INTRODUCTION

Industrial Cowboys in the Far West

Haying at Buena Vista Farm, 1881. The photographer carefully arranged this scene so that the wagons, machinery, and workers would lend perspective to the towering haystack. (See figure 1.) An abrupt horizon bisects the giant mound, and three horsemen pose in the foreground. Loaded wagons wait in line, pointing to the haystack. A man wearing a white shirt stands silhouetted against its dark shadow. He halts a three-pronged "Jackson Fork" derrick in position; its payload hovers above the stack, which rises sixty feet from the ground. Six men wait atop the haystack. They wear broad-brimmed straw hats to shield their faces from the San Joaquin Valley's blistering midday sun. The unseen photographer directs the activity from the roof of a horse-drawn carriage. He has stopped the action and carefully composed the image. But the stillness of the photograph belies the laborers' continuous, systematic movements. The hayers, mowers, and teamsters will wait only long enough for the photographer to capture the scene before proceeding with their assigned tasks. The ranch superintendent and his *vaquero* foreman, facing the camera, will make certain of that. The photograph's subject is not the haystack or its impressive scale, but rather the labor involved in creating it: *haying* at Buena Vista Farm.

The San Francisco photographer Carleton Watkins took two trips to Kern County, California, at the behest of the multimillionaire land developer James Ben Ali Haggin.[1] During his second visit, in 1888, Watkins photographed many scenes: the county seat of Bakersfield, prominent

Figure 1. In Carleton Watkins's *Haying at Buena Vista Farm* (1881), the two men facing the camera are Miller & Lux's Kern County divisional superintendent, S. W. Wible, and the vaquero boss Rafael Cuen. (Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.)

citizens with their families, and the extensive ranch operations that composed Haggin's Kern County Land Company. Haggin desired publicity for his land development projects, and the financially strapped Watkins was always pleased to assist his friend and wealthy benefactor. But Watkins's earlier trip to Kern County, in 1881, had served a different purpose. In 1881 Haggin found himself embroiled in what soon became the American West's most notorious water rights battle, *Lux* v. *Haggin.* To document his company's water rights on the Kern River, Haggin hired Watkins to photograph the landscape as well as his irrigation and ranching enterprises.[2] Watkins fulfilled Haggin's wishes, using an enormous camera equipped with fourteen-by-twenty-one-inch glass negatives. During this engagement, however, Watkins also worked for the Kern County operations of Haggin's courtroom opponent—the land, cattle, water, and meatpacking firm of Miller & Lux. *Haying at Buena Vista Farm* derived from this series of images.

Watkins left few written records of his work for Miller & Lux, James Haggin, or any of the large-scale firms in the Far West that employed his photographic talents. Although thousands of Watkins's photographs and documents were destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and fire, the remaining work is virtually unparalleled for its stark juxtaposition of the western landscape, industrial enterprise, and the region's laboring populations. In one image a giant steel harvester with wooden-spoke wheels dwarfs the workers who rest in its shadow. Another photograph shows miles of Southern Pacific Railroad track snaking precipitously up the central California foothills en route to a distant mountain pass. A third print reveals the skeletal frame of a massive dam, under construction by the Golden Gate and Golden Feather Mining Company, standing half-finished beside the Feather River. Watkins also photographed the sculpted gardens of rural estates and the perfect symmetry of peach-filled shipping crates—elegant scenes that evoked the California myths of sunshine and leisure. Yet even these bucolic images suggest the intersection of landscape, work, and industry.[3] Watkins's keen eye for nineteenth-century industrialism could not have found a more fitting subject than Miller & Lux's Buena Vista Farm.

