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The West and Congressional Fights before the Civil War: Mark O. Hatfield Lecture Series Post-Lecture Discussion

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Citation Details

Lang, W. L., Ostler, J., Smith, S. L., & Coleman, K. R. (2021). The West and Congressional Fights before the Civil War: Mark O. Hatfield Lecture Series Post-Lecture Discussion. *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 122(3), 292–308. <https://doi.org/10.5403/oregonhistq.122.3.0292>

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The West and Congressional Fights before the Civil War

Mark O. Hatfield Lecture Series Post-Lecture Discussion

PUBLIC HISTORY ROUNDTABLE

with William L. Lang, Jeffrey Ostler, and Stacey L. Smith
moderated by Kenneth R. Coleman

This roundtable conversation was hosted virtually on Thursday, March 18, 2021, as a follow-up to a lecture two days prior. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

ELIZA CANTY-JONES: Good evening, and thank you, everyone, for joining us for tonight’s “reflection roundtable.” We begin tonight’s program as we often do our events, by taking a moment to acknowledge that wherever we are in Oregon, and indeed anywhere in the Americas, we are on Indigenous land. I’m speaking to you tonight from Portland, which is located on the homelands of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Tumwater, Watlala bands of the Chinook, the Tualatin Kalapuya, and the many other Indigenous nations of the Columbia River. We take this time to honor those people’s ancestral and ongoing connections to this place and also to recognize the violence that attended other people’s coming and settling here. And we encourage everyone to spend some time learning about the Indigenous peoples on

whose land you live, work, or play here in Oregon.

Just two days ago, Dr. Joanne Freeman joined us for a virtual presentation on her book, *The Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to the Civil War*. As increasing numbers of people become vaccinated, it seems that, where the virus is concerned, our worst days are gone. Violence in politics, however, has increased in recent months. Something we’ve gained through the pandemic is the opportunity to create new programs, and tonight’s is part of a series designed to allow us to reflect on the Mark O. Hatfield Lecture Series presentations.

Through these new reflection roundtables, we have the opportunity to listen in on conversations among historians and community leaders that enable us to bring the Hatfield lectures home to Oregon. We are grateful to our



PARTICIPANTS in the public history roundtable that followed the March 16, 2021, Mark O. Hatfield lecture are pictured here: Kenneth R. Coleman (top left), Stacey Smith (top right), Jeffrey Ostler (bottom left), and William L. Lang (bottom right).

sponsors, whose unwavering support of OHS [Oregon Historical Society] and the work of the Hatfield series has allowed us to persist into the virtual realm, including by bringing Amanda Tyler and John Meacham and two more reflection roundtables to audiences this spring.

I'll introduce tonight's panelists and our facilitator, who has a number of questions prepared. Please feel free to add your own. William L. Lang is author and editor of several books on Pacific Northwest history and the history of the northern plains, including *Confederacy of Ambition: William Winlock Miller and the Making of Washington Territory*. Dr. Lang is currently completing a biography of Joel Palmer, who was Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Oregon territory during the 1850s. Jeffrey Ostler is the Beekman Professor of Northwest and

Pacific History at the University of Oregon. He specializes in the history of the American West, with an emphasis on American Indian history. Dr. Ostler's publications include *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa*; *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*; *The Lakotas and The Black Hills*; and, most recently, *Surviving Genocide: Native Nations and the United States from the American Revolution to Bleeding Kansas*. Stacey L. Smith is Associate Professor of History at Oregon State University. She is the author of *Freedom's Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction*, which won the inaugural David Montgomery prize in U.S. labor history from the Labor and Working-Class His-

tory Association and the Organization of American Historians.

Our moderator is Kenneth R. Coleman, who teaches U.S. History at Portland Community College. His first book, *“Dangerous Subjects”*: James D. Saules and the Rise of Black Exclusion, won the Francis Fuller Victor Award for General Nonfiction at the 2019 Oregon Book Awards, and his *Oregon Historical Quarterly* article, “‘We’ll all Start Even’: White Egalitarianism and the Oregon Donation Land Act,” won the Western History Association’s 2020 Michael P. Malone Award. Please join me in virtually welcoming our panelists and our facilitator.

KENNETH R. COLEMAN: Thanks to the Oregon Historical Society for putting this panel together and giving me this opportunity to really engage in this history in a way that I normally wouldn’t have been able to, and thanks, also, to the sponsors and the patrons. To begin, I want to ask the panelists about your impressions, your initial response after reading this book, if it changed your understanding of this history at all, if it changed your understanding of your own field, or even if it changes the way that you might teach this period to students.

STACEY L. SMITH: One of the things that reading the book reinforced for me — I’m sure a topic that will come up as we continue to talk this evening — is the power of conspiracy in American politics. If you study this era, you know that there were a lot of conspiracy theories about different groups attempting

to take over the government, from the Freemasons to the Pope to, eventually, by the 1850s, competing conspiracies: the “Abolitionist Conspiracy” on one end and the “Slave Power Conspiracy” on another.

