

Fall 1979

# The Inflation of an Overdone Business: Economic Origins of San Francisco Vigilantes

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## Recommended Citation

Senkewicz, R. M. (1979). The Inflation of an Overdone Business: Economic Origins of San Francisco Vigilantes. *The Pacific Historian*, 23(3), 63–75.

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*“The Inflation of an Overdone Business”*  
*The Economic Origins of*  
*San Francisco Vigilantes*

by Robert M. Senkewicz

Although most Americans would probably spontaneously associate the word “vigilante” with the wild west, cattle thieves, range wars, and the like, the largest vigilante movement in American history was urban in location and commercial in character. In San Francisco in the summer of 1856, six thousand vigilantes, led by the city’s mercantile upper crust, established a *de facto* government. Claiming that crime was too often unpunished and politics too often corrupt, the importers and wholesale merchants of San Francisco organized a private police force which hanged four men and forced another thirty or so to leave the city. (Contemporary San Franciscans would doubtless agree that this was heavy punishment indeed!) The businessmen claimed that they were reluctant vigilantes, public-minded citizens forced by crisis to step outside the letter of the law to preserve its spirit. “The voice of a whole people,” stated the vigilantes in a public address, “demanded union and organization as the only means of making our laws effective.”<sup>1</sup>

For about a century, most historians tended to accept the vigilantes’ version of events. Recently, however, a series of investigations has cast serious doubt on the vigilante picture of gold rush San Francisco as a crime-ridden and corrupt city. It is now fairly clear that, in fact, there was no crime wave which forced supposedly virtuous citizens to resort to lynch law. Nor does it seem that the political life of the city was terribly corrupt and venal, even by nineteenth century standards. Current scholars are therefore casting about for alternative explanations of San Francisco vigilantism. There is little agreement among them. Roger Lotchin, for instance, attempts to preserve a variant of the “public interest” interpretation. In his view, San Francisco vigilantism was an effort of the self-perceived “legitimates” to impose stability and order on the “colorful, lawless metropolis.” Peter Decker takes a more group-oriented view. He maintains that the businessmen-vigilantes were attempting to “maintain if not regain, occupational status.” Richard Maxwell Brown, the leading historian of American vigilantism, somewhat combines the two approaches by arguing that the vigilantes were interested in restoring “confidence in San Francisco’s municipal and financial stability.”<sup>2</sup> But there has been as yet little systematic effort to relate the structure of the market in which San Francisco businessmen

operated to the phenomenon of organized violence. In my view, this is unfortunate, for the vigilantes' actions are largely explainable by the terms of such an investigation.

The 1856 San Francisco committee of vigilance deserves study, for it was perhaps the pre-eminent nineteenth century example of urban violence directed by "gentlemen of property and standing." The ease and success with which San Francisco businessmen organized political violence for economic purposes underscores the essential fragility of the political order in nineteenth century America and highlights its vulnerability to economic pressure groups acting in the name of political "reform."<sup>3</sup>

Much has been written on the famous gold rush, but equally important for early San Francisco was a kind of "hustler rush," as young men from the east, determined to pocket the gold the miners were extracting swarmed into the collection of shanties, wharves, and rotting ships (the latter two often the same!) that was the gold rush city. Unable to fashion a commercial environment that would support them in the style to which they fondly hoped to become accustomed, these first generation importers tended to become vigilantes in a last ditch attempt to render a stubborn market benevolent.

Edward T. Hosmer was somewhat representative of this first generation. Almost as soon as word of the gold discoveries reached him he left his home in upstate New York, and travelled to Albany and New York City, contacting friends of his father and gathering from them a cargo to take with him to San Francisco. He also made arrangements with a commission merchant in New York to send him goods on a regular basis after his arrival in California. When he arrived in San Francisco, he carefully toured the city, seeking persons from New York with whom he might be able to establish a business relationship. By the end of 1849, he reported in a letter to his parents, "The firm of Hosmer and Co. is A No. 1 here . . . goods are ordered from New York to the care of **Hosmer and Co.** by a number of our friends."<sup>4</sup>

Alfred A. Dibblee was a New England version of the same phenomenon. In Boston he collected assorted merchandise from friends of the family and established permanent lines of communication between San Francisco and Massachusetts. When he arrived in San Francisco, he met a man named Chicester, a brother-in-law of William Harbeck, a large Boston shipper. The two formed a partnership, and, after Chicester retired from business, Dibblee arranged to retain the Harbeck account. This, together with his own Boston relationship, afforded him a good business.<sup>5</sup>