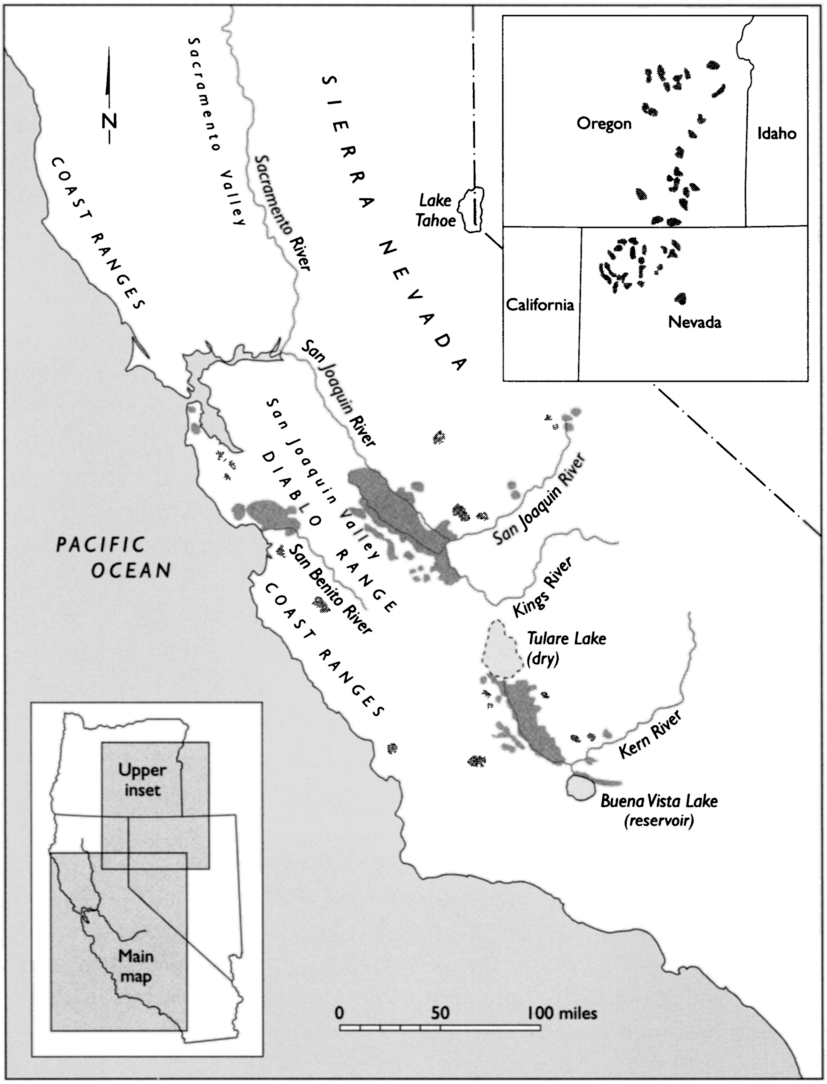
Haying at Buena Vista Farm captures many elements of Miller & Lux's production system. Though unidentified by Watkins, the superintendent in the foreground is S. W. Wible, a self-trained irrigation engineer who entered Miller & Lux's employ after twenty years of scraping a hard living from the surrounding plains. Wible supervised the activities of numerous ranch managers and irrigation canal foremen, who in turn directed the work of countless wage laborers. The man to Wible's left is most likely Rafael Cuen, a skilled vaquero boss whom Miller & Lux hired away from James Haggin's Kern County Land Company. Cuen, like some of the firm's other Mexican or Mexican American vaqueros (or cowboys), worked on company land once owned by his father.[4] The haystack behind these two men represented a key fixture of corporate ranching in the Far West. Similar structures dotted Miller & Lux's contiguous properties for two hundred miles north of Buena Vista Farm, and together the haystacks symbolized one step in the firm's struggle to transform and capitalize on the natural landscape. That struggle required a labor force often exceeding twelve hundred migrant workers, a highly coordinated corporate system, and large sums of investment capital, earned in San Francisco's meatpacking industry. It also demanded extensive water rights, secured in court cases such as *Lux* v. *Haggin*. *Haying at Buena Vista Farm* illustrates a point in Miller & Lux's system where landscape, labor, capital, politics, law, and industry converge.

