the end of access to traditional lands, trade and migratory routes, water, food sources, and cultural practices. Weeks before the war's end in 1865, word of the Sand Creek Massacre and other offenses against American Indians finally triggered broader indignation. "The dealings of this nation toward the Indians," editorialized the New York Times, "form one of the most disgraceful chapters in modern history." This stimulated a congressional inquiry, led by Senator James R. Doolittle, who began a two-year investigation scrutinizing federal management of Indian affairs. It determined that "[t]he Indians everywhere. . . are rapidly decreasing in numbers from various causes: By disease; by intemperance; by wars, among themselves and with the whites; by the steady and resistless emigration of white men into the territories of the west, which, confining the Indians to still narrower limits, destroys that game which, in their normal state, constitutes their principal means of subsistence; and by the irrepressible conflict between a superior and an inferior race when brought in presence of each other." Such observations came too late, though. Mirroring Emanuel Leutze's mural study, the federal government's perceptions of protection had already helped redefine and accelerate the Western Movement and shape the region's future for decades to come. By the end of the war, the foundation for a distinctly different West had been laid.

This essay is taken from *The Civil War Remembered*, published by the National Park Service and Eastern National. This richly illustrated handbook is available in many national park bookstores or may be purchased online from Eastern at www.eparks.com/store.

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Last Updated: 06/10/2013