I think it’s easy — and I’ve probably been guilty of this myself — to really dismiss these conspiracy theories as being overwrought, [to scoff that] people [at the time] believed in ridiculous things. I think Freeman’s book shows us the lived experience of people on the ground, who have no idea the Civil War is coming — they can [understandably] really interpret the events around them, as being a true conspiracy to override the freedoms of their section. So that was something that was very helpful, as a reminder to me, about the power of conspiracy as a political tradition in the United States. I think it’s also really helpful for getting us to, if not understand the power that conspiracies hold in our politics right now, at least understand that we shouldn’t dismiss them, because regardless of whether they’re true or not, if people believe in them, they have really important political consequences.¹

JEFFERY OSTLER: There were a couple of things that really stood out to me, particularly [during] Professor Freeman’s presentation two nights ago. One was her emphasis on emotion as a major factor. She asked us to think about why it was that people came to hate each other so much, and she talked about the emotional logic of disunion. I think emotions really do matter in history. It’s not the kind of thing that

I do in my own work so much. I'm very oriented to structures and processes in sometimes abstract ways, but I very much appreciate that a historian like Professor Freeman really emphasizes emotion.

Another thing that stood out to me was: she said, at the very first, there were seventy incidences of violence that she uncovered. She now has told us way more than we knew about the amount of violence in Washington, D.C.; it's a major contribution. She also pointed out that this was hidden. It was consciously concealed by people, and that made me think about how many times in American history violence is covered up. As Eliza mentioned in introducing me, I work on the history of Indigenous people a lot, and I certainly am aware that violence against Indigenous people has often been covered up and erased. That's certainly true of what's happening in Oregon in the 1840s and, especially, in the 1850s.

WILLIAM L. LANG: I agree with what Stacey and Jeff are saying about the revelations in her talk and the book itself, and I encourage everybody to read the book if you can get a chance. It's a terrific kudo, I think, for OHS to bring her virtually into our discussion a couple of nights ago. The thing that struck me about it was back to the locale. To have all of this violence and this building animosity, as she explained in her talk, in Congress — especially considering January sixth of this year — we realize that, when you concentrate the political decision-making in a singular body (or at least to the extent

that her focus was on the House), and these individuals are carrying with them responsibility and opportunity, sometimes these get short-circuited, mixed up. And, as she pointed out, violence was something that was always lurking in the background, because of the culture of dueling.

One of the things that struck me was the relative absence of that kind of violence in Oregon and Washington. California, I'm not as familiar with to know whether it wasn't just a bit more in evidence down there because of Southerners drawn to the gold rush. The thing that really struck me was the impending doom that was on the horizon, and you could chart that fear with the accretion of violence that she talked about. It was out of their control. This to me was maybe the most revelatory discussion, in her book and in her talk. It's not so much the "broken window syndrome," [that if small problems are not remedied, they become much worse]. It's that they couldn't really control it themselves. And in a democracy, conspiracies, conflicts, personal ambition, opportunity, and then rigid ideological positions — which were pretty evident in the 1850s and are evident today, of course — can have the ability of starting an engine, and once the train starts moving down the track, it is exceedingly difficult to brake.

That's one of the things, at least in the 1850s, that we see in textbook descriptions of [political animosities] getting out of control, but here was a focused, almost laser-like recounting, of the steps toward violence. We're pretty much aware of [such dangers]

in our own life. We've seen it, many of us right before us, in families, in towns, in mob action, that sort of thing, but to think that it's going to infect what, supposedly, is going to be the place where the most important policy decisions are made for the country, is unsettling. [It is] not a warning to us necessarily, but it tells us something about fragility of the American experiment writ large.

COLEMAN: When I read the book, I was struck by the contemporary echo of using rules, and how the rules of the House, the rules of the Senate were being used just to obstruct any kind of movement, any kind of debate, which really resonated with me, looking at the current political situation. I don't even know if that was mentioned in the lecture, but in the book, there was much about how these politicians, particularly Southern politicians, became experts at using these rules just to be able to control the agenda of the political body. Certainly right now, we're seeing a debate over the future of the filibuster, so it was hard not to think about that.

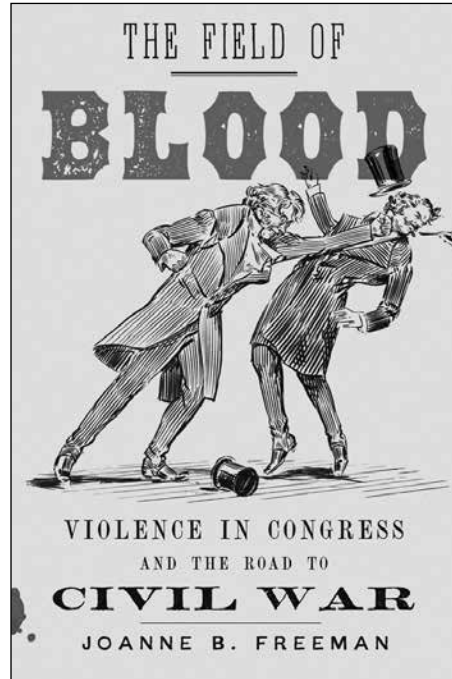
I agree; if you enjoyed the lecture, by all means, read the book. Dr. Freeman has this sense of fun, talking about these horrible incidents, but that sense of fun comes off the page, and this book is a really enjoyable, dare I say entertaining, book to read. I know I'll never look at the *Congressional Globe* again, which I've used as a source many times, as some sort of impartial source of what was actually going on in Congress at the time.

