

Spoils of War:
Development and Dispossession in the American Southwest

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Introduction

The American Civil War is generally remembered as a military campaign to preserve the Union and, following the Emancipation Proclamation, a struggle to end slavery. Such a pivotal event in our history, however, altered the development of the United States in ways that we are still attempting to understand today. Nowhere were these reverberating effects felt more strongly than in the American Southwest, which was, with the most important questions of its identity answered by the Union victory in the Civil War, made available for settlement by the masses and for development by the wealthy. Civil war policies and outcomes prohibited black slavery in the Southwest and excluded native peoples from having a primary role in its development. These policies also brought the region under the control of northern Capitalists, many of whom were former Civil War officers and soldiers, and the Southwest quickly became an important component of America's expanding empire.

The end of the war and the opening of the West led to a dramatic shift in the country's economic and industrial trajectory in the following decades, which began even as the first shots of the war were being fired. Expansion into the West, an important objective of the Republican Party, quickly became a priority in the national legislature when Southern lawmakers left their posts as their states seceded from the union. The Homestead Act, the Morrill Land Grant Act, and the Pacific Railroad Act were Republican policies that would not have been possible with Southerner lawmakers still in office, and they had a dramatic effect on Western development. The Homestead Act allowed applicants to acquire government land within the public domain, the Morrill Land Grant Act created land-grant colleges in the United States through the proceeds of federal land sales, and the Pacific Railroad Act promoted the construction of infrastructure in the West by authorizing government bonds and issuing land grants to private companies. It was the

Pacific Railroad Act in particular that led to the development of America's first transcontinental railroad and had the greatest immediate and lasting impact on investment, development, and industrialization in the American Southwest.

The nearly 2000-mile Transcontinental Railroad was completed on May 10, 1869, providing a freight and passenger line from the California coast to the major metropolitan areas of the Eastern US. This new route allowed people, and more importantly products, to travel distances in a few days that would have previously taken weeks or months. The great cities of the East, with numerous factories, large populations, and seaports to Europe were a ready market for raw goods and products that could be extracted or produced in the vast open spaces of the West. Thousands of Americans attempted to make their fortune, or at least a living, off of the vast untapped resources that western promoters promised. What they often found, however, were perilous mountain ranges, hostile natives, and inhospitable deserts, and before long they were forced to take menial low-wage jobs or simply go home. Success in the West required railroads, railroads required significant financial investment, and investment required promoters, speculators, bankers, lawyers, and developers. These Western capitalists, supported by policies set in place as a result of the Civil War, transformed the economic system and demographic composition of the American Southwest, and laid the foundation of the diverse multi-national culture that exists in the region today.

Geographic Scope

This assessment of Southwestern development focuses primarily on the region along the Arkansas River in Colorado southward into New Mexico, the northernmost region of Mexico that was ceded to the US in 1848 following the Mexican-American War. This was the site of several Spanish-Mexican land grants that were acquired by American land developers including

the Los Luceros, Sangre de Cristo, Nolan, and Las Animas grants, among others. This region includes present-day Pueblo, Walsenburg, and Trinidad to the east, the San Juan Mountains to the West, the Arkansas River to the north, and Taos, New Mexico to the south. These boundaries are significant because they outlined an area once comprised almost entirely of Mexican grant lands, which allowed this region to develop differently from other parts of the West due to its exclusion from the Homestead program. This is also land that was ultimately developed primarily by the Denver and Rio Grande Railway and its successor companies, though other railroads and fuel companies competed for land, resources, and workers in the region.

Academic Scope

This analysis examines how these lands were acquired by outside investors and developers, and how a large section of the American Southwest was transformed from poor farming villages and remote trading posts in the 1840s into an industrial stronghold by the 1890s. The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, combined with forces set in motion from the US victory in the Mexican-American War, fundamentally transformed the Southwest. The Upper Rio Grande and Arkansas River valleys, a borderland region between Mexico and the United States before the Mexican-American War, are of particular interest in this regard. This region included those Spanish-Mexican land grants that the US agreed to honor following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 but were litigated into the hands of US and foreign capitalists by 1872, though not without significant resistance. How did this change occur? How successful were eastern and European capitalists in achieving their goals? How successful were local efforts to resist encroachment in the region? This analysis seeks to answer these questions and explain the effect that Civil War-Era policies had on the American Southwest in the following decades. It should also be noted that the term “American” in this analysis refers specifically to people from

the United States. It is only used for colloquial purposes and is not meant to suggest one group is more or less “American” than any other.

Historiography

The study of the Southwest has been approached from two general directions; one that analyzes the region from a west-facing Anglo-American perspective, and another from the perspective of indigenous peoples and Hispanos, who endured decades of US-driven settlement on their lands. The same is true for the study of this particular region. The most comprehensive analysis of Mexican grant lands to date was produced by former Colorado State Archivist Herbert Oliver Brayer in 1949. His books, titled *William Blackmore: The Spanish-Mexican Land Grants* and *William Blackmore: Early Financing of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad*, focus primarily on British “promoter-capitalist” William Blackmore. These two volumes provide straightforward factual information and are relied on heavily for certain aspects of this analysis. H. Lee Scamehorn expanded on Brayer’s analysis almost thirty years later in his books *Pioneer Steelmaker in the West* and *Mill and Mine*. These works trace the roots of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company (CF&I), which became the largest employer, and the largest owner of land and water rights in the state of Colorado.

Other books, such as Richard L. Nostrand’s *The Hispano Homeland* and Andrés Reséndez’s *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America*, have been important in providing Hispano and Native American perspectives to the study of the region. Their work follows the paths of Hispano and native peoples from their earliest settlements and hunting grounds, explaining where the earliest Spanish settlers came from and how they came to inhabit the land of the Upper Rio Grande Valley. Nostrand describes the Hispano economic system that existed before the Civil War and explains many of the changes

that they were forced to endure as settlers and developers encroached on their lands. Reséndez and other indigenous scholars explore native life and native slavery in the American Southwest. The enslavement of indigenous people was prevalent in the New Mexican grant lands, practiced by Hispanos, Americans, and even other natives, and it endured for decades after black slavery was abolished following the Civil War. This paper seeks to present American, Hispano, and Native perspectives, and highlight the appearance of European immigrants by the end of the nineteenth century to show that the region developed in response to a number of different voices.

