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Control of Violence, Control of Fear: The Progression of Gun Control in San Francisco, 1847-1923

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CONTROL OF VIOLENCE, CONTROL OF FEAR:
THE PROGRESSION OF GUN CONTROL IN
SAN FRANCISCO, 1847-1923

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Presented to

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by

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ABSTRACT

CONTROL OF VIOLENCE, CONTROL OF FEAR:

THE PROGRESSION OF GUN CONTROL IN

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Josselyn Perri Huerta

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This paper focuses on gun control in San Francisco between 1847 and 1923, from the control of the rowdy men of the gold rush, to the management of the Chinese, to the control of the sale and distribution of firearms. For the purpose of this study, the main sources used to understand public perceptions are newspapers, specifically the *Daily Alta California*, *San Francisco Call*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*. While it is impossible to completely recreate the attitudes towards guns, newspapers provide a window into public opinion, while also providing multiple opinions on the same or similar subjects. In addition, government records provide specific information on municipal and state gun laws passed in the wake of the published opinions. From the first ban on discharging weapons in San Francisco to the first concealed weapons ban, San Franciscans examined their relationship with firearms in the rapidly growing city. As the Chinese population increased, the gun control discourse shifted to include the perceived threat of the Chinese “highbinder,” generated by local newspapers. The conversation was further altered in the early twentieth century as white San Franciscans began criticizing the relationship between society and firearms, and lobbied for statewide gun control.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On December 16, 1852 George M. Norton complained to a San Francisco newspaper, the *Daily Alta California*, of the violence occurring in his neighborhood. According to Norton, “sportsmen” had made a habit of firing their guns into bushes, making a game out of trying to strike small birds. Shots were fired without cautions, and stray bullets had struck both Norton and his daughter. Concerned citizens felt unsafe outside, and feared for the lives of their children as they returned from school. San Francisco had banned the discharge of firearms within the city, and while the source of fear would evolve, anxieties such as those expressed by George Norton were common throughout the nineteenth century, and inspired waves of reform.

Nationally, gun control became a concern in the early nineteenth century. Kentucky passed the first concealed weapons law in 1813, followed by many southern states.¹ The early decades of the nineteenth century saw a shift in American gun culture as the popularity of weapons worn for self-defense grew.² The reaction of many states to the perceived increase of violence was to enact measures to limit or ban concealed weapons.³ The nation had a familiarity with gun violence, and established reactions with concealed weapons bans. As Americans settled California, these experiences would translate as laws were established.

¹ Saul Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia: The Founding Father and the Origins of Gun Control in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 2006), 141.

² Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia*, 137.

³ Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia*, 140.

Gold ushered in a diverse population to California in 1849, as men rushed to the Golden State with hopes of collecting their fortunes. San Francisco quickly became the urban center for the newly rich state. With this instant population came a conscious concern for the type of city being created in San Francisco. The presence of violence created a need for control. As early as 1847, San Francisco enacted gun control measure to combat violence and accidental deaths. Over the next several decades, regulations were in a constant state of revision, as new gun control laws were introduced and stricter penalties enforced.

In this early period, two distinct discourses on gun control emerged. Passive manliness, assumed that in the society established in San Francisco, it was unnecessary to carry firearms, and for this reason regulation was also unneeded. Passive men would not carry weapons, especially concealed weapons. In contrast, defensive men believed in the right and responsibility to bear arms for self-defense, but were also convinced of the need for regulation to control irrational violence by banning concealed weapons.

San Franciscans took direct control of violence during the reign of the organization known as the Vigilance Committees, first in 1851 then again in 1856. In an effort to contain crime that was perceived to be going unpunished, or not punished sufficiently, citizens circumvented the established justice system in favor of public punishment of criminals. These men, subscribing to defensive manliness, saw it as their right and duty to use violence to control crime. These actions were justified because of the resulting perceived decrease in crime. The villains at this juncture were assassins and

dishonorable whites, whom the committees vowed to either enact justice on, or drive out of town.

While violence remained in San Francisco, the attention of newspapers shifted to a new enemy in the 1870s. With the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment, the Chinese were targeted as the source of violence in the city. Organized crime in Chinatown helped newspapers paint the image of a population riddled with lawless treachery. This new villain inspired defensive men to advocate increased concealed weapons laws in the 1890s, as the white population took charge of law enforcement. In opposition to this regulation, passive men argued that San Francisco as a society had advanced beyond the need for weapons, and civilized citizen should not rely on firearms for protection.

Following a decrease in Chinatown violence, focus shifted once again. In 1912, San Francisco saw a string a murders of young white women, killed by young men with easy access to firearms. With the decreased perceived threat from Chinatown, the discourse shifted to include firearms themselves and the ease in which they could be acquired. In response, a new discourse unfolded. Judicious men incorporated tenants of passive manhood, but emphasized skilled and responsible gun ownership, as well as disarming impassioned and insane whites for the protection of peaceable citizens. In opposition to the proposed legislation, defensive men believed in their right to take up arms for protection; however, they did advocate legislation to ban concealable weapons.

The discourse surrounding gun control in San Francisco was wrapped in ideas of manliness, race, and civility. What did it mean to be an ideal citizen? Were those who carried guns manly? Or did the answers to these questions only apply to white

inhabitants? The rapid growth of San Francisco included the growth of a racially diverse population, causing white community to define their relationship to violence and firearms. With the rise of violent imagery of Chinatown projected by city newspapers, whites were able to define themselves in opposition to the Chinese who were seen as lawless and notoriously carried concealed weapons. With the decrease of violence in Chinatown, white San Franciscans began further critiquing their relationship to firearms, and concerned themselves with the control of impassioned and “insane” gun holders. As newspapers reported on women becoming the victims of gun violence there was an increased urgency for stricter gun control through standardized statewide gun control.

Literature Review

The image of the American West is draped in violence. Popular culture focuses on heroic gun battles between gun wielding cowboys and wily villains. The economic success of towns and cities depended on maintaining order because businessmen, “[identified] the community’s well-being with his own.”⁴ City leaders in the West “feared that publicity about local violence inhibited the immigration of solid citizens, hard money, and permanent industry.”⁵ In addition, law enforcement and regulations provided a check for lawlessness in western cities.⁶ Ordinances aimed at controlling gun violence had an established history in the United States before being adopted in the West.

⁴ Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 114-115.

⁵ Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 115.

⁶ Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns*, 116-117.

Often, Americans romanticize the lawless image of the American West and the perceived freedom and nonexistent gun control. This relationship creates an interesting relationship between perception, reality, and gun culture. Following the January 2011 shooting of Arizona congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, the Sheriff of Pima County compared modern-day Arizona to “the Tombstone of the United States.”⁷ In response, Katherine Benton-Cohen argued, “for all the talk of the ‘Wild West,’ the policymakers of 1880 Tombstone—and many other Western towns—were ardent supporters of gun control.” In addition, Cohen explains that “when people now compare things to the ‘shootout at the OK Corral,’ they mean vigilante violence by gunfire. But this is exactly what the Tombstone town council had been trying to avoid.”⁸ Tombstone, indeed, had outlawed carrying concealed deadly weapons within city limits. In contrast, Arizonans, at the time of the 2011 shooting, were not required to obtain a permit before purchasing weapons, and could legally carry concealed weapons without a permit.⁹

Gun violence and gun control was not unique to the American West, and methods for combatting the violent use of firearms developed across the country. Nationally, states developed gun control, adopted for the specific purpose of reforming society. Clayton Cramer argues that southern states became the first states in the country to adopt concealed weapons laws in an attempt to reduce bloodshed due to the violent honor

⁷ Katherine Benton-Cohen, “Even Tombstone had Gun Laws,” *Politico*, January 10, 2011, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0111/47366.html>.

⁸ Benton-Cohen, “Even Tombstone had Gun Laws.”

⁹ Benton-Cohen, “Even Tombstone had Gun Laws.”

culture of the South.¹⁰ Saul Cornell argues that while southern states did adopt concealed weapons laws first, the problems concerning concealed weapons were not unique to the South.¹¹ Many of these laws were passed in reaction to a rise in interpersonal violence, caused by the availability of firearms due to the Market Revolution.¹² Meanwhile, states such as California had gun control “rooted in racism,” and as a movement swept the state in 1879 to make it illegal for non-citizens to bear arms.¹³ This became part of a state law banning concealed weapons in 1923. Indeed because the Chinese Exclusion Act prevented the Chinese from gaining citizenship, they were unable to own firearms in the state of California after 1923.¹⁴

In more recent decades, scholars have examined and debated the relative frequency of violence in the West. The study of homicide and the violent or peaceful nature of the West is disputed. There are basically two schools of thoughts on gun violence and gun control in the American West. On one hand, some argue that crime rates dropped as gun ownership increased.¹⁵ For instance, John C. Davenport argues that homicide in San Francisco was at a minimum because of the city was saturated with

¹⁰ Clayton Cramer, *Concealed Weapons Laws of the Early Republic: Dueling, Southern Violence, and Moral Reform* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), 15-17.

¹¹ Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia*, 141.

¹² Cornell, *A Well-Regulated Militia*, 140.

¹³ Clayton Cramer, “Rooted in Racism,” *America’s First Freedom* (July 2011) <http://www.nranews.com/americas1stfreedom>.

¹⁴ Cramer, “Rooted in Racism.”

¹⁵ John Curtis Davenport, “Arming the City: Firearms, Crime, and Society in San Francisco, 1848-1906,” PhD diss. (University of Connecticut, 1999), 8.

guns.¹⁶ On the other hand, scholars such as Clare V. McKanna Jr. insist that the availability of cheap handguns in California seemed to have created an increased homicide rate.¹⁷ To complicate this debate further, Robert R. Dykstra argues that strategies used to calculate homicide rates often distort the reality of violence in the West.¹⁸ The statistical system known as the “per 100,000” rate, yields data which is “highly problematic if not just plain wrong.”¹⁹ Dykstra explains: “The main trouble is technical, involving the statistical fact that the fewer the residents of a given place, the more only a few murders vastly inflate its homicide rate.” These calculations inflate the projected homicide rate of sparsely populated areas, leading to a problem for historians studying violence in the West as compared to urban centers in the East.²⁰

However, San Francisco did harbor violence, and often at the center of attention was Chinatown. While the Chinese rarely committed murders against other races, there was violence within their community.²¹ In an extensive study of San Francisco newspapers, Jules Becker found that newspapers covered the Chinese violence extensively. This, in turn, played a huge role in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and

¹⁶ John Curtis Davenport, “Arming the City,” 2.

¹⁷ Clare V. McKanna, Jr., *Race and Homicide in Nineteenth-Century California* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2002), 11.

¹⁸ Robert R. Dykstra, “Body Counts and Murder Rates: The Contested Statistics of Western Violence,” *Reviews in American History* 31, no. 4 (December 2003): 557.

¹⁹ Dykstra, “Body Counts and Murder Rates,” 556.

²⁰ Dykstra, “Body Counts and Murder Rates,” 556-157.

²¹ McKanna, *Race and Homicide*, 44.

fueled the continued hostilities towards the Chinese.²² These “sojourners,” as Gunther Barth refers to them, were welcomed during California’s labor shortage following the height of the gold rush. Eventually, opinions of the Chinese grew negative and the anti-Chinese movement spread.²³ Newspapers at the time documented the “driven out,” wherein whites systematically removed the Chinese from cities in the West, destroying their homes, and belongings in the process.²⁴

In San Francisco, the Chinese were the subject of many campaigns against their presence in the city. This criticism centered on the threat felt by white San Franciscans due to the presence of the Chinese. Nayan Shan explores the relationship between the white community and the Chinese in San Francisco through the lens of health. Shan argues that “nineteenth-century San Francisco physicians and health officials feared that the mission of enabling human vitality was undercut by the reputed vile and disease-breeding qualities of Chinese settlement in the city.” In the case of health, just as with violence, regulations were placed to “safeguard the health of the entire population.”²⁵

Violence was another point of criticism for the Chinese community in San Francisco. Often categorized as warfare by white observers, violence was present in Chinatown as the criminal element of the society grew. Most feared were the Chinese

²² Jules Becker, *The Course of Exclusion 1882-1924: San Francisco Newspaper Coverage of the Chinese and Japanese in the United States* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1991), 5-6.

²³ Barth, *Bitter Strength* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1.; Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 11.

²⁴ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese America* (New York: Random House, 2007), xviii-xix.

²⁵ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

“highbinders.” This term originated in the early nineteenth century as William Morris explains,

The first *highbinders* seem to have been New York scoundrels. At the start of the nineteenth century, the *New York Post* reported that in the lower part of the city there existed a “desperate association of lawless and unprincipled vagabonds, calling themselves ‘highbinders.’” Later it came into use on the West Coast to refer to Chinese assassins, members of a secret society or tong, who would hire out to kill or perform lesser acts of violence.²⁶

Tong warfare began in the 1880s, and continued into the twentieth century, but was severely hindered by San Francisco’s 1906 fire.²⁷ This violence prompted the creation of a “Chinatown” police squad in the late 1870s, for the sole purpose of patrolling Chinatown.²⁸

Scholars have already studied the anti-Chinese movement, gun violence in San Francisco, Chinese Highbinders, and the history of gun control in the United States. This study serves as a bridge by examining the perceptions of San Franciscans and how ideas about violence and race fueled gun control. Aspects of race and law can be understood by looking at the history of San Francisco through the lens of gun control. The relationship between San Franciscans and violence shows that whites felt a need to control the city and create order from disorder. Often, however, the need for control was a construct, felt only because of perceived violence and disorder. Even so, this construct

²⁶ William Morris and Mary William, *Morris Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 280-281.

²⁷ Richard H. Dillon, *The Hatchet Men: The Story of the Tong Wars in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (New York: Can Rees Press, 1962), 21.

²⁸ Kevin J. Mullen, *Chinatown Squad: Policing the Dragon: From the Gold Rush to the 21st Century* (Novato, CA: Noir Publishing, 2008), 13.

informed policy makers. As reports of violence continued, laws became more stringent, and punishment more harsh.

For the purpose of this study, the main source used to understand public perceptions is newspapers, specifically the *Daily Alta California*, *San Francisco Call*, and *San Francisco Chronicle*. While it is impossible to completely document San Franciscan's attitude towards guns, newspapers provide a window into public opinion, while also providing multiple opinions on the same or similar subjects. Throughout this study various newspaper voices are used to display discourses on race and violence. It is important to note, that while the political affiliation and leaning of the newspapers differ, there is a cohesive anti-Chinese voice. In addition, this study employs government records to bolster claims by providing specific information on municipal and state gun laws passed in the wake of the published opinions. While these sources provide a rich narrative on gun control in San Francisco, they do not come without problems. First, a large portion of this study focuses on the Chinese community; however, no Chinese sources are used. For much of the history of the Chinese in San Francisco, Chinese language newspapers did exist. Despite this, translations into English are unavailable. Second, nineteenth-century sources are often sparse as a result of the 1906 fire and earthquake in San Francisco. For this reason, I have recreated as much of the record as possible, but gaps still remain.

