Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel *Ramona* and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton’s 1885 novel *The Squatter and the Don* are practically literary twins in their common representation of late nineteenth-century social relations in Southern California. Both novels depict the complex interactions and frequent conflicts between Californio rancheros, displaced Indians, and white settlers. Published just a year apart, and with the same general cast of characters and the same palpable concern with the place of racial difference within the nation, these novels have sometimes been paired in critical studies. These novels are seen alternatively as criticizing U.S. representational regimes that perniciously racialized Californios and Indians or as invidiously constituting those very practices.\(^1\) Both participate in shifting post-Reconstruction nation building away from the divisive problem of North and South in the aftermath of slavery to the differently racialized issues of tribal sovereignty and Mexican American civil rights. As discussed in the previous chapter, the domestic aesthetics of the Indian reform movement imagined a united imperial nation through the domesticating project of civilizing savage Indians and semi-barbaric Mexicans out West.

The colonial difference between Indians and whites in *Ramona* is articulated through a reformist discourse of civilization that transformed the pseudo-biological paradigm of absolute racial difference into a temporal-
culturalist paradigm of relative racial difference. Within this latter paradigm, the Californios of *Ramona* in some ways embody Jackson’s model of tolerant inclusivity for the United States in their apparently harmonious relations with Indians. Yet the very dependence of the rancheros upon Indian labor, however sympathetically portrayed, also demonstrated the dangers of cultural and racial degeneration brought about by such intimate contact. In *Glimpses of Three Coasts*, Jackson implied that the natural fecundity of California explained “the character, or, to speak more accurately, the lack of character, of the old Mexican and Spanish Californians” (28). Challenged neither intellectually nor physically by the need to make the land productive, the mestizo descendants of the Spanish conquistadors had degenerated into “merry people of Mexican and Spanish blood, [who] troubled themselves about nothing, dancing away whole days and nights like children” (56). Even the most enlightened Californios scarcely showed aptitude for either industry or learning. Visiting the family of Don Antonio Coronel in Los Angeles, Jackson noted that the dusty library of the “foremost representatives of ideas and progress in the City of Angels” revealed that “the old atlases, primers, catechisms, grammars, reading-books . . . meant toil and trouble to the merry, ignorant children of the merry and ignorant people” of Alta California (121).

Jackson did acknowledge that Spanish and Mexican land grants in California protected Indian rights of occupancy, something U.S. law did not. In *Ramona*, the Señora Moreno rightly hurls invectives against the “Yankee” government that “took away from the Señora the greater part of her best pasture-lands” and hence displaced long-standing Indian communities (15). Yet the narrative imputes a characteristic carelessness to the process by which Spanish and Mexican land grants had been parceled: “It might be asked, perhaps, just how General Moreno owned all this land, and the question might not be easy to answer. It was not and could not be answered to the satisfaction of the United States Land Commission, which, after the surrender of California, undertook to sift and adjust Mexican land titles” (15). Racially linked to the very Indians they conscripted into labor, lazy and character-less Californios were similarly infantilized by the anthropological discourse of civilization.

If in Jackson’s account the Californios partly had themselves to blame for the loss of their lands after 1848, Ruiz de Burton would provide an alternative reading of California’s history centered upon a different account of racial hierarchies and the national families made possible by such an account. *The Squatter and the Don* complicates received notions
about how resistance may inhere in texts simply because of perceived racial alterity. Certainly, the layered history of Spanish, Mexican, and U.S. colonialisms complicates any simplistic account of colonial difference in nineteenth-century California.\(^2\) While narratives written by foreign travelers to Alta California before 1848 had invidiously constructed the Californios as degenerate half-breeds, the Californios clearly distinguished themselves from mestizo and Indian workers upon the basis of their purportedly pure Spanish racial heritage and cultural background.\(^3\)

As one Californio response to the discourse of Californio degeneracy, \textit{The Squatter and the Don} negotiates multiple layers of colonial histories; the historical contingency of colonial difference in the making of social identities comes to the fore.\(^4\) Such complexities force a reconsideration of the meaning of race itself in such a context. In particular, race can neither be understood as simply binaristic in its deployments within the novel (white/nonwhite, white/black) nor reduced to an interpretive shorthand for indicating specifically oppositional practices. Simultaneously, these complications can neither be interpreted automatically under the sign of resistance nor dismissed as irrelevant to U.S. imperial nation building.

Ruiz de Burton challenges the racial hierarchies that had enabled and legitimated the Anglo dispossession of the Californios, highlighting how the U.S. legal system presumed colonial difference as the basis of its operation. Yet Ruiz de Burton’s intervention itself is enmeshed within a Spanish/Mexican colonial logic that would reclaim the very whiteness denied to Californios. \textit{The Squatter and the Don} reconstitutes whiteness as the operative condition of social agency, and hence reifies Californios as “white” even as it erases the preconditions for such claims: the Spanish colonial regime of racialized Indian labor. The novel outlines the inadequacies of what Lora Romero has criticized as “radical alterity,” or the structuralist, ahistorical conception of “resistance” as existing prior to and outside of the operation of power (73). So historically situated within literary studies, texts produced by Californios are sometimes assumed to embody pure resistance, and, as a consequence, interpretation becomes an exercise in correctly identifying that resistance.\(^5\) However, if resistance is produced through and within relations of power rather than “outside” those relations, then a critical understanding of historical alterity can begin to address the multiple, and often contradictory, zones of resistance potentially present in any text. As Romero comments, “Resistance may not transcend power relations altogether, but that does not mean that it merely reproduces the same power relations or that all power relations must
reproduce the status quo” (87). Ruiz de Burton’s intervention in *The Squatter and the Don* indeed generates certain kinds of narrative resistance to racial, gender, and class domination, but not as the pure oppositionality of radical alterity. Rather, this novel’s historical alterity outlines precisely the limitations and inadequacies of appropriating national allegory for interpretive projects of dismantling colonial difference.

