The Gold Rush: Consequences and Contingencies
Author(s): Richard White
Published by: California Historical Society
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25462461
Accessed: 23/06/2010 16:42

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=chs.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

California Historical Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to California History.
Although Mark Twain arrived in California fifteen years after the gold discovery, the humor and irony of his literary style has long been associated with the Gold Rush. This drawing by F. Strothmann of Jim Smiley shaking buckshot out of his famous frog first appeared in a 1903 edition of Twain’s “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.” Twain’s famous story, originally published in the New York Saturday Press in 1865, touched off his literary career and in the twentieth century inspired an annual re-creation of the jumping-frog contest in Angel’s Camp. From The Jumping Frog, Dover Publications, New York (1971).
The Gold Rush: Consequences and Contingencies

by Richard White

Historical anniversaries and commemorations seem to demand hyperbole. Editorialists, writers, and speakers, who in soberer moments might exercise a certain caution in drawing causal connections between past events and present circumstances, act as if they are on historical holiday. The usual rules are suspended. No connection between the Gold Rush and contemporary California seems beyond consideration.

Since even in their quieter moments, Californians are not a people inclined toward understatement, it is not surprising that telling them that the Gold Rush was their common nativity and that 1998 represents their collective one-hundred-fiftieth birthday has opened a deep vein of credulity. It is as if “good natured and garrulous” Simon Wheeler, the narrator of Mark Twain’s “Jumping Frog of Calaveras County,” had somehow transported himself into the late twentieth century and found an audience credulous beyond his wildest dreams. In the story, a traveler asked Wheeler about the Reverend Leonidas W. Smiley and his connection to the Gold Rush, and Wheeler proceeded to tell them about a Jim Smiley and his famous frog. The audiences of the modern Wheelers have no curiosity about the Reverend Smiley’s connection to the Gold Rush; they want to know about their connection to the Gold Rush. The modern Wheelers are happy to oblige. Most everything in California, or so it sometimes seems, is the product of the Gold Rush. The Gold Rush produced great wealth, and so the Silicon Valley is a direct descendant of the Gold Rush. By the same logic, since the Gold Rush produced high prices, the six-dollar beers in airport bars are a legacy of the Gold Rush.

But if all of modern California is the legacy of the Gold Rush, what are we going to do when the next anniversary, the next commemoration rolls around? What will be left to credit to the completion of the transcontinental railroad or World War II, to cite only two events that historians have thought, perhaps mistakenly, had a passing influence on the state. Most likely, the same editorialists and writers who attribute Silicon Valley and modern, diverse California to the Gold Rush will then just as happily attribute Silicon Valley and modern, diverse California to the transcontinental railroads or World War II.

If only to be perverse, I would like to suggest that, perhaps, we should be more careful about claiming legacies and consequences. Perhaps, modern Californians are not in any meaningful way the descendants of the Forty-niners. Perhaps, the Silicon Valley is not, even metaphorically, the equivalent of the Gold Rush. Most miners after all, used low technology, not high technology. They produced a simple basic product that they found in the ground. They did not produce a complicated and sophisticated product they thought up in their heads. Education gave a miner little advantage. I don’t think that this is true for the computer specialists of Silicon Valley. The miners were people of the nineteenth century. Their values, expectations, and beliefs were very different from the people who inhabit the state today. We have connections with the past, but they are difficult and tangled connections. The past is another country.

Don’t get me wrong. I am not against public celebrations and the claims that public memory makes; I just want to distinguish such claims from those of
history. I would be the first to admit that academic history is not the only way to understand the past. I, for example, come from a family obsessed with the past. I have just finished a book about my mother, *Remembering Ahanagran*, and writing it has reminded me that my mother, my brothers, my sister, my aunts, and my uncles all mobilize, use, and claim the past. In one of those idiot insights that mark my own intellectual life, I realized that in a family obsessed with the past, I am the only historian. My attitudes, not theirs, are peculiar.

My attitudes are peculiar because academic historians look at the past in distinctive ways, and little of what I say will make much sense unless I explain this. When I think about the Gold Rush and question its consequences, I am making certain assumptions about history. I need to defend my skepticism.