CHAPTER II

“TOO MUCH LAW AND TOO LITTLE JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA”:¹

EARLY SAN FRANCISCO’S ROAD TO CONTROL

As gold seekers poured into California in 1849, San Francisco rapidly became an urban center. With this hurried growth, came growing pains as San Franciscans struggled to define the identity of their city in the West. Along with the influx of this predominantly male population came an increase of violence. As Benjamin E. Lloyd explained of San Francisco: “Desperadoes and villains of all classes flocked to the city from all parts of the world.”² Soon after the population influx, calls to clean up San Francisco echoed through newspapers. In an attempt to create a safer environment, San Francisco quickly passed laws to regulate firearms. In addition, San Francisco’s newspapers generally supported a statewide ban of concealed weapons. As reflected in newspapers, San Franciscans in the 1850s and 1860s expected the future inhabitants of the city to be peaceful and well mannered. Citizens, perceiving a threat to this vision, took direct control of this future by relying on vigilantism to create law and justice in San Francisco. It was these aspirations for the future of San Francisco that made the discourse for gun control relevant as citizens endeavored to create a safe city containing men and woman of good moral standing.

The small settlement received a large population increase with the arrival of Mormon settlers in 1847. This population would attempt to create a familiar legal system

¹ Benjamin E. Lloyd, *Lights and Shades in San Francisco* (San Francisco: A.L. Bancroft), 22, accessed April 17, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/lightsshadesinsa00lloy>.

² Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 20.

and standards in the West. In 1845, under the instruction of Latter-day Saint leader, Brigham Young, Sam Brannan led over 200 Mormons to San Francisco Bay.³ After the group arrived in July 1846, Sam Brannan used his experience as a journalist in New York to start the *California Star*, an English-language newspaper in San Francisco. The town of about three hundred inhabitants in 1847 experienced a “gradual [swell]” and by 1848 San Francisco had a population of over eight hundred.⁴ Even with gentle growth, as compared to later years, standards were set on the control of violence in San Francisco, as lawmakers attempted to limit the area in which firearms could be discharged.

The Mormon settlers of California had a unique relationship with violence in the East, coloring the way in which they viewed the new society they were building in San Francisco. In an attempt to escape violent persecution, church leaders planned to establish a new church center outside of Illinois, and for this purpose they looked west.⁵ For this reason Sam Brannan was instructed by Brigham Young to establish a Mormon settlement on the Pacific Coast.⁶ It was with the experiences of Mormons in the east, and with the mission to establish a Mormon safe haven, that Brannan came to San Francisco as a newspaper editor. In the interest of controlling violence in the growing town, Brannan concerned his newspaper with gun control laws in their new city. On January 30, 1847, four months after the first issue was printed, the *California Star* reported a ban

³ Kenneth N. Owens, *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, vol. 7, *Gold Rush Saints: California Mormons and the Great Rush for Riches*, ed. Will Bagley (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2004), 32.

⁴ Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 18-19.

⁵ Owens, *Gold Rush Saints*, 31.

⁶ Owens, *Gold Rush Saints*, 31.

on discharging firearms within “the town of San Francisco and vicinity,” but explained that the original order “[was] not observed— and in consequence persons have been injured, and others endangered.”⁷ In an attempt to create more order, a new ordinance stated that, “any person, or persons, who shall discharge any fire arms within one mile of the Public square, shall be fined on conviction thereof, the sum of twenty dollars for each and every offence.”⁸ This approach attempted to restrict citizen’s use of firearms within the city, but did not attempt to limit their access to weapons.

As the city struggled to deal with the influx of population, a unique dynamic was created in San Francisco, making it difficult to clearly define how each group fit into the growing city. When explaining the growth of San Francisco, Benjamin E. Lloyd noted: “The inhabitants numbered two thousand in the first of the year 1849. Money was plenty – not coin, but gold dust, nuggets and ingots. Enormous prices were paid for labor of all kinds. Crime was rampant . . . Yet the city progressed with giant strides. By the end of the year there were twenty thousand inhabitants.”⁹ Wealth and rapid population growth resulted in reports of disorder and crime. Even though discharging firearms within certain sections of the city remained illegal, anxiety persisted in the community, causing the conversation about violence to continue.

Two sides of the gun control debate emerged as the city continued to grow. On one hand, some white citizens believed in defensive manhood and their right, and need,

⁷ “An Ordinance,” *California Star*, January 30, 1847.

⁸ “An Ordinance,” *California Star*.

⁹ Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 19.

to be armed, but that strict laws were necessary in order to forcibly control irrational violence by banning concealed weapons. While others believed in passive manhood, and the unnecessary act of carrying weapons, concealed or openly. These men were convinced that carrying firearms was becoming unnecessary and would eventually be phased out in a civilized society. This discourse on gun control and manliness operated alongside a broader discourse on masculinity in the mid-nineteenth century. Amy Greenberg argues that two distinct constructions of manliness existed at this time: “restrained manhood,” and “martial manhood.”¹⁰ Restrained men “grounded their identities in their families, in the evangelical practice of their Protestant faith, and in success in the business world,” and objected to violence and excess drinking.¹¹ In contrast, “martial men rejected the moral standard that guided restrained men; they often drank to excess with pride, and they reveled in their physical strength and ability to dominate both men and women.”¹² Defensive men embraced violence and aggression as manly qualities.¹³ These contrasting views on manhood shaped attitudes towards firearms in the nineteenth century.

Those subscribing to the passive manhood discourse believed that weapons were unnecessary in a civilized society. One voice in this discourse explained that for the size and diversity of San Francisco, “it is a remarkable fact that there has been so small an

¹⁰ Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11.

¹¹ Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 11.

¹² Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 12.

¹³ Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 12.

amount of crime.”¹⁴ The author proudly stated that, “no city in the United States can boast so clean a criminal calendar in the same space of time as can we in a country which has been stigmatized as destitute of ‘law and order.’”¹⁵ The *Alta* was concerned with the practice of carrying concealed weapons, reported a recent murder in which a man was “rendered an irrational being from the demon of rum.”¹⁶ The article explained that, “the mischief has arisen in the present instance from the pernicious habit, which has already obtained an alarming extent, of carrying concealed weapons – knives and pistols.”¹⁷ This article acknowledged that many believed that “in a new country it is necessary for the protection of the peaceable citizen from the coward and the bully.” However, the *Alta* rejects the practice all together, explaining that carrying weapons “is a practice which should never be tolerated in any community, and the instances where necessity demands it are few and far between – it pertains only to the bravo and the hired assassin, who, thank heaven, find no haven under our skies.”¹⁸ The ideal passive man fostered a community in which firearms were unneeded and undesired, rather than relying on legislation to protect them.

This passive manhood discourse opened the door for a definition of what an ideal, peaceable citizen’s relationship with firearms would be in San Francisco. The *Alta* called for weapons to “be worn openly;” however, the author believed that even this practice

¹⁴ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*, December 19, 1849.

¹⁵ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*.

¹⁶ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*.

¹⁷ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*.

¹⁸ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*.

would eventually fall out of fashion because, “the necessity does not exist and the man who would belt his pistol or knife about him would but excite the ridicule of his fellows.”¹⁹ In this view, men who chose to wear weapons, concealed or otherwise, would face criticism from his contemporaries. The author ends his social criticism explaining that “we hope that before the evil which has already made itself manifest shall produce still more disastrous results, some measures may be taken to prevent this abhorrent practice.”²⁰ In this gold rush environment of risk and wealth, white men were still expected to behave within the constructs of white manliness, and adhere to the “middle-class standards of success, self-control, morality, and respectability.”²¹ For this reason, it was expected that “gentlemen” would wear no weapons, either concealed or otherwise. Anxiety surrounded the issue of concealed weapons, and as the city urbanized and the population grew, so did the calls for increased regulation and control of violent threats.

The growth of vice in San Francisco was accompanied by the use of firearms, as a result, firearms entered the discussion concerning the control of gambling and prostitution. In response to increased crime, a Grand Jury was called in 1850. The *Alta* reported that as a result of the proceedings, twenty-eight indictments were issued. In connection to gambling, the jury’s statement explained that murders often occurred in gambling halls and these, “attributable as they undoubtedly [were] to the evil excitements that are inseparable from them furnish a sufficient reason why the vice should be

¹⁹ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*.

²⁰ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*.

²¹ Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle Class Culture*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2000), 7.

thoroughly suppressed here as it is in every city of all the other States of our Union.”²²

The Grand Jury recommended action banning the “pernicious practice of carrying deadly weapons,” explaining “no man’s life is safe if every drunken brawler is permitted to carry pistols in his pocket.”²³ Discharging firearms within the city of San Francisco remained illegal; however, according to this report, this law failed to deter fatal gunshots.

The eastern states and other urbanized areas became the example for San Franciscans as they looked for solutions to gun violence. Looking back on earlier regulation, the *San Francisco Directory* of 1852 explained that, “early settlers were bent on reducing the town to the order and decorum of some Atlantic cities.”²⁴ According to the report,

Ordinances were passed in 1847, imposing a fine of five dollars on any person allowing hogs to run at large, and a fine of twenty dollars on any person discharging fire-arms within a mile of the public square. Complaints were even made in the newspaper against the practice of smoking cigars in the Magistrate’s office and other public places. Since that remote era of primitive simplicity, the inhabitants of San Francisco have become perfectly inured to hogs, fire-arms and tobacco, in all their uses and applications.²⁵

Early municipal decisions were based on standards influenced by the East Coast. As San Francisco urbanized, there was a conscious effort to make sure a “civilized” city was established. As the city diversified, so did their laws, and awareness of the laws in other

²² “Law Courts: Doings of the Grand Jury,” *Daily Alta California*, November 30, 1850.

²³ “Law Courts: Doings of the Grand Jury,” *Daily Alta California*.

²⁴ *The San Francisco Directory for the Year 1852-1853* (San Francisco: James M. Parker), 7, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/sanfranciscodire185253park>.

²⁵ *San Francisco Directory*, 7.

parts of the country influenced decisions. This included gun control, because firearms threatened the envisioned society of peaceable, white San Franciscans.²⁶

Accidental shootings caused by firing weapons, either for sport or in celebration, within the populous city caused concern for all inhabitants. Newspapers in 1851 reported a growth in gun crimes and general violence in the city, calling for stricter regulations and adherence to the law. In March 1851 the *Daily Alta* reminded readers of the ordinance banning the discharge of firearms within the city, explaining that it “ought to be most rigidly obeyed and enforced.”²⁷ The author described an incident involving firearms within the city as pedestrians “heard the crack of a pistol and the whizzing of a ball, which struck upon the ground within ten feet of where a person was passing along the street, and probably came from the hands of some amateur shooter who was endeavoring to perfect himself in the art.”²⁸ Accidental shootings caused by “amateur shooters” were commonplace and eroded the city’s tolerance of gun violence. Even more troubling were reports of violent crimes.

In February 1851, the patience of the city had reached a breaking point after the robbery of Charles Jansen. According to multiple reports from the incident, on the evening of February 19 two men entered Jansen’s store, asking to purchase a dozen blankets. As Jansen retrieved the blankets, he was struck over the head with a heavy object. When he gained consciousness, \$2,000 was missing from his desk. The *Daily*

²⁶ Davenport, “Arming the City,” 8.

²⁷ “City Intelligence: Careless Shooting,” *Daily Alta California*, March 14, 1851.

²⁸ “City Intelligence: Careless Shooting,” *Daily Alta California*.

Alta asked: “In such a state of things, who is safe? Is there no remedy? No means by which the perpetrators of these outrages may be ferreted out and brought to justice? If once caught, if the law cannot punish them, an indignant community will.”²⁹ The message was clear: if justice was not found through normal channels, citizens were ready to take charge. This event was the breaking point for many San Franciscans, after numerous reports of crime in newspapers, the public felt the situation in their city was dire.³⁰

This episode set off the first incident of popular justice in 1851. Two men were arrested for the crime of burglary, and were identified by Charles Jansen as his attackers. As news of this identification spread, crowds gathered outside the jail, and calls for an execution rippled through the community.³¹ Large crowds continued to fill the Plaza the following day, even after they were urged by the mayor to trust the justice system.³² Distrust of the courts led to the suggestion for the formation of a people’s court to try these two men, causing the crowd to rush the building and retrieve the prisoners.³³ As a jury formed and a judge chosen, the trial began. However, because of Jansen’s recent head injury, doubt arose surrounding the positive identification of the men Jansen

²⁹ “City Intelligence: Bold Robbery,” *Daily Alta California*, February 20. 1851.

³⁰ Kevin J. Mullen, *Let Justice Be Done: Crime and Punishment in Early San Francisco* (Reno, University of Nevada Press, 1989), 128.

³¹ Robert M. Senkewicz, S.J., *Vigilantes in Gold Rush San Francisco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 3.

³² Senkewicz, *Vililantes*, 3.

³³ Senkewicz, *Vililantes*, 3.

claimed to recognize.³⁴ As a result, one of the accused men, who was misidentified, was freed, whereas the other accused was sentenced to jail time.³⁵ These events altered the public's view on popular justice. Josiah Royce, writing in 1886, explained: "the newspapers might hope that the city would escape the curse of popular justice, but the temper of the public made such escape impossible. One thing, however, was secured by the February outbreak: the public would be sure in time to learn from it the proper lesson danger of mere mob law."³⁶ While Royce disapproved, he saw the path of popular justice as inevitable after the February outbreak of violence in 1851.

In June of 1851, San Franciscans organized the First Vigilance Committee in an attempt to control violent crimes. Operating under the belief that there was a group of criminals tormenting the city, who "destroy their quiet, jeopardize their lives and property, and generally disturb the natural order of society," this organization was committed to cleaning up the streets and enforcing justice.³⁷ On June 10, 1851, the committee was given the chance to enact justice for San Francisco, and specifically target the groups known as the Sydney Ducks, a loosely organized group of ex-convicts from Australia.³⁸ That evening, the group was alerted to an incident that occurred at the Whitehall boat station, in which a man was accused of stealing a small safe. Men on the

³⁴ Josiah Royce, *California: A Study of American Character* (1886; repr. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2002), 323.

³⁵ Royce, *California*, 328.

³⁶ Royce, *California*, 327-328.

³⁷ "Organization of the Vigilance Committee," *Daily Alta California*, June 13, 1851.

³⁸ Ken Gonzalez -Day, *Lynching in the West, 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 50.

dock pursued the thief as he escaped by boat and, “after a sharp race they overhauled him and as soon as he saw them gaining upon him he threw his booty into the water.”³⁹ The bag was recovered, and the man, identified as an Australian named John Jenkins, was taken into the custody of the Vigilance Committee. By midnight, Jenkins “had been convicted, and sentenced to be executed upon the Plaza.”⁴⁰ He was hanged at two o’clock in the morning. The *Alta* concluded its report by stating: “As we close this article the [corpse] of the doomed man is swinging in the night air, surrounded by a guard of the committee of citizens. What the result of this affair will be we cannot predict – we trust it will be salutary.”⁴¹

The First Vigilance Committee carried out “justice” through the hanging of four men. Newspapers both criticized and praised the vigilantes for taking control of law and justice. The *Daily Alta* reported on August 28, 1852 that “Atlantic States” were critical of the Vigilance Committee. According to the report, newspapers of those states reflected the public opinion that, “everyone mourned the fall of a younger sister State who had excited the wonder and admiration of the whole world as one who had fallen to the very lowest scale of anarchy.” The author defended the committee, and explained that, “the vigilance committee were the real friends of law and order, and they have succeeded in establishing such a state of quiet and safety as never could have been

³⁹ “Arrest of a Robber: Trial and Sentence by the Citizen Police,” *Daily Alta California*, June 11, 1851.