**A Failing National Allegory**

In making families, the historical romance makes nations. *The Squatter and the Don* stages the making of a national identity as the inevitability of family ties, ties that organized as a common sense would legitimate the nation as the natural mode for organizing and representing “We the People” over and against other communal practices. As such, the romance of reunion can be recognized generally as the narration of national hegemony itself, and specifically as the establishment of racial difference within the post-Reconstruction intertwining of race and nation. However, in *The Squatter and the Don* the romantic dream of national unity is dispelled by another allegory that ominously promises not the nationalized coupling of families but the disappearance of family and nation altogether. Towards the end of the narrative, the patrician son of a once-wealthy Californio land owner is forced by declining family fortunes to accept “the pitiful wages of a poor hod carrier.” Working to build the mansions of San Francisco’s newly minted Gilded Age “railroad millionaires,” the stoic Gabriel Alamar “never complained,” comments the novel’s narrator, but “the eloquence of facts had said all that was to be said”: “In that hod full of bricks not only his own sad experience was represented, but the entire history of the native Californians of Spanish descent was epitomized. Yes, Gabriel carrying his hod full of bricks up a steep ladder, was the symbolic representation of his race. The natives, of Spanish origin, having lost all their property, must henceforth be hod carriers” (351; emphasis in original). Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita have identified this historical trajectory of the Californios as one of a “change in class status, from upper-class to working-class” in Gabriel’s transformation “from ‘Don’ to ‘hod carrier.’” This downward mobility, literalized in Gabriel’s life-threatening fall in which the very bricks he carries bury him, “constitutes the central resentment at work in the novel” (34). As in national allegory, an individual character represents a specific group or class; but rather than making citizens
of the nation, what gets produced through the allegory of proletarianization are racially marked laborers, noncitizens because they are nonwhite. Far from ensuring the integration of Californios into the nation as part of the hegemonic elite, national allegory can no longer provide stable registers of racial and class hierarchies that would ensure the familial production of fraternal citizens. No longer considered white even in a cursory manner by 1885, Californios could not attain the social agency necessary to secure national membership. Despite the multiple marriages between Californio and Anglo elite families that punctuate the novel, the project of national allegory remains radically unrealized.

Hence the decline of the Californios as a landed elite by the 1880s signified not just demotion into the ranks of wage laborers but also the loss of the privileges of whiteness maintained under previous negotiations of national hegemony. Proletarianization is thus not the only cause of resentment at work in this novel, or rather not the only way this resentment is articulated. This change in class status is linked to a change in racialization, so that a proud white genealogy of “Spanish descent” becomes transformed into the demeaning experience of laboring for a transnational corporation under the racial marker of colonial difference. The index of this fall in class status is precisely how wage labor transforms Gabriel from a criollo into a California Indian: “The fact that Gabriel was a native Spaniard, [his wife Lizzie Mechlin Alamar] saw plainly, militated against them. If he had been rich, his nationality could have been forgiven, but no one will willingly tolerate a poor native Californian” (351; emphasis in original). Even the fact of fair complexion, which makes Gabriel and his brother Victoriano “look like Englishmen,” is insufficient to arrest Gabriel’s social refiguration as a California native, or, in other words, as a California Indian (89). In essence, experiencing downward class mobility as the process of being racialized as nonwhite, the Californios in *The Squatter and the Don* demonstrate the shifting historical registers of social agency during the transformation of Spanish-colonial racial hierarchies into those of the post-Reconstruction United States.

Before the U.S. conquest in 1848, Californio rancheros had often kidnapped Indians from rancherías and forced them to work as ranch hands. The extent to which the rancheros depended upon indentured Indian labor in the period between the secularization of the Franciscan Missions in 1834 until the demise of the rancho economy in the 1870s can be gathered from prominent ranchero Salvador Vallejo’s nostalgic comments about Indian laborers during that period:
Our friendly Indians were missed very much, for they tilled our soil, pastured our cattle, sheared our sheep, cut our lumber, built our houses, paddled our boats, made tiles for our houses, ground our grain, killed our cattle and dress their hides for market, and made our burnt bricks, while the Indian women made excellent servants, took good care of our children, made every one of our meals, and be it said in justice to them that, though not learned in the culinary arts as taught by Italian and French books, they made very palatable and savory dishes. (qtd. in Sánchez, Telling Identities 172)

Little changed after the U.S. conquest in this colonial labor regime. Guaranteed U.S. citizenship by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the rancheros helped block citizenship status for Indians at the California state constitutional convention. Working to retain a large pool of disenfranchised laborers, Californios subsequently influenced the passage of laws that guaranteed a cheap, vulnerable labor force when labor shortages hampered their ability to profit from the boom in cattle prices brought about by the Gold Rush. Taking over Californio labor practices as well as Californio land, Anglo settlers readily joined the rancheros in legally codifying the long-standing Californio labor practice of Indian servitude, thus availing themselves of a legalized form of bondage in a free labor state. In a rehearsal of the post-Reconstruction South’s notorious convict lease system, vagrancy laws such as the so-called 1855 “Greaser Act” allowed for the lease of offenders (usually indigent Indians or mestizos) for a specified time as cheap, no-wage labor granted only room and board. Similarly, the Indenture Act of 1850 allowed for the involuntary bonding of Indians to a U.S. citizen for at least a decade with no remuneration.