I definitely think the Gold Rush had consequences, but the claims made for those consequences are all tangled up in what we think history is and with our own position in the present world. We are not the first ones to claim that certain consequences flowed from the Gold Rush. We can learn something about the difficulties of claiming legacies and consequences by realizing how different the consequences we now claim from the Gold Rush are from the consequences claimed one hundred years ago. One hundred years ago, two prominent nineteenth-century Californians, Henry George and Hubert Howe Bancroft, were both rather confident about the legacies of the Gold Rush. That one reached quite opposite conclusions from the other did not shake the confidence of either.

In the late nineteenth century, Hubert Howe Bancroft was the country’s most successful historical entrepreneur. He was a man who quite literally made history pay, and history that pays is often not a particularly critical history. It tends to celebrate whatever values are ascendant at the moment. Bancroft was not a man to alienate potential subscribers. Kevin Starr lumps Bancroft in with a set of authors who concluded that the Gold Rush produced in California “a
Although the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo guaranteed that the property of the Mexican residents of California (Californios) would be “inviolably respected,” Americans and other immigrants—with governmental support—systematically overran and appropriated California lands. This gold-rush daguerreotype of a Hispanic woman is entitled “Spanish Woman,” although her actual ancestry—Californio, Latin American immigrant, or actually Spanish—is uncertain. Courtesy Oakland Museum of California, gift of Dr. Stanley B. Burns.

permanent internationalization of flush times, an attitude of recklessness and swagger and competitive democracy.” The Californian, they asserted, against their own evidence to the contrary, was merely the Forty-niner who stayed on. The Forty-niner became the Pioneer, who became the Capitalist, and all that was prosperous and modern about California was their legacy.1

There is no doubt that this was one side of Bancroft. He, too, was not a man to hesitate when hyperbole beckoned. “The full and permanent effects of the California gold discovery cannot be estimated,” he concluded. “All over the world impulse was given to industry, values changed and commerce, social economy, and finance were revolutionized. New enlightenment and new activities succeeded these changes, and yet again followed higher and broader developments . . . There had been nothing like it since the inpouring of gold and silver to Europe following the discovery of the New World by Columbus.”2

For Bancroft the Gold Rush was a world event whose consequences were in one sense incalculable, but in another sense could pretty much be summed up as late nineteenth-century California. Bancroft was hardly enamored of everything that the Gold Rush brought to California. He saw greed, violence, and all kinds of baseness. He often saw, and only partially justified, genocidal violence against Indians and robbery of Californios. But Bancroft was sanguine. The Gold Rush had created the incredible mix of evil and good, and out of it later events had filtered what Bancroft regarded as the benign and progressive California of the late nineteenth century.

Bancroft is a handy example of one way of constructing consequences. Bancroft knew, of course, that California did not begin with the Gold Rush; he wrote a book about early California. But when he wrote about the Gold Rush, he acted as if, for all practical purposes, modern California began in 1848. Where we begin stories matters. History is not an origin story, and the Gold Rush is not some secular Book

SPRING 1998 45
of Genesis for the state of California. The Gold Rush occurred after some events and before others. It doesn’t explain all that follows, but neither is it likely that it has nothing to do with what followed. The Gold Rush had consequences, but specifying those consequences—and not overplaying them—that is the trick.

To specify the Gold Rush’s consequences, Bancroft created what amounts to an evolutionary history. Later events preserved good traits and eliminated bad, but the Gold Rush provided the basic genotype. How all this happened is never entirely clear. Bancroft often wrote as if Forty-niners remained in the state and bequeathed to those who never actually participated in the Gold Rush a set of attitudes supposedly typical of the event. The newcomers seemingly gladly accepted them. The fact that most Forty-niners went home and most Californians in the 1880s and 1890s had no experience with the Gold Rush is inconvenient, but not fatal. The Gold Rush could, for example, have set up institutions and structures that continued to shape events long after the Forty-niners departed. But in the long run, California’s institutions pretty much mimicked larger American institutions, and such differences as did exist had more to do with Spanish and Mexican precedents than the Gold Rush.