⁴⁰ “Arrest of a Robber: Trial and Sentence by the Citizen Police,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁴¹ “Arrest of a Robber: Trial and Sentence by the Citizen Police,” *Daily Alta California*.

accomplished by our courts, had they been never so good.” California newspapers held respect for the work of the committee. Josiah Royce concluded that,

The lesson of this was a serious one. Popular justice in San Francisco would, it was plain, involve fearful risks of an open collision between the officers and the people and would be a great waste of social energy. Why not gain in future, through devotion to the duties of citizenship, what one thus in the end would have to struggle for in some way, perchance at the expense of much blood?⁴²

In addition, Royce explained “that the lesson was not more permanently taken to heart by San Franciscans is indeed unfortunate.”⁴³ Rejecting the methods of the Vigilance Committee, Royce reflected on the events of 1851 as a waste of resources and criticized the violence. And if lessons were learned in 1851 they were not taken into account in the coming years. This brand of justice resonated with San Franciscans, and the results of the First Vigilance Committee would remain fresh in their memories.

Meanwhile at the state level, gun violence in California created concern throughout the state and the issue of gun control entered into a statewide conversation on violence. Persistent violence in San Francisco and surrounding areas in California furthered this discourse. While referencing a particularly lawless district in San Francisco, the *Daily Alta* printed the opinion of an 1852 Grand Jury hearing on crime: “While the Grand Jury deplores the amount of crime still committed in the county, it considers a large portion of it attributable to the existence of those infamous dens of debauchery and riots known as bars and dancing saloons, situated in Pacific, Dupont,

⁴² Royce, *California*, 332.

⁴³ Royce, *California*, 332.

Kearny and other similar streets.”⁴⁴ With the population boom of the gold rush, such areas quickly became the city’s red-light district. The “Barbary Coast,” as it became known, became the focus of the hearing because of the amount of lawless activity, including gambling and prostitution; in addition, such activities were often associated with the practice of carrying concealed weapons. Benjamin E. Lloyd explained that this area was, “like the malaria arising from a stagnant swamp and poisoning the air for miles around, does this stagnant pool of human immorality and crime spread its contaminating vapors over the surrounding blocks on either side.”⁴⁵ This district became targeted as the source of crime and the stain on San Francisco’s record. The *Alta* continued:

Among the cases submitted, there were three for shooting citizens. The Grand Jury cannot deprecate in too strong terms the frequent and often unjustifiable use of fire-arms, whereby life is wantonly sacrificed and wounds frequently inflicted on persons totally unconnected with the subject of dispute; the Grand Jury trusts that the court will use the most stringent measure to put a stop to this most brutal and barbarous custom.⁴⁶

The use of violence, in the eyes of the jury, was out of control in the city, and the cause of this chaos was the activity of the Barbary Coast. This district was not conforming to the specific vision established for the city, and as the argument for stricter control of violence gained traction, officials at the state level spoke out.

Even though the discourse on gun control was active, reports of careless gun users remained in newspapers, including complaints of citizens discharging firearms within the city. In June 1855, the *Alta* reported a shooting on Kearney Street. The article states:

⁴⁴ “Report of the Grand Jury,” *Daily Alta California*, December 18, 1852.

⁴⁵ Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 78.

⁴⁶ “Report of the Grand Jury,” *Daily Alta California*.

“Before we give the particulars we would inquire where this reckless shooting in San Francisco is to stop? Here in the last ten days no less than five aggravated cases of deliberate pistol fights have occurred, and yet the evil seems by no means likely to be abated.”⁴⁷ During the previous evening, “Jimmy the Drummer” who was “one of the hardest characters about town,” shot a man by the name of Murray. The man was shot twice: once in his right thigh, and again in his left leg.⁴⁸ While Jimmy was arrested for intentionally shooting Murray, the murders remained a source of anxiety for San Franciscans. In an article dealing with recent murders and attempted murders, the *Alta* asked: “what are we coming to, when peaceable citizens cannot walk the streets without being thus liable to be shot down without a moments warning?”⁴⁹ With memory of the First Vigilance Committee fresh in the minds of San Franciscans, the article continues: “just at the present time, when there seems to be a mania for assassinations, it becomes our citizens to be on the lookout for the safety of their own lives, for life here now is in danger.”⁵⁰ Again, the need for vigilance and order were needed as forces against gun violence.

In May 1856, in a move to regain control of law and order, the Second Vigilance Committee was organized. Benjamin E. Lloyd wrote that during this time, “villainy wielded the balance of power, and honesty was at a discount.”⁵¹ Lloyd praised James

⁴⁷ “More Shooting on Kearny Street,” *Daily Alta California*, June 25, 1865.

⁴⁸ “More Shooting on Kearny Street,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁴⁹ “Life in Danger,” *Daily Alta California*, November 22, 1855.

⁵⁰ “Life in Danger,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁵¹ Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 21.

King of William, editor of the *Evening Bulletin*, as being critical of politicians, and calling for accountability and justice.⁵² The murder of King by James Patrick Casey set the Second Vigilance Committee into motion on May 14, 1856. A feud between the men involving King publishing unflattering information about Casey's time in a New York prison caused Casey, a Board of Supervisors member, to become enraged and shoot King. Ultimately, the committee executed Casey along with four others. Reflecting on the events of 1856, Lloyd wrote:

The Vigilance Committee had begun their purging task in earnest. They soon had arrested several of the most notorious villains, and, when a fortnight had passed, the city presented a more peaceful aspect. The coroner's work had been much reduced. The newspapers were minus the regular bloody record. No more was it considered of great risk to walk abroad at night time, and security was felt by all law-abiding citizens.⁵³

The concerns about unsafe conditions on the streets of San Francisco expressed in 1855, seemed to have been answered by the Vigilance Committee. Through these events, white San Franciscan men were taking control of violence, and becoming "civilized" in the West.

While crime and justice were at the forefront in the eyes of many, the 1856 Vigilance Committee held alternative political objectives. The Second Vigilance Committee was organized primarily by supporters of the Know-Nothing Party, which harbored strong nativist sentiment, and were particularly concerned with the growing

⁵² Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 21.

⁵³ Lloyd, *Lights and Shades*, 22-24.

power of the Irish Catholic population in San Francisco.⁵⁴ By adhering to the construction of defensive manhood, the organizers of this committee saw their role in society as the armed citizen, there to protect against and control the unruly, and in their eyes foreign, classes. In their view, violence was justified in this orderly manner.

Men involved in both the First and Second Vigilance Committees did not view themselves as violent, or as practitioners of mob law. Vigilance committees were led by prominent citizens of their respective communities, and just as in San Francisco, received a wide base of support.⁵⁵ These committees were not organized by the criminal class, but by the leading citizens, with the purpose to creating a better society. The 1856 constitution of the Vigilance Committee showed that these men viewed themselves as upstanding citizens for the role they were playing. It explained, “the citizens whose names are hereunto attached, do unite themselves into an association for maintenance of peace and the good order,” which included the “prevention and punishment of crime.”⁵⁶ In addition, organized vigilance committees differed greatly from unpredictable lynch mobs, largely because vigilance committees generally operated in an organized manner, held trials, and did not hang suspects blindly.⁵⁷ Moreover, the death toll of the Vigilance Committee organized in 1851 did not reflect mob violence, as only four of ninety men

⁵⁴ Roger D. McGrath, “A Violent Birth: Disorder, Crime, and Law Enforcement, 1849-1890,” in *Taming the Elephant: Political, Government, and Law in Pioneer California*, ed. John F. Burns and Richard J. Orsi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

⁵⁵ McGrath, “Violent Birth,” 45.

⁵⁶ *Daily Alta California*, “Constitution of the Committee of Vigilance of San Francisco,” July 8, 1856.

⁵⁷ McGrath, “Violent Birth,” 46.

taken into custody were executed.⁵⁸ In total, eight people were executed during both vigilance committees. The organized nature of these movements set these groups apart from the criminals they were attempting to control. The white male San Franciscan vigilance committee members ultimately defined themselves in opposition to the violence and chaos of the criminal world, as they attempted to circumvent the established justice system. The perception was that order had been established; therefore, while this process was violent, the violence ultimately seemed justified.

Gun control remained a concern for state officials as well. In January of 1858, Know-Nothing Governor J. Neely Johnson found it necessary to address the state's relationship with violence and firearms. The Governor condemned the practice of carrying concealed weapons, explaining that it "engenders in the human mind a feeling of reckless desperation, dangerous to the peace and well-being of society."⁵⁹ With this in mind he called for a law to ban concealed weapons stating that, "there are few, if any, of the criminal codes of our sister states, which do not contain a clause prohibiting this pernicious custom; and I earnestly recommend to your honorable body the enactment of such a law as may in future effectually prevent and eradicate so great an evil."⁶⁰ The violent nature of the state was not the future path for California in the eyes of the governor. For a solution, Governor Johnson looked to other states. To the supporters of a concealed weapons ban, gun control was a step in the right direction for a peaceful California. This vision became reality in 1863 when the state adopted "An Act to

⁵⁸ McGrath, "Violent Birth," 46.

⁵⁹ "The Governor's Message," *Los Angeles Star*, January 23, 1858.

⁶⁰ "The Governor's Message," *Los Angeles Star*.

Prohibit the Carrying of Concealed Weapons,” making it a misdemeanor requiring at least thirty days in jail for anyone found to, “wear or carry any dirk, pistol, sword in a cane, slung shot or other dangerous or deadly weapon.”⁶¹

The public initially demanded and supported a statewide concealed weapons ban. One supporter of the 1863 measure, wanted to protect future Californians from crime resulting from carrying concealed weapons, explaining that, “the pioneer cemeteries of California to-day can show far more mounds of men killed in the heat of passion, by stabbing, shooting and cutting, than of graves of those who have died from natural causes.”⁶² This supporter agreed with the passive gun control discourse, and believed that the passage of a concealed weapons ban would help progress California beyond the need for guns. The 1863 law was supported because prior to the legislature taking action “there has been no law passed which would remedy the evil.”⁶³ However, the broad support for the law in 1863 had waned by 1869 when opposition to the law became strong. The *Daily Alta* published one argument arguing in favor of a repeal to the law explaining that, “we have examined the question, and our opinion, stated with diffidence, is that in 1791 there was a right of keeping and bearing arms, that it was not limited to the matter of carrying concealed weapons, and that our statute is an infringement of the right.”⁶⁴ He also believed that the ban was ineffective in suppressing crime and “the repeal of the law would [not] be followed by any increase of homicides, except by killing

⁶¹ “City Items,” *Daily Alta California*, June 26, 1863.

⁶² “City Items,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁶³ “City Items,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁶⁴ “The Carrying of Concealed Weapons,” *Daily Alta California*, March 13, 1869.

of robbers in self-defense, and that would be a benefit to the community.”⁶⁵ The state concealed weapons ban was repealed on February 4, 1870, with this repeal the defensive manliness discourse became more defined, as these men saw bearing arms as not only a right, but also a responsibility to protect themselves and other peaceable citizens from criminals.

San Franciscans cultivated a vision for their city, and developed idealized notions surrounding violence as gun ownership. As violence grew, citizens felt the urge to take control, as the law no longer lived up to their expectation of justice. The Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856 pacified citizens. Having taken desperate actions, they felt safer within their city. At the same time, the California state government began discussing the need for statewide gun control, as a means of violence control. San Franciscans supported a statewide ban on concealed weapons, and in 1863 this became a reality. This short-lived law was repealed in 1870. However, the discourse on gun control remained present in San Francisco. Through the vigilance committees, men embraced defensive manhood and defined themselves as in control of the law through the use of violence. With the rise of anti-Chinese sentiment violence in Chinatown became the center of discussion concerning violence in San Francisco. With the authority of the vigilance committees, and the cultural superiority of violence control, white San Franciscans had created a framework for criticism.

⁶⁵ “The Carrying of Concealed Weapons,” *Daily Alta California*.

CHAPTER III
LAWLESS CHINATOWN: HIGHBINDER VIOLENCE
AND THE DISCOURSE OF GUN CONTROL

Early in the morning on December 26, 1875, Captain William Y. Douglass of the San Francisco Police force organized a raid on a Jackson Street Chinese Theater. Just after one o'clock in the morning, police entered the theater to search patrons for concealed weapons. Panic ensued as police began raiding the theater, blocking exits and corralling Chinese spectators. Police searched each person as they exited; but as the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported on December 27, 1875 their efforts resulted in not one concealed weapon being discovered. Skeptical, Captain Douglass ordered the search of the theater for weapons discarded by the Chinese. According to the report, several knives, a few guns, and some iron bars were found inside the theater. *The Chronicle* explained to their readers that while an ordinance banning concealed weapons had been passed by the Board of Supervisors on July 9 of that year, many inhabitants of the Chinese quarter were likely unaware of the existence of a ban, and in many cases they “do not learn of some new prohibition until they are brought before the Police Judge, who teaches them the lesson at [an] extravagant price.” The report also underlined this claim by stating that the Chinese were known to favor carrying concealed weapons, especially, “an iron bar covered with cloth.” Under these assumptions, the police were authorized to round up and search the Jackson Street Theater in order to teach the Chinese about the new ordinance in the city. It was this fear of an armed Chinese population that informed the decision making of San Francisco’s gun control laws into the twentieth century.

By 1875, San Francisco, and California more broadly, had fostered a tumultuous relationship with guns and violence. As the Chinese population grew, so did the perception of white San Franciscans that these newcomers were eroding their way of life and values. This anxiety and awareness seeped into local government, leading to bans on discharging firearms within certain sections of the city, as well as municipal bans on carrying concealed weapons. With each of these measures, leaders of San Francisco hoped to create a safer city. Sections of the city that appeared unwilling to cooperate in eradicating violence, meanwhile, stirred new debate. Reports of crime in Chinatown brought imagery of the Chinese as lawless and violent to the forefront of this discussion. Beginning in the 1870s, newspapers routinely depicted the Chinese as a lawless and morally corrupt race, which provoked additional hostile attitudes towards the Chinese. As the city struggled to control violence, anti-Chinese hostilities coupled with inflated imagery of the Chinese as violent and immoral, and contributed to stricter gun laws directed at the Chinese community in San Francisco.

In 1875, following the repeal of the statewide ban on concealed weapons, San Franciscans adopted a similar ban within the city and county. Aware of the debate taking place at the state level concerning gun violence, San Franciscans concerned themselves with the control of violence through the control of firearms, especially those hidden from the view of others. On July 9, 1875 the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco City and County passed Order 1226 “Prohibiting the Carry of Concealed Deadly Weapons,” which made it illegal for anyone “not being a public officer or traveler” to carry concealed

weapons without a written permit from the Police Commissioner.¹ Those in violation of this law would, “be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and punished accordingly.”² Gun control at this level felt absolutely necessary for San Franciscans as they searched for a means to control violence in their city.