Like Watkins's photograph, this book situates Miller & Lux within the region's industrial transformation. The Far West that emerged after the 1849 gold rush featured an instant market economy, dynamic urban cores, and large corporate enterprises. In short, the West had a "machine in the garden" that moved across the region with shocking speed.[5] Here, resource-dependent industries drew upon nature's wealth as they organized efficient business systems. The companies that propelled western industrialism both shaped and were shaped by their physical surroundings. Among the top corporations directing the region's industrial activity was Miller & Lux.[6]

Miller & Lux entered the twentieth century as one of the nation's largest industrial enterprises. The firm dominated Pacific Coast meat markets with annual sales exceeding $5 million in 1913. The corporation's herd of one hundred thousand cattle grazed upon 1.25 million acres of company land in three western states. Water, the most prized commodity throughout the Far West, flowed across Miller & Lux properties in a labyrinthine grid—a testament to the work of thousands of immigrant laborers, water rights litigators, and political lobbyists. The firm's innovative and imperious founders, Henry Miller and Charles Lux,[7] had created a vast machine to engineer the natural landscape and regulate the geography of western meat production. At one end of the business were concentrated the lucrative meat markets that fed San Francisco's burgeoning population. The other end fanned out horizontally from San Francisco into the San Joaquin Valley, northern Nevada, and eastern Oregon. (See map 1.) In these hinterlands, Miller & Lux mobilized capital and labor to a degree far surpassing most eastern manufacturing firms. An anomaly in a nation still clinging to its family farm tradition, Miller & Lux was the only agricultural corporation ranked among the nation's top two hundred "industrial enterprises" at the century's turn.[8]

"Industrial cowboys"—this phrase characterizes the firm's founders, but it also functions as a metaphor for the enterprises dominating the Far West's late-nineteenth-century landscape. "Industrial cowboys" juxtaposes the nineteenth century's most powerful transformation with the individualistic ethos of our mythic creation, the American cowboy. Many western firms embodied this amalgam. They were large-scale and ambitious ventures that rode roughshod over the region's terrain. Investment capital financed a variety of western enterprises after 1849: railroad, timber, agriculture, mining, real estate, and irrigation companies, to name only a few. Wild speculation drove some firms into bankruptcy. Others, such as Miller & Lux, cornered markets and forged profitable links with government agencies to claim the region's public domain. The success of many of these enterprises revealed the speculative frenzy dramatized in western lore as well as the coordinated exploitation of the West's social and natural environment. Here was the "westering" of industrialization, the creation of modern capitalist relations in a new and different landscape.

Miller & Lux operated in ways similar to the nation's other emerging industrial firms—by reducing risks, segmenting labor, and creating vertically integrated production units. But the firm also represents a western variant of American business enterprise. The extractive nature of the region's industries necessitated more than the vertical integration of production and marketing: it also demanded unparalleled horizontal consolidation of natural resources. For enterprises like Miller & Lux, monopolizing land, water, and other resources provided an insurance policy against the West's drought and flood cycles and its complex natural environment.[9] Securing land and water rights was not an end in itself. Rather, such rights enabled capitalized interests to transform the landscape and reap huge profits. Miller & Lux's activities ultimately fostered enduring contradictions between the Far West's natural and social landscapes. Conflicts over the control of natural resources produced and exacerbated these contradictions, as they transpired simultaneously in the courtrooms, legislatures, and marketplace and on the land itself. In each forum the central issue remained consistent: who held the right and power to engineer the landscape for market production?



Map 1. Miller & Lux lands (shaded areas). Miller & Lux acquired 1.25 million acres of land in California, Nevada, and Oregon—though Henry Miller claimed that his firm "control[led] ten times the amount of land we actually own."

INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES ON THE LAND

The large-scale firms at the center of western industrialization drew upon several power bases. Financed with private capital, western firms utilized public officials and the larger political state to secure vast holdings of land and natural resources.[10] They developed remarkably dynamic investment strategies and corporate structures; many companies, in addition to creating vertical chains of production, spun off subsidiaries in different business sectors. Far western firms, furthermore, operated out of metropolitan "cores" and incorporated "peripheral" hinterlands into urban markets and business networks.[11] San Francisco (and California as a whole) propelled this regional system. Finally, industrial enterprise in the Far West thrived by engineering natural landscapes and mobilizing large labor forces. These two tactics—manipulating nature and exploiting human labor—reinforced one another throughout the region.[12] These characteristics were certainly not exceptional to western industry. Indeed, they illustrate some common processes through which big business emerged across the nation. Yet a particular type of industrial activity quickly took root in the region—much earlier and farther to the West than acknowledged by conventional understandings of industrialization.[13]

The extractive nature of most western industries made extensive landownership a crucial asset of corporate power across the region. Private rights to millions of acres gave the California and Pacific Northwest timber industry access to vast stretches of old-growth redwood, ponderosa pine, and Douglas fir. Highly capitalized mining corporations extracted the West's deposits of gold and silver through contiguous mineral claims, reinvesting their profits in other land-based operations. The Southern Pacific and Northern Pacific Railroads, largely financed by government gifts of land in the public domain, remained the West's largest landowning corporations during the nineteenth century. By striking deals with other western industrialists, these railroads passed their bounty into the hands of the region's leading firms.[14] Land, therefore, provided the means for capitalized industries to expand across the Far West.

Capitalization was another key component of western industrial growth and power. Lacking its own investment funds in the 1850s and 1860s, Miller & Lux gained support from San Francisco's top financial institutions: Parrott & Company and the Bank of California. Such capital enabled Miller & Lux and many other land-based enterprises to gain unparalleled influence over federal land policy.[15] James Haggin and his partners in the Kern County Land Company all but drafted the 1877

Desert Land Act before grabbing large portions of Kern County under its provisions.[16] Miller & Lux lobbied successfully against the acreage limitations contained in the Swamp Land Act, and then proceeded to claim entire townships of questionable "swampland" in California, Nevada, and Oregon. The corporation's network of agents ranged from county surveyors to high-priced lobbyists in the nation's capital. Like other western enterprises, Miller & Lux effectively merged public land policies with its private interests and seized large rewards in the process.

While access to capital and public land agencies allowed corporations to claim western land, San Francisco provided the geographic nexus through which land consolidations and market relations flourished.[17] The Central Pacific Railroad, the Union Lumber and Pacific Lumber Companies, the Kern County Land Company, George Hearst's various mining companies, and the California Sugar Refinery Company—these San Francisco–based enterprises all used landownership in the countryside as a vehicle for corporate growth. In the process, they reinforced San Francisco's preeminent position throughout the region. Miller & Lux's expansion, perhaps more than that of any other western enterprise, demonstrates the centralizing grasp of the Pacific Coast metropolis.

ECOLOGIES OF INDUSTRY AND NATURE

Though substantially influenced by regional factors, western industry did not remain isolated from its eastern counterpart. Rather, the contemporaneous growth of big business across the nation demands a broader perspective on industrial America. The typical narrative of America's industrial transformation emphasizes eastern factories and European immigrant laborers, manufacturing and Wall Street financiers, and vertical chains of production guided by the "visible hand" of salaried managers.[18] Two developments apparently proved crucial to this transformation: the vertical integration of factory production and marketing, and the emergence of modern managerial systems. While this narrative suggests many key elements of industrial change, it is nonetheless rooted in a particular idea of business expansion that accounts well for the emergence of manufacturing and transportation but fails to register the diversity of modern enterprise and its multifold consequences. As a result, the usual story of U.S. industrialization suggests vital lessons about that well-trod beltway from Lowell, Massachusetts, to Detroit but remarkably little about Montana's copper mines, corporate land reclamation in California, and various other trajectories of industrial modernization. To the extent that the American West informs the discussion of industrialization, it appears as a natural-resource colony plundered by eastern capitalists and firms.[19] Some western historians have served important correctives to this regional bias, but the broad contours of late-nineteenth-century industrialism remain largely unexplored.[20]