Early History and Background

The Upper Rio Grande and Arkansas River valleys were important hunting and transportation corridors for inhabitants of the region going back thousands of years. The most recent to call these lands home before the arrival of Europeans were Pueblo Indians, agriculturalists who grew crops such as corn, beans, and squash in the Upper Rio Grande Valley, along with several nomadic tribes including bands from the Ute and Navajo nations who hunted game and foraged for other foods across western lands. The sedentary Pueblos numbered into the thousands by the late 1500s, cultivating small plots of the region's best farmland. Though they were farmers they had no sense of ownership over either land or water, and irrigation systems were held communally and even shared across various tribes in the region.¹ Their nomadic counterparts followed elk and other wild game into the San Luis Valley to the north for thousands of years on foot, and continued to do so on horseback when the first Americans arrived from the east. Though they are believed to have been peaceful throughout much of their history, by 1848 the Utes of the valley were “well-defined and warlike,” and were a continuous

¹ Alvar W. Carlson, “Spanish-American Acquisition of Cropland within the Northern Pueblo Indian Grants,” *New Mexico Ethnohistory* 22, No. 2 (Spring, 1975), 96.

source of aggravation for Spanish, Mexican, and American settlers until they were finally forced into a peace treaty in 1868.²

The first attempt to colonize the Upper Rio Grande Valley was led by Spanish explorer Juan de Oñate in 1598. Unlike previous military expeditions that sought gold in North America, such as Coronado's famous failure to find the Seven Cities of Gold in 1542, Oñate brought men, women, children, missionaries, and domestic servants north from Mexico to settle the region.³ This initial colonization effort led to the issuance of as many as one hundred "encomiendas," small grants of land awarded to soldiers and settlers by Oñate on behalf of the Spanish Crown, and the establishment or occupation of several small towns along the Rio Grande.⁴ The expedition itself, however, turned disastrous in October 1598 when a group of Oñate's men demanded supplies from the Acoma Pueblo, supplies that the Acoma needed to survive the coming winter. The Acoma resisted, taking up arms against the Spanish in a fight in which eleven Spaniards were killed. Oñate condemned the conflict as an uprising and ordered their village destroyed in an offensive known as the "Acoma Massacre." Around 800 Acoma died in the struggle, and roughly 500 survivors were forced into slavery, with all men older than 25 having one of their feet amputated.⁵

As chaotic as this early attempt at colonization was it opened the door for additional waves of settlement. By 1680 nearly 2,500 Spaniards lived in New Mexico, a number that jumped to nearly 16,000 by 1790.⁶ By the end of the eighteenth century, however, emigration to northern New Mexico stagnated. Initial settlement in this region is important because, as Richard

² Mark Q. Sutton, "Warfare and Expansion: An Ethnohistoric Perspective on the Numic Spread," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 8, No. 1 (1986), 72.

³ Richard L. Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992): 26-27.

⁴ Nostrand, *Hispano Homeland*, 31.

⁵ Marc Simmons, *The Last Conquistador: Juan de Oñate and the Settling of the Far Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991): 30.

⁶ Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland*, 45.

Nostrand explains in *The Hispano Homeland*, the lack of mineral wealth and agricultural production in the region soon turned northern New Mexico into “an isolated, remote, and relatively unimportant frontier outpost.”⁷ This aversion to the region was compounded by enticing new economic opportunities that presented themselves in California and Texas, which drew Mexican settlers away from the valley north of Santa Fe. Both branches of the Santa Fe Trail, pioneered in 1821 by American entrepreneur William Becknell, bypassed the Rio Grande Valley completely in favor of a route that ran along the eastern slope of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Because of its isolation the people of northern New Mexico developed into a distinctive subculture between 1598 and 1865, a subculture that led to a “Hispano” designation that set them apart from other Hispanic identities. Nostrand explains that Hispanos celebrated their “Spanishness” because their ancestors were, with the exception of limited intermingling with native tribes, Spanish Europeans.⁸ The island of cultural seclusion on which they found themselves since the late sixteenth century began to fracture in the 1840s, however, as outside interests set their sights on the Hispano homeland.

Spanish-Mexican Land Grants

The first large land grants, known as *estancias*, were issued to Spanish citizens for the purpose of raising stock, though little is known about these early grants except that they were established near Pueblo villages where Indian slave labor was readily available.⁹ These grants were offered only to citizens of Spain as the Crown feared the intrusion of foreign powers into their colonial lands. Restrictions were eased, however, when Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821. Desperate for new settlers on their northern frontier to safeguard the fledgling

⁷ Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland*, 46.

⁸ Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland*, 14.

⁹ Nostrand, *The Hispano Homeland*, 35.

nation from illegal US immigrant filibusters and hostile native tribes, the Mexican government recruited outsiders to settle these lands. The tracts that were offered included large portions of present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, and Colorado. In northern New Mexico and southern Colorado these grants included the Los Luceros, Sangre de Cristo, Nolan, Maxwell, and Las Animas Grants. Though they were initially offered only to Mexicans, hardships resulting from the Mexican War of Independence left few of them with the financial means to emigrate north and invest in their development. Grants were then offered to Americans and foreigners who pledged their loyalties to the Mexican government, of which they found many who were eager to do so. Prominent Mexican, American, and foreign grantees such as Charles Bent, Charles Beaubien, Kit Carson, Gervacio Nolan, Cornelio Vigil, Ceran St. Vrain, and Lucien Maxwell accepted the challenges and opportunities associated with maintaining and developing these lands.¹⁰

The Los Luceros Grant

The Los Luceros Land Grant, of Spanish rather than Mexican origin, was originally made to a soldier named Pedro Montes Vigil de Santillana in 1742.¹¹ Early Spanish grants such as this one served the same purpose as those later issued by the Mexican government; to protect the northern frontier, initiate economic development, and spread religious and cultural influence. The Los Luceros Grant made provisions for those settlers that already lived on the land to be granted, stating that “pastures and watering places are to remain common to all settlers.”¹² These lands included one of the largest native settlements in the region, Taos Pueblo, where the city of

¹⁰ “Claim No. 14,” “Claim No. 48,” and “Claim No. 2,” *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folders 1 and 4, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1843.

¹¹ “Letter from the Secretary of the Interior,” *Private Land Claims in New Mexico*, Ex. Doc. No. 112, United States House of Representatives, Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Congress, 1861-1862, 28.