It was after the concealed weapons ban was passed that Captain William Y. Douglass launched his raid on Chinatown in search of illegal weapons. The *Chronicle* called the raid ineffective, stating that the “raid amounted to nothing because all weapons had been hidden under benches.”³ The paper questioned the legality of the raid, and the choice to target the Chinese theaters, concluding that the raid was unjustified. While the newspaper explained that it was of the opinion that Chinese immigration was “a curse,” the Chinese were nevertheless, “entitled to the protection of the law under which they live.” The *Chronicle* declared: “Let us have justice for Mongolians as well as for Anglo-Saxons.” While the *Chronicle* saw the injustice of the raid, the 1875 concealed weapons law, in partnership with the police raid, set into motion a new form a criticism of the Chinese. Anxiety concerning the Chinese existed prior to Douglass’s raid; however, the reports of this event directly connected the Chinese to gun violence within the city, allowing newspapers to make a strong connection between the Chinese in San Francisco and the use of concealed weapons. Douglass’s Chinatown raid shows an understanding

¹ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco*, “Prohibiting the Carry of Concealed Deadly Weapons,” order no. 1226 (San Francisco, 1875), 98, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/generalordersofb18sanf>.

² Board of Supervisors, *General Orders 1875*, 98.

³ “The Raid on the Chinese Theaters,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

of the perceived threat of violence and concealed weapons in Chinatown felt by the white community.

By 1870, in a city of one hundred fifty thousand people, the Chinese population in San Francisco was around eleven thousand. As Chinese population grew, images of violence presented in San Francisco's newspapers catalyzed a gun control debate with the notion of a crime-filled Chinatown by projecting crime in Chinatown as connected to Chinese gangsters, or "highbinders." San Franciscan newspapers played an important role in bolstering anti-Chinese sentiment with reports of violence. Such reports ultimately resulted in the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.⁴ Newspapers of the time were the primary source of information for citizens, making the opinions they published significant in gauging public sentiment.⁵ Sensationalized reports were commonplace in nineteenth century journalism, making the image of the Chinese, and in turn public perception, even further distorted.

Newspapers described men wearing makeshift armor under loose fitting shirts and carrying hatchets, knives, or revolvers, referring to these men as "highbinders." The term "highbinder" was originally used to describe "Irish toughs in New York City" but came to describe professional killers belonging to a tong.⁶ San Francisco newspapers clung to this term to characterize any and all Chinese accused of crimes involving violence. The newspapers thus, "turned the Chinese into caricatures, removed their humanity,

⁴ Becker, *The Course of Exclusion*, 1.

⁵ Becker, *Course of Exclusion*, 8.

⁶ Barth, *Bitter Strength*, 103.

developed the image of a society to be feared, and made them objects to be controlled.”⁷ This is not to say that highbinder violence did not exist. Using the alternative phrase “hatchet man” to describe highbinders, and the tong wars of San Francisco beginning in the 1880s, Richard H. Dillon explains that “it was a weird class of civil war; a struggle for power among bad men with the good people of Chinatown the pawns and the prey. Only Chinese suffered from the violent depredations of the hatchet men - the hired killers of the fighting tongs.”⁸ It is clear that newspapers had violence to report in San Francisco. However, over-categorizing Chinese criminals as highbinders seemed to have greatly magnified the crisis, leading to a stereotypical image of the treacherous and violent Chinese, and catalyzing a radicalized discourse of gun control.

Even before the Chinese were associated with violence, their appearance and customs set them apart from their white neighbors in California, creating a framework of critique that would be used against their community. One glaring distinction that set the Chinese apart from other groups in San Francisco was the unique organization of their community. *Huiguan*, “native-place,” or district associations, developed in San Francisco, [as well as, everywhere else] the Chinese migrated both inside China and abroad.”⁹ In the late 1850s, five of the district organizations formed the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, later referred to, by Americans, as the Chinese Six

⁷ McKanna, *Race and Homicide*, 38.

⁸ Dillon, *The Hatchet Men*, 17-18.

⁹ Yuchen Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China's Policy Towards Exclusion* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 1.

Companies when a sixth district associate joined.¹⁰ These organizations formed, in part, due to the lack of official Chinese representation in California until the 1870s, which created a need for strong community organization. Because of their lack of representation “during the anti-Chinese movement in the United States, the Six Companies stepped into the void created by the slow and ineffective responses from the Qing government.”¹¹ According to literature produced by the Chinese Six Companies in 1942, tongs had organized by 1852 as an alternative to the established social organization in Chinatown.¹² While the Chinese Six Companies were district associations, Tongs were instead fraternal organizations open to all; this caused membership to eventually grow beyond that of the Six Companies.¹³ Similar to the Chinese Six Companies, tongs providing social organization as well as services, such as housing, employment, medical care and legal aid.¹⁴ However, tongs also controlled gambling, prostitution, and opium dens within their territory, which led to violence between the various tong groups as they fought to control more territory.¹⁵ San Francisco’s newspapers eagerly covered the violence that occurred between rival tongs. As these groups forced membership on

¹⁰ William Hoy, *The Chinese Six Companies: A Short, General Historical Résumé of its Origin, Function, and Importance in the Life of California Chinese*. (San Francisco: The Chinese Consolidated Association, 1942) 10.

¹¹ Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 1.

¹² Hoy, *Chinese Six Companies*, 8.

¹³ McKanna, *Race and Homicide*, 40.

¹⁴ McKanna, *Race and Homicide*, 40.

¹⁵ McKanna, *Race and Homicide*, 40.

Chinese businessmen in return for protection, tongs became both more powerful and more violent.¹⁶

In addition to membership in suspicious groups, the physical appearance of the Chinese was mysterious to the white community, and encouraged judgment on their character based on their unique appearance. Prior to the wave of Chinese immigrants that began in 1849, American culture had shifted as urbanization took place. As Americans left rural areas in the early nineteenth century and were surrounded by strangers in the urban setting they became concerned with the judgment of strangers. According to Karen Halttunen, at this time of urbanization and migration to cities, “surface impressions were essential to success in the world of strangers, according to the advice writers, because appearances revealed character. In a theory that may be called the sentimental typology of conduct, they asserted that all aspects of manner and appearance were visible outward signs of inner moral qualities.”¹⁷ San Francisco, as a rapidly growing urban center comprised of a majority male population attracted by the gold rush, was filled with strangers. The Chinese in particular were easily identified and judged. Clothing, hairstyle, and physical features immediately set them apart as different and strange to the white observers. Chinese men shaved the front part of the heads and pulled the remainder of their hair back into a long braid called a queue. In addition, instead of abandoning Chinese clothing for western styles upon reaching California, they wore loose-fitting pants and shirts and typically retained these traditions. Newspapers in turn

¹⁶ McKanna, *Race and Homicide*, 40.

¹⁷ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in American Culture, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 40.

caricatured these features, thus creating a memorable stereotype for readers. To the white observer who had been taught over the previous decades to take appearance into consideration when evaluating character, the Chinese were unreadable. According to the images projected by newspapers, the loose-fitting clothing of the Chinese concealed armor, and weapons. Whites possessed neither the linguistic aptitude nor the cultural language to assess these new arrivals, causing anxiety due to the inability to distinguish a treacherous highbinder from a peaceable Chinese.

Newspapers aided in supplying the language used to describe these men, as reports of violence in the Chinese quarters grew. To white citizens, treachery and concealed weapons seemed to fit the appearance of these men. As early as 1849, prior to any large Chinese presence, San Franciscans had defined how “gentlemen” were expected to behave with weapons. The *Alta* expressed the “cowardly” nature of carrying concealed weapons, observing that “the peaceable man never thrusts a bowie knife in his girdle, or a revolver in his pocket – it is the coward and the bully mostly who does it, and who for some financial slight, whips out his instrument of death and is ready to use it upon the most trivial provocation.”¹⁸ It was this logic that led whites to label the Chinese as “treacherous” and “deceptive,” in opposition to the white “gentleman” who would not be deceitful by concealing a weapon.

Experiences of white miners in the 1850s also helped define this language and sentiment towards the Chinese. In discussing the southern mines, Susan Lee Johnson explains that Anglo men felt confident in their dominance at this point, and armed

¹⁸ “The Recent Murder,” *Daily Alta California*, December 19, 1849.

Chinese men did not threaten their position.¹⁹ On the mining frontier, “white people had succeeded in renaturalizing the boundaries of gender and race that characterized their own lives.”²⁰ Therefore, “Chinese women and men stood outside those boundaries, and this is why hoop skirts and deadly weapons on their persons looked so comical to so many white observers. To stand outside bounds of gender and race was, in effect, to stand outside the boundaries of humanity.”²¹ The perceived violence of the Chinese in San Francisco threatened this image as whites felt threatened by the gun wielding Chinese, who were no longer viewed as comically unthreatening, but as an imminent danger.

By the late 1870s, the term “highbinder” enhanced headlines reporting violence in Chinatown and created the appearance of frequent gun crimes. “The Perforating Pistol: A Chinaman Assassinated by a ‘Highbinder’” published on March 12, 1877, described the murder of Ah Suen who, “was shot from behind, by another Chinaman known as Ung Gow.”²² The shooter was described as “a notorious criminal, of the rank of ‘highbinder,’ which, in police parlance, signifies ‘tough.’”²³ Gow was reported to have also been notorious for carrying a pistol and was “a terror to thousands of his countrymen.”²⁴ This

¹⁹ Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush.*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 306.

²⁰ Johnson, *Roaring Camp*, 307.

²¹ Johnson, *Roaring Camp*, 307.

²² “The Perforating Pistol: A Chinaman Assassinated by a ‘Highbinder,’” *Daily Alta California*, March 12, 1877.

²³ “The Perforating Pistol,” *Daily Alta California*.

²⁴ “The Perforating Pistol,” *Daily Alta California*.

article assumed the reader was not familiar with the term “highbinder,” and made certain to define Ung Gow as such. Articles published later in the same year described gun violence in Chinatown as common. Headlines such as “Another Highbinder Murder” create the image of regular violence.²⁵ Similarly, articles with titles such as “Another Chinaman Shot,” projected this violence throughout the Chinese community as not only present, but frequent.²⁶

An economic recession in the 1870s fostered the growth of labor unrest in California, creating an atmosphere with heightened anti-Chinese sentiment. Labor groups latched on to varying reasons as to why the Chinese were undeserving of employment at a time when jobs were scarce. Among the numerous criticisms of the Chinese, the labor movement included “the imagery of a Chinese medical menace,” as a threat to white families.²⁷ The involvement of the Chinese in industries such as textiles and cigar making allowed for the hypothesis that disease entered white homes through the goods manufactured by Chinese workers.²⁸ In this way, Chinese labor was seen as a direct threat to not just white labor, but the white household. Specifically, the Workingmen’s Party of California, in an 1880 pamphlet titled: “Chinatown Declared a Nuisance!” proclaimed that Chinatown was a “laboratory of infection – situated in the very heart of our city, distilling its deadly poison by day and by night sending it forth to

²⁵ “Police Intelligence: Another Highbinder” *Daily Alta California*, June 17, 1877.

²⁶ “Another Chinaman Shot,” *Daily Alta California*, April 20, 1877.

²⁷ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 158.

²⁸ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 158.

contaminate the atmosphere of the streets and houses of a populous, wealthy and intelligent community – is permitted to exist is a disgrace to the civilization of the age.”²⁹

Crime and violence, like disease, were also seen as a threat to white citizens of San Francisco. The Workingmen’s Party, when speaking of the Chinese, explained that “ours laws are nothing to them,” claiming that the Chinese held secret trials as a way of circumventing the law.³⁰ The party further explained that “highbinders” were in charge of “buying and selling women, kidnapping, gambling and the subornation of perjury.”³¹ These images of the Chinese community were also found in newspapers at this time, and labor movements adopted them to fit their need to create a vivid enemy for the labor movement.

Supporters of the anti-Chinese movement created a sense of urgency as they felt white citizens were directly threatened by the presence of the Chinese in the city. Members of the anti-Chinese movement “asserted their own masculine roles as protectors of the nation’s morality and families.”³² As part of “an Investigating Committee of the Anti-Chinese Council,” organized by the Workingmen’s Party, found that “through actual observation (the subscribed committee having inspected Chinatown for the last six weeks), we find there places where thieves and highbinders are sheltered from the law,

²⁹ Workingmen’s Party of California, *Chinatown Declared a Nuisance!* (San Francisco: Workingmen’s Party of California), 5

³⁰ Workingmen’s Party of California, *The Labor Agitators; Or The Battle for Bread* (San Francisco: Geo. W. Green, c.1879), 23, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb8g500604/?order=2>.

³¹ Workingmen’s Party of California, *The Labor Agitators*, 23.

³² Karen J. Leong, “‘A Distinct and Antagonistic Race:’ Construction of Chinese Manhood in the Exclusionist Debate, 1869-1878,” in *The Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 134.

and tramps and vagabonds are educated.”³³ The violence described by this committee seemed to pose a direct threat to the morality of the city, and led the Workingmen to lobby for Chinese removal. In addition, the lack of traditional families within the Chinese community was viewed as a moral threat.³⁴ The Workingmen saw this population as hopeless, explaining “this alien people, on which our civilization left no impression, who have never changed the habits of their own native soil, though twenty years have passed since their arrival here, belong to the Mongolian race.”³⁵ Morally, the Chinese were seen as threatening to the masculine ideals of the labor movement. These criticisms do not differ greatly from the middle-class opinions featured in contemporary newspapers; however, the voice of the labor movement was even more acutely focused on the Chinese “threat”.

As this image of the violent, untrustworthy Chinese grew, so did the desire to remove the Chinese “problem.” In 1876 the California State Senate appointed a special committee to “investigate the Chinese immigration question.”³⁶ The *Alta*’s coverage of this hearing discussed violence in Chinatown as a point of concern.³⁷ The report described violence and corruption in the Chinese community including murder, attempted murder, and blackmail.³⁸ At the conclusion of these hearings the committee released a

³³ Workingmen’s Party of California, *Chinatown Declared a Nuisance!*, 12.

³⁴ Leong, ““A Distinct and Antagonistic Race,”” 132.

³⁵ Workingmen’s Party of California, *Chinatown Declared a Nuisance!*, 12.

³⁶ “The Chinese Investigation,” *Daily Alta California*, May 27, 1876.

³⁷ “The Chinese Investigation,” *Daily Alta California*.

³⁸ “The Chinese Investigation,” *Daily Alta California*.

report titled: “Chinese Immigration: Its Social, Moral and Political Effect,” exploring the conditions of both China, and the Chinese in America. Congress, state governors, and the public received printed copies of this report.³⁹ Details of violence available in the report, helped to legitimize anti-Chinese sentiments that eventually led to exclusion. By this time the anti-Chinese movement was maturing, as racial stereotypes were catalyzed by the idea of Chinese labor as competition for scarce jobs. The report brought detailed arguments against the Chinese to the attention of white Californians, and with it, an argument that the Chinese community harbored violent, weapon-carrying criminals.

In the 1880s, San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors continued making the Chinese the center of their discussion on the city’s security. In 1884, the board commissioned a special committee on the “Condition of the Chinese Quarter.”⁴⁰ While the report’s main focus was the perceived threat to public health posed by the Chinese inhabitants, the committee emphasized the general sentiment towards Chinatown. As the report explains,

In a great and growing city like San Francisco, where streets and sewers demand large expenditures for the protection of the public convenience and the public health, with her public parks needing extension and embellishment, her public buildings in a state of dilapidations, schools and public education calling for a larger facilities and necessary larger expenditure, with the great Chinese cancer demanding a larger expenditure for police and other purposes than has ever yet been expended upon it, the financial policy that scrimps and pinches – regardless of these wants – to such an extent that government can merely exist in a shabby and inefficient form, cannot justly be regarded otherwise than as short-sighted, if not humiliating and disgraceful.⁴¹

³⁹ Dillon, *The Hatchet Men*, 132.