While the few appearances of Indian servants in The Squatter and the Don serve mainly as opportunities for the Alamos to complain about Indian “laziness,” the general invisibility of Indian labor in the narrative belies the degree to which the wealth they produced also manufactured Californio “whiteness” before and after 1848. Certainly the Spanish colonial racial hierarchy, largely maintained during the Mexican period, had emphasized limpieza de sangre (purity of blood), despite this gesture’s easy effacement of the Californios’ historically mestizo origins. In danger of losing their dominant status as white after the U.S. conquest, the Californios traded upon their status as class elites in post-1848 California to construct an Anglo-Californio hegemony that at some fundamental level granted them rights and privileges as white citizens, and these political
concessions resulted in real material advantages from the resulting increased control of Indian labor. Ultimately, as the example of Gabriel Alamar demonstrates, in the post-Reconstruction national ordering of racial hierarchy the only begrudged difference between an Indian day-laborer and a “Spanish” Don was indeed the whiteness that Indian labor on Californio ranchos had created. Precisely this renewed figuration of whiteness is what *The Squatter and Don* attempts to renegotiate for the Californios in the years following Reconstruction as they collectively experienced proletarianization. Deploying an affective national allegory encoded not simply in fair complexions but in blushing subjectivities, the narrative seeks to restore a lost social agency for the Californios within the bodily signification of whiteness.

Yet as a “poor native Californian,” Gabriel Alamar also stands not as a (white) citizen of the United States but as the indigenous colonized of the novel’s railroad empires, “the Napoleons of this land whose power the sons of California can neither check, nor thwart, nor escape, nor withstand” (365). If *The Squatter and the Don* works to enact a class-based, bodily representational technology of whiteness within constructions of U.S. nationalism, then the ruins of this project trace the historical trajectory of the Californios’ corporate dispossession by indicating how national allegory could no longer translate the affective parameters of race into privileged positions within a national hierarchy by the 1880s. Rather than (re)mapping the blushing white body of the nineteenth-century historical romance as the privileged indicator of the nation’s racialized parameters of social agency, *The Squatter and the Don* exhibits the disarticulation of the sympathetic white body from the national interpretive frame that empowered it. A monopolistic corporate hermeneutics is articulated, with the prosthetics of empire superceding racial categories, and transnational networks of corporate capital exceeding national limits. Unable to celebrate nationally (re)productive unions, *The Squatter and the Don* foregrounds the inability of national allegory to reestablish the racialized terms of national unity in the face of social relations restructured by emergent transnational corporations.

**Wedding Whiteness**

Born in 1833, María Amparo Ruiz de Burton came from a prominent family with significant land holdings in the sparsely populated northern Mexican
province of Baja California. During the U.S. invasion of Baja California during the U.S.-Mexican War, Ruiz de Burton met and married U.S. Army Captain Henry S. Burton, the field commander of the U.S. forces in the area. Subsequently moving to the new U.S. territory of California, first to Monterrey and then to San Diego, the Burtons purchased Rancho Jamul in San Diego County. This property would figure prominently in Ruiz de Burton’s life, even if the Burtons and their two children spent many years on the East Coast in Virginia, Delaware, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington, DC. Cosmopolitan and well connected, the Burtons moved easily among Eastern elites, participating in events such as President Lincoln’s inaugural ball and socializing with Mary Todd Lincoln.10

Well educated in Spanish and English literature, Ruiz de Burton published two novels and a comic adaptation of Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quixote. Offering a biting satiric critique of U.S. institutional behavior, from the politics of the U.S. Army and the president’s office to the domestic mores of genteel New England womanhood, her 1872 novel Who Would Have Thought It? counterpoised the hypocritical foibles of a smug, self-congratulatory Eastern establishment with the true romance between the honorable New England lad Julian Norval and the cultured Mexican beauty Lola Medina. Rescued as a youth by Norval’s father from hostile Indians in the Southwest who had kidnapped her mother, Lola joins Julian to form a partnership of true elites that unites the nation across cultural and wartime divides. This union becomes possible as the dark dye applied to Lola’s white skin by the Indians wears off, allowing Julian and the other Easterners to appreciate Lola for the cultured “Spanish” woman she really is. Freed of the specter of miscegenation, Julian and Lola can proceed to found a new national unity through their union. As José Aranda, Jr. notes, Lola and Julian’s marriage represents “a union of two colonial enterprises . . . where Mexican colonialism and its material wealth are merged with U.S. colonialism and its promises of representative democracy” (“Contradictory Impulses” 569).

Yet by the time of the 1885 publication of The Squatter and the Don, the prospect of Californios and Anglos jointly managing the grand imperial project of the United States had vanished. Sensing that just one Californio-Anglo romance would no longer suffice, Ruiz de Burton would multiply the romance plots between white Easterners and Californios in The Squatter and the Don to no avail. Rather than successfully uniting the elites of the two coasts, this narrative registers the singular impossibility of doing so in the face of changed racial and economic parameters of social agency.
The romantic plot of the novel focuses on the often vexed relationship between the Darrell and Alamar families in Southern California during the latter years of Reconstruction. William Darrell, the white squatter of the title, has encroached upon the lands of Don Mariano Alamar, the patrician Californio ranchero whose livelihood has been threatened by squatter encroachments and legal challenges to his 47,000-acre San Diego County land grant from the Spanish Crown. In order to avoid strife, Darrell’s wife Mary tells their son Clarence to purchase 640 acres outright from Don Mariano. In the process Clarence and Don Mariano’s daughter Mercedes meet and fall in love. The union of the two families promises to secure the fortunes and futures of both through the affective ties of marriage, but the narrative tells more a tale of familial woe than marital bliss.