¹² “Los Luceros Grant,” Document Nos. 2 and 3, Office of the Cadastral Engineer New Mexico, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, 1742.

Don Fernando de Taos (Taos) was established in 1615. Taos became an important settlement for trade between natives and Hispanos in the region and served as a base of operations for those who obtained Mexican land grants in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Sangre de Cristo Grant

The first Hispano settlers in the San Luis Valley, about fifty miles north of Taos, were reluctant to venture so far north until there was sufficient protection from nomadic tribes who made settlement in the valley perilous until the US took control of it in 1848.¹³ Just as they and their Hispano ancestors had done for generations in New Mexico, these early Coloradans grew corn, beans, chilis, and calabash, and raised sheep and goats on small ranches. They also established the first permanent non-native town in Colorado, San Luis, in 1851. The Sangre de Cristo Grant, on which these Hispanos lived and worked, was owned by a Canadian-born fur trader named Charles Beaubien who inherited it from his son, Narcisco. Narcisco was only twelve years old when he obtained his grant from the Mexican government in 1843, and only sixteen when he was killed by Native and Hispano insurgents during the Taos Revolt of 1847.¹⁴ It is likely that Charles himself purchased this land in his son's name because he was already in possession of a portion of the Maxwell Grant to the east. The 1,250,000 acre Sangre de Cristo Grant was issued to the Beaubien family because, as stated in Narcisco's initial grant application, they planned to "encourage the agriculture of the country and place it in a flourishing

¹³ Arrell Morgan Gibson. "Native Americans and the Civil War," *American Indian Quarterly* 9, No. 4 (Autumn, 1985): 401.

¹⁴ "Sangre de Cristo Land Grant-Recommendation of Confirmation by Surveyor-General," *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 1, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1856.

condition...finding in it the qualities of fruitfulness, fertile lands for cultivation, and abundance of pasture and water” for growing crops, raising sheep, and building settlements.¹⁵

The economic and social systems of the San Luis Valley during this period seem primitive to those of the United States, Europe, and Mexico at this time. Large tracts of land within the grant region were owned by the grantee, who sold or rented tracts to relatively wealthy Hispanos (*Ricos*), who sub-divided these tracts and distributed small plots to poor farmers (*peons*), who gave up a portion of their agricultural production as payment for their land. There were no cash crops or wheat grown in the valley, no cattle, and very few horses or draft animals. The Hispano farmers and ranchers that worked the land built and maintained *acequias* (irrigation systems) themselves and owned them communally, a practice their ancestors likely picked up from the Pueblos, which was necessary to ensure that there was enough water available for all who needed it. They lived in adobe homes, and they owned few metal tools or other precious items as trade outside the valley was extremely limited. Despite a lack of monetary exchange in the valley, however, they experienced decades of economic stability.¹⁶ Subsistence farming and a barter system of economic exchange prevailed through the early 1870s, though wheat production began on a limited scale in the 1850s to serve US soldiers stationed at Ft. Massachusetts, and later at Ft. Garland.¹⁷ A system of land use and ownership unique to the region also developed, though in most cases it could not hold up to the scrutiny of the US legal system as American capitalists and their lawyers descended on the valley in the late 1860s.

¹⁵ “Claim No. 14 of Charles Beaubien,” *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 1, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1843. Grant sizes appearing here are those confirmed by the United States Congress, listed in *Colorado Weekly Chieftain* on 6/18/1868.

¹⁶ Herbert O. Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants of New Mexico and Colorado* (Denver: Bradford-Robinson, 1949), 10-13.

¹⁷ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 16.

The Las Animas/Vigil & Saint Vrain Grant

Cornelio Vigil and Ceran St. Vrain, prominent residents of Taos, applied for and received a grant from the Mexican Government on December 8, 1843. The wording of this grant petition was similar to that of others in the region, stating that they found on the property “sufficient fertile land for cultivation, an abundance of pasture and water, and all that is required for a flourishing establishment, and for raising cattle and sheep,” and that “in the coming spring we will commence operations, which will be continued until the colony shall be established and settled.”¹⁸ As was the case in the San Luis Valley, there was little agricultural production in the region when the grant was issued for fear of Indian raids. This massive tract of land, consisting of 3,079,000 acres, stretched north and east from the Sangre de Cristo mountain range to the Arkansas River at its junction with the Purgatoire River.¹⁹ It included the Huerfano, Cucharas, and Apishapa Rivers (which are dry most of the year), along with the town-sites of present-day Walsenburg and Trinidad. Except for its proximity to Bent’s Fort, a trading post north of the Arkansas River owned by pioneer William Bent and Ceran St. Vrain, and the Mountain Route of the Santa Fe Trail, little interest was paid to the region until massive coal deposits were surveyed here in the late 1860s.

The Nolan Grant

Like his friend and business partner Charles Beaubien, Gervacio Nolan was a French-Canadian fur-trapper and trader who came to New Mexico in 1824 in search of land and profitable business opportunities. Both men applied for and received Mexican citizenship in 1829 to become eligible to receive land grants, and both men married local Hispano women and

¹⁸ “Claim No. 2 of Cornelio Vigil and Ceran St. Vrain,” *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 23, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1843.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Grant sizes appearing here are those confirmed by the United States Congress, listed in *Colorado Weekly Chieftain* on 6/18/1868.

raised families near Taos.²⁰ Nolan received his grant, on the northern edge of Mexican territory along the Arkansas River, from the Mexican government in Santa Fe on December 1, 1843.²¹ This relatively small tract of land, 500,000 acres, included an area south of the confluence of the Arkansas River and Fountain Creek, the site of the modern-day city of Pueblo, Colorado.²² Pueblo at this time was nothing more than a small adobe trading post on the north side of the Arkansas in unorganized United States territory. Again, there was little agricultural production in the region due to the presence of several potentially dangerous native tribes that hunted along the two rivers, so economic activity was confined to the trading post and the near-by Santa Fe Trail. El Pueblo was abandoned, however, following the “Fort Pueblo Massacre” on December 25, 1854 in which a force of 50-100 Indian raiders under the leadership of Chief Tierra Blanco (White Earth) led an attack that killed fourteen Mexicans and one Canadian at the fort.²³

Activity did not return to the region until Nolan’s heirs sold his estate fifteen years later to a woman named Annie Blake for \$10,000. Mrs. Blake sold two-thirds of the land for that same price; one-third to prominent Texas businessman Charles Goodnight and another third to Arkansas Valley pioneer Peter Dotson soon after she purchased it.²⁴ Goodnight established Rock Canyon Ranch on the his portion of the grant in the 1869, and helped organize the Stock Growers Bank of Pueblo soon after that.²⁵ The establishment of a bank provided a sense of

²⁰ Malcolm Ebright, *Gervacio Nolan Land Grant*, New Mexico History.org, accessed April 3, 2019, <http://www.newmexicohistory.org/places/gervacio-nolan-land-grant>.