These two men were joined by many others, and their combined presence gave a frenzied commercial tone to the life of early San

Francisco. Some participants were wildly optimistic. "If one has moderate capital," wrote a '49er, "he can make money fast." In the same vein a few years later a teamster wrote his wife, "I came here to make something, and I mean to." But others were less sanguine. An 1851 businessman described the city as "This land of strangers, where nothing but the merciless grasp of the money getter greets you on every side." Hosmer could also see the darker side of the coin: "Friends are of but little service. Everybody is intent on making money, and have but little time to talk without they are well paid for it."<sup>6</sup>

A good dose of pessimism was warranted, for the overblown expectations which the hustlers brought with them soon bumped up against reality. It was not easy to do business in the urban frontier. Not surprisingly in view of commercial intelligence was slow to develop. An enduring pattern of chaos was set before California had been admitted into the Union. In early 1849, merchant Henry F. Teschenmacher wrote to Boston, "It would be impossible to say what kinds of a cargo would sell well in six months from now, as vessels are expected from all parts of the world." However, scarcely one month later, the same Boston business establishment heard from another correspondent, "A cargo well assorted to consist principally of eatables and houses and furniture will pay a good profit." With such conflicting estimates at hand, the natural tendency of shippers was to send whatever they could and hope for the best. As a result, early San Francisco was generally inundated with more merchandise than could be sold and oversupply was the basic condition of the market. An 1851 newspaper issued a complaint that was to permeate the commercial correspondence of the period when it stated, "Now we find our markets broken down with merchandise from the Eastern states." A ship captain who arrived at San Francisco early in the same year reported that the market was "extremely dull . . . the whole country is full of goods and large arrivals are expected."<sup>7</sup>

This condition, which one merchant termed "the inflation of an overdone business," appears to have been the basic condition of the San Francisco market except for parts of 1852 and 1853. In 1851, for instance, one merchant grumbled, "There is enough lumber to last for five years, and though many fortunes have been lost by shipping it here (for very few shipments that have arrived here for a year past have paid expenses, let alone first costs) yet it is still sent in hope of a raise." An Anonymous correspondent took out his frustrations, and probably those of many merchants, by sending a satirical letter to the *Herald* in which he "advised" eastern suppliers to send immediately "five hundred assorted cargoes, as the supply in the market is not sufficeint for more than fifteen months." He continued, "Any article quoted at high prices,

the consumption of which is limited, should be shipped in large quantities, in order to compete with the host of other shippers." Such "advices" finally had some effect, although only a temporary one, in 1852. In March, merchant-vigilante Robert S. Lamot wrote to his father, "There is a better show of prices than I have known for two years. The market is more steady and settled."<sup>8</sup>

But by early 1853 the market was again full. Early that year, a commission house reported to a dealer in Chile that barley was abundant at San Francisco, and that any shipments would result in losses, "unless the price improves soon." The news that a large shipment of flour was on the way created a temporary panic, as holders frantically tried to unload their stocks before the fleet arrived. By the end of March, merchants were advising suppliers of Chile flour that "Chile produce can be sold only for a loss," and recommending "great caution in making shipments for some months to come." By January 1854 some of the smaller importers, caught with large amounts of goods, failed. Even one of the larger dealers complained, "No one can make a calculation on this market." By March business was reported "as dull as it can be," and advice was passed along "not to send either flour or barley here, unless there should be an actual failure of crops here, which is not likely to happen." In June, a teamster, whose own livelihood was tied up with the general state of the market, put the matter more succinctly, observing "We don't need supplies here of scarce anything."<sup>9</sup>

By February and March of the next year, Chile dealers were being advised in increasingly shrill terms not to send any more flour, since, for what must have been the umpteenth time, "whilst goods continue to arrive in large quantities, prices must give way." A lawyer observed, "Times are excessively gloomy here . . . no one doing well except the lawyers." The overabundance of goods, combined with a series of bank failures in February 1855, led one San Francisco commission merchant to report, "The whole country is for sale." In the middle of 1855, a laborer who was having difficulty finding work complained, "Things have fell off so every day there is some merchant fails that was supposed to be well off. The palmy days of California are over." By March, 1856, one paper offered this gloomy assessment:

