Lincoln's New Mexico Patronage: Saving the Far Southwest for the Union

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President Abraham Lincoln, ca. 1861. (Photograph by Matthew Brady, neg. no. 0-60, courtesy The Lincoln Museum, Ft. Wayne, Ind.)
New Mexico Territory receives scant mention in connection with the administration of President Abraham Lincoln. Historians have generally concluded that Lincoln and other federal officials attached no great value to the territory and mostly neglected it. It is true that Lincoln could devote little attention to the administration of the western territories during the Civil War, which threatened the very future of the country. However, evidence suggests that Lincoln did care about saving New Mexico for the Union and should be given some credit for achieving this goal. Although Lincoln's western patronage record was generally undistinguished, his appointments to the New Mexico Territory were popular men who had experience in the Southwest and who often did not identify themselves with the Republican Party. In fact, the patronage record of New Mexico was, in some ways, more similar to those of the crucial border states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland than that of the remaining western territories.

Even among historians of the Southwest, there has been a conception that the region was mostly ignored by the federal government during the Civil War. Those who mention the attitudes of Washington officials at all usually stress their apathy in this matter. For instance, Ray C. Colton, writing on the war in the southwestern territories, argues that the federal government assigned no “strategic importance” to New Mexico until 1862. Alvin Josephy, historian of the Civil War in the West, states that “the western territories, and particularly New Mexico, were treated at times as if they were a nuisance.” Likewise, James A. Howard II,
discussing the war in New Mexico and Arizona, concludes that the gov­ernment viewed New Mexico “as a burden rather than as an attribute.”

Neither Lincoln scholars nor southwestern historians have examined Lincoln’s New Mexico patronage to any great degree. J. G. Randall’s classic multivolume biography of Lincoln and recent important biogra­phies by David Herbert Donald and Philip Shaw Paludan note New Mexico in connection with attempts to compromise the secession crisis in 1861, but these scholars say nothing about Lincoln’s appointments to federal offices there. In their study of Lincoln’s patronage, Harry Carman and Reinhard H. Luthin assert that Lincoln’s appointment of Henry Connelly as governor of New Mexico Territory in 1861 was the only gubernatorial appointment “not tinged with party politics,” but their work barely touches on territorial patronage. Histories of the West and Southwest by Ralph Y. McGinnis and Howard Roberts Lamar do give some information on the men Lincoln appointed to New Mexico offices but fail to fit these appointments into the broader context of territorial patronage. Loomis Morton Ganaway’s work on New Mexico’s place in the prewar slavery controversy and Vincent G. Tegeder’s article on territ­orial patronage give Lincoln credit for appointing loyal Democrats to office in New Mexico, but Ganaway does not discuss territorial patronage in general, while Tegeder fails to mention Connelly.

Territorial patronage made up a large percentage of federal patron­age in the mid-nineteenth century. In each territory, a governor was chief executive and a territorial secretary carried out many of the same functions as state lieutenant governors. In addition, each territory was divided into three federal judicial districts, each of which was presided over by a federal district judge. When sitting together, these three judges formed the territorial supreme court. Other positions included the territorial marshalcy and land office commissioner. All positions were filled by presidential appointment subject to confirmation by the Senate. Each territory also had the right to send a nonvoting delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives; these were elected by the territorial voters.

Lincoln’s policy regarding civil appointments to the territories was not notably different from his predecessors and successors. Partisan political considerations played the major part in deciding who would be appointed. Patronage was a successful presidential candidate’s main method of rewarding his supporters. In Lincoln’s case, his appoint­ments had to be acceptable to powerful eastern Republicans. At the
beginning of Lincoln’s first term, there were eight western territories: New Mexico, Dakota, Colorado, Nebraska, Utah, Nevada, Washington, and Indian Territory. The last of these did not have a traditional civil government since it was administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the branch of the Interior Department that oversaw administration of Indian tribes. After his inauguration, then, Lincoln had the opportunity to fill thirty-five major territorial posts, five in each territory. He appointed residents to posts in their own territories in only nine instances, four being in New Mexico. In the other western territories, Lincoln appointed only five residents out of thirty total appointees and never more than two residents in any one territory. New Mexico was the only territory in which residents were appointed as both governor and territorial secretary. The only other territory to receive a resident as governor was Washington, but he was replaced by an Illinoisan before the year was out.4