²¹ “Claim No. 48 of Gervacio Nolan,” *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 40, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1843.

²² Grant sizes appearing here are those confirmed by the United States Congress, listed in *Colorado Weekly Chieftain* on 6/18/1868.

²³ Sources differ on the exact date, the number of attackers, and the specific tribes that attacked. Chief Tierra Blanco was a Ute Chief.

²⁴ “Copy of Deeds from the Heirs of Gervacio Nolan,” *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 40, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1870.

²⁵ Harley True Burton, “A History of the J A Ranch, II,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1928): 223.

financial security for ranchers and farmers, spurring emigration to the region. Peter Dotson, Goodnight's business partner, opened a hotel in the center of what became downtown Pueblo, constructed a number of houses in the area, and took the job of postmaster of the city.²⁶ The Thatcher brothers, John, Mahlon, and Henry, came to Pueblo around the same time. The Thatcher's owned and operated several Pueblo businesses including a bank and a grocery store, they all ran for political office, and by the 1890s John and Mahlon were well known Pueblo socialites.²⁷ Henry, before his death in 1884, served as Colorado's first Supreme Court Justice. As important as these men were to the development of the Nolan Grant, however, significant investment in the region would not, and could not, be realized without the railroads.

By 1869 northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, then under the "authority" of the United States for over two decades, was still a land of fur traders, subsistence farmers, and nomadic hunters. On paper the Mexican grant lands, which the US agreed to respect under the terms of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo, were "owned" by the estates of the men to whom they were first granted, but they were home to thousands of other people.²⁸ Sedentary Pueblos, nomadic bands from various native tribes, and Hispanos of Spanish descent lived and worked in these lands for generations. With little or no financial resources, legal authority, or even a grasp of the English language, however, they were nearly powerless to defend their rights in a US court of law. This hardly mattered well into the 1860s. Concerned with California Gold, Texas Cattle, and Civil War, Americans largely ignored a region of little strategic importance and few natural resources. The Southwest did have resources, however, which were finally realized in the late 1860s by a former Civil War general with visions of a new industrial revolution in the West. The

²⁶ "Peter K. Dotson: A Pioneer," *Colorado Weekly Chieftain*, July 14, 1898.

²⁷ *Colorado Daily/Weekly Chieftain*, January 5, 1894, April 13, 1877 and February 3, 1897.

²⁸ "Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo," Article VIII, 1848.

abundance of coal, iron, and agricultural products in the Southwest needed the railroad as much as the railroad needed them, and the railroad was coming.

Civil War Policies

Historian Ari Kelman, in his speech “A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek,” explains that movement into the West was a “cornerstone” of the Republican Party. The passage of westward-facing legislation that began to take shape immediately after Southerners “absented themselves” from congress at the beginning of the war, Kelman argues, is a clear examples of this.²⁹ While the Homestead Act is often credited with “opening the West” for settlement, the Pacific Railroad Act actually had a more significant impact on the development of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico as this portion of the West was settled through the purchase of Mexican land grants rather than homestead claims. The Pacific Railroad Act called for the construction of a transcontinental railroad that connected western goods to eastern and European Markets, encouraging the investment, large-scale development, and western capitalism that fundamentally transformed life and land in the region.

While Southern lawmakers were not opposed to a transcontinental railroad before the Civil War, they opposed railroad legislation that bypassed the Southern states. In February 1860 Iowa Representative Samuel Curtis introduced a bill to the US Congress to fund the construction of a rail line to the Pacific. It passed a vote in the House but died in the Senate due to opposition from Southerners, who preferred a route that would follow a southerly course than the one proposed. Many in congress actually expected a southern railroad would eventually prevail, which was the motivation behind the Gadsden Purchase of Mexican territory in 1854.³⁰ With

²⁹ Ari Kelman, “A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek” (presentation, Civil War Institute Conference on the Civil War in 1864, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA), June 21, 2014.

³⁰ *A Memorial and Biographical History of Northern California: Illustrated* (Lewis Publishing, 1891), 215.

strict partisan division the fate of the Transcontinental Railroad remained uncertain, but only until the Republican Party won the Presidential Election a few short months after the initial failure of Curtis' bill, which led to the secession of the Southern states and the beginning of the Civil War.

In 1862 Curtis introduced another bill, the Pacific Railroad Act, which easily passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Lincoln on July 1st of that year. This legislation authorized extensive land grants in the Western United States and the issuance of 30-year government bonds to the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads in order to construct continuous rail and telegraph lines between "the most practicable point" in Iowa and the Sacramento River in California.³¹ Ari Kelman and fellow historian Boyd Cothran explored the relationship between the Republican Party and western development in a *New York Times* article titled "How the Civil War Became the Indian Wars." In it, they explain that "members of the Republican Party hearkened back to Jefferson's dream of an 'empire for liberty,'" and believed that moving west would allow the country to leave slavery behind.³² The Morrill Land Grant Act, the Pacific Railroad Act, and the Homestead Act, they claim, allowed federal authorities to offer Northerners a deal: "Enlist to fight for Lincoln and liberty, and receive, as fair recompense for their patriotic sacrifices, higher education and Western land connected by rail to markets."³³ Support for these arguments can be found across the Southwest as it was a Union Officer and Civil War hero, General William Jackson Palmer, that had the greatest impact on the region in the following decades as a result of these policies.

³¹ "Pacific Railway Act," July 1, 1862, Enrolled Acts and Resolutions of Congress, 1789-1996, Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives, Sections 1, 2, 8, and 9.