Despite the mutual acceptance of Anglo and Californio families (as shown by multiple marriages throughout the narrative between the Alamars and their neighbors, the Mechlins and the Darrells), the Alamars lose their rancho, for which the narrative blames the depredations of squatter hordes, the U.S. government, and the rapacious Central and Southern Pacific Railroads. Yet if monopoly railroad corporations prove most culpable in this eventual decline of the Californios, the betrayals of the U.S. government in adjudicating the property rights of its Californio citizens reveal the invidious distinction made between Anglo and Californio in the latter’s dispossession by due process of law. As such, Ruiz de Burton retraces the largely untold history of the Californios’ dispossession, a collective history based on the disparate legal treatment of Californio citizens to the material advantage of white ones.

Countering the widespread notion of Californio indolence expressed in Jackson’s *Glimpses of Three Coasts*, Ruiz de Burton opens *The Squatter and the Don* with a recapitulation of Californio land dispossession since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Decrying federal and state laws that “drive to the wall all owners of cattle ranchos,” Don Mariano Alamar reflects how “there are some enactments so obviously intended to favor one class of citizens against another class, that to call them laws is an insult to law” (66). Rather than upholding the rule of law, U.S. law promotes squatter lawlessness against Californio property owners by statutes that “seem more intended to help the law-breakers than to protect the law-abiding” (65). Equating the land loss of the Californios with the failure of the nation to recognize the civil rights of its new Californio citizens, the novel launches a scathing critique of the racialized legal constructions that enabled this dispossession by due process. Ruiz de
Burton exposes the otherwise seamless conventions of the fictional narrative and reveals novelistic discourse as the ideological contestation of nationalist history.

As the novel indicates, the pattern of land dispossession at the heart of the Californio experience of proletarianization varied widely, but generally Californio land holdings in northern California came under squatter pressure as soon as the northern Sierra Nevada gold mines had been largely depleted by the early 1850s. The travels of William Darrell trace the historical progression of squatter encroachments upon Californio holdings across the state. Having “crossed the plains in ’48” with the novel’s other squatters as his teamsters, Darrell squatted on Californio lands in Sonoma and Napa Counties along with a great number of disappointed gold seekers (64). Unsuccessful in his bid for northern Californio land, Darrell decides at the novel’s opening to migrate to San Diego County, where a much smaller influx of Anglo immigrants lessened the possibility that Californio holdings in the southern “cow counties” would be under immediate squatter pressures.

Despite this relative respite from squatters for rancheros in Southern California, the expense of defending land titles before the U.S. courts drained the resources of Californios throughout the state. In 1851, Congress passed the Land Act, which required titleholders of land grants made under the Spanish and Mexican regimes to prove the validity of those titles before a San Francisco–based Land Commission. If titles were judged to be fraudulent or inadequately documented, the land would revert to the public domain and be opened to settlement under the 1841 Preemption Act or the later 1862 Homestead Act. Encouraged by the possibility that prime Californio lands could become public domain, squatters actual and fictional staked claims and made improvements in anticipation of owning the land outright. Mainly involving themselves in small-scale wheat raising, squatters and settlers alike procured passage of pro-agricultural, anti-ranching acts such as the 1872 No-Fence Law. This legislation allowed for the lawful capture of crop-eating cattle, thus forcing onto rancheros the expenses of litigation and damages or those of fencing crop fields to prevent such occurrences. Often cattle in such cases were simply shot, further reducing the value of the ranchero’s herd. In addition, property tax laws exempted the state’s agricultural and mining industries and heavily taxed rancho lands, including the various improvements made by squatters. As with the Land Act, these laws effected a pernicious legal distinction between Anglo farmer and Californio ranchero.
Dealing with an unfamiliar legal system in an unfamiliar language proved disastrous for the land-rich but capital-poor Californios. Anglo lawyers frequently took a section of the property in payment for representing rancheros before the courts. This arrangement resulted in significant portions of the land grants leaving Californio hands as cases, often having passed on appeal through the Land Commission, federal district court, the California Supreme Court, and finally the U.S. Supreme Court, took an average of seventeen years to settle. Rather than alienate land to prove title or pay taxes, rancheros would often mortgage their property to lenders who charged exorbitant rates since the property itself was uncertain collateral. If the state did not seize the property for nonpayment of taxes, financiers would foreclose once compound interest had made repayment impossible. These troubles were multiplied by the precipitous drop in cattle prices after the initial Gold Rush boom, while a series of natural disasters such as the torrential floods of 1862 and a severe drought lasting the subsequent three years depressed prices even further. Between curtailed income and skyrocketing expenses, the rancheros often lost every last acre.