In the Lincoln administration, major territorial posts also tended to go to Republicans. Many of Lincoln’s appointments to territories were associated with radical Republicans, men with very strong antislavery and politically partisan feelings. For instance, William Jayne, appointed to the Dakota governorship, was favored by radicals because of his strong antislavery views and his advocacy of a federally subsidized transcontinental railroad. Governor William Gilpin of Colorado, who also supported the idea of a government-financed transcontinental railroad, was supported by powerful radical Republican senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio. William H. Wallace, Lincoln’s first appointment as governor of Washington, supported the radicals’ goal of territorial organizations for Idaho and Montana. However, some unfortunate territories were dumping grounds for men who were clearly incompetent. For instance, Lincoln’s first appointee as governor of Utah, John W. Dawson, was a political hack from Fort Wayne, Indiana, of such dubious character that Republican leaders of that community had submitted his name for a territorial office mainly to get rid of him. Outside New Mexico in 1861, the only Democratic governor Lincoln appointed was James W. Nye, a New Yorker who became Nevada’s first and only territorial governor. Despite his party affiliation, Nye was a close friend of Secretary of State William H. Seward and a strong antislavery and pro-Union advocate. Even chauvinistic Republican Horace Greeley, influential editor of the New York Tribune, could approve of Nye. Lincoln’s
need to reward his supporters, Republican and Democratic, was often the main impetus behind his choice of territorial officers.5

Lincoln's New Mexico patronage, however, dramatically diverged from this pattern. A prime example was Lincoln bestowing the governorship upon Dr. Henry Connelly, a Democrat. Born in Virginia in 1800 but raised in Kentucky, Connelly had been a resident of New Mexico and Chihuahua since 1824. A prosperous and influential merchant in the territory when it still belonged to Mexico, Connelly had helped arrange the surrender of New Mexico by Mexican governor Manuel Armijo to American general Stephen W. Kearny during the war with Mexico. In 1850 Connelly was elected governor of New Mexico during an abortive attempt to win statehood. From 1853 to 1859, he served in the upper house of the territorial legislature and had close ties with some of the most prominent Hispanic families of the territory. He married twice; both of his wives were Hispanas. When he was sworn in on 4 September 1861, he became the first resident to serve as territorial governor of New Mexico under the United States.6

Lincoln's choice for territorial secretary, the second highest territorial office, was Miguel Antonio Otero Sr., another New Mexico resident identified with the Democrats. Born into a powerful New Mexican family, Otero had been educated in St. Louis and New York after the territory's transfer to the United States. In 1852–1853, Otero served in the territorial legislature and defeated incumbent Manuel Gallegos in the 1855 election for territorial delegate. In Washington D.C., Otero considered himself a Democrat and supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Senator Stephen A. Douglas. He married a woman from South Carolina and became known as a proslavery man. Otero won reelection to his post in 1857. Two years later, he was instrumental in convincing the territorial legislature to pass a law protecting slave property in New Mexico. He served as a delegate to the Democratic convention in Charleston in 1860, supporting Douglas for the presidential nomination. Lincoln's victory with less than forty percent of the popular vote drove Otero to criticize the election for thwarting the will of the majority of the American people and bringing a party of dangerous fanatics to power. In a manifesto "to the people of New Mexico" dated 15 February 1861, Otero strongly censured the Republican Party for its opposition to New Mexico's slave code, warning New Mexicans of the "hostility to the death" that Republicans held toward New Mexico and its people. He urged the election of anti-Republican legislators and delegates and predicted, "After a short duration of their power,
this horde of infidels will be driven from the Capital, and you, as well as
your fellow citizens of the States whose rights are menaced will be left in
peace and prosperity.” However, Otero did not openly advocate the seces­
sion of the territory, instructing New Mexicans that “the faculties with
which the law has clothed the Legislative Assembly are sufficiently ample
for your protection.” Likewise, he believed that Lincoln’s antislavery ten­
dencies would be moderated through Congress and that the election
results were not sufficient cause to destroy the Union. However, west­
ern newspapers reported that Otero allegedly favored joining California
and Oregon should they secede to form a “Pacific Republic.”}

Lincoln retained Kirby Benedict, another Democrat, as chief justice of the territorial supreme court. Benedict was one of the few New Mexico officers whom the president knew personally. Although born in Connecticut, Benedict had been an attorney in Illinois two decades earlier and knew Douglas as well as Lincoln. Since becoming a judge in New Mexico in 1853, Benedict had gained a reputation as a political supporter of Douglas and had been appointed chief justice of New Mexico by President James Buchanan in 1858. Despite Benedict’s Democratic affiliation, Lincoln had faith in his Unionism and knowledge of the law, and refused to remove him, even when radical Republicans protested.⁸