My first question, when I was reading the book, was if Oregon saw anything like this violence that Dr. Freeman describes in Washington. I took a look around at this, and there were a few scattered incidents, some heated feuds, a lot of heavy drinking, even amongst people who were preaching temperance. So, I saw some echoes, but I didn't see anything like the fighting within the legislature that Freeman describes. What made Oregon different? Bill, you already alluded to this somewhat in terms of the makeup of the settlers who came out here to be begin with, but I'd like to know more about what made Oregon different.

LANG: [As whites in Oregon imposed] a society on Indigenous land through treaties in the early 1850s, [part of their purpose in coming to the] West — they argued more about religion and sectarianism [than they did about how they treated Native people]. They [focused on their moral sanctity] to a much greater extent than in most places in the country. Part of that, of course, was because of their ambition to be in a new place, to be able to create their own world, to a degree. And the other thing that dominated it was the fact that the first non-Native [permanent] settlers were sectarian Methodists, but also then joined by others, including Catholics. So, the Catholic-Protestant animosity that quickly developed was analogous in some ways to the ideological [political and cultural] animosities that Freeman talked about in Congress. They weren't the same thing, of course — they weren't trying to kill each other,

and they certainly weren't working off of a code of dueling — but they were working off of another kind of a code. They wanted to create a society for themselves, and they wanted to make sure that others who came either lived by their rules or didn't come at all.

OSTLER: Bill is really the expert here on political culture within Oregon in the 1840s and 1850s. I came across a wonderful little story in David Johnson's book, *Founding the Far West*, where he relates that there was a newspaper article that was published by Horace Greeley in the *New York Tribune* that talked about a situation in Oregon in the 1857 Constitutional Convention, where men were armed, they were pulling guns, they were pulling knives. It was a fight between the anti-slavery and the pro-slavery forces, as though something in Oregon was happening that was equivalent to what was happening in bleeding Kansas at the same time. And, according to this account that Horace Greeley published in the *Tribune*, weapons were fired. There were only a couple of minor injuries, but it would have been something like what Professor Freeman was talking about. The interesting thing is that it was fake news; it actually had not happened. There was an unnamed individual who had written up the fake story that sent it off to Horace Greeley, and he fell for it and published it. We don't know if he [Greeley] retracted it or not, when he found out it was false, [and] of course,



ON MARCH 16, 2021, Joanne Freeman gave a lecture to Oregon Historical Society attendees of the Mark O. Hatfield Lecture Series. Her book, *Field of Blood: Violence in Congress and the Road to Civil War*, was published in 2018.

Oregon papers pointed out that it was false.² But I thought that was kind of revealing, both because it shows that there really wasn't that kind of violence, but it also does show that, at least to some readers and I guess to Horace Greeley himself, it seemed possible that something like that could happen anywhere. If it was happening in Kansas, maybe it could've happened in Oregon, and one of the interesting things there would be to wonder about why it didn't happen in Oregon but was happening in Kansas.

Certainly, as Bill points out, the political culture is different, the arguments are different, but on the other hand, Oregon was isolated. I think that may have been a factor, and it was a territory, which I think also may have been a factor in determining the kinds of political issues that were on the table. In Kansas, they had so much violence because, although there were a lot of Indigenous people in Kansas in 1854 when it was created as a territory, there weren't very many white settlers. They all flooded in because Kansas was very close to Missouri, [and] all Missourians, pro-slavery people, flooded in. And, then, a bunch of anti-slavery people flooded in to settle Kansas from New England [and] the Ohio Valley. So, the proximity of Kansas to the centers of conflict, I think, mattered. Oregon was a long, long ways away.

COLEMAN: It's hard to imagine any border ruffians making the 2,000-mile trek to Oregon to stir up a lot of trouble, and we can talk about how Oregon managed to just sort of kick the can on the slavery question, all together. Kansas had rival constitutions, [and] Oregon was going to make sure that that didn't happen. I would like to talk just a little bit, if you could, Jeffrey, about a territorial arrangement that Oregon was under and how that affected politics within Oregon, being a territory rather than a state, [including] what sort of relationship that meant they would have, not only with Washington, D.C., but [also] in terms of how parties operated within the territories.