The truth is that with very few exceptions we are overstocked with imported merchandise, and some fifteen or twenty ships are known to be within a few days' sail of us, which will quite rationally account for the existing dull state of business . . . and it is quite as rational to believe that there will be no improvement until the heavy stocks are worked off.<sup>10</sup>

In attempting to deal with depressed business conditions, the first generation San Francisco importers had a limited number of options. One involved trying to bypass the middlemen, the jobbers, and inducing

the merchants in the interior of the state into larger purchases by the lower prices the importers could then offer. But his option, sporadically adopted, proved inconvenient. The importers had all they could do in trying to manage the external trade, without bothering themselves with the intricacies of the Sacramento or Marysville markets. Thus, they were generally forced to deal with the jobbers, despite the fact that the jobbers consistently frustrated them by buying only what they were absolutely certain they could sell. As an 1855 paper remarked, "The jobbers have strictly limited their purchases to their actual wants from day to day."<sup>11</sup>

Another option involved the formation of primitive cartels, through which the importers attempted to hold a particular item until the jobbers met their asking price. The historical sources are filled with tales of such efforts, which generally ended in failure. In July 1853, for instance, a group of importers temporarily managed to run up the price of flour, only to be beaten by the large volume of imports which arrived by the end of the summer. In January 1854, another group worked up the price of coffee, but that effort collapsed in less than a month. Flour cartels were tried, again unsuccessfully, in 1855 and 1856.<sup>12</sup>

The cartels were defeated by the nature of economic conditions. There were simply too many would-be commercial magnates importing too much merchandise into California. Some were obviously stronger than the others, with better credit ratings in the east and a greater ability to absorb temporary losses. But, unfortunately for others, steam dominated the transportation network to the east. Every two weeks a steamer left San Francisco, and on these regular departure days, weaker importers needed cash to remit to their suppliers. So the temptation to try to break the cartel and make a killing proved consistently irresistible. As one paper put it:

Experience in this market has amply demonstrated the fact that with a six months' stock of any staple article in the hands of a hundred different holders, prices cannot be maintained at a standard covering the cost of production or manufacture. Chiefly for the reason that one-third to one-half the number of operators have not the means to hold for a sufficient length of time, but are obliged prematurely to realize, in order to raise money, and thereby break down the market. This result to speculation without any proper basis has been witnessed again and again.<sup>13</sup>

These frequent "speculations" point to a spotty tradition which the San Francisco merchants possessed by the spring of 1856 of attempting common action to solve their commercial problems. The failure of so many of the speculations points to the mixed results which such efforts achieved. In general, the merchants were able to act in concert with some degree of success only when they acted against an outside

adversary, and they were generally unable to act in concert when a problem stemmed from within their own ranks.

Prior to 1856, the most spectacular example of mercantile cooperation against outside adversaries had been the 1851 vigilance committee. A group of merchants, outraged at what they considered crime against themselves and their property perpetrated by an allegedly well organized group of Australians, formed a vigilante force. Modelled on the groups that seemed to be endemic to the mining camps, the 1851 San Francisco vigilantes lynched four men and expelled another twenty or so.<sup>14</sup>

But merchant cooperation could also take less eccentric and dramatic forms. The fledgling Chamber of Commerce served at times as the agency through which the merchants dealt with forces and institutions outside themselves. For example, one practice which increasingly upset the city's importers was that of dispatching ships from the east with unspecified manifests. Since mail and newspapers were sent to California across Panama or Nicaragua, while goods and merchandise had to travel around Cape Horn, mail would arrive at San Francisco ahead of goods dispatched at the same time. By reading in the papers and mail the manifests of the ships that had left the east, a San Francisco importer could obtain a reasonably clear idea of what items were going to appear in the San Francisco market. As one of them put the matter, "We have copies of the manifests of all the different vessels leaving the Atlantic ports for California, so we keep posted as to the goods on the way, and can advise our correspondents more understandingly on what to ship us." However, with San Francisco overstocked and prices low from 1853 on, shippers adopted the practice of putting down on the manifests something like "merchandise." In this way, they attempted to sneak their goods through the seas and make something of a killing for themselves when the goods hit the uninformed San Francisco market.<sup>15</sup>

In June 1855, one paper remarked that the manifests were getting "more and more mystifying," and by August the Chamber of Commerce was trying to do something about the situation. Its secretary was authorized to correspond with the Secretary of the Treasury and ask him to order Eastern collectors to require that all manifests be fully specified. Apparently that remedy did not work out, for by the beginning of the next year, the Chamber memorialized the legislature on the danger to commerce of "the extremes of scarcity and oversupply." The State Senate passed an innocuous resolution of the matter.<sup>16</sup>

