

[Consider the Alternative: The Uncertain Fate of the Antebellum West](#)

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Chair: Lisa Emmerich, California State University, Chico

Commentator: Brian DeLay, University of California, Berkeley

Albert Gallatin and the Mobilization of Opposition to the U.S.-Mexican War
Sean Harvey, Seton Hall University

"They Begin by Mentioning the Great Being": Faith, Fate, and Political Decision Making in the Antebellum Texas Borderlands

Max Forrester, Washington University in St. Louis

"Come out to the Indian Country": Slavery and Migration in the Antebellum Southwest

Nakia Parker, University of Texas at Austin

Dueling Futurities: Independent Indians and Mexicans in Coahuila, 1848-1861

James Nichols, Queensborough Community College, City University of New York

This panel explores four strikingly different Antebellum visions for the future of the continental interior. Eschewing East-coast, Anglo-Protestant perspectives, these papers present alternatives to the enduring narrative of Manifest Destiny, and examine the consequences wrought by these competing desires for the West, often from the point of view of those actually living there. Together, we hope to present a place and time marked by contingency, where overlooked institutions and economies, or the actions of an inspired few, could have profound effects on the course of 19th century American history.

Max Forrester looks at religion and diplomacy in the experience of immigrant and sedentary Indian groups in the Texas borderlands in the two decades before the U.S.-Mexican War, and argues that issues of faith and perceptions of fate profoundly influenced the political choices of Native peoples trapped between allegiances. The alliances that these Indian groups founded were frequently comprised of incredibly diverse peoples (Western Cherokees, Kickapoos, Delawares, Shawnees, among others); this paper explores the role that mutually intelligible understandings of fate could play in facilitating a language of diplomacy, overcoming cultural differences and resource shortages, and choosing sides when violent conflict became inevitable.

Sean Harvey examines Albert Gallatin's attempts to organize widespread opposition to the U.S.-Mexican War by tracing the networks of individuals extending far beyond the East coast that informed and facilitated his efforts. Gallatin opposed expansionism, doubting that the union could encompass territories stretching to the Pacific. Yet, what he considered an unjust war also promised a windfall of ethnological knowledge concerning the possibility of indigenous social development. This paper argues that Gallatin's efforts reveal the complementary roles of learned societies and religious organizations in allowing prominent men to parlay wealth, reputation, and local weight into national influence in a representative democracy through the public sphere.

James Nichols examines the arrival of Black Creeks, Seminoles, and Kickapoos to the South Texas borderlands following the U.S.-Mexican War. Invited across the border by Mexico in an attempt to populate and protect the region, these so-called tribus emigradas instead imagined an independent pan-Indian colony outside of the purview of both Mexico and the United States. Through an analysis of cultural identities and visionary politics, this paper demonstrates that even after the making of the modern boundary in 1848, the geographical destiny of the south Texas borderlands was anything but certain.

Nakia Parker looks at forced migration patterns and lived experiences of people of African and black Indian descent who came with their Native enslavers from the southeastern United States to resettle in the West. Considering Indian and black forced migrations in tandem, instead of as separate and pivotal traumatic events, can illuminate topics such as Native American involvement in the market economy and how conceptions of blackness and notions of Native sovereignty and futurity formed, collided, and reconciled during the mid-19th century. Ultimately, this paper aims to demonstrate that Native Americans were principal, not peripheral, historical actors in the institution of slavery in the Southwest as well as the domestic slave trade.

Recorded in April 2018 at the OAH Annual Meeting held in Sacramento, California as part of the Mellon-funded Amplified Initiative.

Introductions

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Sean Harvey

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Nakia Parker

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James Nichols

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