⁴⁰ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year Ending 1884-1885*, Condition of the Chinese Quarter and the Chinese in San Francisco (San Francisco, 1885), 162.

⁴¹ *San Francisco Municipal Reports 1884-1885*, 274.

By placing blame on the Chinese community for insufficient facilities in San Francisco, white San Franciscans added a layer of contempt towards the Chinese. The Chinese were seen as having need for public services and as a result were a drain on the community as a whole. The perceived lawlessness caused an increased need for policing, which siphoned funding away from other services in the city.

The committee also publicized the supposed Chinese proneness to violence and vice. As part of the report a map of Chinatown was produced, detailing the location of opium dens, prostitution houses, and gambling establishments (fig. 1). The committee explained that, “it may almost be said that the whole Chinese community exists in open defiance of the law, and, as a matter susceptible of clear demonstration, they are at present, and long have been, stronger than the law (as it is administered), to which we of other races are sternly held amenable.”⁴² These sentiments added to the perception that the Chinese inhabitants of the city of San Francisco, and more broadly, the Chinese in the United States, were given to vice, violence, and treachery with no regard for law. While this report discussed violence within Chinatown, disease was a main focus for the committee. Largely due to living conditions in Chinatown, there were perceptions that this district harbored and spread disease, which caused the city to impose regulations in an effort to curb the spread of disease. These ordinances limited the number of people allowed to inhabit living spaces, and regulated the general sanitation of the city. Reports of violations of these laws added to the perception of lawlessness in Chinatown. This investigation of the “Condition of the Chinese Quarter” aimed to explain the risk the

⁴² *San Francisco Municipal Reports 1884-1885*, 173-174.

Chinese posed to the Anglo population of San Francisco, and in doing so this knowledge fed the anxiety.⁴³ The map details the use of each space on the ground level in Chinatown, and by collecting this knowledge a starker contrast was formed between the two races, and tensions grew out of defining the Chinese space.⁴⁴

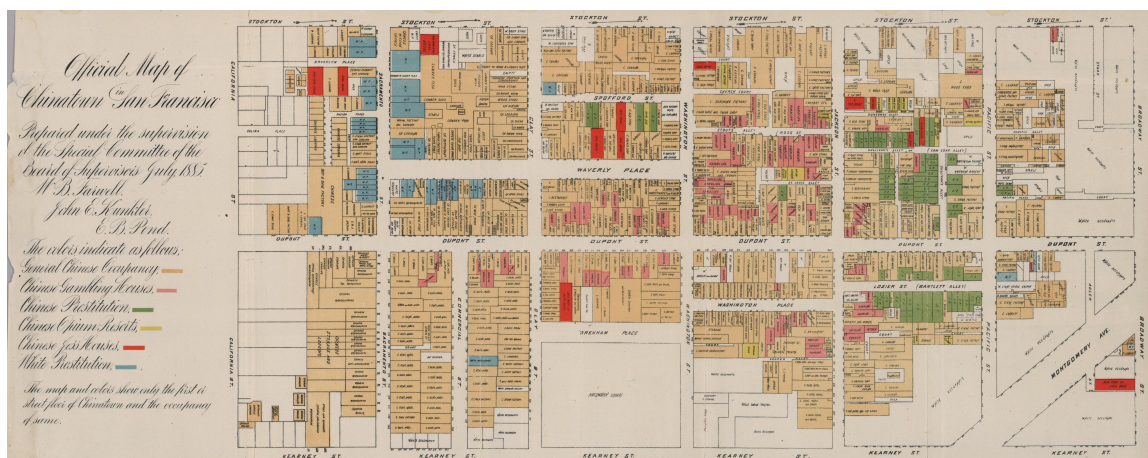


Figure 1 “Official Map of Chinatown San Francisco,” from the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection

Continuing into the late nineteenth century, newspaper articles depicting Chinese criminals used words such as “Mongol” and “highbinder” to generalize the character of all Chinese people in their description. On September 9, 1885 the *Daily Alta* published “Mangled Mongols: Foy Mow’s Terrible Revenge Upon Two Countrymen,” which reported an attack on two Chinese men by a friend and gambling partner. The *Alta* reported that Fow Mow attacked Joong Ah Hoy and Yon Quong with a hatchet. Like many articles, the title described these men as “Mongols,” drawing for the reader an image of brutality and ruthlessness, recalling the notorious image of Genghis Khan. In addition, the article made broad assumptions about all Chinese. “The inherent cruelty of the Chinese nature has seldom been so horribly exemplified as it was in this city at an

⁴³ Shah, *Contagious Divide*, 17.

⁴⁴ Shah, *Contagious Divide*, 42.

early hour yesterday morning” reported the *Alta*.⁴⁵ As the article progresses the author makes numerous claims about the nature of the Chinese, stating that the criminal was on his way home when “the dark demon of revenge was hovering over him and instilling murderous thoughts into his pagan mind.”⁴⁶ In addition, the report explains that the crime was committed because Fow Mow had lost all of his money gambling with the two men he attacked. Not only does this crime link the Chinese to vice, but the author then broadly charges all Chinese of being “inherently cruel,” painting the community as immoral, brutal, and capable of cold blooded murder.

Newspapers did not refer to the Chinese as men. Instead, because of their foreignness, they were “celestials,” “Mongols,” and “almond-eyed devils.” Gail Bederman argues that Victorians “[lacked] the conceptual framework to differentiate between physical morphology and cultural traits,” therefore, they “subsumed both into a gestalt which they termed ‘race.’”⁴⁷ The late nineteenth-century construct of manliness was deeply connected to race, so much so that “many middle-class whites felt scientifically justified in believing that no racially primitive man could possibly be as manly as a white man, no matter how hard he tried.”⁴⁸ Biology and deeply engrained understandings of manliness barred the Chinese, like other minorities, from achieving equality. In addition, the concept of civilization was intertwined with the traits of

⁴⁵ “Mangled Mongols: Foy Mow’s Terrible Revenge Upon Two Countrymen,” *Daily Alta California*, September 9, 1885.

⁴⁶ “Mangled Mongols,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁴⁷ Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29.

⁴⁸ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 29.

manliness.⁴⁹ Therefore, to the white observers in San Francisco, the Chinese were incapable of civilization.

Headlines also capitalized on the term “highbinder” to direct the reader’s attention to violence in Chinatown. These headlines and the widespread use of the term “highbinder” created the impression of a wide phenomenon of tong violence, and a sense of ruthless and barbaric Chinese. The January 18, 1887 issue of *The Daily Alta* printed an article titled: “A Bold Highbinder,” which detailed the removal of a girl from a “Chinese den” and her attempted recapture. One of the Chinese men attempting to take the child “slipped and fell on the pavement, at the same time drawing a revolver.” The man, Wong Bing Lin, was arrested and charged with carrying a concealed weapon. When searched, the police found a knife. “He also wore a coat of mail made out of compressed paper pulp, which could turn a bullet.” Judging by his attire and his actions, it is unlikely that *The Alta* was exaggerating when it called Wong a highbinder; however, the paper further connected the Chinese community to this criminal, stating that Wong was a well-known member “of a noted gang of highbinders who infest Chinatown.” This statement created the sense that Chinatown was crawling with highbinders. In the eyes of the newspaper, this “infestation” had to be controlled before it spread throughout the city.

In addition, newspapers selectively utilized the term “highbinder” to instill a sense of danger and mystery to their story. For example, in the initial arrest of La Yeck the *Alta* reported on May 10, 1890 that La Yeck was discovered among a group of “highbinders” who were waiting outside of the courthouse and they “intended killing

⁴⁹ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 29.

some of the witnesses when they were going back to Chinatown.”⁵⁰ In contrast, on May 24, 1890, the *Daily Alta* reported that La Yeck was convicted of carrying a concealed weapon and sentenced to 250 days in jail or a \$250 fine. Without using the term “highbinder” the report explains that,

a crowd of Chinese, who were standing in the plaza, opposite the old City Hall, intended shooting a witness who appeared against one of their friends, who was being examined in Judge Joachimsen’s Court on a charge of murder. The policeman made a descent on the crowd, and finding La Yeck with a revolver concealed in the sleeve of his blouse, took him into custody.⁵¹

Where one report labels the group merely as “Chinese,” the other identifies them as “highbinders.” In addition to the *Alta*’s report of the verdict, *The Call* also refers to the La Yeck as a highbinder.⁵² By initially calling La Yeck a highbinder, the *Alta* grabbed the reader’s attention by connecting these men to violent and controversial tongs, in a way that merely labeling them “Chinese” would not.

Articles such as the account depicting Fow Mow attempting to murder two men, whom the author claimed were his gambling friends, projects the image of the treacherous Chinese. The author deduced that Mow gained access to the men’s home by hiding his weapon, then waited, “with Mongolian patience the moment when slumber would have closed the eyes of his intended victims.”⁵³ According to the report, Fow Mow was acting on his inherent “instinct” to gain revenge by deceiving and then killing two men, who only hours before had been his friends. This was not depicted as a crime

⁵⁰ “Another Chinese Row Expected,” *Daily Alta California*, May 10, 1890.

⁵¹ “He Carried a Concealed Weapon,” *Daily Alta California*, May 24, 1890.

⁵² “He Cannot Kill Now,” *San Francisco Call*, May 24, 1890.

⁵³ “Mangled Mongols,” *Daily Alta California*.

of passion resulting from a heated game of poker; instead, Mow was portrayed as leaving the game, having time to consider the crime, then returning to the men only to wait for them to be at their weakest before striking. Other articles described “highbinders” or “Mongols” committing violent crimes at night and in dark alleys, often taking great effort to conceal their weapons from the sight of the victims. In one instance, a young Chinese woman was slashed across the face by, “an unknown Chinese” who “sprang from a doorway,” then escaped.⁵⁴ The report cites the cause of this crime as a feud between “Mongol gamblers, who had made several attempts to gain possession of [the girl].”⁵⁵ This type of commentary instilled the sense that Chinatown inhabitants were subject to surprise attacks and frequent violent acts.

As reports of gun violence increased, the Chinese community became the center of the debate over gun control in San Francisco. On February 5, 1890 the *Daily Alta* published a statement made by Chief of Police Patrick Crowley concerning an increase of gun violence. He discussed the growth of the murder rate and attributed it to the frequent use of deadly weapons. In line with defensive manhood’s concern for the peaceable citizen, Crowley criticized the current concealed weapons ban stating: “The ordinance which prohibits the carrying of such weapons is inoperative, because the law-abiding citizens seldom applies for permission to carry a weapon, but those who have no regard for the law go ‘heeled,’ and upon the slightest provocation they use their weapons with

⁵⁴ “A Mysterious Stabbing,” *Daily Alta California*, May 27, 1889.

⁵⁵ “A Mysterious Stabbing,” *Daily Alta California*.

deadly effect.”⁵⁶ The 1880 concealed weapons ban referenced by Crowley simply stated that “every person violating any of the provisions of this Order shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor and punished accordingly.”⁵⁷ He went on to argue that simply criminalizing concealed weapons did not prevent gun violence. This caused a greater attempt to curb violence, and in contrasted with previous laws, Chief Crowley recommended to the Board of Supervisors, “that the minimum penalty shall be a fine of \$200, or imprisonment for two months.”⁵⁸ Though that particular statement did not specifically refer to the Chinese, in an effort to give his audience a source for the violence Chief Crowley also recommended that shooting galleries be removed, “in the Chinese quarter, where nearly every Chinaman is the owner of a pistol and is handy in its use.”⁵⁹ Defensive men advocated in gun laws as a precaution to protect peaceable citizens. When laws looked to be ineffective, they believed more stringent laws were necessary to deter criminals further. By targeting the Chinese as “handy” in the use of pistols and particularly vulnerable to the allure of firearms and shooting galleries, Chief Crowley pinpoints a significant factor of the violence problem in San Francisco.

The following month, San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors took action in agreement with Chief Crowley’s statement. Order No. 2189 was amended, making the

⁵⁶ “Carrying Concealed Weapons: Chief Crowley Speaks to the Cause of so Many Murders,” *Daily Alta California*, February 5, 1890.

⁵⁷ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco*, “Prohibiting the Carry of Concealed Deadly Weapons,” order no. 1601 sec. 22 (San Francisco: Bunker and Hiester, 1881), 7-8, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/generalordersofb18sanf>.

⁵⁸ “Carrying Concealed Weapons,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁵⁹ “Carrying Concealed Weapons,” *Daily Alta California*.

offense a misdemeanor punishable “by a fine of not less than \$250 and not exceeding \$500, or by imprisonment not less than three months and not exceeding six months, or by both such fine and imprisonment.”⁶⁰ The amended act not only incorporated Chief Crowley’s advice, it also increased the minimum fine from \$200 to \$250.⁶¹ In addition, in the following year’s *Municipal Report*, Chief Crowley wrote: “imposing increased penalties for carrying concealed deadly weapons, has been in force nearly four months and I believe with good result.”⁶²

In addition, convinced by the evidence provided by Chief Crowley, the Board also took action to diminish the attraction of guns by regulating shooting galleries and banning them in specific areas of San Francisco. On March 17, 1890 the municipal government of San Francisco passed Order Number 2,192: “Designating a District Within Which Shooting Galleries may not be Maintained and Prohibiting the Keeping open of Shooting Galleries, or the Discharge of Cartridges therein between Certain Hours of the Day and Night.” This ordinance declared that, “no shooting gallery shall be kept or maintained within that portion of the city and county, bounded by the north line of

⁶⁰ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors: Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco*, “Prohibiting the Carry of Concealed Deadly Weapons,” order no. 2189 (San Francisco: P.J. Thomas, Printers, 1890), 12, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/generalordersofb1890sanf>.

⁶¹When looking at this same incidence in *Arming the City: Firearms, Crime, and Society in San Francisco*, John C. Davenport concluded, “the supervisors noted, but *did not* act on the chief’s recommendations” (175). Davenport cites identical remarks made by Crowley in the “Report of the Chief of Police” written in July 1889 and published in the *San Francisco Municipal Reports* for the fiscal year of 1888-1889 as the source of his conclusion. While the Chief’s words were first published in 1889, newspapers later published similar remarks in February of 1890, and in March of the same year, the Board of Supervisors passed the amendment.

⁶² San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *San Francisco Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1890*, Chief of Police’s Report (San Francisco, 1890), 180.

California street, a line 30 feet west and parallel with the west line of Kearny street; from California street to Broadway, the south line of Broadway and the east line of Larkin.”⁶³

This area, which encompassed the designated district of Chinatown, was specifically targeted based on Chief Crowley’s recommendation. Following the passage of this ordinance, if a shooting gallery was found to be operating within Chinatown the owner would be guilty of a “misdemeanor and punished by a fine not exceeding \$1000 or by imprisonment not exceeding six months or by both fine and imprisonment.”⁶⁴

The anti-Chinese sentiment of the Board of Supervisors can be seen in other legislation passed in the same year. On February 17, 1890 at a meeting of the Board of Supervisors, an order to remove Chinatown from San Francisco was passed.⁶⁵ Although, anti-Chinese sentiment was popular, the ordinance immediately met resistance. Referred to as the “Bingham Ordinance” after its author, Supervisor Henry Bingham, the new ordinance required residence of Chinatown to be removed to a southern section of the city previously reserved for animal slaughter and processing, the law would also make it unlawful for Chinese to do business outside of the set district.⁶⁶ *The Chronicle* quickly realized the effect of this law, explaining that, “many attorneys are of the opinion that the

⁶³ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors: Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco*, “Designating a District Within Which Shooting Galleries may not be Maintained and Prohibiting the Keeping open of Shooting Galleries, or the Discharge of Cartridges therein between Certain Hours of the Day and Night,” order no. 2192 (San Francisco: P.J. Thomas, Printers, 1890), 273, accessed May 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/generalordersofb1890sanf>.