Another example of merchant cooperation occurred in 1855. In one of its regular outbursts against the Chinese, the legislature passed "An Act to Discourage the Immigration to this State of Persons who cannot become Citizens thereof." It was a very simple act, directed at "any

vessel arriving in any of the ports of this state.” The law stated that, for each person on board the ship who was ineligible for California citizenship, the master, owner, or consignee of the vessel had to pay a tax of fifty dollars. The Commissioner of Emigrants in San Francisco was to enforce the act there. Edward McGowan, a local Democrat, held this office at the time of the passage of the act. In 1856, the Know-Nothing legislature asked McGowan to report on his enforcement of the act. He replied that he had heard that ninety-six Chinese had landed in the preceding five months, but that “in no instance has the tax been collected, as every merchant in this place, and all others who know anything of the laws of the United States, are fully aware of the unconstitutionality of the said law.”

The Assembly Committee on Mines and Mining Interests, to whom the reply was referred, was furious and recommended that the Governor immediately remove McGowan. But the San Francisco merchants, in whose eyes the Chinese were not competing miners, but potential customers, memorialized the Mining Committee with a communication “upholding and sustaining” McGowan’s policy. Even though the communication was summarily rejected by the Committee, and the Governor did remove McGowan, the memorial itself was significant. Signed by seventy-six individuals and firms, fully half of whom (thirty-eight) were commission merchants or importers, it was an impressive display of commercial union. The legislature could also serve as the outside adversary through its taxation policies, which the San Francisco merchants, probably in common with almost every group of merchants ever taxed by anyone, thought excessive.<sup>17</sup>

Yet, the constant failure of the many speculative combinations which were scattered through the period indicated that the merchants of the city had less success in banding together when a readily perceivable outside adversary was absent. The constant overstocking afforded a good example of this inability. The business correspondence of the period was filled with specific requests for goods, and generalized complaints about there being too many goods on hand. For example, on July 30, 1853 the importing firm of Grogan and Lent wrote a supplier in Chile, “Business continues quite brisk . . . Flour has advanced more than was expected: holders of Chile [flour] refuse to sell under \$18.” Grogan and Lent predicted that Chile flour would reach \$24 and advised their correspondent to send some “quickly.” Yet, just two weeks later, Alexander B. Grogan, a partner in Grogan and Lent, wrote the same supplier and complained that business was very dull. He placed the blame on “overstocking,” which he vigorously denounced! In sum, San Francisco merchants were unable to police themselves, but, as the 1851 vigilance committee clearly demonstrated, they were more than willing to try to police others.<sup>18</sup>



But in 1856, a series of political events gave the merchants the opportunity to try to break the commercial rut into which they had fallen. A brief look at the city's politics is necessary to understand why a vigilance committee was again formed in the city. The one political constant in gold rush San Francisco was the Democratic party. Split between northern and southern wings, the party often squabbled before election. Only in 1854 did the party formally divide, with both the northern and southern wings presenting opposing tickets. The strength of the party lay in the waterfront first ward, which apparently became more of a working class area from 1849 to 1856. This electoral fact tends to support the impression conveyed by the sources that the strength of the party lay among laborers, and made it easier for the importers to regard part of the political system as controlled by potential adversaries.

The form which opposition to the Democrats assumed was not so constant. Through 1853, the opposition consisted of the Whigs and a loose succession of business-dominated "reform" parties, which pushed a variety of clean government schemes. In 1854 an increased anti-Catholic agitation, spurred by the question of state aid to parochial schools, fostered the fusion of the Whig and business opposition into the Know-Nothings. Aided by the Democratic split, the Know-Nothings won the election, but they lost to a reunited Democracy at both the city and county elections in 1855. In 1856, in an apparent attempt to keep the Know-Nothing coalition alive, James King's *Bulletin*, the leading paper in the city, continued to push religious and educational questions. There is some slight evidence to indicate that the city's merchants tended to cluster in the ranks of the opposition. In 1851, for example, one merchant wrote, "They have done me the honor of electing me as a member of the Whig Central Committee, which I am not sorry of, as it will give me an acquaintance with a great many merchants of this town (of whom it is principally composed)."<sup>19</sup>

