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Kevin Waite. ***West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire.*** Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6318-0 (hardcover, $95.00); 978-1-4696-6319-7 (paperback, $29.95).

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At the time that the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, the future of slavery in the conquered Mexican territories—California, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado—looked bleak. Although debt peonage and other coercive labor practices remained in force, Mexico's Congress had abolished slavery by law in 1837. Northerners—and a handful of southerners—in the United States Congress were opposed to reestablishing slavery where it had been abolished, and an even greater number of Congressmen doubted that the climate of this arid region would lend itself to chattel slavery. The region itself seemed opposed to slavery. In 1849, California petitioned for admission to union as a 'free' state. New Mexico followed suit the following year. Historians have, by and large, assumed that proslavery interests turned their attentions to more promising regions: notably, the Spanish island of Cuba, and the newly organized territory of Kansas.

But Kevin Waite shows that southern whites did not give up on the Southwest so easily. Southern politicians pushed for the transcontinental railroad to take a southern route that would connect the slaveholding states with Pacific ports, even going so far as to purchase the southern strip of Arizona and New Mexico, the Gadsden Purchase, in 1853, at the cost of $15 million. They constructed the Overland Road, a precursor to the Pony Express, in an attempt to bind the South with the West. Enslavers also immigrated to what Waite calls the Desert South (what would become New Mexico and Arizona), and assumed positions of power in California, where they succeeded in protecting the 'property' rights of slaveholders who imported their enslaved people to the region before California was admitted as a free state. In Southern California, southern-born whites pushed for the region to become its own state—slaveholding, of course. In New Mexico, southern-born members of the territorial legislature succeeded in pushing through a Slave Code in 1859. After the outbreak of Civil War, the southern half of the New Mexico Territory seceded, forming the Confederate Territory of Arizona, and Los Angeles became a hotbed of secessionist sentiment. After the end of the Civil War, southern whites moved West, where they continued to push for laws that would entrench white supremacy.

This book makes an enormous contribution to our understanding of the coming of the Civil War—one that will change how we teach about the sectional crisis in the United States. Most accounts of this period start with the U.S.-Mexican War and the resulting Compromise of 1850, which, among other things, admitted California as a free state, and in the process, disturbed the balance of power between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states. Historians have detailed how southern politicians attempted to restore the political balance through quixotic attempts to annex the Spanish island of Cuba or their

ultimately unsuccessful efforts to turn Kansas into a slaveholding state.[1] *West of Slavery* shows us that we must also see the Southwest as a critical theatre of sectional controversy.

By demonstrating the importance of New Mexico and California to the sectional crisis, this book contributes to the growing scholarship connecting the histories of the South and the West.[2] The connections that Waite draws between the South and the West trouble the usual regional divisions of the United States. Instead of three discrete regions—North, South, and West—we see a South that is merging with the West. This raises a provocative question of whether American historians should think of the slaveholding South as a discrete region, or should we see the boundaries of slavery as extending more broadly and changing with time—perhaps extending into the Midwest in the early nineteenth century, as territorial and state legislatures sought to protect slavery, endorse coercive labor practices, and exclude free Blacks—and certainly to New Mexico and California in the wake of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. *West of Slavery* makes a convincing case that the maps showing the slaveholding and nonslaveholding states merit qualification, given that 'free' states like California did not, in fact, live up to the label.

Another fascinating question this book raises is why eleven southern states seceded from the United States between 1860 and 1861. Since about the 1960s, historians have described the Civil War as a conflict between two rival sections of the United States, one committed to slavery, and the other skeptical of it. According to this view, northerners rejected slavery and were determined to stop its expansion to the west, even if they were willing to accept its existence in the South. Meanwhile, white southerners took this position as a threat to their way of life, and founded an independent nation to protect human bondage. The theory that eleven southern states seceded because of a perceived threat to slavery is based on the (misplaced) idea that the fight over slavery's expansion was occurring in places like Cuba and Kansas, where the failure of southern ambitions was glaringly obvious. Cuba remained a Spanish possession, and Kansas voters rejected a referendum to join the Union as a slave state. In California and New Mexico, however, proslavery southerners enjoyed a number of successes: the Gadsden Purchase, the Overland Road, and the 1859 New Mexico slave code, to name a few. *West of Slavery* has laid the groundwork for future scholars to ask how white southerners understood these successes and what they meant for the sectional crisis. Did proslavery southerners ultimately see their efforts in New Mexico and California as failures, because the transcontinental railroad did not follow the southern route; the number of enslaved people in the Desert South remained small; Southern California did not become a separate slave state; even New Mexico's Slave Code, which was adopted in 1859, was annulled two years later? Or did they in fact see California and New Mexico as reason to hope that they could maintain political power even in regions that at first glance seemed inhospitable to slavery?

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[1] David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-61* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2008).

[2] Eugene Berwanger, *The West and Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Elliott West, "Reconstructing Race," *Western Historical Quarterly* 34:1 (Spring 2003), 6-26; Stacey Smith, *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill, *The Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2016); Steven Hahn, "Slave Emancipation, Indian Peoples, and the Projects of a New American Nation-State," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3:3 (2013): 11-53. William S. Kiser, *Borderlands of Slavery: The Struggle over Captivity and Peonage in the American Southwest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2017); Alaina Roberts, *I've Been Here All the Wile: Black Freedom on Native Land* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021).

West of Slavery is a groundbreaking study that transforms our understanding of the sectional controversy in the United States. Beautifully written, deeply researched, and brilliantly argued, it is essential reading for historians of the Civil War and the American West alike.

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