By placing the burden of proof upon those who had validated land grants under Spanish and Mexican law, the very premise of the Land Act could only be to “despoil” the Californios in legal fashion, according to the novel’s Don Mariano Alamar. Far from guaranteeing the equal treatment of citizens under the law, the Land Act demonstrated the use of law itself as a weapon “conquerors” would use against the “conquered”:

How could have Mexico foreseen then [in 1848] that when scarcely half a dozen years should have elapsed the trusted conquerors would, “in Congress assembled,” pass laws which were to be retroactive upon the defenseless, helpless, conquered people, in order to despoil them? The treaty [of Guadalupe Hidalgo] said that our rights would be the same as those enjoyed by all other American citizens. But, you see, Congress takes very good care not to enact retroactive laws for Americans; laws to take away from American citizens the property which they now hold, already, with a recognized legal title. No, indeed. But they do so quickly enough with us—with us, the Spano-Americans. (67; emphasis in original) Or, as Ruiz de Burton wrote more succinctly to Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo’s son Pláton, the North Americans’ “boasted liberty and equality of rights seem to stop when [they] meet a Californian” (qtd. in Emparán 317).
Rather than evenhandedly adjudicating between the competing economic and political interests of U.S. citizens, the Land Act enacts power differentials according to racialized discourses of white supremacy in which Anglos are not bound to respect any rights the Californios might have in their property, despite the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. What appears in U.S. nationalist discourses as the neutral adjudication of conflict among citizens is revealed as the racialized continuation of imperialism by other means, resulting in a process of colonial subject formation. In José David Saldívar’s words, “Ruiz de Burton writes against the grain of U.S. historiography and represents the cultures of U.S. imperialism not only as territorial and economic facts but also inevitably as a subject-constituting project” (156). As such, the U.S. legal system reflected and advanced this process of racial formation, redefining the Californios as a nonwhite population and modifying their position as citizens of a white nation. In essence, The Squatter and the Don no longer functions as a national allegory in that the ideal of the liberal mediation of regional, economic, and other differences are no longer operative within post-1848 U.S. nationalism for the Californios, or rather are only operative on the white side of the color line of which Californios increasingly found themselves on the other side.

**Blushes and Political Economy**

There is a sense in which The Squatter and the Don, even if unable to complete the project of national allegory, nonetheless secures a tentative form of whiteness for the Californios. Clarence and Mercedes eventually do marry, which does not prevent the loss of the rancho, the source of the Californios’ independent wealth, but does halt the Alamar family’s precipitous slide into a rapidly coalescing mestizo and indigenous working class. Ruiz de Burton’s historical romance figures the marriage between Mercedes and Clarence as the romantic union of two white people, working to mark, however provisionally, the Californios as white. These ties are made possible by the constant circulation of sentiment communicated through the blushes between the two lovers while in each other’s presence. Mercedes blushes again and “again like a rose,” while Clarence, not to be outdone, reddens “to the roots of his hair” continually throughout the narrative (101; 182).

In _Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel_...
and the Blush, Mary Ann O’Farrell traces the double-signification of the blush as both the visibly reliable indicator of moral character in the body’s involuntary betrayal of individual will, and as a bodily practice that makes visible the social reading frame itself. In other words, the blush highlights the structures of interpretation that allow its revelation to become intelligible as such: “The use of the blush in the nineteenth-century novel . . . can be thought as articulating the tension between a sense of the blush as expressive of a deep personal truth . . . and a notion of the blush . . . as a mechanism . . . of the workings that forward the grander social work of legibility and manners” (O’Farrell 111). On one hand, the blush coordinates the invisible truth of moral character with involuntary bodily signification, aligning the legibility of character with the formation of proper individual subjectivities. On the other, the blush renders the overdetermined social relations of how character is constructed, thus revealing the legibility of the social itself. In this cultural logistics, the blush functions as a bodily discipline that ensures the individual’s role in the service of maintaining and reproducing the gendered division of labor in a patriarchal social order, even when the apparently demure blush would announce the presence of an excessive, seductive desire (which, of course, typically leads to marriage).

Yet insofar as this understanding of the cultural work of the blush separates the agency of the blushing body’s subjectivity and the structures of collective agency that inform the interpretation of that individual’s body, something is lost in relating the cultural work of the blush in confirming collective positionalities. The blush’s betrayal of an individual’s sense of agency matters less than what that betrayal affirms. In some sense, the blush is not so much the denial of individual agency as much as the confirmation of the collective potentialities of agency arising out of the different racial possibilities of agency under colonialism. In this respect, O’Farrell’s analysis neglects to examine the colonial context within which the blush articulates not only a politics of class but a politics of race as well. In order to foreground this terrain in The Squatter and the Don, I will turn to the articulation of collective economic and political agency signified by blushing effusions of the white body operative during the foundational moment of the United States.

This linking of individual subjectivity to racially nationalized positionalities finds perhaps its canonical expression in Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia (1784). Jefferson postulated that the racial differences of color “fixed in nature” between white masters and black slaves
determined a self-evident distinction in each race’s capacity to screen the unintended bodily effects of moral sentiment (186). Identifying the ability to blush as “the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty” in the white race, Jefferson articulated the visibility of sentiments displayed by the blush across the white face to an aesthetics of racial legibility: “Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, that immovable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race?” (186–87). This quote from Notes on the State of Virginia suggests that a profound epistemological uncertainty confronted Jefferson in reading the emotional states of African slaves. Their emotions existed, he conceded, but the “immovable veil of black” confounded the colonizers’ ability to interpret the emotional states of this conscripted colonial work force (187).²⁰