The event that led to the formation of another vigilance committee occurred in May 1856, when King published an attack on Democratic Supervisor James Casey. The attack, personal and extravagant, was typical of the style that had made King the most controversial man in the city: he stated that, for a variety of political and personal offenses, Casey "deserved to have his neck stretched." That evening, Casey accosted King in the streets and shot him. King lingered for a few days, but eventually died from the wound. After the shooting, Casey's friends the police immediately whisked him off to jail where, they thought, he would be safe. Soon an angry crowd, composed of those who did not wish to stretch Casey's neck, gathered in front of the jail. The militia had to be called out to disperse the unruly mob, but a core of the city's merchants quietly took advantage of the excitement and chaos. Literally overnight,

they organized another vigilance committee, which was dominated by an executive committee composed largely of importers and headed by importer William T. Coleman, whom Robert Louis Stevenson later termed "the lion of the vigilantes." Within a week, the vigilantes had overwhelmed the jail and lynched Casey. For the rest of the summer they ruled the city, arresting and deporting about thirty men and hanging three more. (Their erstwhile ally McGowan was on their hit list, but he escaped.) In addition, they published a series of reports purporting in the name of the people to expose crime and corruption. In a typical broadside, they stated: "For years our citizens endured the great evils existing in their midst . . . The ballot box was dishonored, the laws were perverted, justice was prostituted, government was corrupted."<sup>20</sup>

But not everyone in the city was convinced that crime and corruption were the committee's main business. John Nugent, editor of the *Herald*, was one such. On the day after Casey shot King, he spoke against a renewal of vigilantism and quickly found out that the committee meant business. Within a few hours, over 200 persons cancelled their subscription to his paper, the auctioneers' association, under pressure from the importers, withdrew its advertising, and a pile of *Healds* was burned by merchants along Front Street, which contained many wholesale establishments. On the next day, the *Herald* was only half its normal size and almost bereft of auction advertising.

But Nugent refused to budge, and the *Herald*, probably with covert financial assistance from local Democrats, attacked the vigilantes throughout the summer. Nugent concentrated on commerce. He originally argued that the disruption of business that would result from the merchants' organizing a vigilance committee would harm business in the city. Speaking before the execution of Casey, he said, "A lynch law execution now would be a lasting detriment to the character of our city. It would destroy all confidence abroad, and indirectly retard immigration and the investment of capital."<sup>21</sup>

Through May and June, Nugent constantly pointed out that the vigilance committee was run by businessmen and kept repeating that the longer they stayed away from business, the more they would be cutting their own throats: "It is well known to every person of intelligence that since the commencement of the present excitement very little business has been done in this city. This is a fact that will be duly weighed at the East . . . a total of a million and a half dollars wasted within the last month." He stated that failure might be just what some of the San Francisco merchants deserved, pointing out to his readers in the interior that the men who had organized the vigilance committee were the very speculators who were constantly trying to corner the market in some commodity or other and thereby raise prices for the consumers.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of June, however, the *Herald* had adjusted its perspective. Nugent began to argue that “bad business” was exactly what the vigilance committee had been after all the time. This had first been suggested by General Volney Howard in a report to the Governor. Speaking of the well-known practice of evading jury duty, Howard argued that, had the city’s businessmen discharged their legal obligations as good citizens, there would have been no necessity for any vigilance committee. He went on:

There are in the vigilance committee some merchants of wealth and integrity. There are a host of others on the verge of bankruptcy. There are men unable to make their remittances before this commotion began, and who are now urging its prolongation, because it affords them a plausible excuse for not sending per mail funds which they are unable to remit.

Nugent picked up this argument, for it provided the perfect answer to the question that had been puzzling him: why were so many businessmen neglecting business? He argued that the vigilance committee was interested not only in cancelling the immediate remittance that some businessmen were perhaps unable to meet. In his eyes, the committee had a more important goal:

An intelligent and valued correspondent suggests that when the news reaches the city of New York of the state of things existing in this town, shippers will hesitate to ship large consignments as heretofore to this place, and the comparatively smaller shipments will cause a rise in the price of many articles of merchandise. Will not many of the so-called Committee in that event reap a monstrous profit on various descriptions of goods which they may have in store?