OSTLER: Oregon had been a territory for a relatively long period of time, and Oregonians had some real reservations about becoming a state. It was only really the late 1850s that they wanted to move that way. Part of it was because of the *Dred Scott* decision, which made it seem as though slave owners would have rights to bring slaves into territories, and that propelled, at least some Oregonians, to want statehood.³ I think, because it was a fairly long territorial period, it meant that the kinds of issues that might have led to conflict over slavery were able to be adjudicated without a great deal of controversy. Bill might be able to say more to us about that. There was a general kind of consensus to try to keep it out of politics as much as possible. There was a sort of sense of a commitment to popular sovereignty. Democrats were largely in charge. Whigs were fairly weak all along. And though there were factions within the Democratic Party, they had kind of worked out arrangements, and under the territorial government, they didn't have to decide as quickly as some other places.

COLEMAN: Stacey, I want you to talk about Oregon and your thoughts on this, but I also know that you're a historian of California, and particularly of this period, so maybe you could talk about Oregon and then transition into talking about California, which was a remarkably different situation. [California] didn't have a territorial period like Oregon did. The whole thing moved very, very quickly.

SMITH: One of the key things that actually was similar between Oregon and California, in this period, is that isolation that Jeff was talking about. It's really important to understand that the distance between the Pacific states and the rest of the United States was huge, and that actually meant that national political parties didn't adhere the same way in the Pacific coast states and territories as they did elsewhere. For instance, a really interesting thing that comes out of Oregon is that when Oregon finally organizes its own branch of the Republican Party, Oregon Republicans pass a resolution in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Going against the Kansas-Nebraska Act was the foundation of the Republican Party nationwide, and here you have Oregon Republicans saying, "popular sovereignty; that's the key thing that we care about." It's incredible. I had a lot of colleagues who said, "whoa. Oregon Republicans are voting for Kansas-Nebraska?"⁴

So that's a really interesting change and difference that we see in Oregon, and actually, in California, too. The Whig party was, if not nonexistent, extremely absent in California. Politics in California kind of work themselves out in really different ways, in the absence of those national parties. People don't go to the [national party] conventions, because they're thousands of miles away, [and] party news [from the East Coast] doesn't make it out to the Pacific coast for months. So the isolation of Oregon Territory and California, I think, are pretty important in terms of understanding how party politics work differently on the West Coast.

Actually, California is a lot different than Oregon in terms of the amount of violence [in state politics]. Whereas we see a somewhat more homogeneous white American population moving to Oregon, just the flood of people that come into California for the gold rush [brought] a very diverse — ethnically, racially, nationally, regionally — group of people, [which] creates a situation where you actually have a large number of Southerners from slave states, including some from the deep South who are themselves slaveholders. They get involved in California politics, [and] while they only make up a third of California's U.S.-born population, they control a lot of politics in California. They control the governorship. They control the state supreme court. They are prominent in the legislature and the judiciary. Two of California's early senators are pro-slavery Southerners.⁵ So, violence is actually fairly common in California politics. There were four major political duels in California between 1851 and 1861; three of those ended in death. And a man was stabbed to death on the floor of the California Assembly in 1861. [This stabbing] wasn't over sectional issues, but it was [committed by] a Southerner who basically had the honor code, the dueling code, in mind and essentially stabbed his enemy to death on the floor of the assembly.⁶

[Finally,] because there are a large number of Southerners in California, and because California actually does have an enslaved African American population of about 500 to 1,500 people, these issues were not absent from California politics. It was hard to avoid

them. Slaveholders and pro-slavery people managed to push through a fugitive slave act for California and then renew it twice more so that, between 1852 and 1855, any enslaved people who were brought into the state of California could be captured and essentially deported back to the Southern states and back to slavery.⁷ This is how powerful the slave power was in California. So, there's a very different scene in California, as compared to Oregon.

COLEMAN: I just got a question from someone who's watching. Were Oregon Democrats different, in the 1850s, from Southern Democrats? Obviously the Democratic Party dominated Oregon much like it does today, but it was a very different Democratic Party with a very different set of constituencies. What made Oregon Democrats different from the Southern Democrats and even Southern Whigs, I suppose, that Freeman talks about in her lecture and also wrote about in her book?