For the other two supreme court justices in New Mexico, Lincoln chose Sydney A. Hubbell and Joseph G. Knapp. Hubbell, a resident of
Bernalillo County, New Mexico, had served on the Territorial Council, in the upper house of the legislature, during the 1860-1861 session. Although not a public figure as well-known as Connelly or Otero, he was respected in the territory’s legal community. A correspondent of the *New York Times* reported that the new justice enjoyed “the full confidence of the bar and the public in devotion to his country’s service.” The correspondent also praised Hubbell’s “just discrimination and good sense.” Knapp, a resident of Wisconsin, was recommended to Lincoln by Senator James R. Doolittle, a Republican of that state, and other members of Wisconsin’s congressional delegation. Knapp’s appointment received little notice at the time, but he would later become the center of one of New Mexico’s most acrimonious public debates when he criticized the policies of Brig. Gen. James H. Carleton, the commander of the Department of New Mexico.9

In appointing Connelly and Otero to office in New Mexico, Lincoln faced substantial opposition within his own party. Several Republicans in both New Mexico and the states were wary of Connelly. William Need, a soldier in the territory, wrote Secretary of State Seward to protest Connelly’s nomination. According to Need, the nominee had been a friend of slavery—technically legal in New Mexico—and had himself been a slaveholder. Only changing his allegiance in response to circumstances, Connelly was “now a professed neutral Union man, provided the Union cause is strongest.” A correspondent for the *New York Tribune* made similar charges in October 1861. He alleged that Connelly was “at heart a secessionist,” had been a prime advocate of New Mexico’s slave code, and had aided secessionists in the territory. Instead of offering evidence, the correspondent claimed that these charges could “be proved if necessary.” In point of fact, the allegations of both Need and the *Tribune*’s correspondent contained some truth. Connelly was indeed a former slaveholder and, as a member of the 1859 territorial legislature, had voted in favor of the territorial slave code.10

Like many Democratic Unionists, Connelly did not actively oppose the institution of slavery at the war’s beginning but neither did he ever make any public statements or take any action in support of secession. Most Republicans came to accept Connelly as his commitment to the Union became apparent. On Christmas Day, the *Tribune* published, without editorial comment, a portion of Connelly’s 1861 annual message, in which the governor lauded New Mexicans’ efforts on behalf of the Union and promised to continue the fight against the Confederacy. The same
column and one published three days later also mentioned that Connelly favored the repeal of the territorial slave code. The New York Times, more moderate than the Tribune yet still a pro-Lincoln paper, printed an excerpt from Connelly's inaugural address, calling it "an able and patriotic document." A correspondent of the Ohio State Journal complimented Connelly on the antisecessionist tone, labelling his annual message "most excellent." These impressions of Connelly were strengthened when the New Mexico slave code was repealed in December and he continued to speak out on the need for New Mexicans to support the Union's war effort.11
Otero's nomination was not at all popular among Republicans, due to his strong identification with the proslavery South and his open excoriation of the Republican Party. The same William Need who had warned Seward against Connelly also charged Otero with being lukewarm in his support of the Union. Need wrote, "I think he is a neutral Union man, and can 'jump on either side of the fence.'" Greeley went a step farther, bluntly calling Otero a "traitor." When Otero's nomination was just a rumor, Greeley reminded *New York Tribune* readers of his role in formulating a slave code for the territory and implied that Otero's appointment to a territorial office would jeopardize New Mexico for the Union. Greeley concluded, "There has been no more pliant tool of the Slavery Extensionists than this same Otero." The *Tribune* printed Otero's February manifesto without comment in November 1861 under the headline, "Secession in New Mexico." Although Otero did not explicitly call for New Mexico to join the Confederacy, this document was generally considered secessionist in tone by Republican sympathizers. "Luz," a *New York Tribune* correspondent in New Mexico, claimed that Otero had sent the manifesto to wealthy Hispanos, "urging on them strongly the claims of the Southern Confederacy to their support." So pervasive was this interpretation of the manifesto that it was passed on to historians. Benson J. Lossing's *Pictorial History of the Civil War*, a popular history that went through several editions in the late nineteenth century, stated that the purpose of the manifesto was "to incite the inhabitants of New Mexico to rebellion." In 1889 the well-known historian of the West, Hubert Howe Bancroft cited Lossing's statement, although Bancroft did not study the address himself. As late as the 1920s, New Mexico historian Ralph Emerson Twitchell accused Otero of being "disloyal to the core," mainly on the basis of the manifesto. Twitchell's assessment apparently agreed with that of Otero's Republican contemporaries, for in July Otero's nomination was decisively defeated in the United States Senate. The three-term delegate very quickly faded from the New Mexico political scene; he had already decided to pursue mercantile interests in Missouri. He had delayed his departure only to serve as territorial secretary. With nothing further to hold him in New Mexico, Otero moved to Missouri in 1862.\(^\text{12}\)

