

Rural discontent settles in the state of Jefferson

By Tay Wiles, High Country News

It was a pleasant day for September in California's Central Valley, sunny and hot but not unbearably so. Kayla Brown sat cross-legged on the grass under an oak tree in a public park, surrounded by friends and family, including her husband, parents and two sons. Brown, who is 27 and sprightly, with a blonde ponytail and blue eyes, was holding court on 19th century American history and the run-up to the Civil War. A lot of Californians "actually sympathized with the Confederates," she said.

Brown was in Marysville, just north of Sacramento, to take part in a Civil War re-enactment, a hobby she's had since she was 11. Today, as usual, she was dressed as a Confederate. "I've been dying epically, valiantly, for the South for three days," one member of the group said, smiling, as they took a break from the day's skirmishes. Brown added: "The North was morally right, but somebody's got to be a Confederate."

Brown's youngest son, 18 months old, toddled by, swinging a slice of apple tied to a string, making swooshing airplane sounds. "I hate public schools," Brown said, moving the conversation from history to contemporary politics. The Common Core curriculum is a sham, she said; grade-schoolers are forced to learn about topics like contraception and gender identity. That's why she is homeschooling her children. Gun laws are too strict in California, and mountain lions are over-protected. "We have more lions than anywhere else in the country," one member of the group said. "That's because we're not allowed to shoot them for eating our livestock," another added. (California residents can, in fact, shoot a mountain lion that is killing domestic animals, though they need to

obtain a permit from the state.)

People here call far Northern California – the 20 or so counties north of Sacramento – the North State. The region is largely rural and white (though the Latino population has risen in recent years and there are several Native American tribes), and its politics are mostly red (only four counties went for Hillary Clinton in 2016). But the North State is also an idea that encompasses a shared regional identity for people like Brown, who has lived here her whole life and never wants to leave. “You have a lot of rural folk, people who have been here for three, four, sometimes even five generations,” she told me at the re-enactment. “We’re literally tied to the land.”

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