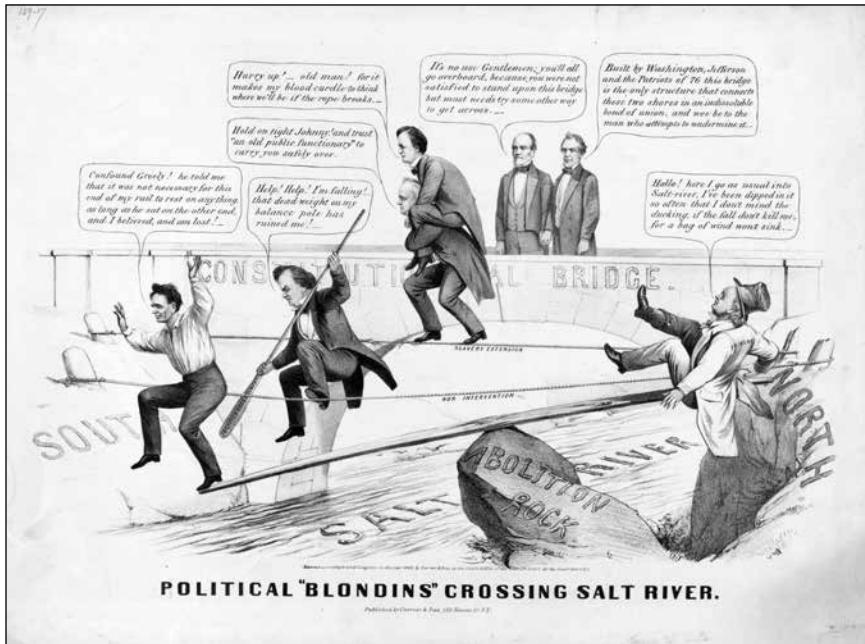
LANG: Democrats in Oregon, in comparison with Democrats elsewhere in the country, didn't have some of the really steady and reliable foes to rail against. So, for example, there isn't a national bank. There isn't a bank, actually, in Portland until the 1860s. So, in the 1850s, the Jacksonian strain of the Democratic Party — which was very much alive, and there were quite a few Jacksonian Democrats in Oregon — didn't really have any windmills to tilt against. They didn't have anybody especially that they were worried about. Their major problem was whether or not anybody was going to mess around

with them, if anybody outside of Oregon was going to try and set the agenda to control them. They fought against the Hudson's Bay Company, a foreign company, and if they looked at danger, they looked at peril from political forces outside of Oregon.

And we have to remind, as a point of clarity, that there were eight federal officers in Oregon appointed [by the President who] had considerable power. The legislature and the local politicians were all subservient to them in that the money, the ultimate control, the policy, etc., that made so much difference came from outside the territory.

The fact that they did not have a very significant opposition party is not unimportant, because what they did then was, of course, to eat themselves. They went after each other; they split apart. Those that weren't ardent enough were considered to be soft, and it invited splintering and bickering. Most of it was focused on whether or not — back to what I said earlier — they could control their socioeconomic environment.

OSTLER: On the issue of slavery, it's clear that the pro-slavery wing of the Democratic Party was not as strong in Oregon as it was, as Stacey's talking about, in California. The center of gravity of the Oregon Democratic Party, I think, really was more toward a Stephen Douglas popular sovereignty. It's nonetheless the case that Joe Lane, who was then a territorial delegate and a major figure, was the vice-presidential candidate on the Breckinridge pro-slavery, deep South ticket in the election of 1860. And although Abra-



THIS POLITICAL CARTOON, published by Currier & Ives, ridicules the 1860 presidential and vice-presidential candidates' positions on extending slavery to the territories. From left to right, Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, James Buchanan, and Samuel Breckinridge (on Buchanan's shoulders) balance over the "Salt River" between the North and South. John Bell and Edward Everett stand on the "Constitutional Bridge," and Horace Greeley sits precariously on a rail balancing on "Abolition Rock."

ham Lincoln carried Oregon in 1860, the Breckinridge ticket did very well.⁸ I don't think it's necessarily a reflection of an extremely strong pro-slavery sentiment, as more of a reflection of Lane's ties, but also [of] the fact that many Oregonians did think that the South, at least, ought to have the right to keep slavery there, where they had it. Oregon Democrats — very few really did want slavery, and the Constitution had been a free-state constitution.

COLEMAN: Yes, it is fascinating that Breckinridge got more votes than Ste-

phen Douglas, the champion of popular sovereignty, which so many Oregonians seem to identify with and kind of based their entire political program on. I think we can chalk that up, perhaps, to the popularity of Joseph Lane. If there was a fighter for Oregon in Washington, D.C., they would've conceived of Joseph Lane in that position. Stacey, do you have anything to say about the Southern Democrats versus Oregon Democrats?

SMITH: Again, I'm going to do the California thing and say it's very simi-

lar. In California, as I mentioned, there isn't much of a Whig opposition party, and so you have, as Bill aptly said, the Democratic Party ruling everything and essentially tearing itself apart, just in the same way that the National Democratic Party was doing at the same time. Ultimately, at least in California, those splits of pro-slavery/anti-slavery just couldn't be contained in the same party anymore, and Californians were actually late in terms of organizing a Republican Party, [which they didn't do] until 1856. Even though John C. Frémont, the presidential candidate for the Republicans in 1856, had huge California connections, the Republican Party was very unpopular in California until right about the eve of the Civil War. So it is, again, very much a story of the Democratic Party and its inability to contain a diversity of opinions and stances — especially, in California, on slavery — that leads to a political fracture that reflects what's going on nationally in politics.⁹

COLEMAN: Reading Dr. Freeman's book, I counted five references to Oregon, [and] none were of any particular consequence. She didn't necessarily make this an easy conversation to have, but as she mentioned in her lecture, it was westward expansion that really raised the temperature on North-South sectional wisdom in Congress. Particularly in the 1850s, you have all these patches and compromises that are trying to keep this thing together. She focuses mostly on the controversy over introducing slavery into the territories carved out of the Louisiana Purchase and the Mexican secession.