In the actual history of California and the United States, both the genetic metaphors and the metaphors of legacy fail. A past event, or a set of past events, does not act as some sort of historical DNA passed on from generation to generation, producing the collective equivalent of hair or skin color or predisposition to cancer. The present does not in this sense develop inexorably from the past. Such a reading of the past as a genetic code has, ironically, the consequence of rendering most of what actually happened in the past utterly meaningless. Everything that happens between then and now becomes merely, as Bancroft had it, a filtering or refining of the original material.

Still, Bancroft’s claims have an appeal, because Bancroft’s idea that the Gold Rush had consequences is deeply historical in the sense that modern historians understand history. Any assertion of a set of historical consequences springing from a particular event or set of events is inextricably attached to the basic historical idea of contingency. This sounds more complicated than I mean it to be. Contingency, in the sense that I am using it, simply means that something that happens is dependent on something else happening, and that the something else is neither inevitable nor even predictable. The old saying that begins “For want of a nail, a shoe was lost, for want of a shoe a horse was lost, for want of a horse a battle was lost . . . .,” and goes on until a whole kingdom has been lost, is an example of contingency. The movie It's a Wonderful Life, which revolves around the difference that the life of a single man (played by Jimmy Stewart) makes and how different his town would have been without him, is about contingency.

There are historical models in which contingency does not matter. If, for example, history is only the product of meta-forces that inevitably steer it in a certain direction, then particular events do not much matter except as signs of the forces at work. If a Hegelian spirit, or a Marxist class struggle, or a Christian God determines the eventual outcome, then events are merely epiphenomena with no important consequences of their own. Such teleological history cares about events only insofar as they are signs of the spirit or God’s purpose or History with a capital H.

Contingency means that particular events matter. To say that the Gold Rush had important consequences is to say that some of the events that followed the Gold Rush would not have happened if the Gold Rush had not happened in the way that it did. The consequences of the Gold Rush were in the most obvious sense contingent on the Gold Rush happening.

As much as I hate to admit it, the flip side of the idea of historical contingency is counterfactual history. Counterfactual history is essentially “what if”
Henry George (1839–1897), social critic and economist, came to California in 1857 and found work as a miner, printer, and itinerant newspaperman. He was one of the first and loudest opponents of railroad expansion, arguing that it “kills little towns and builds up great cities, and in the same way kills little businesses and builds up great ones.” Shown here in a photograph made by a leading San Francisco photography studio, George moved to New York in 1880 just as his best seller Progress and Poverty propelled him to national fame. Photograph by Vance’s Gallery, Bradley and Rulofson, Proprietors. California Historical Society, FN-21526.
ifornia and the nation and the world, but instead how little, after a promising start, it changed them. George can speak for himself:

The discovery of gold in California brought together in a new country men who had been used to look on land as the rightful subject of individual property, and of whom probably not one in a thousand had ever dreamed of drawing any distinction between property in land and property in anything else. But, for the first time in the history of the Anglo-Saxon race, these men were brought into contact with land from which gold could be obtained by the simple operation of washing it out.3

For George, the novelty of the case "broke through habitual ideas, and threw men back upon first principles, and it was by common consent declared that this gold-bearing land should remain common property, of which no one might take more than he could reasonably use, or hold for a longer time than he continued to use it. This perception of natural justice was acquiesced in by the General Government and the courts, and while placer mining remained of importance, no attempt was made to overrule this reversion to primitive ideas. . . . Thus no one was allowed to forestall or to lock up natural resources. Labor was acknowledged as the creator of wealth, was given a free field, and secured in its reward."4 For George, the Gold Rush, rather than being a celebration of laissez-faire capitalism, was a bullet aimed at its heart. It exalted labor over property and capital. This moment when private property in land was thrown into question was, for him, the moment of possibility. It revealed the injustice and harm of allowing largely unrestricted private property in land and allowing speculators to collect rent: the unearned increment when prices rose. But, George regretted, with "the decline of placer mining in California, the accustomed idea of private property finally prevailed in the passage of a law permitting the patenting of mineral lands." This was the infamous 1872 Mining Act.