Why did Lincoln break with his usual territorial policy so dramatically in making appointments to New Mexico? New Mexico was a unique territory at the outset of the Civil War. It was still relatively new, most of its geographical area only becoming part of the United States
in 1848 as a result of American victory in the war with Mexico. The area bounded by the Rio Grande on the east, the Colorado River on the west, the Gila River on the north, and the Mexican border on the south was an even more recent acquisition officially purchased from Mexico in 1854. Commonly called the Gadsden Purchase, this parcel of land was known popularly as "Arizona," although it was part of New Mexico Territory and not a separate political entity. Alone among western territories, New Mexico had a non-Indian population made up mostly of Hispanos, former citizens of Mexico who retained their own culture and Spanish language under American jurisdiction. The census of 1850 counted fewer than six hundred English-speaking whites, or Anglos, out of a total non-Indian population of nearly fifty-seven thousand people in New Mexico.  

Lincoln had to make patronage decisions against a backdrop of public pessimism in the North over New Mexico’s loyalty. It was widely believed in the loyal states that New Mexico was in great danger of becoming a part of the Confederacy. Greeley asserted that New Mexico’s leading men and officeholders were all southern sympathizers and that “the masses are their blind, facile tools.” In February 1861, Greeley declared that “the secession rebellion is in full blast” in southern New Mexico. The New York Tribune reported that pro-Confederate leaders were mounting an effort to take New Mexico into the Confederacy. “With the help of Texas and of Gen. Twiggs [they] may perhaps hope to succeed,” Greeley concluded. 

Their apprehension had some foundation; a number of factors tied New Mexico to the South. The 1859 slave code had been passed to create alliance with southern legislators to help New Mexico win a transcontinental railroad route. In addition, many men who held important federal positions in the territory had been appointed by Democratic administrations and were of southern origins or had expressed sympathy for the slave states. Colonel William W. Loring, who became the commander of the Military Department of New Mexico in March 1861, was a North Carolinian, as was Governor Abraham Rencher, Connelly’s predecessor. Rencher, called by Greeley’s New York Tribune “a useful tool of the Slave Power,” was the latest in a line of southern men to hold the top executive office in the territory; all three of his predecessors as civil governor had been residents of slave states at the time they were appointed to office. Territorial Secretary Alexander M. Jackson, whom Otero was to replace, had been born in Ireland, but was raised in
Mississippi and openly supported the Confederacy. Many of the men
who owned mines in the southern and southwestern parts of the terri-

tory, such as Granville Oury and Sylvester Mowry, were sympathetic to
the South. Otero himself, who was finishing his third term as territorial
delegate in 1861, openly declared his alliance with southern legislators
in Washington. Greeley concluded that “zealous Slavery Propagandists
fill all the important Federal offices” in New Mexico. On 2 April, echo-
ing Greeley, the *St. Louis Republican* published an anonymous letter
charging Governor Rencher with leading a prosouthern “revolution” in
Santa Fe and capturing nearby Fort Marcy.15

The rumor lacked even a shred of truth, but the *Tribune* and
*Republican* articles typified Union public attitudes toward New Mexico.
In addition, the president of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson
Davis, was known to have a marked interest in the Far Southwest. As
President Franklin Pierce’s secretary of war, Davis had ordered the
exploration and survey of the region and urged the Gadsden Purchase
to pave the way for a transcontinental railroad through the region, a
route that would have benefitted the slave states. There was some sus-
picion that he had deliberately stocked the territory with military offi-
cers whom he knew to be secessionists. From New Mexico, Need wrote
to Secretary of War Simon Cameron that Davis’s “military prototypes
and protégés . . . were placed here purposely to second and forward his
ulterior designs.” The *New York Tribune* charged, “Pro-Slavery Army
officers have been sent there, taking slaves with them.”16