³² Boyd Cothran and Ari Kelman, "How the Civil War Became the Indian Wars," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2015, accessed April 5, 2019, <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/25/how-the-civil-war-became-the-indian-wars/#more-157105>.

³³ Boyd Cothran and Ari Kelman, "How the Civil War Became the Indian Wars."

Early Interest and Financing

Efforts to profit from the Southwest began years before the Transcontinental Railroad united capitalists across the country. William Blackmore, British promoter and land speculator, was one of the first businessmen to target the American Southwest as a destination for foreign investment and settlement. His activities in the region began in 1868, though he initially had trouble attracting European interest in the West after disappointing returns on similar investments following the Colorado Gold Rush of 1859. Rather than solicit funds to purchase land directly Blackmore decided to incorporate a land development company and solicit funding for that instead, selling shares of its stock to raise funds to purchase Mexican grants. His scheme worked. The United States Freehold Land and Emigration Company, Ltd. was incorporated in 1869, and in less than a year Blackmore sold \$1,000,000 in bonds for \$500,000 to overseas investors.³⁴ With this initial investment Blackmore's company purchased the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant from western promoter and former Colorado governor William Gilpin, who had purchased the land from Charles Beaubien just before his death in 1863.³⁵ Blackmore and the company he founded went on to purchase most or all of the Los Luceros and Las Animas grants, along with several smaller Mexican grant properties.

Blackmore's success in obtaining financing for his emigration company and his subsequent marketing scheme to resell these lands to investors, settlers, and developers depended largely on a marketing strategy that was less than honest about the region and its resource potential. To help him solicit initial funding for the United States Freehold Land and Emigration Company, he sought out a well-respected explorer and government geologist by the name of

³⁴ William Gilpin, *Notes on Colorado and its Inscription in the Physical Geography of the North American Continent* (London: Witherby and Company, 1870), 52.

³⁵ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 66.

Ferdinand V. Hayden to perform a survey of the Sangre de Cristo Grant. According to author Herbert Brayer, Hayden's "professional standing was beyond reproach, and his publications were sought after by English and continental financiers and investors as well as by the European learned societies."³⁶ His report stated that this land in question was "by far the finest agricultural district I have seen west of the Missouri River," its mountains "seem to be charged with ores of gold, silver, copper, lead, and iron," and that "I know of no region of the West more desirable for settlement...combining as it does all the elements of wealth and productiveness."³⁷ In reality much of the land was difficult to farm due to a short growing season and a lack of rainfall, and most of the minerals that he touts existed in only trace amounts. Hayden's enthusiasm for the region can be explained, however, by a \$10,000 payment he received following the sale of the company's bonds in 1870.³⁸

Failure

Despite "combining all of elements of wealth and productiveness" Blackmore's plan to settle the grant lands ultimately failed. Part of his original plan was to encourage colonists, around 20,000 from Holland, to migrate to the region in large waves. Due to what he cites as a lack of communication between his Dutch investors and colony leaders, however, they decided to back out at the last minute.³⁹ He also expected to generate interest from English investors associated with wool production as it was one of the few natural resources that was already being produced in large quantities. Brayer explains the reasoning behind Blackmore's assumption, stating that the "the British generally favored those enterprises in which they either had previous

³⁶ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 73.

³⁷ *William Blackmore Land Records* (Folder 95, Box No. 10798), New Mexico State Archives, 1871.

³⁸ "Memo of Division of Shares in the United States Freehold Land and Emigration Company," *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 8, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, n.d.

³⁹ "Letter to William Bell," *William Blackmore Land Records*, Folder 17, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1871.

experience at home, or in which they envisioned an opportunity to supply domestic needs.”⁴⁰

Without a transportation system in place to bring the wool to market, however, Blackmore was unable to generate interest in developing the San Luis Valley, even among his own countrymen.

Blackmore’s emigration company also faced stiff resistance from the locals. Though the Hispanos who lived on the Sangre de Cristo lands were at a significant disadvantage in negotiating their position within the American legal system, they were better organized and better prepared than their native counterparts. One benefit that they had was that some English speaking, educated, non-Hispano residents lived among them whose interests were aligned with theirs. One of these residents was a German immigrant named Ferdinand Meyer, a relatively prosperous merchant and rancher who operated a sheep ranch and a large general store in the town of Costilla. Meyer, like many of his Hispano neighbors, settled in valley at the request and under the authority of Charles Beaubien, who promised them deeds to the small tracts on which they settled, the majority of which were in the most desirable farmlands adjacent to scarce water sources.⁴¹ Meyer formed an alliance of local residents and actually had some success in fighting the encroachment of speculators and developers. In disputing Gilpin’s claim to the grant, from which Blackmore’s company purchased it, Meyer and his “citizens’ committee” were granted sixty square miles of prime farm and ranch lands for the residents of Costilla.⁴²

Meyer and his allies’ success was an exception rather than a rule, however, and the majority of Hispanos and Native Americans in the region were left out in the cold. Lawyers for the United States Freehold Land and Emigration Company and other American and foreign companies, who often took payment in land, mislead locals into believing the process to claim

⁴⁰ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 24.

⁴¹ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 107.

⁴² Letter from Squarey to Blackmore, *William Blackmore Land Records*, Document no. 0424, Box No. 10798, New Mexico State Archives, 1871.

their land was more difficult than it actually was.⁴³ The nomadic tribes of the Southwest, like those across the entire North American continent, were forced to either sign unequal treaties with the US government or face annihilation. Bands of Utes, the most prominent and active nomadic tribe in the region, signed one such treaty in 1868 that forced them to move onto a reservation on Colorado's unsettled western slope.⁴⁴ As much as eighty percent of the land that was occupied by Hispanos in the Mexican grant region was procured by foreign and American corporations by the end of the century.⁴⁵ Ironically, in the coming years many of these resident Hispanos were forced to take jobs working for the industries and the men who were responsible for taking their land.

William Jackson Palmer

William Jackson Palmer witnessed the industrial revolution in Britain first-hand in the 1850s before taking a job with the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1857, where he worked as personal secretary to company President J. Edgar Thomson until the Civil War broke out four years later. After serving the Union with distinction, quickly rising to the rank of Brigadier General, Palmer returned to railroad life as the Director of Surveys for the Kansas Pacific Railway when the war ended in 1865. Responsible for the Kansas Pacific's extension to Denver, he became intimately familiar with both the beauty and investment potential of southern Colorado. While surveying the land in 1868, he and his colleague William Bell noted ore deposits, coal beds, salt deposits, timber, and agricultural lands across the region.⁴⁶ Palmer was so impressed with what he found that he recommended to his superiors that a Kansas Pacific line be built from Denver southward to the Arkansas River, through the San Luis Valley, and ultimately down into Mexico."⁴⁷ The

⁴³ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 17.