⁶⁴ Board of Supervisors, *General Orders* 1890, 273.

⁶⁵ “The Supervisors: Chinatown Removal Order Passed to Print,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 18, 1890.

⁶⁶ Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 224.

order is unconstitutional and cannot be enforced. At all events a strong fight on the part of the Chinese is anticipated.”⁶⁷ As the order took effect, its legality was quickly tested as Judge Lorenzo Sawyer heard the case of Lee Sing, who was arrested in May 1890 in violation of this ordinance. Judge Sawyer ruled the ordinance unconstitutional, stating in his opinion:

The obvious purpose of this order, is, to forcibly drive out a whole community of twenty-odd thousand people, old and young, male and female, citizens of the United States, born on the soil, and foreigners of the Chinese race, moral and immoral, good, bad, and indifferent, and without respect for circumstance or condition, from a whole section of the city which they have inhabited, and in which they have carried on all kinds of business appropriate to a city, mercantile, manufacturing, and otherwise, for more than 40 years.⁶⁸

While singling out the Chinese community for relocation was found unconstitutional, stringent concealed weapon regulations affecting the Chinese remained in force (albeit at the discretion of the police department).

Harsher punishments for offenders did not completely pacify citizens worried about violence in San Francisco. In September of 1891, the dispute over gun control entered the headlines once again, as the San Francisco ordinance was challenged in the State Supreme Court. O.F. Cheney, who was presumably not Chinese, was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon and fined \$250. In line with popular practice, when offenders were unable to pay fees, they were often jailed; therefore, because Cheney was unable to pay the fine, he was forced to serve 250 days in jail (one day for every dollar he

⁶⁷ “The Chinatown Order,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 15, 1890.

⁶⁸ *The Federal Reporter. Volume 43: Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit and District Courts of the United States. September-December, 1890*, (Saint Paul: West Publishing), 361, Accessed October, 7, 2014, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc36372/>.

owed). Cheney in turn, argued that his imprisonment was unjust because the original ordinance limited sentences to six months and “that the ordinance prohibiting the carrying of weapons concealed is repugnant to the Constitution of the State.”⁶⁹

The court upheld the concealed weapons ordinance, Cheney remained in jail, and articles professing their approval of the decision surfaced. According to *The Call*:

In its decision the court said that it is a well-recognized fact that the unrestricted habit of carrying weapons concealed is the source of much crime and frequently leads to breaches of the peace and causeless homicides which would not otherwise occur. The majority of citizens have no desire to wish to carry such weapons, and it is often the case that the innocent bystander is made to suffer for the unintended act of another, who in the heat of passion attributes to himself some fancied insult or trivial injury.⁷⁰

Fear of violence continued to exist in San Francisco, making this ordinance seem absolutely necessary. In a defensive argument, *The Call* suggests that the original ordinance was passed to “protect the law-abiding citizens as well as to prevent a breach of the peace.”⁷¹ An article responding to the same case and published just one day later took a different stance. Adhering to the argument of passive manhood, the author replied to the argument that “the ordinance had no terrors for the turbulent classes, and consequently only disarmed citizens who imagined that weapons were essential to their safety.”⁷² *The Call* explains that, “while there is some force in this argument, the general public opinion is that the city of San Francisco has passed out of the stage of civilization

⁶⁹ “Carrying Weapons: The Supreme Court Decides the Ordinance to be Legal,” *San Francisco Call*, September 3, 1891.

⁷⁰ “Carrying Weapons,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁷¹ “Carrying Weapons,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁷² “Carrying Concealed Weapons,” *San Francisco Call*, September 4, 1891.

which reduced law-abiding citizens to the necessity of carrying arms for self-protection.”⁷³ This argument held that civilized men should not go armed, and should not rely on firearms for protection. These authors had two distinctly different definitions of manliness in relation to firearms. While one advocated that men go armed against criminals for the good of society, the other argued for the refusal to carry weapons in favor of being peaceable. It is clear from these articles that the argument concerning gun control in San Francisco remained an issue even after the ordinance was amended to make the consequence for carrying a concealed weapon much harsher.

The discourse on control continued as the police struggled to find a solution for violence in Chinatown, and decided to take a direct approach by establishing a greater police presence therein. With reports of highbinder violence, the public pressed for more protection from Chinatown. In March 1891, the *Daily Alta* reported highbinder “warriors” fighting in the streets of Chinatown. Chief Crowley’s response was to “send an additional detail of police into the Chinese quarter to preserve the peace.”⁷⁴ According to the *Alta* reported he feared “that if they shoot they will be more likely to injure white people passing by than any one else.”⁷⁵ In November of the same year, with this threat in mind, Chief Crowley made his official recommendation for a police station in Chinatown, stating that it is “absolutely necessary.”⁷⁶ The article concluded, as if to remind the reader of the importance of a strong police presence in Chinatown, with a

⁷³ “Carrying Concealed Weapons,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁷⁴ “A Chinese Feud,” *Daily Alta California*, March 1, 1891.

⁷⁵ “A Chinese Feud,” *Daily Alta California*.

⁷⁶ “Dead Highbinder,” *San Francisco Call*, November 12, 1891.

report of “a big highbinder who was recently searched and relieved of a large revolver” and who was sentenced to 250 days in jail.⁷⁷ With an established force in Chinatown, the officers believed they would gain a firmer handle on the situation. However, in 1893 violence in Chinatown still seemed unmanageable. Chief Crowley admitted that the force was “handicapped from the fact that we have no one connected with the force who understands the Chinese language.”⁷⁸ Of particular concern to the Chief was the Chinatown tradition of posting notices around the district informing the community of events. According to reports, this tradition was also used by tongs to announce battles. As the Chief explained: “they post their bills on the walls and they may be intending to murder for anything we know to the contrary.”⁷⁹ In practice, because of the language barrier, any planned Chinese event could be perceived as a threat requiring additional police activity. Chief Crowley went on to explain that he, “might put the whole police force in Chinatown and thoroughly ransack the place, but that would leave the rest of the city unprotected and is not to be thought of. But I am sending as many extra men as can be safely spared.”⁸⁰ Anxiety created an atmosphere of fear and the need for control of the Chinese community.

The relationship between the San Francisco Chinese and Anglo communities remained tense in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In a world in which it was

⁷⁷ “Dead Highbinder,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁷⁸ “Shots and a Rush: An Early Morning Fight on Jackson Street,” *San Francisco Call*, March 10, 1893.

⁷⁹ “Shots and a Rush,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁸⁰ “Shots and a Rush,” *San Francisco Call*.

expected that character be represented by the outward appearance of a person, concealed weapons were particularly concerning. Victims of such weapons could not anticipate the attack if the perpetrator appeared to be peaceable, only to have a weapon concealed by his clothing. The Chinese further complicated this imagery as whites were unable to read their character by their appearance. As newspapers projected images of violence onto Chinatown, whites became unable to separate the images of highbinders from peaceable Chinese in San Francisco. Defensive men saw it as their responsibility as gentlemen to arm themselves against the unpredictable and treacherous Chinese. Additionally, they saw gun control as a necessary deterrent for irresponsible gun carriers. In contrast, passive men saw regulation as unnecessary because of the trajectory of society, which they believed, would soon not have a place for firearms. Race served as a catalyst for the discourse on gun control in San Francisco as images of lawlessness and increased violence added clarity to the cause of defensive and passive manhood as those groups defined themselves in opposition to the Chinese.

CHAPTER IV

CONTROLLING CHINATOWN

Congress's Geary Act of 1892 further restricted the Chinese in the United States, and in turn, escalated tensions between the Chinese and white communities. This act was an extension of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and required the registration of all Chinese laborers. The Chinese Six Companies fought the Geary Act, and urged members not to comply with the act and avoid registration. When the law was upheld, angered, the Chinese community lost the confidence in the Chinese Six Companies. That loss of confidence allowed tong associations to gain leadership in the Chinese community, further adding to the fears of the white community.¹ This failure of the Six Companies lessened their activity in the courts; however, they continued to be active in legal fights on behalf of Chinese in the United States and in those in China attempting to get to the United States.² Growth of tong violence heightened tensions between Anglo and Chinese San Franciscans. As newspapers criticized the Chinese and published opinions on how to fix the "Chinese problem," white San Franciscans continued to develop an identity in opposition to the Chinese. While San Franciscans viewed themselves as the ideal peaceful citizens, who resorted to violence only in self-defense.

In March of 1893, *The Call* published citizen opinions on the subject of the Geary Act and the deportation of the Chinese. According to M.R. Roberts, "the Chinese would vigorously resist any attempt on the part of the Government to carry out the provisions of

¹ Dillon, *Hatchet Men*, 94.

² Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 124.

the Geary act as it reads. I had been told by a Chinese who was well informed that there would be a riot and bloodshed if there was any imprisonment at hard labor or any deportation.”³ The article concludes with a section titled: “There May Be Trouble,” which expresses anxiety over the anticipated backlash from the Chinese community over the Geary Act. *The Call* explained that, “it is a well-known fact to the police that the majority of the Chinese possess firearms of some kind, and when a Chinaman buys a revolver or rifle he usually purchases the most deadly and effective weapon he can find.”⁴ According to the article, in the weeks prior to publication, “the gunstores of the city have been patronized pretty liberally by Chinese, and in almost every case a revolver of large caliber is asked for. A number of the gunstores immediate neighborhood of Chinatown were visited yesterday, and the same story came from all.”⁵ The article ends with a reminder to the community of highbinder violence in Chinatown, explaining that, “the run on the gunstores by Chinese customers may be to replace the weapons confiscated by the police during the recent highbinder riots.”⁶ White San Franciscans feared backlash from Chinese San Franciscans who seemed unpredictable and violent.

Following the Chinese Six Company’s misstep in their handling of the Geary Act in 1892, the mistrust felt in the Chinese Community towards the Six Companies allowed tong organizations to flourish. As a result, violence in subsequent years seemed to have

³ “A Pagan Problem: How Shall the Chinese Be Deported?” *San Francisco Call*, March 28, 1893.

⁴ “A Pagan Problem,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁵ “A Pagan Problem,” *San Francisco Call*.

⁶ “A Pagan Problem,” *San Francisco Call*.

escalated.⁷ This swell caused reactions from both the white and Chinese communities as both communities sought to gain control of the violent situation. Newspapers continued projecting images of lawlessness in Chinatown, which constricted the tension felt by whites.

Incidents of violence kept the fear of the Chinese highbinders fresh in the minds of San Franciscans. On July 10, 1893, the *San Francisco Call* reported the injury of two white men as they walked along Dupont Street. As the two men crossed Clay Street, Albert Klein “felt a sharp pain in the back of his head and fell fainting in the arms of his companion.”⁸ After Klein was examined at the hospital, the newspaper reported that a bullet had produced an inch long scalp wound, even though neither of the men had heard gunshots.⁹ The article reported that the “bullet was a spent one fired by some highbinders who [were] practicing with a revolver from the roof of a house in the northwest portion of the Chinese quarter.”¹⁰ Because these men were walking through Chinatown when one of them was injured, the newspaper found it necessary to report that the injury was inflicted by highbinder violence. This type of report kept violence in Chinatown at the forefront in the minds of white San Franciscans.

Aiding the image of the mysterious Chinese, newspapers reported on the experiences of police in the district that felt their crime fighting abilities were obstructed by heavy doors and maze-like alleys, creating the feeling of inaccessibility and further

⁷ Dillon, *Hatchet Men*, 94.

⁸ “Chinatown Dangers,” *San Francisco Call*, July 10, 1893.

⁹ “Chinatown Dangers,” *San Francisco Call*.

¹⁰ “Chinatown Dangers,” *San Francisco Call*.

mystery. In one instance, the *Morning Call* reported a shooting of a Chinese storekeeper by a highbinder. When police responded and attempted to track the shooter down, a “strong door” prevented his capture. Police in Chinatown were reportedly blocked by “stairways and barricaded with doors that defy the sharpest axes and the strongest arms.”¹¹ This event led to orders from Sergeant James Gillen for his officers to “Break down every door that is barred and bolted as a barricade ... Search every Chinaman you suspect of carrying a concealed weapon.”¹² Not only were the Chinese violent and willing to carry firearms, they were also able to successfully hide from the consequences of using their weapons.

In addition, Chinatown was thought to be maze-like, allowing suspects to easily escape. Chief Crowley praised the work done by *The Call* to expose the underground world of Chinatown in the article: “A Mongolian Maze: The Dens of Underground Chinatown,” published on February 21, 1893. Crowley explained, “[the report] will ... enable them to understand how it is made possible for almost every Chinese murderer to elude the officers in pursuit of him and escape.”¹³ According to *The Call*, “not only are these mazes underground and therefore completely shrouded in darkness, but they connect from house to house until a fleeing Chinese, if he knows the way, can traverse several blocks without coming above ground.” This imagery adds a new layer to the unreadable Chinese. To the white observer, not only are the men themselves viewed as

¹¹ “Highbinder Ways,” *The Morning Call*, February 16, 1893.

¹² “Highbinder Ways,” *The Morning Call*.

untrustworthy, an image was also built of a Chinatown concealing violent criminals beneath its houses and streets.

In the months surrounding the enforcement of the Geary Act, in May 1893, the Chinese Six Companies in partnership with merchants in Chinatown made an effort to organize against the violent associations in Chinatown. On March 16, 1893 the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that, “the Chinese merchants . . . met last evening and formed what might be termed a vigilance committee” in opposition to the highbinders.¹⁴ The report explained, “in the past the highbinders have been so powerful that they have compelled merchants to join their societies and pay tribute on pain of death for refusal.”¹⁵ Chief Crowley promised his support for those merchants committed to building peace in Chinatown.¹⁶ Others drew direct connections between the events of 1893 and the earlier San Francisco Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856, explaining that, “the companies have adopted American ideas to the extent of organizing a vigilance committee, and just to tickle American notions make a public acknowledgement that they have organized for legitimate business.”¹⁷ The statement posted in Chinatown began: “We the Six Companies, have organized a Vigilance Committee for the purpose of protecting our interests. The highbinders are becoming too open in their lawlessness.”¹⁸ In this way,

¹⁴ “Unhappy Highbinders,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 16, 1893.

¹⁵ “Unhappy Highbinders,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹⁶ “Unhappy Highbinders,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹⁷ “Mongol Vigilants [*sic*],” *San Francisco Call*, April 7, 1893.

¹⁸ “Mongol Vigilants [*sic*],” *San Francisco Call*.

The Call praises the new vigilance committee as adopting defensive manhood by protecting and promoting peace in their district.