It was not unusual for easterners to question the devotion of west-
ern residents to the Union in 1861, but in New Mexico hard evidence
demonstrated that disloyalty was a serious problem. Although rumors
of pro-Confederate activity in the Santa Fe area were false, resentment
against the North was strong in the Gadsden Purchase area known as
Arizona—although this resentment was directed as much against the
territorial government as against Washington. Because this area was so
far distant from the territorial capital and could only be reached through
land occupied by hostile tribes, the territorial government never estab-
lished regular courts or law enforcement there. Disgusted with this state
of affairs, Arizonans had been agitating since 1856 to have the region
declared a separate federal territory. In 1860 a public convention met at
Mesilla, a town on the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico and found-
ed the Territory of Arizona. On 16 March 1861 its leaders declared
Arizona’s attachment to the Confederacy. Later that spring, another
convention in Arizona's other population center, Tucson, seconded this initiative. Aiding this process were Arizona's commercial ties to Texas and the Texans themselves, who sent representatives to encourage the Arizona secessionist movement.\textsuperscript{17}

Another danger was that New Mexico was the only western territory, excepting Indian Territory, to border on a rebellious state. Texans had long dreamed of acquiring an outlet to the Pacific, and the Confederacy was aiming at an alliance with, or a military takeover of, the northern Mexican states, which would endanger New Mexico. New Mexico stood on the route of any invasion that the South might launch against mineral-rich California as well.\textsuperscript{18}

Lincoln, then, was aware that the Far Southwest was highly vulnerable to Confederate and pro-Confederate influence. Appointing officials sent from eastern states, he surmised, would only cause local resentment that might very well tip the balance of popular feeling against Washington and toward the secessionists. Yet, if Lincoln desired to appoint residents to federal New Mexico posts, he would have to do so at the expense of strengthening the Republican Party in the territory. Because New Mexico had been Mexican territory until 1848, traditional American party organizations were of little importance in the territory. Throughout the 1850s, the vast majority of legislators in New Mexico were of Mexican origin, and few had ever been exposed to or had a chance to take part in the American party system. Parties in New Mexico tended to be semiformal groupings based on specific regional issues. The first political factions under U.S. governance had formed around 1851 over the issue of whether Hispanos or Anglos should hold key territorial offices. Later, attempts to reform the Roman Catholic Church in the territory provided another issue that fractured the existing factions. Although prominent New Mexicans occasionally identified themselves with national parties, loyalties to family and to local and regional factions were of much more importance and overshadowed national political allegiances. Given that Democratic administrations had been in power for all but the first two years of New Mexico's tenure as a territory, most of the experienced New Mexico politicians from the states were Democratic officeholders. Although a few individuals in New Mexico claimed allegiance to the Republican Party, there was no effective party organization from which Lincoln could draw appointments.\textsuperscript{19}

Under these conditions, Lincoln proved willing to give serious weight to patronage recommendations from residents of the area. His
main correspondent from New Mexico was John S. Watts, a former federal justice in the territory. Watts came from the same Whig-Republican background as the president. A lawyer in Indiana in the 1840s, he had served as a Whig in Indiana’s House of Representatives from 1846 to 1847 and had been appointed an associate justice in New Mexico by Whig president Millard Fillmore in 1851. After resigning in 1854, Watts stayed on to practice law. By 1861, he was known as one of the territory’s leading Unionists. In several letters to both Lincoln and Seward, Watts emphasized that placing nonresidents in New Mexico’s territorial offices would have serious consequences. “If you or your cabinet are of the opinion that you have not friends enough in New Mexico to fill the little worthless places to be filled in it,” Watts informed the president, “so long as that opinion is entertained and acted upon you will never have votes enough to win an election in it.”

Watts recommended both Connelly and Otero for their territorial posts. He called the former “the most able influential and popular man in New Mexico.” Watts’s recommendation for Otero was even more emphatically stated: “Upon the appointment of Mr. Otero to this office depends the success or failure of the administration in New Mexico.” Dr. Michael Steck, a longtime resident of the territory who would become its superintendent of Indian affairs the following year, concurred with Watts. Both men claimed that Otero would, in Steck’s words, “favour the views of the present administration,” a surprising statement in view of Otero’s clearly stated antipathy to Republicanism. However, the two men believed that Otero could help solidify the ostensibly doubtful Unionism of New Mexico’s Hispanos, who were, after all, the dominant population of citizens in the territory, at least in a numerical sense. “Had the question of disunion not presented itself I should not have recommended the appointment of Mr. Otero,” Watts informed Lincoln, “but the issue now is with New Mexico, Texas and slavery or the United States and freedom and in that battle I shall find Mr. Otero and the large mass of his people on the side of the Union and freedom.” Watts believed that having Otero as secretary would “preserve the Territory from internal discontent.” He explained to Lincoln, “If [Otero] is appointed the large majority of the contending parties are united and success is easy. If he is not appointed he will be run for Delegate and party issues will be deepened and intensified.” Steck succinctly summed up the point: “[Otero] is a native of this territory and
connected with the most wealthy and influential families in the Country and enjoys the entire confidence of his people."  