As a corporation, Miller & Lux illustrates many features of business modernization during the late nineteenth century: the central role of investment capital; vertical chains of production and marketing; a large, ethnically segmented labor force; and a distinct managerial structure. But the example of Miller & Lux also cautions us against creating an inflexible model of industrial development. Beginning as meat wholesalers, Henry Miller and Charles Lux quickly expanded their business to encompass cattle, land, irrigation, and land reclamation projects—hardly the typical factors of industrial production. Only later did Miller & Lux integrate forward into marketing meat by-products nationally. Like other industrial firms, Miller & Lux faced uncertain markets, new competitors, and labor problems. But unlike risks faced by eastern manufacturing companies, Miller & Lux's most significant risks sprung from the environment. Nature impacted the corporation as much as the corporation shaped its natural surroundings.[21] One brief example: soon after Miller & Lux began purchasing land, a massive winter flood (1861–62) destroyed California's crops and littered the landscape with livestock carcasses. Two years of devastating drought (1862–64) immediately followed the flood, demonstrating the hydraulic extremes that characterized California's natural environment. These natural "disasters" might have marked the end of the state's ranching industry.[22] Instead, these conditions set some ranching enterprises on a different path, one marked by modern business systems and extensive land consolidations. In the midst of flood and drought, Miller & Lux entered a period of furious land acquisition remarkably similar to other firms' resource stockpiling strategies.[23] But the western terrain represented more than a potential resource warehouse. This rugged and vast landscape decidedly influenced the actions and ideas of those who inhabited the region. A dialectical interaction of humans and the natural environment, rather than a one-sided conquest of nature, framed the processes by which western society and industry established its foothold.[24]

A natural environment of vast complexity and unpredictable extremes confronted all immigrants to the Far West. Here, environmental disturbance and disorder set the standard.[25] Earthquakes, repeated forest and grassland fires, floods, and droughts constantly transformed the landscape. But natural change had little place in the ordered and productive "garden" envisioned by most westerners, and by agriculturalists in particular.[26] For individual farmers and the industry as a whole, irrigation and land reclamation offered the possibility of dependable production amid unpredictable natural conditions.[27] This effort to change the waterscape represented one part of a larger engineering agenda that sought to simplify nature's complexity, redesign ecosystems, and restrict environmental change. Though radically transformed—"broken with steam and with steel," one agricultural booster commented—the natural environment still remained an active agent in the Far West's development.[28] Human labor and technology could neither halt the forces of natural change nor regulate the region's many variations. The engineered landscape produced great wealth, but it also produced unexpected environmental and social consequences.[29]

Transforming the waterscape emerged as a key determinant of regional development, and Miller & Lux's consolidation of the largest irrigation companies illustrates how private interests during the late nineteenth century dominated the environmental engineering agenda. The monumental importance of water has led some historians to characterize the West as a "hydraulic society"—a "social order based on the intensive, large-scale manipulation of water and its products in an arid setting."[30] California's Central Valley, the southern half of which is the San Joaquin Valley, was especially "representative of an emerging West and its sudden transition . . . from wilderness to technological dominance." But the West was hardly unique according to this line of reasoning. Rather, it represented the modern fulfillment of hydraulic societies dating back to ancient Egypt and China. Like these powerful predecessors, the West's hydraulic engineering ultimately supported a "coercive, monolithic, and hierarchical system."[31]

Many historians have criticized this deterministic approach to western water and its grim depiction of western society. Did a monolithic and coercive state surround the West's irrigation canals, or, as other historians contend, did various factors create avenues for reform and democratic possibilities?[32] The study of Miller & Lux, one of the principal architects of the West's waterscape, illuminates a western society constructed around several intersecting systems of power. The corporation's water engineering functioned as only one part of its relationship to government, markets, smaller landowners, workers, and the natural landscape. Western society, furthermore, contained far more important connections to the industrializing eastern states than it did to ancient irrigation civilizations. Miller & Lux's rise reveals a process of western industrialization in which market relations commodified and transformed all natural resources, not just water.[33] An industrial capitalist society, rather than a singularly hydraulic one, propelled the Far West's development during the late nineteenth century.