Interestingly, recent scholarship has reinforced the extent to which the gold-rush era in California represented a strong, and very serious, attack on the norms of Anglo-American property law. The Biddle Boggs case, which centered on access to minerals on John C. Frémont's Mariposa grant, was an attempt to put use before ownership. The powerful squatter's rights movement stressed rights to land that came through use and improvement rather than purchase or grant, and changes in statutes of limitations did impose some limits on property rights.5 But in any case, the moment was lost, and, for George, the most important consequence of the Gold Rush was its lost possibilities.6

George's legacy is in a sense counterfactual. It is the unrealized possibility of a realized event. But precisely because, in George's view, the Gold Rush only partially and temporarily diverted the American devotion to private property in land, the Gold Rush ceased to be a determinative event. By bringing in Americans, it simply speeded the imposition of the American land system over California. That system would have come anyway. It was that land system, rather than the Gold Rush, that ensured, as George argued in Poverty and Progress, that there would be poverty in the midst of riches. With or without the Gold Rush, the world would have been pretty much the same.

George and Bancroft stood in virtually the same place at the same time and assessed the consequences, the legacies, of the Gold Rush in an almost opposite manner. Bancroft was largely satisfied with Gilded Age California. He was willing to recognize evil and immorality in the past, but saw them as being progressively removed. He could see in the Gold Rush what he regarded as the best qualities of himself and his contemporaries, and he regarded the bad qualities of the Gold Rush as something that history itself gradually eliminated. George, critical of Gilded Age society and its growing disparities of wealth, saw the Gold Rush as a moment of white, male egalitarianism—and his major concern was with whites—whose best qualities were quickly lost.
It was an event that revealed other possibilities, but they remained lost possibilities. Today, historians see the Forty-niners as threatening less property law than the actual property of Californios and Indians, people who hardly figure in George’s analysis. And contemporary Californians might see George’s emphasis on the priority of human use in any claim on property as less liberation than as a threat to public lands, where natural processes are to some degree protected from the harshest consequences of human use. Times change; evaluations change.

We now stand a hundred and fifty years after the Gold Rush and more than a hundred years after George and Bancroft. Their legacies—whether some distinctive California personality type or the idea that Forty-niners’ methods of distributing property rights provided a model for solving virtually all American social problems—seem more distant and dated than the Gold Rush itself. Legacies are time-bound. The traces of past events that we pick up and emphasize depend as much on our present concerns as on the event itself.

We see the limits of George’s and Bancroft’s assessments, but, of course, our own assessments of the consequences of the Gold Rush are as time-bound as Bancroft’s and George’s. Our only hope is in recognizing that we do not stand outside history when we make assessments of the past. We have no God’s-eye view. We are fully within the very historical movement that we observe. Assessing the past must necessarily involve an assessment of our own modern condition and where we stand within it, but to be useful, it must do more than that. It must refine the nature of the claims that we make. We can never make our views complete, but we might make them less partial.

Thus I recognize that the things that strike me about the Gold Rush, the things I try to connect with in the modern United States, are as much a product of my own position within modern society as were the conclusions of Bancroft and George. I see the Gold Rush as a period of intense cultural and racial contact. I see the Gold Rush as bringing capital—and with it power—to California in a way that gave it a head start over the rest of the West. I see the gold-rush as a laboratory of power and resistance as Anglo Americans carved out privileged access to gold. I see gold-rush California, thanks to MacRorhough, as a place where the values of emerging capitalism and the values of what might be called a domestic, kin-based America clashed in ways that resonate down to the present. Such concerns are, however, not the only connections with the Gold Rush; they are only what to me are the most visible part of the spectrum in the late twentieth century. There is, admittedly, much more there.

My place in my society constrains my concerns. I can live with that. History is so broad and contains so many things that it needs some constraint. But that I am constrained in what I see does not mean that I can’t find better and more sophisticated ways of establishing connections between the past and the present. I can hope for a more refined gauge of consequences.

If consequences are connected with contingency and contingency always assumes a counterfactual alternative, then we can begin to refine our thinking by looking closely at what it is that we make contingent when we emphasize the contingency of the Gold Rush. The interesting counterfactual question is not what if there were no gold in California. Eliminating the material fact of gold is silly and not very profitable. The interesting question is, what if the Gold Rush, as an event, had not taken place in a certain way at a certain time? What if, for example, gold had been discovered and exploited when California was still safely Mexican? What if, for example, gold had been discovered first in Colorado or Idaho or Alaska? Or what if another generation had passed before gold was discovered in California? What difference would this have made? How you phrase the question in many ways determines the answer.