President Lincoln put a great deal of stock in Watts's judgement. His western origins, his Whig political background, his well-known Unionism, and his appointment to federal office by the Fillmore administration for which Lincoln vigorously campaigned, may well have made the president favorably inclined toward the frontier lawyer. In addition, by providing a detailed list of recommendations, Watts relieved Lincoln of the tedious task of finding for himself men fit to govern a distant territory about which Lincoln had little firsthand knowledge. Still, Lincoln's decision to be guided by Watts shows a good deal of consideration toward New Mexico. Acting on Watts's recommendation, Lincoln both defied elements of his own party and broke with his usual policy for appointing territorial officials.

Congress's refusal to confirm Otero's appointment left Lincoln with the problem of finding a replacement. His choice, James H. Holmes, was a more typical Lincoln territorial appointee than Otero. A Republican and native of New York, Holmes had been nominated for office by two powerful Republican senators, James H. Lane of Kansas and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts. On the other hand, Holmes had lived in New Mexico for three years before his appointment; so he presumably had some familiarity with the territory before taking the job. Holmes proved to be an unfortunate choice for Lincoln. The new secretary was widely unpopular in the territory and provoked a battle between a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats, led by Watts (now territorial delegate), and more radical Republicans. In February 1862, Watts charged Holmes with leaving New Mexico without State Department permission at a time when the territory was under threat of conquest by Texas. According to Watts, Holmes had gone to Washington "to slander the Governor, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, myself, and other friends of your administration because we are not rabid abolitionists." Watts also preferred against Holmes a long list of formal charges encompassing both personal misconduct and official corruption. The former included allegations that Holmes had owned a brothel and a "Whiskey Shop" near Fort Union, New Mexico. The latter encompassed accusations that the secretary had given to relatives and acquaintances drafts from public funds and secured an appointment as New Mexico's U.S. marshal for his brother-in-law, who was neither qualified for the post nor a resident of the territory. Watts even went so far as to state that Holmes was "utterly condemned &
despised as unworthy of the association of gentlemen by all the Federal Officers in N. Mexico.” In addition, Holmes attempted to found a newspaper in Santa Fe, which appeared to be a conflict of interest to many New Mexicans, given that the territorial secretary awarded government printing contracts. 23

Holmes’s supporters charged that the campaign against him was part of an overall effort to discredit Republicans in the territory and open it to domination by men whose loyalty to the Union was dangerously unreliable. Watts’s remark about abolitionism was almost certainly a response to attempts by Holmes to bring the issue of the repealed 1859 slave code into the battle. Writing in defense of Holmes was Eliakim Persons Walton, a Republican congressman from Vermont. Walton was also a personal friend of S. B. Watrous, a leading Republican in New Mexico. The Vermont politician stated of Governor Connelly, Superintendent James L. Collins, Chief Justice Benedict, and their supporters, “I know some of them as the tools of Reuben Davis of Mississippi in foisting the notorious and abominable pro-slavery act upon an unwilling people, and some of them as sympathizers with rebels.” Augustus Wattles, an Indian agent in the territory, charged that the opposition to Holmes was a politically motivated response to his efforts to build “a Republican press and Republican Party in New Mexico,” and thus to resist the passage of New Mexico into Democratic and, implicitly, disloyal ranks. Senator Sumner reminded Lincoln that Holmes had founded “a Republican paper” in Santa Fe, and Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas warned Lincoln that removing Holmes “would be disastrous to the best interests” of New Mexico. 24

Lincoln’s previous appointments, especially those of Connelly and Otero, had been opposed by the radical Republicans both in Congress and New Mexico, but Holmes’s appointment prefigured the greater success radicals would have in influencing New Mexican affairs after the Union repulse of the Confederate invasion in 1862. It soon became clear, however, that Watts’s influence with the administration had not ended, for by January 1862 Lincoln and Seward had already decided to remove Holmes. An anonymous note on the State Department’s copy of the charges against Holmes hints at the trust Watts still inspired in Washington: “Mr. Watts bases his application for the removal of Mr. Holmes upon facts communicated to him from sources known to be true.” A striking sign of Lincoln’s concern for public opinion within the territory was that he held it above the wishes of such influential Republicans as Sumner and Pomeroy. 25
To evaluate the role that New Mexico's distinctive situation may have played in Lincoln's appointments, it is useful to examine briefly his patronage record in New Mexico's neighbor to the north. Colorado Territory shared some characteristics with New Mexico. Although not contiguous to any seceded state, fewer than fifty miles lay between Colorado's southeastern corner and the nearest point in Texas, across the panhandle of Indian Territory. Also, rumors of pro-Confederate initiatives in Colorado were rife in the early days of the conflict. A few secessionists in the territory made no secret of their sympathies, causing Unionists to fear widespread anti-Unionist conspiracies. Shortly after taking office in May 1861, Governor William Gilpin warned Colonel Edward R. S. Canby, the commander of the Department of New Mexico in Santa Fe, of "the strong and malignant element within this Territory," whose object was a takeover of Colorado as a prelude to a Confederate invasion of New Mexico. Rumors of secessionist sentiment in Colorado had already reached Lincoln's ears in Washington by the spring of 1861. He had given face-to-face instructions to Gilpin that the latter's mission as governor would be to keep Colorado from falling into the hands of the secessionists.26