⁴⁴ *Treaty with The Ute*, Article 2, March 2, 1868. <https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-HTML-Treaties/TreatyWithTheUte1868.html>, Accessed April 16, 2019.

⁴⁵ Herbert O. Brayer, "Report for the Office of Land Use Coordination," Department of Agriculture, 1941.

⁴⁶ William A. Bell, *New Tracks in North America* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1869), xxxv, 47, 114.

⁴⁷ William J. Palmer, "Letter to Queen," History Colorado, *William J. Palmer Collection* (Box IX, Folder 702), Aug. 7, 1869.

Kansas Pacific, however, was in serious financial trouble by this time and was unable to extend the line beyond Denver. Palmer, still believing that there were fortunes to be made in the Mexican grant lands, decided to establish his own railroad enterprise, the Denver and Rio Grande, and continue his pursuit of industrial development in the West.

Palmer, it should be noted, was not railroad man. He was not a steel maker, a geologist, a coal baron, or a philanthropist. Though he did all of things at some point in his life he was first and foremost a land speculator. Almost everything else he did in his career was a means to this end. He and his associates purchased land cheaply, brought the railroad to that land (thereby increasing its value), and sold off parcels at a premium. He understood better than most the impact that the railroad would have on the region, and he understood the financial benefits associated with controlling its route. The extent of these plans, and his passion for his work, are illustrated in an 1869 letter to his fiancée concerning the future site of Colorado Springs:

The divide (later the Palmer Divide), or spur, which juts out from the Rocky Mountains, covered with a pinery; and, south-eastward, the Great Plains open out so far as the plains can reach, the softened outlines of earth blending with the sky. This, I think, is the finest view of all. It reminds you constantly of the ocean, on whose shores you seem to be standing, gazing out on its billowy depths.

In true Palmer fashion these poetic lines are soon followed by thoughts of business, as later on in this same letter he writes:

Down in the valley of Monument Creek will be the farms of industrious ranchers who will supply this Eden with what is required for the material wants of its occupants. And among other advantages are these: it is only 30 or 40 miles from the line of our Railroad on the Bijou; a good team will take us across to it in four or five hours; it is also within two or three miles from the line of a Railroad that in a few years must be built from Denver southward to the Arkansas.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The development of the D&RG, this letter suggests, was less about building a railroad than it was about building a new, self-sustaining society in what he saw as a pristine environment, and to make his fortune in the process.

It was this quest for inexpensive land that brought Palmer into contact with William Blackmore, who's United States Freehold Land and Emigration Company by this time controlled the Los Luceros, Sangre de Cristo, and Las Animas land grants. Palmer, through his own various companies, purchased land that became Colorado Springs and the grants owned by Blackmore's company between 1869 and 1878, shortly before the construction of D&RG lines to those areas. He also purchased the Nolan Grant from Annie Blake, Peter Dotson, and Charles Goodnight for \$130,000 in cash with plans to incorporate the town of South Pueblo.⁴⁹ After securing this land and a bond for \$100,000 from the existing city of Pueblo, Palmer and his associates proceeded to complete the D&RG line to the Arkansas River. As part of the company's agreement to secure these funds from Pueblo company officials agreed build a depot on the north side of the river within one mile of the Pueblo County court house.⁵⁰ Upon completion, however, Puebloans were outraged to find that the depot was actually constructed on the south side of the river on a company-owned rival townsite called *South Pueblo*. Though the D&RG was later forced to return the initial funds to the city of Pueblo after an ugly court battle, this is a prime example of the tactics Palmer and other developers in the post-Civil War American West used, often successfully, to inflate the price of their lands and manipulate local governments, a process that was repeated numerous times throughout the Southwest.

⁴⁹ *Records III*, Pueblo County Assessor's Office, April 6, 1872.

⁵⁰ Herbert O. Brayer, *William Blackmore: Early Financing of the Denver and Rio Grande Railway* (Denver: Bradford-Robinson, 1949), 143.

Railroads

After much discussion and debate congress finally decided to build the Transcontinental Railroad along a northerly route, bypassing both Colorado and New Mexico in favor of a route through southern Wyoming. Palmer knew, however, that no matter where the main line came through it would establish a need for ancillary lines that allowed people and goods to access it. This is primarily what the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad was intended to be; an access line between the resources of the Southwest and the Transcontinental Railroad. Palmer's original plans, however, went far beyond a simple secondary line to serve the main line. His plan for the D&RG was to build the American half of a *transnational* line that was meant to stretch all the way down into Mexico City, making it a main line to run north-south rather than east-west. Unfortunately for the D&RG it encountered what Palmer despised more than anything in business; competition.

The Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe (ATSF) was laying its own tracks to the Southwest at this time and a skirmish, dubbed "The Colorado Railroad War," broke out when the two met outside of Trinidad, Colorado. Though the dispute ended without a shot being fired, the Denver and Rio Grande was forced to cede Raton Pass to its rival, cutting it off from its path to Mexico.⁵¹ The two met again eight years later in Fremont County in another skirmish that included famous gunfighters such as Doc Holliday, Bat Masterson, and "Dirty" Dave Rudabaugh. Both railroads sought a right of way through the Royal Gorge to the rich mining fields in Leadville, but there was only room for one line in the narrow canyon. After two years of sabotage, espionage, and a gun fight in Pueblo involving a stolen cannon from the Colorado

⁵¹ Robert G. Athearn, *Rebel of the Rockies: A History of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 221.

State Armory, the D&RG won the rights to the canyon in a federal court.⁵² Though the ATSF continued to serve some of the larger nearby communities, the D&RG became the primary developer of rail lines in the region through the remainder of the nineteenth century.