Change the timing of the event, and other possibilities change. We need to remember that the timing
In the first months of the Gold Rush, it was not uncommon for Californios, Indians, Americans, and European immigrants to work side-by-side in the mines, as suggested in this daguerreotype of the Walter Taylor mine at Taylorsville, 1849. But increased competition, cultural differences, and the arrival of less tolerant people soon inflamed racial hostilities, leading to claim jumping, mob violence, and the eventual enactment of the Foreign Miners' Tax. Courtesy Huntington Library.
of the event not only enabled some things to happen but cut off other possibilities. If, for example, the Gold Rush had come a decade sooner, California would have been Mexican rather than American. California might have shared the fate of Texas—a lightly populated area of northern Mexico overrun by American immigrants. But if it had not, if Mexico had, for example, found a way to wed itself to the British fleet, the wealth that poured out of California might have fueled Mexican development. Proportionately, the wealth of California would have made a greater difference to Mexico than to the United States. John Coatsworth has given an indication of what the loss of the northern territories of Mexico and the development of mining in them meant to Mexican history. The wealth from mining alone that flowed out of California and the rest of the Mexican cession before 1900 exceeded the total Gross National Product of Mexico during that period.7 Seen from Mexico, the Gold Rush was only a sign of what might have been.

Timing, too, is critical in assessing what did happen in California. With or without the Gold Rush, California would have eventually attracted a large population. With or without the Gold Rush, Indian people would have been dispossessed, but perhaps not so brutally. With or without the Gold Rush, Californios would have been stripped of land, but perhaps not so thoroughly. We can guess this, because similar things happened elsewhere. With or without the Gold Rush, railroads would have reached California, and with or without the Gold Rush, these railroads would have monopolized vast tracts of land.

In their broad outlines all of these things and more would most likely have happened, but the critical question is: did their happening at the time and in the way they did make a difference? Clearly, in the short term, all of this made a huge difference. In terms of wealth, population, and political power, California was, for all practical purposes, the West between 1850 and 1880. San Francisco in 1880 held 233,959 people. All of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho added together contained a population of only 282,494. As late as 1900, one out of every five people living from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast lived in the San Francisco-Oakland area.8 This impact extended beyond the West. Let’s take as an easy example the consequences of the Gold Rush for American power in the Pacific. Did the Gold Rush begin American penetration into the Pacific? No. There was an American presence prior to the Gold Rush. Did the Gold Rush have consequences there? There is strong evidence that it did. Jean Heffer in his recent L’États Unis et Le Pacifique speaks of the golden age of the American merchant marine in the Pacific. He argues that although the amount of American commerce in the Pacific increased greatly in the early nineteenth century, the commerce remained marginal until the discovery of gold in California. In the 1850s the commerce rose to represent roughly 10 percent of the ships entering and leaving American ports. At the beginning of the century, all American ships in the Pacific departed from the Northeastern ports and returned there. All this changed in the Gold Rush. In 1856, the first year for which there are statistics on San Francisco, Pacific commerce accounted for nearly half of the entering ships and three-quarters of the departures. It made Panama the principle zone of transit between the East and West coasts. With San Francisco, the United States gained an entrepôt on the Pacific that gave it a great advantage over America’s European rivals.9

Thirty years and more after the Gold Rush, its consequences remained clear in the boost it gave California, but it is possible to imagine consequences as something that ripple out from an event into some pond of time and grow fainter and fainter as one draws away from the site of the event. The consequences of the Gold Rush grew less clear, and the lines of causality between a modern event or situation and an event in the past became more and more complicated. As they extended deeper into time, the consequences of the Gold Rush intersected with other events. Advantages given by the Gold Rush that seemed insurmountable in the late nineteenth
century were, in fact, surmounted. San Francisco's hegemony over the Pacific, for example, hardly seems evident in the 1990s.

