

Benjamin Madley. *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. 712 pp. \$38.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-300-18136-4.

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Commissioned by Kate Brown (Huntington University)

Benjamin Madley's book *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873* is a recent addition to the wonderful Lamar Series in Western History from Yale University Press. Noting that "relatively little" has been written about the destruction of California's Native population, Madley contributes to the growing body of historical work that explores "genocide," a term of twentieth-century origin, to understand events deeper in the past. Some readers might question the usefulness of applying this term to events in the past, but Madley succinctly makes the case for why these events in California can accurately be described as genocide. He writes, "Genocide is a twentieth-century word, but it describes an ancient phenomenon and can therefore be used to analyze the past" (p. 5). He documents how other historians have used the term in their studies and connects it to the use of the older word, "extermination." Madley sets his book in a larger context by writing that he seeks answers to larger and uncomfortable questions about the role of genocide in the making of modern democracies like the United States. He also connects his work to the present by asking broad questions about how descendants of California Indians should react to this history, wondering about possible forms of reparation and recognition. Finally, he asks how modern non-Native Cali-

fornians might reevaluate their relationships with Native descendants. The book explicitly does not address the idea of a concerted effort at the cultural destruction of Native peoples. Much has been written about that elsewhere, and Madley is specifically focused on proving how and why these events should be labeled as genocide.

Thus *An American Genocide* joins a growing body of work that seeks to bring scholarship about genocide, ethnic cleansing, and Native American history into conversation with each other. Gary Clayton Anderson's recent book, *Ethnic Cleansing and the Indian: The Crime That Should Haunt America* (2014), comes to mind in particular. Additionally, Brendan C. Lindsay's recent book, *Murder State: California's Native American Genocide, 1846-1873* (2012) covers the same period and much of the same territory as Madley's book. It is unfortunate that these two books came out so close together, although Madley's work will probably be considered the comprehensive account. The key difference between the two books seems to be Lindsay's focus on racism as the cause of murderous actions by the state of California.

Additionally, *An American Genocide* contributes to the larger story of Native American population decline and destruction throughout North America during the period of colonial and US expan-

sion. Much of the literature on that destruction focuses on disease, specific wars, and especially on the process of forced removal from the American South in the nineteenth century. The California Indian catastrophe shows a different picture of that destruction, indeed, of what might have happened elsewhere had circumstances been different. It also makes one realize how cheap US officials' rhetoric regarding treaties and "civilization" programs were in other instances. Had circumstances in other times and places favored US control as much as they did in California, with what other histories of genocide would we be reckoning?

The book also contributes to the literature on federal Indian policy in a unique way. As most historians of federal Indian policy know, the situation in California was different compared to most other US states because none of the treaties negotiated by federal commissioners with local Native groups were ever ratified by the US Senate. Madley explores the real, on-the-ground consequences of this fact in a more comprehensive way than any previous historian. Other historians have shown how little protection federal treaties usually offered to Native people, but Madley demonstrates that without treaties at all, murderous state policies toward Native people were easier than ever to implement. He thus focuses a lot on those state policies, noting multiple times that one reason for the continuous violence against Native peoples was laws passed by the state legislature that prevented Native people from testifying in court. Additionally, the authorization from California lawmakers of militia activities against Native people and the clear signal that people who killed Natives would not be punished "inspired an even greater number of vigilante killings" (p. 354).

However, Madley also reveals that even though no federal treaties with California Natives were ever ratified, that did not mean that the federal

government was uninvolved in the genocidal policies that were implemented there. At times, the federal government tacitly supported those policies by not intervening, even when reports from federal officials made it clear what was happening. But more often the federal government explicitly supported those policies by providing financial aid to California to conduct murderous militia expeditions against Native people and by sending in federal troops to do the same. For example, Madley notes, "[e]ven in the midst of a national civil war that stretched federal finances to their limits, US congressmen reaffirmed their commitment to California Indian hunting by fulfilling the promise of Congress to support past California volunteer militia expeditions" (p. 320). Congress appropriated over \$218,000 to repay the state of California for expenses incurred by their state militia during campaigns to hunt down and exterminate California's Native population. Weapons shipments and other funding followed.