Newspapers suggested that the white community approved of the new Chinese Vigilance Committee. However, the activities of the committee were obstructed by regulation, blocking the Chinese from truly taking control of law and order in the way of the Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856. Rules and procedures seem to have been imposed by the Six Companies in conjunction with the police. One such rule required “a storekeeper [who sees] any fighting or shooting or [sees] any assassin trying to escape ... shall come out of his place and blow his police whistle four times, and if he will catch the assassin and arrest him he will receive the reward.”¹⁹ Unlike the vigilance committees of early San Francisco, the Chinese were completely reliant on the white police force to enact justice, rather than imposing justice on their community. Procedures in place encouraged the Chinese Vigilance Committee to adopt passive manliness. In contrast to previous white vigilance committees who armed themselves and used violence to gain control, the Chinese were instructed to blow police whistles in order to alert police of highbinder activity. This passive view on firearms and violence ultimately reduced the Chinese Vigilance Committee to nothing more than a protective association. In addition, the defensive manhood discourse gained clarity as they approved of the Chinese efforts to control violence, but disapproved of and use of violence to gain results. Whether this was by design of the Chinese, or by the police force is unknown; however, this incidence is an example of the relationship between the Chinese and the police.

¹⁹ “Killing for Coin,” *San Francisco Call*, April 5, 1893.

While the Chinese Vigilance Committee held no powers of coercion on its own right, violence was celebrated when performed by whites in an effort to gain control of Chinatown. Lieutenant William Price served in Chinatown in the late 1880s and early 1890s was famous for his surprise attacks on highbinder meeting places. In accordance with defensive manhood, Price armed his men with axes, which they used to destroy the buildings in hopes of forcing highbinders out of their hiding places and directly attacking the “Chinatown mazes” and “strong doors.”²⁰ The press praised these acts as masculine and heroic. Price, “the mere mention of whose name chills the blood in the highbinders’ veins,” entered Chinatown in July 1896 to take control.²¹ The *Call* reported that highbinders had run Chinatown for the past few months, and all efforts had failed to hinder them. With the arrival of Price, “the crusade commenced and ere nightfall many a Chinese whose head had been bumped, or who had enjoyed the pleasure of being booted down a flight of stairs, was sorry that he had ever belonged to a highbinder association. A vast number were willing and ready to lay aside the ax and gun and offer the olive branch of peace.”²² As highbinders reconnected following the raids and “without warning the police would suddenly appear in the midst of one of the gatherings and bedlam would break loose.”²³ When recounting an earlier raid, Price explained, “we marched from one to another of these societies and literally cut them to pieces; did not

²⁰ Kevin J. Mullen, *Chinatown Squad*,” 65-67.

²¹ “Terror in Chinatown,” *San Francisco Call*, July 28, 1896.

²² “Terror in Chinatown,” *San Francisco Call*.

²³ “Terror in Chinatown,” *San Francisco Call*.

leave a bit of furniture five inches long in one of them.”²⁴ In addition to winning over the white San Franciscans with his destruction of Chinatown, Price claimed, “among the better class of Chinese who belonged to these societies through fear, or for self-protection, we were held in favor for what we had done.”²⁵ Price’s “manly” efforts were a stark juxtaposition to the lawless and unrestrained Chinese.

Tong violence continued to plaster newspaper headlines through the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, which inspired new campaigns to control the Chinese. While there were rumblings of ineffective gun control and the need for more police, there were also calls to reform Chinatown as a whole. The spotlight remained on Chinatown’s violence, as the *San Francisco Chronicle* declared in 1900 that the “Chinese May Have to Go,” in response to a recent shooting in Chinatown. Chief William Sullivan issued a warning to the Chinese, “that unless the highbinder war, which started Wednesday night, is speedily brought to an end steps will be taken to drive the Chinese out of the city.”²⁶ He continued, “I will not put up with the work of highbinders. If they do not abide by the laws I shall have them cleaned out.”²⁷ It was this general lawlessness that caught the attention of proponents of Chinatown removal.

On June 27, 1900 the Public Improvement Central League met in San Francisco to discuss the possibility of removing the Chinese from Chinatown as a means of control.

²⁴ Interview, September 22, 1898, container 1, folder 1:66, Coll. 81/55, Hart Hyatt North Papers, 1865-1966, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁵ Interview, September 22, 1898, Hart Hyatt North Papers.

²⁶ “Chinese May Have to Go,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 2, 1900.

²⁷ “Chinese May Have to Go,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

According to the *Chronicle*, which asserted, “that the time has come,” the group advocated Chinatown be moved from the “heart of the business district of San Francisco.”²⁸ The Chinese would be allowed to stay, “so long as they conformed to the same sanitary, police and fire regulations enforced in other parts of the city.”²⁹ A later article with the headline “Widen Streets of Chinatown and Purge Place of its Evils” contended that if Chinatown were improved it would become desirable “for business houses and residence, and buildings would command as high rentals.”³⁰ Realizing the legal problems surrounding previous attempts to remove Chinatown, the *Chronicle* explained that, “the city is endowed with the power under the charter to widen, extend, straighten or close streets, and with certain preliminaries favorably settled, could within a few months so remodel Chinatown as to make it one of the most desirable parts of San Francisco – and correspondingly uncomfortable to the Chinese.”³¹ The article continued: “The people who realize the danger of the present Chinatown, and who are equally well aware of the value of the location for white people, are chiefly concerned in ways and means to bring about the desired exodus in a lawful but effective manner.”³² By widening the street, the maze-like quality commented on by so many observers of

²⁸ “Citizens Would Move Chinatown,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 28, 1900.

²⁹ “Citizens Would Move Chinatown,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

³⁰ “Widen Streets of Chinatown and Purge Place of its Evils,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 1, 1900.

³¹ “Widen Streets of Chinatown and Purge Place of its Evils,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

³² “Widen Streets of Chinatown and Purge Place of its Evils,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Chinatown, would be reduced. This in turn would make the district less unnerving to whites, and at the same time unattractive to the supposedly criminal Chinese.

Newspapers reported on wars being fought in Chinatown between 1900 and 1910, and tong fighting remained present in the city; however, violence seemed to have slowed by the 1910s and appeared only sporadically in the newspapers. San Franciscans, it seems, were less anxious about violence in Chinatown. In part, the diminished population of Chinese in San Francisco could explain this. Between 1890, when Chief Cowley recommended the harsher concealed weapons law, and 1910, the Chinese population decreased from 25,833 to 10,582, a population that made up just 2.5% of the total population of San Francisco in 1910.³³ While the reduction was largely due to the Chinese Exclusion Act and increased hostilities to the Chinese, it was also caused by partially by the earthquake and ensuing fire that destroyed Chinatown in 1906. This destruction also affected tong violence, as Richard H. Dillon explained, “The ranks of the hatchet men, already thinned by old age, extradition, voluntary return to China, and death, scattered after 1906. Some went to Oakland; others to Portland and Seattle. Many went to San Jose or south to Los Angeles, and a considerable number went on East to Chicago or New York to cause trouble there.”³⁴ As Chinatown was rebuilt, in subsequent years tong violence continued, but did not reach the levels it had before 1906.³⁵

³³ “San Francisco Population,” SFGenealogy, last modified December 2014, accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.sfgenealogy.com/sf/history/hgpop.htm>.

³⁴ Dillon, *Hatchet Men*, 360.

³⁵ Dillon, *Hatchet Men*, 361-362.

The identity of defensive manhood evolved as the relationship between Anglo and Chinese San Franciscans evolved and changed. Increased tension following the Geary Act caused the city to praise efforts coming out of the Chinese community, while simultaneously barring the Chinese from using violence to control crime in their own community. In contrast, Lieutenant Price was celebrated for violently destroying Chinatown buildings in search of highbinders. Chinese Exclusion caused the Chinese population in San Francisco to decrease after 1882. This coupled with the 1906 earthquake and fire caused a decrease in violence in Chinatown. For this reason, the debate surrounding gun control shifted to be less directly about race.

CHAPTER V

THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS RESPONSIBLY:

THE SHIFTING DISCOURSE IN SAN FRANCISCO

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Anglo San Franciscans refined their identity as civilized gun owners. In 1903 the *Chronicle* asked: “Why does a man carry a revolver?” In a social commentary, the article published an image of a white male holding out a revolver to a police officer, all while concealing a second firearm behind his back (fig. 2).¹ The armed man seems to cooperate with the officer while refusing to give up his weapon. The article argued that gun ownership was dwindling and would soon be unnecessary, and this is evident in the article’s subheading, which asked: “And do you know that you are marching with a rapidly diminishing minority?”² With the decline of highbinder violence the debate shifted from a ban on concealed weapons to the general control of firearms. While race remained an issue as whites continued to feel threatened by non-white violence, the main focus shifted to the control of unpredictable, impassioned, and insane whites and non-whites. This discourse became more prominent following publicized gun violence towards women.

¹ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*, July 12, 1903.

² “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.



Figure 2 *San Francisco Chronicle* July 12, 1903

Two distinct discourses were present as San Franciscans struggled for control. As in previous years, defensive manliness remained a viable voice. These men felt it essential to display their manliness with firearms, and believed in the necessity to take up arms for self-defense. In contrast, judicious manliness emphasized skill and gun safety, believing that experienced and knowledgeable men should carry weapons, but those lacking in the necessary expertise should remain unarmed. This discourse incorporated tenants of passive manhood, as there was a general understanding that society had moved past the necessity of carrying firearms. Judicious men believed in regulation and placed high emphasis on responsible gun ownership.

Judicious men believed that to be manly required one to be in control of one's weapon and to have expertise in its use, or to not carry a firearm at all. The Chief of police discussed the dangers of unskilled gun owners, as the *Chronicle* reported:

‘Of course I think it adds to the danger of the average person to carry a revolver,’ said George W. Wittman, Chief of Police, when questioned upon the subject. ‘No one has any business with weapons unless he means to shoot and to shoot quickly and straight when he find his life threatened. If he misses or hesitates, or begins

to fumble, he draws the fire of his opponents, and provokes them to kill him, whether they at first meant to do so or not. No one can shoot and bring down his man on the instant either, without lots of practice and general knowledge of how to handle a gun.³

As the Chief explains, men should be armed, but if they choose to do so they should know how to use their weapon properly to avoid accidents. The article continues by urging citizens to practice with the revolvers, even when city life may make it difficult. “For the safety of themselves and the general public it is necessary that they should be expert,” noted Chief White.⁴ It was not enough to merely own a weapon; a man was expected to hone the skill of using it, and in the absence of skill, should not carry a weapon.

Judicious men were confident that in 1903 men should not rely on firearms for protection, and should avoid carrying firearms out of mere habit. In “Do You Carry a Revolver?” the *Call* commented on this phenomenon explaining: “The Roman youth looked forward from his earliest years to the proud moment when he would be permitted to wear the sign of manhood – the toga virilis.”⁵ In contrast to Roman boys looking forward to wearing a cloak signifying manhood, “the American boy, on the other hand, waits impatiently for the day when he shall be considered old enough to carry a pistol.”⁶ The *Chronicle* criticizes the practice, explain that “the average man carries a pistol because his father did, which is no better reason than that which actuates a hen in

³ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.

⁴ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.

⁵ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.

⁶ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.

crossing the road.”⁷ The article continues, “pioneers had a need of guns and knew how to use them”; however, men in 1903 only carry firearms out of “what scientists call persistence of type – [a] hereditary idea that it is the proper thing to do.”⁸ Unskilled gun owners were common because of this “habit,” which led to more accidents from improper use. Judicious men argued that those untrained the use of firearms should not rely on them for protection, and should not carry weapons in general.

By identifying civility with masculinity, criminals were excluded from this definition. Civilized men were expected to be peaceable and in control of themselves. In response to the frustration of police catching ordinary citizens carrying concealed weapons while criminals remained armed and committing crimes, in line with defensive manhood the *Chronicle* explained that it is time for, “property owners . . . to display their own manhood.”⁹ In addition, the author noted, “it is not, never was and never will be the fact that a mob can long dominate any city or part of a city whose substantial interests are in the hands of men and not sheep.”¹⁰ Men viewed themselves as in control of shaping the identity of this civilization.¹¹ To let criminals dictate the rules of the city was unacceptable. The *Chronicle* thus called for “property owners . . . to organize and show themselves men. If the police [would] not protect them they [knew] where to go. No man on either side should be allowed to carry concealed weapons, but on the other hand,

⁷ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.

⁸ “Do you Carry a Revolver?” *San Francisco Call*.

⁹ “Murder Still Ripe,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 4, 1907.

¹⁰ “Murder Still Ripe,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹¹ Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*, 15.

the streets should be made so safe that there will be no inducement to do so.”¹² The police were charged with the inability to protect, and the citizens felt that they themselves had to protect the streets. In contrast with judicious manhood, this article argued that when threatened, men should bear arms to gain control regardless of their skill or experience with their weapon of choice.

Irresponsible firearm use fueled the judicious manliness discourse. In one such instance, on July 18, 1909, the *San Francisco Call* reported an incident in which a “society woman shot herself with a pistol, which a man carelessly tossed upon the table.”¹³ This event was criticized as careless by the newspaper, adding to the argument that guns had outlived their effectiveness in society, and the men’s “habit” had become more dangerous and was now responsible for killing an inexperienced woman. Reformers of this era were alarmed by events such as this, and the results of the wide availability of firearms and ineffective laws.¹⁴ The *Chronicle* argued, “the times have changed and the manners should keep them company. There is not now a good reason for the average man to go about the streets with a pistol in his pocket.”¹⁵ To curb this behavior, the paper called for the ban on carrying concealed weapons enforced more strictly. In addition, the *Chronicle* explained,

The action of our police department last week in openly auctioning off more than 300 revolvers shows that in this city we have not yet awakened to the meaning of

¹² “Murder Still Ripe,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹³ “The Pistol Habit,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 18, 1909.

¹⁴ Alexander DeConde, *Gun Violence in America: The Struggle for Control* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 105.

¹⁵ “The Pistol Habit,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

the pistol abuse. It would have required little thought on the part of the officials to have told them that these weapons, which had passed to the city from the pockets of thugs and fools, would be bought up cheap by pawnbrokers and others and find their way back to cheap criminals later on.¹⁶

In the paper's opinion, New York and Chicago were models in regards to gun control, having just recently taken "stocks of deadly weapons confiscated by the police were taken out into the harbor by tug and thrown overboard."¹⁷ The perceived overflow of weapons on the streets of San Francisco made increased regulation rational.

As legislation involving firearms evolved in New York and Chicago, San Francisco's newspapers took note. As Chicago began the process of passing legislation as well, the *Chronicle* printed the details of the bill. The report noted that the law would allow offenders to be sentenced to prison for carrying concealed weapons, or for selling weapons to a minor.¹⁸ Chicago's bill also called for a gun registry to be created.¹⁹ A similar law in New York caused a reader to write into the *San Francisco Call* from Virginia City, Nevada. After having read an article in a magazine about the New York Law, the writer described the effects it had on New York's gangs, especially the report of "no shooting between gangs since."²⁰ The writer argued that "a similar law passed by the California legislature would put a stop to the Chinese tong fighting and largely do away

¹⁶ "The Pistol Habit," *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹⁷ "The Pistol Habit," *San Francisco Chronicle*.

¹⁸ "Bill Asks Year Term for Carrying of Guns," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 24, 1911.

¹⁹ "Bill Asks Year Term for Carrying of Guns," *San Francisco Chronicle*.

²⁰ "Letter From the People," *San Francisco Call*, February 17, 1912.

with the numerous holdups in your city.”²¹ This discourse was not without elements of race, and was not free from the influence of Chinatown violence, which had been reduced but not eradicated. States, he argued, like cities, took it upon themselves to pass gun-control legislation to control violence.