The advantages that the Gold Rush bestowed could dwindle unless supplemented by other developments. Does the Gold Rush make a difference in establishing California as, as I have asserted in other places, the capital of the West? Again, we have to specify the time in question. Certainly, in the short run it did. The Gold Rush not only created capital, it did so in a place distant from existing concentrations of capital and where ownership of existing resources was originally largely by non-whites and was thus open to violent seizure. In the words of the geographer Richard Walker, "California comes into modern history shining with promise and dripping with blood."10 The creation of capital, and also technological knowledge associated with mining, allowed California, alone among western states, to have within it men who could finance large enterprises and men who had the technological skills to run them. That capital allowed much of the wealth from Nevada's mines to flow into California; the knowledge allowed California to export its mining engineers. Californians controlled transcontinental railroads—first the Central Pacific and then the Southern Pacific. The Gold Rush created wealth that allowed California, alone among western states, to be a source of capital for commodity production elsewhere in the West. California gold translated into control of Washington timber and Hawaiian sugar.11 I could go on.

Similarly, the Gold Rush, by creating the first urban markets in the West, allowed Californians to shape production elsewhere in the West because San Francisco became the West's most lucrative market. And the access to capital, and the size of that market, allowed California to develop the West's only significant non-extractive manufacturing center.12

Again, I could go on and on, but we need to be careful. These events had consequences, but the consequences had limits. They become entangled with other events. California capital was important in developing the West, but less important as time went on than European and eastern capital. Even midwestern capitalists could cut into what had been sectors dominated by California since the Gold Rush. Two St. Paul neighbors, Frederick Weyerhaeuser and James J. Hill, could cut deeply into the California pie. By the early twentieth century it was midwestern timber barons who displaced California producers in that industry. Hill's and J. H. Harriman's railroad operations, not those centered in California, dominated much of the West. And in any case, J.P. Morgan's New York dominated all of them. The Gold Rush gave California a valuable advantage, but by the twentieth century that advantage was dissipating.

By 1910, California's population, after the doldrums of the 1890s, had resumed its rapid growth, but the state was growing less rapidly than the rest of the Pacific Coast. In 1890, for example, the Pacific Northwest's population was only 63 percent of that of California alone, but by 1910 the Pacific Northwest had nearly as many people—90 percent—as California. And, even more critically, California no longer was synonymous with San Francisco. Los Angeles, which owed little to the Gold Rush, was outstripping the Bay Area. The Gold Rush had given California a good run, but it was nearing its end. This hardly means that there weren't lingering advantages to California's gold-rush head start or that California's power dissipated. It only means that historical explanations of California's success become far more complicated than the Gold Rush.13

The most easily traced consequences today—pollution from old mine sites, the location and small size of Indian reservations—are largely negative. The many positive aspects of modern California do not trace so easily back to the Gold Rush.

As the twentieth century wore on, what had once seemed a thick rope of consequences anchored in the Gold Rush had become a mere thread, and that thread was intertwined with many others. The Gold
This 1849 daguerreotype, showing a hodge-podge of recently erected housing, including canvas tents, looks east from today’s downtown San Francisco toward a waterfront clogged with abandoned vessels. California Historical Society, FN-1311.
Rush retained its importance, but that importance was more and more metaphorical. Here, it is simplest to quote Kevin Starr:

California would never lose this symbolic connection with an intensified pursuit of human happiness. As a hope in defiance of facts, as a longing which could ennoble and encourage but which could also turn and devour itself, the symbolic value of California endured—a legacy of the Gold Rush.14

I would advise patience before you buy all the claims proffered for the Gold Rush’s legacy. At the very least wait until the next centennial or bicentennial or sesquicentennial of a famous California event comes along. My guess is that most of the legacies now so cavalierly claimed for the Gold Rush will then be claimed for, let’s say, the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Speakers at celebrations are quick to claim connections between their audience’s lives and distant and heroic events. It may be the point of the celebration; it may be how public memory connects us to the past. It is an important use of the past, but it is often poor history.

NOTES

4. Ibid., 386.
11. Ibid., 65.
14. Starr, Americans and the California Dream, 68.

“Temporary and Permanent Bridge, Green River [Wyoming], Citadel Rock in Distance,” ca. 1868, by Andrew J. Russell, company photographer for the Union Pacific Railroad. This famous photograph is considered one of the great visual artifacts of the building of the first transcontinental railroad, which, like the Gold Rush, also transformed California and the American West. Courtesy Oakland Museum of California, Andrew J. Russell Collection.