The first branch of the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad ran from Denver to Colorado Springs and was completed on October 27, 1871, with construction to the Arkansas River at Pueblo wrapping in June of the following year.⁵³ From Pueblo lines were built to Canon City in 1872, Trinidad, Cucharas (via Walsenburg), and the San Luis Valley in 1876, Espanola, New Mexico (south of Taos) in 1880, and finally lines to Salida and Crested Butte were completed in 1881.⁵⁴ Because of cost and the irregular nature of the terrain through which it travelled the D&RG was constructed as a narrow-gauge line, with its rails and cars 2 ½ to 3 feet wide instead of the standard 4'8½". These lines, winding their way through small adobe towns, steep mountain passes, and across thousands of miles of seemingly empty space were built to provide access to the timber, agricultural products, and mineral resources that Palmer and Bell had surveyed while working for the Kansas and Pacific Railroad in 1868. With the railroad in place western capitalists could finally turn a profit from the region's abundant natural resources.

Mines and Towns

The D&RG, like all railroads, required fuel to run its engines and iron to produce its rails. One of the primary reasons that Palmer was attracted to these lands was the rich outcrops of bituminous coal that he found there, which led to the development of a number of ancillary lines in order to reach them. The Central Colorado Improvement Company, a subsidiary of the

⁵² Judy Suchan, "The 'War' for the Royal Gorge," *Colorado Central Magazine*, January 3, 2011.

⁵³ H. Lee Scamehorn, *Pioneer Steelmaker in the West* (Boulder: Pruett, 1976), 27.

⁵⁴ *Camp and Plant* (Denver: The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, 1901-1903), multiple issues, Steelworks Center of the West, <http://www.steelworks.us/index.php/archives-2/digital-resources/camp-and-plant/>, accessed April 10, 2019.

D&RG, was incorporated by Palmer and his associates in 1872, and was responsible for purchasing land and developing mining operations. Between 1872 and 1892 over thirty company mines and quarries were built across southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Mines in Fremont County near Canon City produced high-quality bituminous coal used to heat domestic homes and commercial buildings. Those in Huerfano and Las Animas Counties, near Walsenburg and Trinidad, also produced bituminous coal, though it was of a slightly lower quality and was used as fuel for locomotives and for producing coke.⁵⁵ Coke, a type of fuel produced by heating coal in special kilns known as “coke ovens,” was an important component of the steel making process as it burns hot enough to melt iron ore in a blast furnace. After 1881 coke ovens were built at or near mines in the southern coal fields for use in the blast furnace in Pueblo.

More important than the mines themselves were the mining towns that developed alongside them. The majority of coal, iron, and flux deposits were not located near established cities or towns, so the company had to build towns near the resource deposits so that miners had a place to eat, sleep, purchase supplies, and simply unwind. The Southern Colorado Coal and Town Company, a successor to the Central Colorado Improvement Company, was established to purchase land and build mining camps in 1876.⁵⁶ The company established its first town, Engleville (a.k.a. El Moro), the following year at a site four miles southeast of Trinidad. By 1888 three more towns, Starkville, Morley, and Sopris were built at coal mines near Trinidad, and the towns of Pictou and Rouse were built near Walsenburg to the north on land that was part of the

⁵⁵ “Geology and Coal Resources of the Walsenburg Area Huerfano County Colorado,” *US Geological Survey Bulletin* 1042-0, 1951.

⁵⁶ H. Lee Scamehorn, *Pioneer Steelmaker in the West*, 27.

Las Animas Grant.⁵⁷ Although four or five miles from an established city may seem like a short commute by today's standards, for coal miners who worked long hours in the years before the widespread availability of automobiles the development of these townsites was a necessity.

Initially these towns were comprised of little more than shacks made from adobe or scrap metal that were built by the workers themselves, but the company soon provided higher quality pre-fabricated homes that were of standard size and could be assembled quickly. In some cases, company towns outlived the mining operations for which they were built and developed into independent cities. Many of these cities still exist today, and hundreds of people still live in these pre-fabricated company homes. Before 1890 the majority of those who worked in the mines and lived in company towns were self-identified American and Hispano men who lived on their own. Some of these Hispanos, who moved to the area from New Mexico and the San Luis Valley, relocated permanently, while others took their pay back home with them during the slow winter months. By the end of the century this ethnic composition changed dramatically, however, with over thirty different nationalities represented on company payrolls by 1900.⁵⁸ In the late 1890s the company began building schools, stores, churches, and recreational facilities that served entire families that called these remote company coal towns their home.

The Steel Mill

The question of whether the Southwest was ever really industrialized is a valid one as, upon first glance, much of the region appears just as it did before the Civil War. Wide-open spaces covered in grama grass, yucca, and cactus are still bordered by 14,000 ft. snow-capped mountain ranges. Farms still stretch across the San Luis Valley, occasionally interrupted by

⁵⁷ Book of Plat Maps of the Colorado Coal and Iron Co., Research Room Credenza (not filed), Steelworks Center of the West, 1901.

⁵⁸ Rick J. Clyne, *Coal People: Life in Southern Colorado's Company Towns, 1890-1930* (Denver: Colorado Historical Society, 1999), 44.

small, economically depressed towns and adobe-style buildings, and many of the people who live in the region have dark skin and speak fluent Spanish. Upon closer inspection, however, the remnants of industry become clear. Barbed-wire fences line interstates and dirt roads for thousands of miles in every direction. The high plains that were once dotted with sheep are now covered with corn-fattened cattle, and the farms of the San Luis Valley now produce everything from barley for Coors beer to Indian-style quinoa for Whole Foods. Mine tailings, a toxic mud-like waste leftover from the region's mining operations, rise in massive piles like pitch-black mountains over small towns across Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Nowhere is the evidence of the western industrialization more apparent than in the city of Pueblo, where the imposing skeleton of a massive steel mill still casts its shadow over the Arkansas River. It is here, on the northern edge of the American Southwest, that the rust-covered heart of the Industrial West stands as a monument to its own existence.