While gun control reform was on the minds of many, an event in 1912 pulled the conversation into the headlines. On June 3, 1912 Charles Bonner, a nineteen-year-old man, shot and killed seventeen-year-old Bernice Godair outside her home after a night at the theater with her aunt. Bonner explained that Godair was keeping something from him, and in a “fit of temper,” he shot her.²² According to Bonner, he “shot as long as there was anything in the gun to shoot with, and after it had clinked eight or ten times [he] realized it was empty.”²³ According to court testimony, Bernice’s aunt, Mrs. Minette Godair Dreux, yelled for Bernice’s grandmother, Louisiana Godair, who upon seeing, “her granddaughter lying there she started to pick her up, but hearing Mrs. Dreux say, ‘Charlie, how could you do it?’ she seized him by the hair, threw him on the floor and beat him with the pistol until his brother wrenched it from her.”²⁴ As the story of his disturbing actions spread, Bonner’s sanity was quickly questioned. While *The Call* called Bonner, “the mildest mannered, gentlest little murderer who ever sat in the shadow of the gallows,” Bonner was aware of his actions and realized his inevitable punishment.²⁵ After

²¹ “Letter From the People,” *San Francisco Call*.

²² “Bonner Weird Enigma: Rage Drives Boy Murder,” *San Francisco Call*, June 5, 1912.

²³ “Bonner Weird Enigma: Rage Drives Boy Murder,” *San Francisco Call*.

²⁴ “Story of Shooting of Girl is Retold,” *San Francisco Call*, August 21, 1912.

²⁵ “Bonner Weird Enigma: Rage Drives Boy Murder,” *San Francisco Call*.

reviewing this case, the coroner's jury "recommended that [firearms] sales should be regulated by the proper authorities."²⁶ In addition, "had the purchase of the weapons in this case been accompanied with more difficulties and legal technicality the purchase might have been delayed and reconsideration of the contemplated act brought about."²⁷

In the wake of Godair's murder, citizens were shocked into action. Statistically, women in the United States were less likely than men to be murdered, and men were far more likely to be murdered by other men than by women.²⁸ Perhaps the violation of this nineteenth century norm disturbed San Franciscans, as it was a young woman murdered. Following the events of June 3, 1912, many parties came forward requesting stricter gun regulation. One such groups, a women's organization called the Juvenile Protection Association, called for stricter gun control, agreeing to send their request to the Board of Supervisors, specifically citing the death of Godair for their action.²⁹ On June 12, 1912 the *Chronicle* reported:

Aroused to definite action by the recent murder of seventeen-year-old Bernice Godair, which culminated in a series of similar crimes, the Mayor, Police Commission and Chief if Police are advocating stringent legislation to prevent not only the carrying of concealed weapons in the State of California, but also the sale of firearms small enough to be hidden on the person of purchasers, an evil that for years has gone almost unnoticed here.³⁰

²⁶ "Jury Would Limit Sale of Firearms," *San Francisco Call*, June 7, 1912.

²⁷ "Jury Would Limit Sale of Firearms," *San Francisco Call*.

²⁸ Eric H. Monkkonen, *Murder in New York City* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 72-78.

²⁹ "Women in Favor of Chicago Plan," *San Francisco Call*, June 18, 1912.

³⁰ "Police Authorities Advocate Enactment of a State Law to Prevent the Sale of Weapons," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 12, 1912.

While this discourse included the regulation of concealed weapons, the murder of Bernice Godair and the recent legislation passed by New York and Chicago, shifted the debate in San Francisco to include the sale of firearms.

Officials in San Francisco came out in support of the control of firearms, believing that the model set by other urban centers would benefit their city. Chief of Police David A. White was in favor of increased regulations, explaining that “in New York they have passed such a law, and I believe it is safe to say that the shootings due to sudden passion and in the heat of argument have been much less frequent than before the enactment of the statute.”³¹ One facet of the New York law approved of by San Franciscans was the destruction of firearms instead of the wholesale auctioning of confiscated weapons. It was believed that destroying the weapons would keep them out of pawnshops. In line with judicious manliness, City Attorney Percy V. Long argued that such legislation would, “reduce to a minimum the murders committed by love crazed youths and angry men and women who because they find it easy to purchase a firearm, are too ready to use one for trivial causes that after their burst of temper has died down leave them to regret the act for the remainder of their lives.”³² Long declared that, “the root of the entire evil really lies in the laxity shown by pawnbrokers and dealers, who will take a chance and sell revolvers at prices ranging from \$2 to ten times that amount.”³³ Pawnshops were blamed in the murder of Godair, as the *Chronicle* explained, Bonner

³¹ “Police Authorities Advocate Enactment of a State Law,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

³² “New Statute to Govern Sale of Firearms Soon to be Drafted and Presented to Legislature,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 13, 1912.

³³ “New Statute to Govern Sale of Firearms,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

was able to, “walk excitedly into a shop on Third street, select a cheap weapon and deliberately ride back to the home of Bernice Godair, there to shoot her when she laughed at the advances of the lovesick schoolboy.”³⁴ Officials aimed to cut off the pawnshop’s supply of cheap weapons by stopping city auctions of firearms.

Supporters specifically called for state legislation and standardized practices for issuing firearm permits in hopes of reducing the amount of gun owners. Jesse B. Cook, president of the Police Commission, believed that “the Police Commission should have the only right to grant permits, and that, as in New York, which is far ahead of other cities in the matter of regulating the sale and carry of firearms, no dealer should be allowed to sell a deadly weapon of any kind without being shown a regular permit signed by the president of the Police Board.”³⁵ Establishing this process throughout the state was key in the minds of the proponents. Creating a statewide law would help avoid a situation where “it would only be necessary for a person, intending to commit murder or assault, to cross to Oakland or Alameda, purchase a revolver and return to lie in wait for his victim.”³⁶

While the calls for gun control legislation were from judicious men, their efforts were met with backlash from defensive men in San Francisco. These men disagreed with the proposed legislation, believing that men should be able to safely protect himself, and his home. On June 14, 1912 the *San Francisco Chronicle* published: “Unregulated Sale

³⁴ “Police Authorities Advocate Enactment of a State Law,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

³⁵ “Police Authorities Advocate Enactment of a State Law,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

³⁶ “Police Authorities Advocate Enactment of a State Law,” *San Francisco Chronicle*.

of Weapons: Legislation Should be Against the Wielders and Not Against Pistols.” The author argued that, “the object of any legislation should be to increase the use of pistols for self-defense and diminish the other uses. How best to accomplish this end is a question that has not been solved, in spite of statements to the contrary, as witness the results in New York and Illinois.” While the writer did not in favor a New York or Chicago style law, concealed weapons remained his focus. The author advocated that the “average householder” own firearms for self-defense. To avoid issues of concealment, gun owners, “should be compelled to buy pistols of such length of barrel that concealment would be impossible.”³⁷ To solve this, the article argued: “Householders, requiring permits to purchase a pistol for defense of their homes, could be issued a license to buy a weapon with a ten-inch barrel, rendering concealment nearly impossible, while increasing serviceability.” Instead of falling in line with city officials, the author proposed alterations to concealed weapons laws to make the firearms owned by citizens unable to be concealed. While this added to the discourse, in January 1913 the *Chronicle* reported that a bill was introduced to the state Senate to regulate “the sale of firearms and it is thought it will do much to stop the large number of murders and suicides in the larger cities.”³⁸

Not until four years later, however, did the state of California pass its first gun control law since the repeal of the concealed weapons ban in 1870. This law included restrictions on carrying concealed weapons, and gave the control of regulating permits to

³⁷ “Unregulated Sale of Weapons,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 14, 1912.

³⁸ “Would Restrict Sale of Firearms,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 11, 1913.

the city and counties of California. The law also required, “at least once in each year to destroy or cause to be destroyed such instruments, weapons and other firearms in such manner and to such extent that the same shall be and become wholly and entirely ineffective and useless for the purpose for which it was manufactured.”³⁹ In addition,

every person in the business of selling, leasing or otherwise transferring a pistol, revolver or other firearm, of a size capable of being concealed upon the person . . . shall keep a register in which shall be entered the time of sale, the date of sale, the make, model, manufacturer’s number, caliber or other marks of identification on such pistol, revolver or other firearm.⁴⁰

Adopting many aspects of the New York and Chicago laws, the apprehensive *San Francisco Chronicle* called this legislation “a step, and it is only a step, in the right direction.”⁴¹ Believing that the “intention is excellent, but it is difficult to see how such a law is going to minimize the undoubted evil of the ready revolver.”⁴²

Race continued to play a role in the discourse of gun control in California, as judicious men worked to disarm non-whites they viewed as threatening. In 1923, the California State Legislature passed a second gun control bill, amending the 1917 law. Most notably the new statutes stated, “no unnaturalized foreign born person . . . shall own or have in his possession or under his custody or control any pistol, revolver or other

³⁹ California State Legislature, *Statutes of California: Passed at the Forty-Second Session of the Legislature*, (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1917), 222, accessed May 14, 2015, http://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/Statutes/1917/17Voll_Chapters.pdf.

⁴⁰ California State Legislature, *Statutes of California*, 1917, 222

⁴¹ “Regulating the Ready Revolver,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 18, 1917.

⁴² “Regulating the Ready Revolver,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 18, 1917.

firearm capable of being concealed on the person.”⁴³ Because the Chinese Exclusion Act had been extended permanently in 1902, thus denying Chinese Americans citizenship. California’s 1923 gun control law effectively disarmed the entire Chinese community.⁴⁴ While tongs remained in San Francisco, violence in Chinatown had decreased overall; however, enough remained to cause concern. Even so, violence in Chinatown did not result in a direct increase in regulation in San Francisco.

The white community in San Francisco called for additional safeguards as they examined their relationship to firearms. White San Franciscans had defined themselves as in possession of law and order, and needed to control impassioned and insane whites who chose to carry weapons. When violence directed at young women from within the white community plastered the headlines, calls for reform were quick. Judicious men called for the state legislature to pass gun control in hopes that statewide regulations, as opposed to local ordinances, would keep all citizens of California peaceable. At the center of this debate was the fear of non-whites, or impassioned whites, obtaining firearms, concealing them, and threatening peaceable citizens with violence. One such criminal, Charles Bonner, who murdered Bernice Godair, was quickly labeled as “insane,” and was therefore, not in control of his actions. This was another class that whites wanted to keep disarmed, those who were out of control and incapable of gaining control of their emotions. For this reason, judicious men argued that statewide gun control was the only option if the insane were to be kept from leaving San Francisco,

⁴³ California State Legislature, *Statutes of California: Passed at the Forty-Second Session of the Legislature*, (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1923), 696, accessed May 14, 2015, http://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/sites/clerk.assembly.ca.gov/files/archive/Statutes/1923/23Vol1_Chapters.pdf.

⁴⁴ Cramer, “Rooted in Racism.”

purchasing a firearm, and returning. In opposition, defensive men argued for their right to bear arms in self-defense, but agreed that concealable weapons should be banned to protect citizens from unknown assailants. The 1917 and 1923 gun control laws in California aimed to force control on an uncontrolled situation, and ease the minds of whites who perceived violence and chaos in the uncontrolled classes.

CONCLUSION

Fear motivated all sides of the discourse on gun control through the late nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century in San Francisco. The diverse city was forced to quickly define its relation to violence as men from all corners of the globe rushed to California in search of gold. As San Francisco became an urban center, two distinct voices emerged in the conversation concerning concealed weapons and violence in the city. Defensive men argued that strict laws banning concealed weapons needed to be passed and enforced in order to forcibly control irrational violence. After the repeal of California's concealed weapons ban in 1870, these men defined themselves as having the right and responsibility to bear arms in protection of themselves and other peaceable citizens. To defensive men, concealed weapons bans were one way in which law-abiding and non-violent citizens could be protected from violence. Passive men saw society as evolving out of the need for firearms, and believed that civilized men should not rely on firearms for protection. Passive men considered carrying weapons to be uncivilized, and concealed weapons were even more so. Over time, these discourses were molded by perceptions of violence within San Francisco.

Vigilante justice swept San Francisco in 1851 and 1856, as large groups of Anglo San Franciscans viewed the justice system as ineffective. While simultaneously claiming to abhor violence, these defensive men, sought control through violence. To these men, the ends justified the means. In their eyes, if they were to protect peaceable citizens in the face of a perceived growing crime rate, they would have to use whatever methods necessary. Ultimately, the vigilance committees hanged only eight men following public

trials. While eight men lost their lives during this popular takeover of San Francisco, there events were less deadly compared to other occasions of mob violence in the West.¹

As the Chinese population grew in San Francisco, whites began to define themselves in opposition to the newcomers. With the help of newspapers, whites perceived Chinatown as lawless, dangerous, and filled with treacherous criminals, concealing their weapons until the moment of attack. In response to increased reports of gun violence, San Francisco's first concealed weapons ban was passed in 1875. As newspapers defined Chinatown as violent and full of vice, defensive men called for more regulation to help protect nonviolent citizens. The imagery eventually led to the passage of strict a concealed weapons law in 1890, with a hope that bans on concealed weapons and a heavy fine with possible jail time on those that offended would deter criminals from carrying weapons in the first place, or be jailed and off the street after offending.

As highbinder violence lessened after San Francisco's 1906 earthquake and fire, the white community's relationship with guns came into focus. The death of several women caused by gun shot wounds made appearances in the papers just as New York and Chicago began having success with strict concealed weapons bans, and gun registry laws controlling crime. The change in focus caused a new voice to emerge, as judicious men called for the state legislature to pass regulations similar to New York and Chicago. These men put an emphasis on skilled and responsible gun ownership, and did not believe that every peaceable citizen should carry a weapon. In opposition, defensive men believed in carrying weapons for self-defense. While they believed in regulation, they

¹ McGrath, "Violent Birth," 46.

did not support laws modeled after New York and Chicago. Both discourses defined themselves as protectors of the peaceable, primarily women and children.

Newspapers provide a window into the discourse on gun control, allowing the reader to glimpse the perceptions that made calls for regulations possible. However, the main source on which these arguments rely does not come without complications. It is impossible to know who exactly read these articles, or what they thought about the messages. Only the authors' voice can be interpreted and the subsequent events judged based on what was printed. Government documents help to support these thoughts with concrete ordinances, laws, and special committee investigations. The greater problem here is the lack of first hand accounts from Chinese in San Francisco during the nineteenth century. For this reason, I chose to focus on the perception of these people in the white community and the effects of these perceptions on gun control.

While this approach yielded interesting conclusions, a study dealing with the reality of violence in San Francisco and the relationship between violence and gun control would be beneficial. Records concerning homicide rates and arrests made for carrying concealed weapons are available in San Francisco's Municipal Reports. It would be possible to use these records in conjunction with newspapers to understand whether rising, or falling, arrest and death rates influenced newspaper reporting. This would provide a broader understanding of San Francisco's relationship with violence.

This study could also be expanded to include race and gun control in California as a whole. Los Angeles and Sacramento faced highbinder violence in the same period that San Francisco saw an upsurge in disorder. Research of these places at the same time

could help us understand how they dealt with the issues of an armed non-white population in the midst of violence. In addition, rural areas should not be ignored, as it would be useful to explore how rural areas handled gun violence and gun control, and how race impacted the conversation. A study comparing these urban areas in California with rural areas would broaden the understanding of gun control in the West.

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