In the middle of July, the editor of the *Herald* presented his seasoned view of the 1856 vigilance committee:

Several clipper fleets have arrived at this port within the past three months . . . There was no market for them previous to the commencement of the insurrection in this city. The immediate effect of recent events will be to destroy the confidence of foreign merchants . . . Few will be ready to credit merchants doing business in a city where all law and civil rights have been subverted. Shipments will cease, and as a natural consequence the stock of necessities now on hand will go up and the mercantile Diet who now sit in such state on Sacramento Street will realize large profits upon their wares . . . The immediate results of the present movement will be that prices will be inflated, and those who have a large stock of those articles on hand will realize a fortune. Who will suffer? The people. By them the bills will have to be footed.<sup>23</sup>

Nugent’s view is most persuasive for a number of reasons. First, it takes into account the primary commercial fact of the day, that the market continued to be overstocked. In explaining the behavior of businessmen, economic factors are not unimportant. Second, the city’s pro-vigilante newspapers, which were ready at a moment’s notice to

defend the committee from any and all charges, generally ignored Nugent's arguments about the self-interest of the vigilantes. Their unwillingness to engage him suggests that he was making a very strong case. Third, unless one is willing to attribute superhuman organizational ability to the importers who formed the committee, one does have to account for the fact that thousands of men were effectively mobilized within a few days. It is plausible that the details of disruption had been worked out in advance and the the importers were awaiting a pretext for action.<sup>24</sup> San Francisco merchants had previously been able to mobilize only in the presence of an outside adversary. And James Casey, Democratic politician, Irish Catholic, and murderer, was the perfect adversary, one who could resurrect the Know-Nothing opposition coalition and turn it into a vigilante force under the direction of the city's frustrated men of commerce.

If such was the strategy, it did not entirely work. The vigilantes did win the fall elections, and their government did help businessmen a bit by reducing taxes. They also abolished annual elections, in an effort to reduce the importance of sustained political organization. In a typical "public interest" justification, one of the vigilantes stated that they had realized that "rotation in office was the primal cause of the adulteration of public virtue, which, unless it were checked, would bring to bear upon our republican institutions an almost unendurable strain."<sup>25</sup>

But the basic problem, overstocking, was not susceptible to such solutions. A longer range solution was called for. The 1850's continued to be years of economic distress for the importers, and the problem was alleviated only when the first generation had been winnowed. By 1860, almost half had left the city.<sup>26</sup>

On another level, though, they did succeed. As William T. Sherman somewhat bitterly recalled, they "controlled the press and wrote their own history."<sup>27</sup> On the level of the usable past, they were victorious. For they left to their city and their nation the idea that urban merchants were the pre-eminent repositories of public virtue, that, as a group, they were uniquely capable of disinterested, selfless, and nonpolitical action. That was their legacy, their bequest to that generation of businessmen-reformers, the Progressives, who followed them.<sup>28</sup>

## NOTES

1. Hubert Howe Bancroft, **Popular Tribunals** (San Francisco: The History Co., 1887), II, 320. Bancroft's two volume work is the standard account of the 1856 vigilance committee. The most complete recent bibliography on the subject is contained in Doyce Nunis (ed.), **The San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1856: Three Views** (Los Angeles Westerners, 1971).

2. Roger Lotchin, **San Francisco, 1846-56: From Hamlet to City** (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 255, 261; Peter Randolph Decker, "Social Mobility on the Urban Frontier: The San Francisco Merchants, 1850-1880," Diss. Columbia 1974, p. 237; Richard Maxwell Brown, **Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism** (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 138, 361.

3. Leonard L. Richards, "**Gentlemen of Property and Standing:**" **Anti-Abolitionist Mobs in Jacksonian America** (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970) is the basic account. See also David Grimsted, "Rioting in its Jacksonian Setting," **American Historical Review**, 77 (1972), 361-397.

4. Edward T. Hosmer to his father, February 25, March 2, October 31, 1849, Hosmer Correspondence, Borel Collection, Stanford University.

5. "A California Commission Merchant," **Bulletin of the Business History Society**, vol. V, no. 5 (October 1931), 7-11; vol. V, no. 6 (December 1931); 1-5; vol. VI, no. 1 (January 1932), 7-11.

6. Ferdinand C. Ewer to his mother and sister, October 31, 1849, Ferdinand C. Ewen Diary, California Historical Society, San Francisco; Thomas T. Seward to his wife, February 9, 1855, Thomas T. Seward Papers, California Historical Society, San Francisco; William K. Weston to his father, April 28, 1851, William K. Weston Papers, California Historical Society, San Francisco; Edward T. Hosmer to his father, September 25, 1849, Hosmer Correspondence.