Lincoln appointed territorial officials to Colorado with much the same discernment that was evident in the New Mexican appointments. For example, Gilpin, although a resident of Missouri, was an acknowledged expert on Colorado. While serving in Colonel Alexander Doniphan's command during the Mexican War, Gilpin had traveled extensively in the area. In 1860, he authored a book praising Colorado's mineral potential, even going so far as to predict that the territory would one day become the center of world civilization. So closely was Gilpin identified with Colorado that a Lincoln-authored memorandum on territorial appointments identified him as being "of Colorado" although he lived in Missouri. Gilpin's appointment was a popular one in the territory. The territorial secretary, Lewis L. Weld, was also very familiar with Colorado, working as an attorney in Colorado for several years, and practicing law for a time in Denver and then in the gold-mining region of Gregory. Thus, the two most important federal officials in Colorado were men who were knowledgeable about the region and familiar to residents of the territory. Only one other Coloradan was appointed to a federal post—Denver businessman Copeland Townsend as U.S. marshal. The remainder of territorial offices went to outsiders,
but Lincoln's slate of appointments generally met with widespread approval in the territory. His patronage in Colorado reflected his policy in New Mexico: appointing well-known figures with creditable qualifications to the most important offices. Also as in New Mexico, Lincoln's appointment took strongly into account the perception that Colorado was vulnerable to Confederate attack.27

The experience of New Mexico in federal patronage resembled that of the border slave states more than that of other western territories. In the crucial states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware—slave states that did not secede—Lincoln also concentrated on appointing strong Unionists regardless of party. Although the president could not appoint high executive officials to the states, he did control important federal offices such as United States postmasters, district attorneys, and marshals and, of course, appointments to the highest level of the military. For instance, Kentucky's United States district attorney, James Harlan, was a Unionist Whig, as were many of the appointments to federal offices in that state. Lincoln split his Maryland patronage almost equally between the followers of his Republican postmaster general, Montgomery Blair, and the faction loyal to powerful congressman Henry Winter Davis, a political gadfly who had supported the Constitutional Union Party in the 1860 presidential election. In Missouri, Lincoln allowed himself to be guided in patronage matters by Francis P. Blair Jr., brother of the postmaster general. The Blairs were Republicans, but moderate ones; family patriarch Francis P. Blair Sr. was a slaveholder and the family enjoyed credibility among Democrats. Their dedication to the Union cause was not in question in the Lincoln administration, but his commitment to the Blairs angered many radical Republicans. Lincoln also removed General John C. Frémont, a hero to many radicals, from command in Missouri after the general issued an unpopular proclamation freeing the slaves of Confederate sympathizers.28

New Mexico fits into this pattern quite neatly, although in some ways Lincoln went farther in the territory to appease non-Republicans than he did in the border states. Many non-Republicans he appointed to office in the states were Constitutional Unionists or Whigs, but most New Mexico appointments went to Democrats, and few appointees in border states had the kind of prosouthern history that Otero could claim. Of course, far less was at stake in New Mexico than in Missouri, Kentucky, or Maryland. The secession of Maryland would have left the national capital entirely surrounded by Confederate territory, and
Lincoln was convinced that the loss of Kentucky would make the entire Union military position untenable. It is likely that Lincoln carefully struck a balance between Unionism and local acceptance even more in the border states than in New Mexico. Still, the similarity of Lincoln's patronage policy in New Mexico to that in the border states suggests the territory's strategic importance in Lincoln's thinking. 29