I don't think she intended to do this, but it can obscure what westward expansion and settler colonialism actually meant, on the ground, for the people living in the antebellum West, Native and non-Native people alike. It also potentially reinforces a myth — I don't think Freeman is trying to do this — that somehow the United States expanded into this wilderness, or this sort of blank canvas, when, in fact, the West contained a multitude of different cultures [and] communities that have existed, overlapped, and sometimes clashed for centuries.

So, settler encroachment on Native land obviously instigated or exacerbated patterns of violence that were an overwhelming concern to everyone living in the West at the time. A lot of the settlers saw Indigenous people as an obstacle to settlement, an obstacle to economic gain, whereas Indigenous communities were struggling to maintain their position and their survival in this rapidly shifting landscape. And, then, you throw [in] mining, [and] suddenly everybody's fanning out throughout the West looking for precious metals in the 1850s, which only adds to this volatility. I'm curious: how did all these tensions manifest themselves in terms of regional politics? How did they show up in regional politics?

LANG: It's a huge question. I'm just going to talk about a couple of things that relate to the last part of what you said, which was how did it relate to politics. I think it's fair to say — and Jeff may have some more specific things to add to this — if you're in Oregon in

the 1850s, and you are trying to defend Native people, and especially Native people in their homelands, you're in a very, very small group. In the broadest possible sense, Oregonians were racist. They were white supremacist, not that they were different from people, say, in Illinois and New York, but they had something much different in mind at that particular moment — the same kind of thing that had happened earlier in places like Ohio and Illinois and in the Southeast — they wanted the land. They moved the Indians off their homelands, in almost any way they possibly could, and when that tactic failed, they often used violence. How did that work out with politics? It seems to me that there are two or three different ways.

One of them was — in the case of someone like Lane, [and] in the case of someone like Isaac Stevens, who was the territorial Governor of Washington, and a few others in Oregon of lesser lights — the notion of being against the Indians, fighting the Indians, solving the “problem,” getting the land, moving the community forward, being able to develop a society—provided a ladder rung up into national politics. On the other end of the equation, anybody in a local area — whether you're in southern Oregon, whether you're in the Willamette Valley, whether you're east of the Cascades— if you didn't “defend your local opportunities,” to take advantage of anything that was in the landscape, anything in the environment, and Indians were in your way, as you pointed out, Ken, that could precipitate violence. But, most impor-

tantly, your political fate, your future, all would be tied directly to how successful you were in marginalizing Indians.

OSTLER: I think what Bill said is very useful on this. My way of thinking about these kinds of questions in pretty much every place in the United States, and certainly Oregon, is that pretty much all white Americans agree that they're entitled to take the lands of Native people. [They agree] that Native people don't use their lands, that America is a superior civilization, that white people are [a] superior race, and that God has given them the right to eventually have these lands and make them productive as private property. Divisions occur about how to do that, and in Oregon, there's roughly two different approaches. One is particularly pursued in the southwestern part of the state in the late 1840s and 1850s, and it's really a policy of outright genocide.¹⁰ We know something about the extent of that violence, but I'm convinced that we don't know enough about it and [that] some of it's been erased.

That said, there are a number of people like Joel Palmer who don't want to gain Indian lands that way. [They] want to do it through a treaty process and removal from the Willamette Valley and Rogue River Valley to the coast. At the moment, the coastal areas aren't particularly lands in demand by white settlers. So, there's divisions of opinion about how to do that, and political careers are at stake, as Bill points out. But I do think that's the basic structure that

we have; everybody's agreed on the goal, the question about how to do it is the question that people would fight about.

COLEMAN: One thing you see in Oregon, [is] Thomas Dryer, who sort of led the Whigs from his party organ, the *Oregonian* — his position on removal was not terribly dissimilar from the Democrats' position on removal. So, there wasn't really going to be a lot of debates, but again, it would be more about tactics.

OSTLER: I'd just like to add that the process of removing people to the coastal reservations, what eventually became Grand Ronde and Siletz mainly, was terribly destructive. There are many, many trails of tears in Oregon. It's not that people are being killed literally at gunpoint — although sometimes [they were], even in the removals — but it's people being forced into absolutely miserable conditions. The death toll of those removals is really appalling, and that's another kind of violence that I don't think we appreciate enough.¹¹

COLEMAN: Thank you. Stacey, I'd love to hear from you on this, especially having read your book on California. You can talk about Oregon as well; there's a lot that you can tell us about.

SMITH: One important thing that I can say about the California case — and I think this actually applies elsewhere as well — is that we shouldn't disconnect this debate over the expansion of slavery from the question of what's going

to happen to Indigenous people. This conversation has shown that. In some cases, they're literally intertwined with each other, and one of the really strong examples of that is in the history of California. Part of the reason that California did not go through a territorial phase is that Congress was deadlocked for a couple of years between the end of the war with Mexico and 1850, about granting territorial status and organizing California, Utah, and New Mexico as territories. So California was kind of left in this limbo, where it wasn't a territory, it was a seized colony, or state, of Mexico, and then, it suddenly went into statehood [when Californians decided that they were just going to hold their own state constitutional convention without Congressional approval]. That created a lot of dislocations, confusion, and violence, especially as it regarded Native people. There wasn't a strong federal presence in early U.S. California.