Jefferson’s anxiously rhetorical interrogative only fitfully casts this epistemological challenge to colonial knowledge as the self-evident truth of racial ontology. In other words, by making the legibility of the blush a kind of writing, Jefferson’s aesthetics of racial legibility desperately sutures the gaps in colonial knowledge. This suture provides the textual linkage between the white individual’s bodily betrayal to the collective agency of whites within the new nation’s political and economic registers. Only insofar as blushes constitute the legible sign of moral sentiment, blushing serves as the screen of racial legibility upon which invisible moral character is made visible upon the body. Thus the white body’s ability to screen emotions across the face indicated the capacity to place private sentiments into public circulation, in contrast to the aesthetically displeasing and morally suspect stoppage of emotional economies found in the “eternal monotony” of the black slave’s face. Put differently, the legibility of the blush corresponded to the racialized white subjectivity proper to the new nation’s political and economic circumstances of democratic openness and laissez-faire mercantile capitalism.²¹

Insofar as the apparent inability to publish moral character via the blush indexed their position as objects within the national economy, black slaves, as the antithesis of economic and political agency, seemingly confirmed the social power of whiteness in the new nation. In contrast, the white ability to blush legibly, self-evidently, indicated, rather than any suspension of individual agency, precisely the ascension to a national collective agency. As published in blushing white faces, moral character stands as the subjectivity correlative of the structural positions of white-
ness. To blush is to enact the subjective roles of agency allowed within the structural parameters of nationalized whiteness. The blushing white body is thus imagined to be the site of not only individual subjectivity but the signifier of collective national economic and political agency as well.

But precisely this nationalized conjunction of blushing white bodies and positional agency is both deployed and contested in *The Squatter and the Don*, even as the material conditions and ideological possibilities for racialized subjectivities underwent drastic changes in the transition from the early republic's mercantile capitalism to the emergent corporate monopoly capitalism of a century later. In the coalescing of post-Reconstruction nationalism around whiteness as the imperative category of civil rights and political agency, Ruiz de Burton's historical romance creates a system of circulating sentiment that enables Californio claims to whiteness by inscribing within Californio bodies the very structure of a laissez-faire, entrepreneurial, capitalist economy that might ensure continued Californio economic and political power. Blushes identify Californios as having the properly laissez-faire subjectivity for free flow of nation-building sentiment. Put differently, the circulation of blushes and blanchnesses within the text establishes this properly white subjectivity, thereby enabling the Californios' ascension to allegorical status within the national allegory of the historical romance.

In appealing to the national aesthetics of racial legibility, *The Squatter and the Don* worked to establish whiteness for the historically mestizo, or mixed-blood, Californios, in order to regain the privileged political and economic subject-position that they had previously enjoyed. By claiming Californio whiteness through the blush, the narrative can posit the making of a truly national, bicoastal family union through marriages that no longer pose the specter of miscegenation. Simultaneously, this new national family can maintain vertical racial hierarchies in the class division of labor, with both California Indians and African Americans (represented by Mary Darrell's faithful "colored servant" Tisha) cheerfully toiling for their white patrons (59). Bereft by the 1880s of the material base of cattle ranches that had hitherto enabled a begrudged status as white within post-annexation California, the Californios found their racial identity as white ever more precarious as they collectively became wage laborers, an Indianized proletariat. Backed by the financial and cultural capital of their white in-laws, the Alamars can shift the material base of their whiteness from a failed pastoral economy hounded by legal challenges and political enemies into an entrepreneurial enterprise based upon professional employment and
speculative investments in real estate, mining, banking, and the stock market.

So if by the novel’s close Gabriel Alamar no longer can claim the patriarchal inheritance of the rancho as the eldest son of Don Mariano, as a banker he no longer must work as a hod carrier either. With the Alamar family married into the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie thanks to his (at long last) brother-in-law Clarence, Gabriel is able to convert a renewed class status into “whiteness,” and “whiteness” into “white-collar.” Even if actual Californios were not so fortunate as to be bailed out by sympathetic Anglo in-laws, the cultural work of the novel is to secure what W. E. B. Du Bois termed “the wages of whiteness” for them, and thus a relatively privileged position within post-Reconstruction U.S. nationalism. Through the historical romance’s romantic unions, Californio claims to whiteness allow access to the class positions that might ensure continued Californio economic and political viability on the white side of the national color line. In short, the wholesale transfer of the Alamar family from landowners to the professional classes through intermarriage highlights the process by which Californios are made white and could continue to be white within a rapidly encroaching corporate economy.

The Rise of the Soulless Empire

As the drama of contingent Californio whiteness is played out, *The Squatter and the Don* launches a critique of the national processes that ensured Californio dispossession by due process of law. This critique ultimately rests upon the narrative’s insistence that the Californios had been improperly racialized as a nonwhite, conquered minority. The narrative places the Californios’ dispossession by due process at the heart of the racializing allegory of proletarianization, equating the parameters of liberal consensus as the enforcement of unequal power differentials. The novel’s inability to complete the necessary wedding of Mercedes Alamar and Clarence Darrell in a timely manner stands symptomatic of the contradiction between narrative insistence upon Californio whiteness and the ultimate denial of white social agency. That their wedding is abruptly canceled, severely jeopardized, and only belatedly performed highlights the ultimate dissolution of the Anglo-Californio hegemony of the immediate post-annexation period that allowed the Californios to retain some measure of political and social power even after the U.S. conquest.
Despite the Californios’ succession into “the wages of whiteness” through intermarriage, the very structure of white nationality remains quite tenuous in *The Squatter and the Don*. The novel ends not with the success of a reunited nation in which Californios enjoy their properly elite place but with a desperate plea for “a Redeemer who will emancipate the white slaves of California” (372). Titled “Out with the Invader,” the last chapter closes with a call for a mass uprising to restore the nation and release Californios and Anglo Californians alike from an imperial dependency imposed by the Central and Southern Pacific Railroads. Throughout the latter half of the narrative, this vampiric railroad monopoly emerges as an imperial force that reduces the Californios, and indeed all Californians, to “poverty, overwork and discouragement,” or, in other words, to the slavery of low-paying wage labor without the prospect of upward mobility (319). Ignoring its larger responsibility to the national good by arresting the invisible hand of the market, the railroad corporation figures an ominous alternative collectivity to the nation; indeed, the corporate takeover of the nation throws the very possibility of a nationalist genealogy of racialized descent into doubt. The allegory of proletarianization brought about by monopoly corporate capitalism threatens to replace a U.S. national community in which all citizens are white descendants with the debased experience of waged labor in which racial distinctions are chaotically erased in the service of imperialist postnational corporations.