Although not an economically critical territory in 1861, Lincoln considered New Mexico important enough to abandon partisan considerations in his initial appointments in order to ensure that the territory stayed loyal to Washington. Confederate troops from Texas invaded New Mexico and captured Mesilla late in the summer of 1861. After a winter break, Confederate general Henry Hopkins Sibley, who had served in the U.S. Army in New Mexico, resumed the offensive in February 1862. Although Sibley hoped to win converts from New Mexico to his cause, he received almost no support north of secessionist Arizona. Two complete New Mexico volunteer regiments were raised from the Hispanic population to fight the invaders. Many Hispanos were motivated by a profound hatred of Texans harking back to Texan filibustering expeditions against New Mexico in the 1840s and the Texas-New Mexico boundary dispute at the end of the Mexican-American War. However, Lincoln's appointees certainly helped the cause of Unionism in the territory. Governor Connelly in particular was instrumental in rallying New Mexicans to resist the Confederate invasion, mostly by appealing to their enmity toward Texans. The Texans were initially successful, even managing to capture Santa Fe. However, by July 1862 they were pushed out of the territory by the New Mexicans augmented by troops from Colorado and California. 30

Once the Confederate threat was removed, Lincoln's appointment policy in New Mexico became more typical of his territorial patronage as a whole. After this point, Lincoln's appointments seemed motivated by partisan politics to a greater degree. The discredited Secretary Holmes was replaced by William F. M. Arny, who had formerly resided in Illinois, where he was an acquaintance of Lincoln, and in Kansas. He had lived in New Mexico for only a year after being appointed the Indian agent for the Ute and Jicarilla Apache agency in the northern part of the territory. A well-known radical Republican, Arny heightened political tension in the territory by attempting to counteract the influence of the earlier Democratic appointees such as Connelly. The governor and Justice Benedict were allowed to maintain their posts for the rest of
Lincoln’s life, but many lesser offices went to men of powerful Republican connections. For instance, Nathaniel Usher, brother of Secretary of the Interior John Palmer Usher, was appointed a Federal district justice in New Mexico in 1864. This later switch in policy helped demonstrate that during the early crisis months Lincoln was less concerned with creating political allies among the Republicans—radicals particularly—than with trying to ensure the loyalty of New Mexico’s residents. The appointments of Connelly and Otero to federal office alienated some Republicans but won the Lincoln administration friends in New Mexico. Once that crisis was over, patronage in New Mexico became motivated more by political partisanship especially as Lincoln looked toward reelection in fall 1864.  

It would certainly be difficult to argue against the prevailing notion that the federal government assigned relatively little importance to New Mexico in 1861. And yet, perhaps Lincoln should be given more credit for foresight on the issue than he has been. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, territorial patronage was granted for partisan considerations and Lincoln’s appointments were, on the whole, no exception to this rule. His early appointments to New Mexico Territory’s offices, however, did constitute an exception. New Mexico’s unique position as a territory with a non-Anglo majority among U.S. citizens, proximity to a seceded state, and a strong secessionist movement made enough of an impression to justify Lincoln abandoning his usual territorial policy and defying his own party to ensure that the territory stayed loyal to the Union. His New Mexico patronage policy did bear some similarities to his policies in the border states, where he sought to build broad cross-party coalitions that would help ensure their citizens’ loyalty. Although Lincoln’s record as a territorial administrator was generally unexceptional, New Mexico’s experience proved that he could be flexible and inspired when the situation demanded.
NOTES


Mexico’s Troubled Years (Albuquerque: Horn & Wallace, 1963), 93–98; Josephy, Civil War, 42; Tegeder, “Territorial Patronage,” 85.


8. Ralph Emerson Twitchell, Old Santa Fe (Santa Fe: Santa Fe New Mexican Publishing Corporation, 1925), 348–51; Tegeder, “Territorial Patronage,” 84–85.


22. Watts to Lincoln, 2 April 1861, Lincoln Papers.

23. Tedeger, “Territorial Patronage,” 84; Abraham Lincoln to William H. Seward, 22 January 1862, *Collected Works*, 5:107; Statement of the Secretary of the Territory of New Mexico (undated), Watts to Lincoln, 14 February 1862, Application and Recommendation. For Watt’s changes against Holmes, see Secretary of the Territory of New Mexico, James H. Holmes, Abstract of charges preferred against him by Hon. John S. Watts, Delegate from New Mexico (undated), Application and Recommendation; Lawrence R. Murphy, *Frontier Crusader—William F. M. Arny* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972), 117.

25. Lincoln to Seward, 22 January 1862, Seward to Lincoln, 22 January 1862, *Collected Works*, 5:107; Secretary of the Territory of New Mexico, James H. Holmes, Abstract of charges preferred against him by Hon. John S. Watts, Delegate from New Mexico (undated), roll 23, Application and Recommendation.