Some of the genocidal activity that we see in California can be attributed to [the fact] that the state of California made its own Indian policy, which is not how things are supposed to go in the federal system; that's a U.S. federal government prerogative. That's not to say that the federal government is going to necessarily do any better for Native people, but the chaos of the situation — because Congress has deadlocked over slavery in the territories and will not act to organize these territories — creates political conditions that allow California to make its own decisions, and those decisions have terrible consequences for Native people. [The federal government] just sort of leave[s]

And if a majority of all the votes given
 for and against free negroes shall be
 given ^{against} free negroes, then the following
 section shall be added to the Bill of Rights,
 and shall be part of this constitution, "Section
 " —. "No free negro or mulatto, not residing
 " in this state at the time of the adoption
 " of this constitution, shall ever come reside
 " or be within this state, or ~~hold~~ ^{any} real
 " estate or make any contract or main-
 " tain any suit therein; and the Legislative
 " Assembly shall provide by penal laws

THE PRELIMINARY DRAFT of the Oregon Constitution includes a provision for handling the outcome of a vote against permitting free Blacks in the state: "No free negro or mulatto, not residing in this state at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall ever come reside or be within this state, or hold any real estate or make any contract or maintain any suit therein."

it up to the California legislature, which passes a law allowing the enslavement and indenture of Native children, which basically rewards — and I'm sure there [are] cases in Oregon, too — genocidal warfare by giving bounties to militias that go into the inland areas and kill Native Americans. So, the chaos generated by the inability to break that gridlock over the question of slavery in the territories, is [in] a lot of ways directly related to the utter chaos in policy toward Native Americans in California.¹²

COLEMAN: There's something so ironic about this conversation, because as Dr. Freeman said in her lecture, it

wasn't just Congress that was violent; there was a lot of violence in society. A lot of the places where the Oregon Trail migrants originated were fraught with mob violence. It was endemic to life in this period. So, in many ways, they were trying to get away from that and start anew in a place where they can avoid all the violence that they had left. But, by doing so, there's suddenly this immediate anxiety that, at any moment, there could be some sort of violence. You see that very early on; there's a lot of fear and antipathy, particularly in the Willamette Valley.

We don't have much time left. I do want to touch a little bit on anti-slavery

politics in Oregon. Somebody asked a question about Black exclusion, and certainly, Black exclusion was part of anti-slavery politics in Oregon. Oregon has a reputation for being anti-slavery, but it's certainly not William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionism that we're talking about. [Please talk] a little bit about what an anti-slavery politics mean in Oregon at this time.

SMITH: I think it's really important to make the distinction between being someone who is anti-slavery and being an abolitionist. We tend to combine those two terms in a way that people in the nineteenth century wouldn't have understood or necessarily done themselves, [when] it [was] possible to be anti-slavery, but to not be an abolitionist. There were full-fledged abolitionists in Oregon; they're [a] much smaller number. [But] the mainstream anti-slavery view was the view of free soil, that the West needed to be free, that slavery needed to be excluded from any new western territories, so that free white workers, especially those from the North — the region that holds this belief — would be able to thrive and prosper and not have to compete with slaveholders. A big part of that is the question of: well, if African Americans are allowed to come into Oregon, free or enslaved, are slaveholders going to find a way to bring them in very large numbers, [and] perhaps free them? This was a worry in California, and sometimes did happen, [so there was the perceived possibility that slaveholders would] free the people before bringing

them to Oregon and then establish, kind of, de facto slavery there. So, this idea of Black exclusion is very much linked, in some ways, to this anti-slavery, free-soil view that only by keeping the territories white is it possible to keep slavery out of the West. This is not a humanitarian view of what it means to be against slavery. Instead, it's much more rooted in economics and social concerns.¹³

COLEMAN: Aside from the handful of abolitionists, there's not a moral objection to slavery. It's not even an objection to slavery as it exists anywhere else. I see it as a NIMBY [not in my back yard] approach, like: we don't want it here, but it's fine if you'll do it where you are; just don't bring it into our community.

LANG: The only thing I would add is that anti-slavery, whether it verged into abolition in individual discussions, really had an awful lot more to do with the perception of Oregon in some ways as being moral, that is, being on moral grounds. Many individuals who made any kind of a comment about it were getting on a high horse by comparison with their compatriots. It didn't have any real effect, any power, as a moral issue in Oregon politics. The major problem, or major thing that they were trying to do, was to create a socioeconomic new world [in Oregon]. So, I think that Stacey's right about the economic aspects of it, the free-soil vision, and that sort of thing. I really think it's an awfully insular issue for Oregonians, essentially moral questions that don't have any political bite or traction.

