

national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be *the great nation* of futurity. . . .

We have no interest in the scenes of antiquity, only as lessons of avoidance of nearly all their examples. The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? . . .

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High—the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere—its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of equality, the law of brotherhood—of "peace and good will amongst men."

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RICHARD HENRY DANA

Two Years before the Mast

1840

Richard Henry Dana was, like Zenas Leonard (see Document 16), a northerner who explored the Pacific coast in the 1830s and wrote about his adventures with a clear faith in America's Manifest Destiny. But the similarities end there. Dana, a wealthy Bostonian of Puritan ancestry, left Harvard College to enlist as a merchant seaman at age nineteen in the hope that time afloat would improve his ill health. He spent two years at sea, visiting Mexican ports along the Pacific coast, including California, and published his account of the trip in 1840. Dana's elegant writing style and rhapsodic prose won acclaim. His racist view of Mexicans and

From Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841), 212, 214–16.

critique of their political and social systems also offered an implicit justification for the U.S. conquest of California. When gold was discovered there, the book became a bestseller, and gold rush pioneers used it as a travel guide. In this excerpt, taken from a chapter titled "California and Its Inhabitants," Dana offers his views of California society and the future of the region.

Revolutions are matters of constant occurrence in California. They are got up by men who are at the foot of the ladder and in desperate circumstances, just as a new political party is started by such men in our own country. The only object, of course, is the loaves and fishes;¹ and instead of caucusing, paragraphing, libelling, feasting, promising, and lying, as with us, they take muskets and bayonets, and seizing upon the presidio and custom-house, divide the spoils, and declare a new dynasty. As for justice, they know no law but will and fear. . . .

In their domestic relations, these people are no better than in their public. The men are thriftless, proud, and extravagant, and very much given to gaming; and the women have but little education, and a good deal of beauty, and their morality, of course, is none of the best; yet the instances of infidelity are much less frequent than one would at first suppose. In fact, one vice is set over against another; and thus, something like a balance is obtained. The women have but little virtue, but then the jealousy of their husbands is extreme, and their revenge deadly and almost certain. . . .

Of the poor Indians, very little care is taken. The priests, indeed, at the missions, are said to keep them very strictly, and some rules are usually made by the alcaldes² to punish their misconduct; but it all amounts to but little. Indeed, to show the entire want of any sense of morality or domestic duty among them, I have frequently known an Indian to bring his wife, to whom he was lawfully married in the church, down to the beach, and carry her back again, dividing with her the money which she had got from the sailors. If any of the girls were discovered by the alcalde to be open evil-livers, they were whipped, and kept at work sweeping the square of the presidio, and carrying mud and bricks for the buildings; yet a few reals would generally buy them off. Intemperance, too, is a common vice among the Indians. The Spaniards, on

¹ Allegedly feeding the multitude. Dana is sarcastic here.

² Magistrates or judges.

the contrary, are very abstemious, and I do not remember ever having seen a Spaniard intoxicated.

Such are the people who inhabit a country embracing four or five hundred miles of sea-coast, with several good harbors; with fine forests in the north; the waters filled with fish, and the plains covered with thousands of herds of cattle; blessed with a climate, than which there can be no better in the world; free from all manner of diseases, whether epidemic or endemic; and with a soil in which corn yields from seventy to eighty fold. In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be! we are ready to say. Yet how long would a people remain so, in such a country? The Americans (as those from the United States are called) and Englishmen, who are fast filling up the principal towns, and getting the trade into their hands, are indeed more industrious and effective than the Spaniards; yet their children are brought up Spaniards, in every respect, and if the "California fever" (laziness) spares the first generation, it always attacks the second.

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RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Young American

1844

Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord, Massachusetts, was one of America's great philosophers. He was also the father of transcendentalism, an antebellum philosophical movement that promoted individual intuition, rather than religious doctrine, as the key to both personal and social enlightenment. In 1844, when he first delivered his lecture "The Young American" before the Mercantile Library Association of Boston, he was already a much-acclaimed essayist and orator whose profound, highly intellectual lectures attracted large and enthusiastic crowds of middle-class Americans.

Although Emerson asked listeners to cultivate self-reliance, reject materialism, and ignore the views of others (all tenets of transcendentalism),

From Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Young American," in *Essays, Orations, and Lectures* (London: William Tegg, 1848), 154, 169.