This invocation of white slavery highlights the novel’s claim of a juridical failure in the nature of U.S. citizenship, in that the Thirteenth Amendment’s injunction against involuntary servitude scarcely stops monopoly corporations from enslaving the nation itself. Refusing to allow the struggling port town of San Diego to become the nation’s second transcontinental railroad terminus upon the Pacific Ocean, the railroad monopoly ensures that “San Diego must be strangled,” and along with San Diego any possibility that the Alamar family might enjoy continued economic viability as a capitalist (and not just managerial-professional) national elite (314). Don Mariano’s attempts to secure such a Californio future prove disastrous as his speculative property investments in San Diego collapse in value following the Big Four’s successful efforts to block the Texas Pacific Railroad. In effect, enforced underdevelopment of Southern California’s economy completes the dispossession of the Californios that had started with the U.S. conquest and greatly accelerated by the 1851 Land Act. Without the Texas Pacific, relates Don Mariano, “the work of ruining me begun by squatters will be finished by the millionaires” (311).
Ignoring “the wail of the prostrate South, or the impassionate appeals of California,” the Southern Pacific had interfered with “the rights of the Southern people” to partake of the rapidly expanding post-Civil War capitalist economy (216; 316). Blocking the circulation of commodities onto the burgeoning Pacific Rim market, the railroad corporation hinders the trade that would realize the Californios’ modernization of their economic base. For Ruiz de Burton, the machinations of autocratic corporate monopolies had replaced the democratic ideal of enlightened self-governance with the selfish, avaricious, and immoral corruption of the very governmental institutions created for the good of “We the People.” The plea for liberation from white slavery in *The Squatter and the Don*, then, is not a condemnation of capitalism. After all, Clarence’s entrepreneurial investments, and the Alamar family’s own mercantile efforts, hold out the possibility of saving Californio whiteness. Rather, the approbation is for a government-corrupting monopoly corporate capitalism that would erase racial distinctions in the pursuit of profit. Elevating the wage labor relationship over any and all racial distinctions, the corporation monstrously endangers the white status of white people, as in the case of Gabriel Alamar.

According to the narrative, the stranglehold the Southern Pacific Railroad has upon California’s economy creates a crisis of embodiment in which the markings of racialized servitude have improperly been transferred from the pre-Emancipation South’s black bodies to the post-Reconstruction West’s white ones. What enables white slavery in California is the extent to which corporate proletarianization indiscriminately interpolated whites and nonwhites alike into a wage labor economy in a way that eroded racial distinctions. In essence, the narrative protests the erasure of race in the railroad monopoly’s suspension of the mercantile or entrepreneurial economy in which and from which the positions of political and economic agency accrued to nationalized white bodies. If the irony of monopoly is that a corporation devoted to the transportation of goods and people, and, indeed, symbolic of western U.S. progress itself, has become the agent of economic stagnation and stoppage, then what is perhaps even more striking is how the corporation dissolves the legible connections between moral sentiment and bodily expression.

Casting Californios and settlers alike as the victims of the monopolistic practices of the Southern Pacific, the narrative traces this immoral enslavement of whites to a peculiar lack of affect on the part of the corporation and its agents: “That soulless, heartless, shameless monster,” says Mr. Mechlin, “has no soul to feel responsibility, no heart for human pity,
no face for manly blush” (320). In supplanting the laissez-faire circulation of mercantile capitalism, the monopoly corporation disarticulates what had been the earlier linkage between free-market agency and the white body, destroying the legibility of race and thus national white privilege. As legally embodied yet morally unintelligible, this corporate empire transforms the economic and political agency of white U.S. citizens into the subjection of abjectly racialized human commodities. While white slavery is utterly unimaginable under the post-Reconstruction structuring of national agency around whiteness, under the narrative’s characterization of the post-national corporate empire, it is the logical result of erasing racial legibility.

The railroad monopoly’s apparent lack of commitment to the white nation is not limited to the attempt to erode whiteness. Draining capital from California as well as from the New South to “build railroads in Guatemala and British America,” the monopolies encourage the flight of capital across national borders (370). More concerned with transnational circuits of labor and capital rather than national welfare, corporations replace the social agency of blushing white individuals with that of disembodied, deterritorialized entities that defy even their national origins. In the final chapter Ruiz de Burton quotes “a very able orator” at the California legislature’s special session of 1884 that unsuccessfully attempted to force the Central Pacific to pay its taxes: “It has not occurred before in the United States that a great Commonwealth has been defied successfully by its own creatures” (369). In short, the railroad monopoly had become an imperium in imperio, an empire within the nation, that threatened to replace the nation’s white citizenship with the corporate empire’s white slavery. Delinking class difference from racial difference, corporations made white Californios into Indians, white workers into the structural equivalent of black or Chinese workers, and U.S. citizens into colonial subjects.