In the late nineteenth century capitalists came west to make their fortunes. Fortune in the West required valuable land. Valuable land, in the Southwest in particular, required the railroad. Railroads, of course, require rails, rails require steel, and steel requires natural resources, specifically iron, fuel, fluxing agents, and water. This region, apparently desolate and devoid of mineral wealth, provided all of these things, and in 1881 a steel mill was born. Pueblo was chosen as the location for the mill because of its centrality to these natural resources and its proximity to water, the most valuable resource of all. In an effort to reduce costs and take another step towards complete vertical integration Palmer and his associates incorporated yet another company, the Colorado Coal and Iron Company (CC&I), to build the mill and produce rails for the Denver and Rio Grande Railway. On September 5, 1881 the company's first blast furnace, "Betsy," was "blown in" in a formal ceremony that was attended by company officers

and Pueblo community leaders.⁵⁹ By the end of Spring 1882 the site included a casting house for making pig iron, two five-ton Bessemer vessels for completing the steel production process, a storage house, cranes, crushers, ladles, and a rolling mill to produce rails from raw steel.⁶⁰ By the end of the decade the mill was also producing barbed wire, bars, beams, nails, spikes, and plates for a wide variety of purposes and consumers.

The significance of the steel mill to the development of the region cannot be overstated. After CC&I merged with its largest competitor and changed its name to the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company (CF&I) in 1892, thousands of men and women came from around the world to work at the plant, and thousands more came to support them. Grocery stores, restaurants, laundry services, recreational facilities, schools, churches, taverns, and more sprung up in Pueblo, Trinidad, Walsenburg, Alamosa, Canon City, and at dozens of small mining towns to support industry in the region. The company actively recruited Eastern European, Italian, Welsh, and Irish laborers to work in the mill and mines, drawing immigrants to southern Colorado both to pursue employment and to escape war, poverty, and famine in their home countries. Many of these immigrants brought their families with them, spawning future generations of blue-collar workers who were born and raised in the American Southwest. By the end of the nineteenth century the steel mill was the pinnacle of industrial development in the Southwest, and the catalyst for immense social and cultural changes that occurred in the following decades.

Conclusion

The United States claimed the Southwest and its resources as the spoils of two separate wars; the Mexican American War and the Civil War. Both of these conflicts, along with others such as the Spanish American War and the Indian Wars, were driving forces behind America's

⁵⁹ H. Lee Scamehorn, *Pioneer Steelmaker in the West*, 47.

⁶⁰ H. Lee Scamehorn, *Pioneer Steelmaker in the West*, 48.

imperialist agenda that expanded and developed more boldly with each successful campaign. As important as Northern victory in the war was for many Americans, especially African American slaves who gained their freedom as a result of that struggle, President Lincoln, General Palmer, and the vast majority of Northerners showed little concern for the thousands of people whose lives and cultures were decimated by Union Civil War policies. Native Americans, both sedentary and nomadic, were stripped of their lands, forced onto reservations, starved, and even massacred as a result of those policies, paving the way for an “industrial revolution” that polluted air and water in the Southwest for the next hundred years. However, as destructive as these policies were for some, they created unique opportunities for others, and initiated one of the most intriguing social experiments the country has ever witnessed.

The American West was a place where a variety of thoughts and ideas came together in the late nineteenth century. White-Anglo modes of life dominated both the North and the South, and those who emigrated to that part of the country were expected to adapt to that way of life. The post-Civil War West, however, was a blank slate where Northerners, Southerners, native peoples, Hispanics, foreign immigrants, and African Americans mixed with a greater level of equality than existed in the East. Emigrants from all walks of life often brought xenophobic ideologies with them, but without an established social apparatus that protected ideas of racial superiority these thoughts were often concealed, and they faded more rapidly. Industrious and influential white men, such as Charles Bent and Kit Carson, openly married and started families with women of native and Hispanic descent. In industrial towns across the West Hispanics, Italians, Slovenes, Germans, the Irish, and immigrants from other foreign nations brought old-world feuds with them, but they were forced to work together, depend on each other, and even fight alongside each other for better pay and safer working conditions in the following years.

Their children attended the same schools where they met, befriended, and eventually married those of other faiths and nationalities, blurring racial and ethnic lines in the process. Greater equality, however, was not complete equality, and the influx of capital from wealthy eastern and European investors insured that privileged white capitalists continued to exploit people and resources as capitalism rolled west.

Hispanos had long called the Southwest their home, and they successfully lived off the land following hundreds of years of trial, error, and hard-earned experience. Having spent generations in this dry and rugged terrain they understood the special techniques required to survive here. Survival, however, was all that could reasonably be expected in the high-desert climate of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. As investors, immigrants, and American settlers came west following the Civil War in search of new opportunities, Hispanos were forced to fight legal battles against powerful corporate forces with little money and barely a grasp of the English language. For waves of speculators, lawyers, investors, and developers, whose goal was to obtain western lands quickly and cheaply, the Spanish-Mexican land grants of the Upper Rio Grande and Arkansas River valleys seemed like an easy target.

Initial attempts to settle and colonize the land failed. The Southwest required significant financial investment, along with infrastructure that facilitated communication and transportation, to become profitable. Developers from the East, with the financial backing of wealthy European investors, imported and constructed the equipment, infrastructure, and workforce required to industrialize the West. The Denver and Rio Grande Railway made natural resources and agricultural production of the of the region profitable by connecting them to Eastern markets via the Transcontinental Railroad, fundamentally altering the economic model, agricultural production, and modes of employment for the entire Southwest. The mines and the steel mill,

initially built to serve the railroad, brought thousands of immigrants to the region, changing its demographic composition and igniting an explosion of other industries and services. Most of the people who live in southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico today are the descendants of the hard-working men and women who came to build railroads, mine coal, and make steel.

The most influential scholar of these Mexican grant lands to date, Herbert Brayer, stated that, “except for the exploitation of mineral resources, it was not an area that could be greatly altered by capital. After a hundred years of exploitation the land grant area in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado is intrinsically the same as it was when General Kearney seized it from Mexico (in 1846).”⁶¹ This statement, however, ignores the *people* that capital and industry brought to the region, and the world that they built for themselves and their families. Nineteenth century miners and steelworkers had children who also became miners and steelworkers, but they also had children who filled the roles of administrators, school teachers, entrepreneurs, and other professionals who enjoyed higher pay and safer working conditions with each passing generation. Today less than one percent of the region’s population still works in the railroading, mining, and steel-working industries, but industry in the West is an important part of America’s cultural heritage that requires more attention than it has been given by historians and other scholars. The Civil War, while significant to the industrial, economic, and social growth of the Southwest, is just one factor in the development of the region’s rich and complex history.

⁶¹ Brayer, *William Blackmore: The Spanish Mexican Land Grants*, 26.

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