Madley shows that there is much to be learned from the interactions between state and federal policies, as one usually supported the other. A full picture of federal Indian policy necessarily needs to explore how those federal policies were supported (or not) by state policies. Federal participation in California's Native genocide is made vastly apparent by Madley's work, highlighting the need for scholars of federal policy to perhaps look more closely at the participation of other state legislatures in the implementation of federal Indian policy in the nineteenth century. In this area, however, Madley could also have further strengthened his argument for the bloody uniqueness of California's Indian policies by drawing more explicit comparisons to other state Indian policies and to federal implementation practices in other areas. Because of the book's focus on California and its lack of wider context regarding federal Indian policy in general, readers less familiar with those policies might miss the full force of his argument

The book deeply mines federal records, California state government records, and local newspapers. Madley is careful to explain why there are so few Native sources available, a problem that almost always confronts historians of Native America. Historians of the federal government will appreciate Madley's careful use of government records, and can learn much from the long but useful appendices attached to the end of the book. Totalling nearly two hundred pages, the appendices painstakingly chart how Madley tracked and verified instances of violence against Native people in California.

The introduction explains the frame of the book and justifies Madley's focus on the term "genocide." He then begins what he intends to be a comprehensive account of the destruction of the Native population of California after the arrival of United States control in 1846 by noting continuity with previous practices of discrimination implemented by Mexican officials. Massive Native population decline was already well underway in 1846, partly related to the spread of disease, but also because of the violent and discriminatory practices of Mexican officials and settlers. Yet once the United States assumed control of California, the population decline continued to increase. Madley cites census data showing that the Native population fell from about 150,000 in 1846 to barely 16,000 by 1880. This decline was not the result of an uncontrollable demographic disaster; rather, it was the consequence of an "organized destruction of California's Indian peoples under US rule" (p. 3).

Throughout the book's eight chapters, Madley explores four categories of the killing that together made up the genocide of California's Native population: battles, massacres, homicides, and executions. All of these occurred over the first thirty years of US control in California because there was a "sustained political will" to enact and carry out policies and procedures that supported those

actions. Each subsequent chapter slowly builds the case for labeling these events as genocide, careful example by careful example. Chapter 1 lays an important foundation by succinctly describing life in Native California before the arrival of US control in 1846. What follows is a comprehensive account of the first encounters of US officials like Captain John C. Fremont, encounters that the author describes as a "prelude to genocide" (p. 42). Chapter 2 explores first encounters between US officials and California Natives. Chapter 3 explores the massive impact of the gold rush. Chapter 4 is narrowly focused on December 1849 to May 1850, in which Madley describes various "killing campaigns" in detail.

Of particular note is chapter 5, "Legislating Exclusion and Vulnerability," which is especially useful in its discussion of the US continuation of labor practices that essentially kept many California Natives enslaved. Even as the controversy over the expansion of slavery into the West raged elsewhere in the United States, US officials laid the groundwork "to maintain existing systems of Indian servitude without overtly legalizing slavery" (p. 145). Other authors have written about the practice of Native enslavement in California, but none so succinctly as Madley. Thus Madley's work also reveals something for readers interested in the expanding historiographies of Native enslavement.

The book concludes with a short account of the Modoc War, perhaps the most well-known conflict between the United States and a California Indian group. It was yet another case where resistance was eventually met with orders for complete destruction, or as General Sherman's orders explicitly stated, "utter extermination" (p. 342). Madley explores several possible reasons for the abandonment of the attempt to exterminate the Modocs and other California Native groups beginning in 1873. Changes in the law that led Native people to be able to testify against whites in criminal tri-

als and a rethinking of Indian policy under President Grant (his infamous “Peace Policy”) led to important shifts, as did the fact that the Native population had shrunk to such low levels. This did not stop the killing entirely, as it had become an ingrained part of California society. Removal to federal prisons or to Indian Territory awaited other California Natives as the federal government began to incorporate California into its other existing Indian policies. Madley returns in the conclusion to making the case that what happened in California was indeed genocide. This reader wholeheartedly agrees with Madley’s assessment. His careful attention to detail and use of all the available evidence has led to the creation of the most comprehensive accounting of the destruction of California’s Native population.

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