Facing the ongoing transnational corporate transformation of racial economies, the novel abandons the historical romance narrative altogether, as if that representational form could not negotiate the restructurings of race and class that exceed the nation’s narration. In calling for redemption from white slavery, The Squatter and the Don suggests the historical ruin of national hegemonies imagined as white family ties secured through the legibility of the blushing body. Seemingly erasing the nation and its racialized order inscribed within blushing bodies, transnational corporations trade upon the racial and gendered division of labor at the heart of nationalism to imagine postnational groupings. Yet in some sense
the supersession of the national allegory by the allegory of proletarian-
ization may be not so much a refutation of the nation's racial formations
but rather a transformation of colonialist paradigms. Transnational in its
operations, the Southern Pacific Railroad becomes what Bill Brown has
called “a prosthetic extension of America—not a ‘natural’ expression of
westward expansiveness, but the mechanical institution of hemispheric
domination, the technological and technocratic control over the global
flow of goods” (134–35). In this sense, the experience of the Californios
anticipates what would become the dominant twentieth-century mode
of U.S. imperialism after the U.S.-Spanish War of 1898. The blushing indi-
vidual may embody the racialized subject formation of a nationalized
mercantile capitalism, but the unblushing collective of the deadly, soulless
corporation enacts the logistics of colonialist and neocolonialist agency in
the corporate age of U.S. empire.

Empire after California

The allegorical mappings of eros and polis in The Squatter and the Don
register the imperial presence of monopoly corporations as they traverse
national boundaries and exceed national sovereignties. If the novel mainly
protests the invidious corporate racialization of whites, nonetheless, The
Squatter and the Don also obliquely registers the subterranean resistance
of racialized labor to either ranchero or corporate exploitation. This resis-
tance comes from the Indian and mestizo ranch laborers whose presence
is taken for granted and whose racialization frames Californio agency
before and after 1848. The construction of these communities as objects
of knowledge within national allegory’s hegemonizing project has not
erased all traces of persistent agency in contesting subaltern status even
from within the colonial experience of exploitation. Grave as the danger
posed by the transnational corporation to Californio social agency, the
threat posed by racialized labor may be greater still, even if portrayed as
essentially bereft of agency or community.

Indeed, Chapo, an Indian servant at the Alamar rancho, singlehand-
edly derails the modernist project of national allegory as completely as
any monopoly corporation. Following his father’s rude assault upon Don
Mariano, Clarence’s hasty departure from a distraught Mercedes is made
possible by Chapo’s studied neglect in following Victoriano’s orders to
groom and stable the horses “immediately”: “Yes, patroncito, I’ll do it
right away,’ said the lazy Indian, who first had to stretch himself and yawn several times, then hunt up tobacco and cigarette paper, and smoke his cigarette. This done, he, having had a heavy supper, shuffled lazily to the front of the house, as Clarence was driving down the hill for the second time” (278). The resulting cancellation of the lovers’ wedding jeopardizes the dream of national unity, but in a way different from Californio imaginations of corrupt antinational corporations. In this case, the immediate cause of narrative and national crisis is traced to Chapo’s sense of time, as “the Americano went off with his horses before he [Chapo] had time to put them in the stable” (279). The narrative implies that Victoriano could have overtaken Clarence on the way to the San Diego ship docks and averted the financial disasters of the Alamar family if only Chapo had followed orders without delay. The narrative links Chapo’s deficient sense of time to the racialized disposition of Indian laziness. His work habits cast the entire project of national allegory in doubt. If, for the narrative, the mark of premodernity lay in laziness, then the Indian was simply too savage to have yet internalized the bodily discipline vital to work regimes under a developing capitalism.

From within the logic of the narrative, in no way could Chapo’s actions be interpreted to signify an all-too-clear understanding of capitalism’s restructuring of temporal (i.e., work) relations along the color line, nor laziness read as resistance to the colonizer’s imposed narrative of modernity. This narrative instance demonstrates the ideological necessity of denying the foundation of Californio whiteness upon the labor of subaltern communities. Whiteness triumphant or imperiled can only be imagined as the result of the actions of true agents of history—white individuals, nations, or transnational corporations—whether legitimate or not. Hence, the narrative reveals no possibility that in coming to share the same structural and symbolic positions within the corporate U.S. imaginary, Californios and indios might also share a similar consciousness of racialized class positions. The call for redemption from white slavery, then, is what remains of the failure of post-Reconstruction national allegory. No longer able to imagine nationally relevant families, The Squatter and the Don is also unable to suggest alternatives to a reinscription of the nationalist wages of whiteness.

The possibility that, far from superseding the nation and its racialized order, transnational corporations trade upon the racial and gendered division of labor at the heart of nationalism to imagine other, postnational groupings fails to register for the novel. Similarly, the possibility that the
very flows of labor across borders and (sometimes) color lines might provide a new basis of imagining communities, not structured according to nationality, cannot be brought to fruition. In relying upon the racialized claims of citizenship or descent, *The Squatter and the Don* demonstrates the dead end of national allegory for contesting corporate restructurings of everyday life. Rather, whether oriented North and South or East and West, the imperial nation would take the corporate form in the ensuing American Century.