COLEMAN: The only thing I wanted to add to that [is], in terms of Oregon, when they were coming up with the state constitution, they went very quickly. They drafted up this constitution in a couple months. One of the reasons it went so quickly, is they just decided to have, basically, a gag rule on slavery and, really, a gag rule on Black exclusion. They saw these as probably the two most controversial topics. They just kicked the can to popular sovereignty and said, “we’ll just let the voters decide.” So, I think there is some resonance there with kind of the gag rule that dominates a section of Freeman’s book. I did

see an echo in Oregon, where they could just avoid the sort of melee that Horace Greeley described in that newspaper article. They were able to avoid it because they just didn’t even talk about it.

CANTY-JONES: Thank you all so much. The hour has just flown by. I want to say thank you, again, to all of our Hatfield Lecture Series sponsors and, especially, thank you to all of you for taking the time to share your knowledge with us tonight and putting in the extra work to look up different things in books today. Take care everybody.

NOTES

1. The classic analysis of conspiracy theory in U.S. politics is Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 1964, 77–86. For Civil War–era conspiratorial thinking, see Freeman, *The Field of Blood* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), chapter 6; Frank L. Klement, *Dark Lanterns: Secret Political Societies, Conspiracies, and Treason Trials in the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984); and Michael E. Woods, “‘The Indignation of Freedom-Loving People’: The Caning of Charles Sumner and Emotion in Antebellum Politics,” *Journal of Social History* 44:3 (2011): 689–705.

2. David Alan Johnson, *Founding the Far West: California, Oregon, and Nevada,*

1840–1890 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 140–41.

3. *Ibid.*, 65.

4. Robert W. Johannsen, *Frontier Politics and the Sectional Conflict: The Pacific Northwest on the Eve of the Civil War* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1955), 76–77.

5. For a discussion of southerners in California politics and law, see Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 63–79; and Kevin Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), Chapter 4.

6. These included the Denver-Gilbert duel of 1852; the Broderick-Terry duel of 1859; the Terry-Worthington duel of 1861; and the Showalter-Piercy duel of 1861. In 1860, William H. Stone of El Dorado County shot at Assemblyman John C. Bell of Sacramento County and then stabbed him to death on the floor of the assembly over a county boundary dispute. See Ryan Chamberlain, *Pistols, Politics and the Press: Dueling in 19th Century American Journalism* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2008), 1–4; Waite, *West of Slavery*, 120–21; Jeff Erzin, *Confederate Veterans in Northern California: 101 Biographies* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2020), 112–14; Clarence C. Clendenen, “Dan Showalter: California Secessionist,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 40:4 (1961): 309–325; and California Legislature, “Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. John C. Bell, Assemblyman from El Dorado County: Delivered in the Assembly and Senate of California, Seventeenth and Eighteenth of April, 1860” (Sacramento: C.T. Botts, 1860).

7. Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, Chapter 2.

8. For a summary of the 1860 election in Oregon, see Richard Etulain, “Election of 1860,” *The Oregon Encyclopedia*, <https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/election-of-1860/#.YPWuFkBIUIU> (accessed July 20, 2021). Lincoln carried Oregon with 5,345 votes (36.2 percent); John C. Breckinridge finished a close second with 5,075 (34.4 percent); Douglas gained with 4,131 votes (27.9 percent); John Bell, at the head of the Constitutional Union Party, received 213 votes (1.4 percent).

9. Gerald Stanley, “Slavery and the Origins of the Republican Party in California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 60:1 (Spring 1978): 1–16.

10. For the “genocidal wars” of southwestern Oregon, see Gray H. Whaley, *Oregon and the Collapse of Illahee: U.S.*

Empire and the Transformation of an Indigenous World, 1792–1859 (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 231. For “genocide of Native peoples” on the Oregon coast, see David G. Lewis and Thomas J. Connolly, “White American Violence on the Oregon Coast,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:4 (Winter 2019): 371. The most recent study of genocidal violence in the Pacific Northwest is Marc James Carpenter, “‘Rake Up No Stories of Evil’: Memory, Celebration, and Erasure of Settler Violence in the American Pacific Northwest,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 2021).

11. For Trails of Tears in Oregon and the violence connected to them, see David G. Lewis, “Four Deaths: The Near Destruction of Western Oregon Tribes and Native Lifeways, Removal to the Reservation, and Erasure from History,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 115:3 (Fall 2014): 414–37.

12. Benjamin Madley, *American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), esp. 163–72; Benjamin Madley, “California’s Yuki Indians: Defining Genocide in Native American History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 39:3 (Autumn 2008): 303–332.

13. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Kenneth R. Coleman, *Dangerous Subjects: James D. Saules and the Rise of Black Exclusion in Oregon* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2017); Jim M. Labbe, “The Colored Brother’s Few Defenders: Oregon Abolitionists and their Followers,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:4 (Winter 2019): 440–67; Kenneth R. Coleman, “We’ll All Start Even, White Egalitarianism and the Oregon Donation Land Claim Act,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120:4 (Winter 2019), 414–39.