B. Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 498pp, USD38.00.

Reviewed by Antje Deckert

The author, Benjamin Madley, is Associate Professor at UCLA's history department. Although he identifies as non-Indigenous, Madley's primary research interest concerns First Nations and colonialism. Madley developed his passion early in life spending "much of his childhood in Karuk Country [. . .] where he became interested in the relationship between colonizers and indigenous peoples" (UCLA 2019). This is Madley's first book. Albeit only recently published, it already comes with a long list of accolades, including the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for History, the Raphael Lemkin Book Award from the Institute for the Study of Genocide, and an entry in the *Indian Country Today* Hot List. Soon after you begin this read, it becomes apparent why the book has received so much praise: it is a real page-turner. Madley's bare prose is gruesomely detailed, of intense clarity, and unsettling overall. He provides convincing evidence and arguments, thus manifesting an indictment of a genocide attempt that was supported by the US and Californian governments.

The sepia-coloured book cover depicts Chief Kintpuash, who led fifty Modoc warriors against hundreds of US soldiers. He was captured and executed in 1873 – the year that also marks the end of the historical period covered by this book. Kintpuash's life is exemplary of so many who died during the Californian genocide. Born on ancestral land but forced to live on a reservation, he fled twice, both times leading a group of Modoc back to the lands that were rightfully theirs. After the US military executed Kintpuash, they severed his head, sent it for study to the Army Medical Museum, and then handed his skull over to the Smithsonian Institute, which, after a decade of petitioning, finally returned it to Kintpuash's descendents in 1984. The book cover reminds us of First Nations' resistance and the impact the genocidal past continues to have, especially in regard to an official apology and reparation payments (9). In this spirit, Madley dedicates his book to "California Indians, past, present, and future" and also acknowledges the role First Nations played in guiding his work. This fact deserves mentioning because it is not a given in research publications written by non-Indigenous authors (e.g., Smith 2011).

This monograph fills a crucial gap in research because it is the first year-by-year account of the genocide committed against First Nations in California under US rule between 1846 and 1873. The book focuses more narrowly on "direct acts of violence" (11) committed in battles, massacres, homicides, and legal executions.

It is primarily sourced from the reports of non-Indigenous perpetrators and bystanders. The restricted source selection is both deliberate and appropriate. Since the UN definition of genocide requires that perpetrators act with the intent to destroy a social group, such an intent – i.e., commitment to an action with the expected genocidal outcome – can only be determined by unearthing the thoughts that perpetrators harboured at the time of action. Madley acknowledges that “[a] history of California’s 1846–1873 genocide – told primarily from California Indian perspectives – is important and remains to be written” (11).

The book contains eight chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter One describes the world of First Nations in California before European contact, its vast natural riches, the vibrant civilizations, their diverse languages, and social, economic and political relations. It also records the devastation Spanish, Russian, and Mexican invaders brought to First Nations between 1769 and 1846.

Chapter Two, “Prelude to Genocide”, discusses the two years of the Mexican–American War. Madley illustrates how Anglo-Americans used racist ideology to justify their exploitation, enslavement, sexual violation, punishment, dehumanization, and demonization of Indigenous men, women, and children. Madley demonstrates that the judiciary and US government were both complicit in this racist system and how these degradation tactics paved the road to public demands for total extermination.

Chapter Three covers the Gold Rush era, which caused a major migration to California’s three mining regions. Europeans invaded the riverbanks that produced the livelihood for a dozen First Nations. The crowding intensified with the arrival of 100,000 non-Californian immigrants. Many “regarded all Indians as their enemies” (76) and came well-armed with both weapons and misconceptions. They considered Indigenous people killers and competitors, even though “they did not violently impede the thousands of gold seekers” (73). The volatile mix of racial hatred and alleged threat prompted the first genocidal attacks – attempts to annihilate tribes whose homelands stretched across the goldmines. Such attacks naturally spurred retaliation that fed invaders’ pre-existing fears and normalized indiscriminate killings. Furthermore, “[d]estroying Indian villages and their food stores [became] a crucial tactic for creating ‘conditions of life intended to destroy the group’” (96).

Chapter Four, “Turning Point”, focusses on the two-year transition between the Mexican–American War and the formal incorporation of California into the United States. California was under US military control but lingered in a state of anomie, which proved lethal for the hundreds of Indigenous people who were massacred by the US military and ad-hoc vigilante groups. Madley uses the Bloody Island Massacre as an example to demonstrate that the US military approved of so-called pedagogic violence, gave extermination orders, and hence acted with

genocidal intent. These actions were condoned by the US Senate, the California Supreme Court, and newspapers. The perpetrators were promoted to the highest ranks, teaching the public “that killing California Indians was not a crime that would be punished or even thoroughly condemned” (139), which introduced an even “more violent era” (142).

Chapter Five, “Legislating Exclusion and Vulnerability”, evidences how lawmakers secured Anglo-American economic and political interests while “criminalizing Indian freedom” (147) and stripping Indigenous people of all rights. Treaties were signed but the US Senate refused to ratify them, leaving First Nations legally unprotected. In this chapter, Madley illustrates how legislation enabled Anglo-Americans to enslave, disenfranchise, torture, silence, dispossess, and kill thousands of Indigenous people.

Chapter Six, “Rise of the Killing Machine”, details several expeditions that volunteer ranger militias executed on order of the Californian governor. Well-paid, armed, and supplied by the State, they massacred hundreds of Indigenous people in targeted attacks, making “clear that hunting Indians could be financially advantageous” and, in doing so, provided a “powerful temptation to fabricate or exaggerate” wrongdoings (183). However, “treaty making remained a priority in 1851, which limited the lethality of militia operations” (195).

“California now had a legal, political and social system that [. . .] overtly supported ranger militia expeditions and their massacres” (240). Chapter Seven, entitled “Perfecting the Killing Machine”, details several of these expeditions and describes how California’s government bolstered militias’ financial and material support. Militia power was now on par with US military forces, who joined militia groups in their genocidal attacks against First Nations. Moreover, the US government transferred \$800,000 in 1856 to support ranger militias – “crucial funding [that] made the genocide an increasingly state and federal project” (250).

Chapter Eight, “The Civil War in California and its Aftermath”, evidences that, even when the Civil War raged between the Union and the South and left California with “a military vacuum” (299), volunteer militia and vigilantes continued their slave raiding and genocidal expeditions against First Nations. The end of the Civil War brought no relief to First Nations either. As for released Black slaves, slavery continued by another name for Indigenous people in California, because the 13th Amendment permitted the preservation of California’s convict lease system, which “remained legal until 1937” (333). The chapter ends with a description of “[t]he last known large-scale massacre of California Indian people [which] took place in 1871” (335).

In sum, *An American Genocide* is representative of decolonizing academic writing that speaks truth to power. It makes a valuable contribution to legal, criminological, and state crime scholarship with its well-evidenced record of genocidal

intent actioned against First Nations. It assists in demystifying the extent, brutality, and directness of colonial violence. The book is suitable for laypeople as well as undergraduate and postgraduate students of history, law, criminology, Indigenous studies, sociology, and the more recently established “Western civilisation studies”. It is a must-read for decision makers in the US federal and Californian governments, and for academics who study First Nations, genocide, or colonialism.

Antje Deckert, Social Sciences and Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand.

References

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