Private property rights constituted another critical component of western incorporation. Private landownership carried distinct and personal meaning to the individual claimant, but the legal relationships between land, minerals, water, and other resources were less concrete and had to be continually negotiated through political institutions and capitalist markets. Here, the West contributed to the national transformation from a "static agrarian conception" of property to a "dynamic, instrumental, and more abstract view" that accompanied industrialization.[34] Privatizing property ultimately centered on controlling access to the land's resources; it was simultaneously an act of inclusion and exclusion.[35] In the 1860s, for instance, Miller & Lux carved out the rich bottomlands of sixteen former Mexican land grants, excluding the *rancheros* and Anglo settlers alike from the properties' most valuable resources. The following decade, Miller & Lux used its private property along the San Joaquin River to seize extensive water rights and take over the West's largest irrigation canal. During the 1880s, the firm formalized in court the connection between property in land and property in water: *Lux* v. *Haggin* (1881–86) supported Miller & Lux's riparian right to the Kern River's flow despite the adverse claims of upstream irrigators. While these examples revolve around the annexation of water, Miller & Lux also exercised its property rights to secure many other company interests.

Engineering the landscape and securing property rights were two means that Miller & Lux used to attain wealth and power in the Far West. A third was the exploitation of regional opportunities. As the firm extended its system of production across a vast region, it reinforced San Francisco's power in the hinterlands. In many ways, the city's imperial scope mirrored the expansion of contemporaneous midwestern cities. One recent study of Chicago skillfully recounts how the exchange of natural resources and produced goods linked the city with its hinterlands: meat, wheat, timber, and other products from the countryside entered Chicago's markets in exchange for various manufactured goods. This process ultimately linked "first nature" landscapes with "second nature" resources and commodities, even as the market "concealed the very linkages it was creating."[36] In this study, Chicago merchants propelled urban expansion, and the mercantile system facilitated city-hinterland relationships.

San Francisco followed a similar path of urban imperialism in that its meteoric rise resulted largely from the high value of natural resources extracted from the hinterlands. But an industrial system, not a mercantile one, played the decisive role in transforming San Francisco and the Far West. The city's leading firms took their capital, technology, labor forces, and systems of production to the countryside and appropriated its natural wealth. Miller & Lux, like other San Francisco–based firms, actually owned the hinterland soil upon which its production took place. These powerful corporations established the terms of wage labor in local communities, and when rural labor pools proved insufficient, they imported workers from the city. San Francisco firms built company towns to centralize secondary industries, often displacing previous population centers. They used political leverage in rural communities to further specific business agendas and undermine popular demands for reform. Like Chicago merchants, San Francisco merchants certainly facilitated trade patterns throughout the region.[37] But the San Francisco corporations that spread industrial relations across the landscape held a far more material presence, and their activities reduced significantly the power of local communities to make autonomous decisions about their development and livelihood.

HENRY MILLER AND CHARLES LUX: FROM THE OLD COUNTRY TO THE FAR WEST

Though not specifically a study of Henry Miller or Charles Lux, this book inevitably confronts the decisions and ideas of these two business entrepreneurs. Why did Miller and Lux join together to form what would become one of the West's most powerful enterprises? What forces motivated their business decisions—to integrate backward, stage hostile corporate takeovers, and pursue a modern litigation strategy? What inspired the transformation from immigrant butcher to industrial cowboy? To answer these questions we must move beyond standard tropes of the heroic West (the partners were individualistic "empire builders," according to the author of a 1930 novel about the firm) and reductionist notions of ethnicity (Miller acted in a "thoroughly, virtuously Germanic" fashion, wrote Mary Austin) to examine their experience as European immigrants.[38]