7. N. S. B. Gras, "Business Letters from San Francisco Bay," **Journal of Business and Economic History**, 1 (1932), 324-334; **Daily Alta California** (San Francisco), March 19, 1851; "Trade with California in the Fifties," **Bulletin of the Business Historical Society**, vol. V, no. 5, (May 1931), 9.

8. Charles Hosmer to his parents, January 8, 1851, Hosmer Correspondence; Robert S. Lammot to his mother, January 14, 1851, Lammot Family Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley; **San Francisco Daily Herald**, June 6, 1851; Robert S. Lammot to his father, March 1, 1852, Lammot Family Papers.

9. Grogan and Lent to Faxon D. Atherton, January 14, 1853; P. N. McKay to Faxon D. Atherton, January 31, 1853; Grogan and Lent to Faxon D. Atherton, March 31, 1853; Alexander B. Grogan to Faxon D. Atherton, February 28, 1853; March 15, 1854, Faxon D. Atherton Papers, California Historical Society, San Francisco; Thomas T. Seward to his wife, June 1, 1854, Seward Papers.

10. Alexander B. Grogan to Faxon D. Atherton, March 15, 30, 1855, Atherton Papers; Joseph B. Crockett to his wife, February 28, 1855, Joseph B. Crockett Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley; Alexander B. Grogan to Faxon D. Atherton, May 15, 1855, Atherton Papers; Thomas T. Seward to Lucy Seward, June 27, 1855, Seward Papers; **San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin**, March 27, 1856.

11. **Alta**, January 10, October 14, 1853; **Daily California Chronicle**, April 30, 1855.

12. Grogan and Lent to Faxon D. Atherton, July 30, 1853; January 31, 1854, Atherton Papers; San Francisco: **Chronicle**, June 16, 1854; February 26, March 11, April 3, 9, 1856; **Herald**, March 30, 1856; Alexander B. Grogan to Faxon D. Atherton, April 4, May 4, 1856; Atherton Papers.

13. **Chronicle**, July 25, 1855.

14. Mary Floyd Williams, **History of the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1851** (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press: 1921) is the best account of this committee.

15. Robert S. Lammot to his father, December 29, 1852, Lammot Family Papers.

16. *Chronicle*, June 7, 1855; Rough Minutes of a Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, August 11, 1855, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Papers, California Historical Society, San Francisco; *Bulletin*, February 6, 1856; *Chronicle*, February 7, 22, 27, 1856.

17. Rodman W. Paul, "The Origins of the Chinese Issue in California," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25 (1937-1938), 181-196; California Assembly, *Journal* (1856), 321-322; *Bulletin*, October 19, 1855; Colville's *San Francisco Directory*, vol. I, For the Year Commencing October, 1856 (San Francisco: S. Colville, 1856).

18. Grogan and Lent to Faxon D. Atherton, July 30, 1853; Alexander B. Grogan to Faxon D. Atherton, August 15, 1853, Atherton Papers.

19. The preceding two paragraphs are based upon Robert M. Senkewicz, "Religion and Non-Partisan Politics in Gold Rush San Francisco," *Southern California Quarterly* (Forthcoming, 1979); Robert S. Lamot to his father, March 25, 1851, Lamot Family Papers.

20. *Bulletin*, May 14, 1856; Bancroft, *Popular Tribunals*, II, 537; Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Wrecker* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1912), p. 156.

21. *Herald*, May 16, 1856.

22. *Herald*, May 16, 29, June 4, 1856.

23. *Herald*, June 25, 30, July 12, 1856.

24. T. H. Watkins and R. R. Olmsted, *Mirror of the Dream: An Illustrated History of San Francisco* (San Francisco: Scrimshaw Press, 1976), p. 88, suggest that Coleman may have "spent more than a little time daydreaming about the ideal structure of vigilance."

25. William T. Coleman, "San Francisco Committees of Vigilance," *The Century Magazine* 43 (1891), 133-150; Clancey J. Dempster, Statement, p. 17 MS. in Bancroft Library; *Bulletin*, November 25, 1856.

26. Decker, "Social Mobility on the Urban Frontier," p. 2.

27. William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1875), I, 131. In 1856, Sherman was managing a bank in San Francisco.

28. On the middle-class nature of California Progressivism, see George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951); on the business orientation of urban progressivism, see Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 55 (1964) 157-169.