

*Waikiki Dreams* situates the rise of California's surf culture within the expansion of American empire and settler colonialism, while also connecting the modernization of surfing to World War II wartime technological advancements that influenced the industry. Although scholarly in nature, Moser's accessible prose ensures that the work remains engaging for non-academic readers as well, making it a compelling addition to both academic and popular discussions of surf history.

*Independent Scholar*

JASON OLD

*California, A Slave State.* By Jean Pfaelzer. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2023. pp. 520.)

Jean Pfaelzer's *California, A Slave State*, is an ambitious effort to tell the story of California's multiple systems of slavery and servitude from the era of Spanish colonization to the early twenty-first century. Wide-ranging chapters cover the coerced labor of Indigenous people in Spanish missions, on Mexican ranches, and in the Russian fur trade; the enslavement of African Americans; systems of sexual servitude that Chinese and Indigenous women suffered; California's vast system of mass incarceration and prison labor; and twenty-first-century sex trafficking.

My assessment of the book echoes both the praise and concerns of Charles McClain's review of Pfaelzer's 2007 book, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (Random House), which appeared in the fall 2009 issue of *Law and History Review* (vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 697–99). McClain, a preeminent scholar of Chinese immigration legal history, called Pfaelzer a "talented narrator," and he praised *Driven Out* for being both "comprehensive" and "a work of considerable impact." The same can be said of *California, A Slave State*. The chronological scope and topical diversity of the book are impressive. Pfaelzer has the admirable goal of bringing the injustices of California's past to light. Her captivating narrative will likely bring greater public attention to important questions about reparations and reconciliation in the Golden State.

Unfortunately, *California, A Slave State* suffers from many of the same serious problems that McClain found in Pfaelzer's previous work. *Driven Out*, McClain observed, was "marred by a distracting number of imprecise or inaccurate statements." In addition to documenting numerous factual errors in the book, McClain noted that "Pfaelzer badly misreads several court cases."

The same can be said about this latest book. Interpretative and factual errors, combined with profound problems in the author's handling of primary sources, make it impossible to recommend *California, A Slave State* as a piece of reliable historical research.

Mishandling and misrepresentation of primary sources are the most worrisome problems. I will review some of the major examples of these problems that emerge in Chapters 5 and 6 dealing with African American slavery in California (my own area of expertise).

On page 122, Pfaelzer presents what appears to be a direct quotation from Kentucky's *Louisville Daily Journal* from May 9, 1849, which allegedly supports a Georgian scheme to seize California as a slave state: "In 1849 the *Louisville Daily Journal* suggested that 'if three to five hundred Georgians immigrated to California, each accompanied by one to five slaves, they could force California to enter the union as a slave state.'" Tracking the endnote to the original primary source, however, shows that both the interpretation and quotation itself are completely inaccurate. First, the assertion that the *Louisville Daily Journal* supported the plan is wrong. The article in question contains a multi-paragraph explanation of why southerners should not try to force slavery on California. Second, and much more disconcerting, the quotation itself does not appear to exist. An article on the second page of the *Journal* did report that there was a scheme afoot to have "from three to five hundred Georgians" take enslaved people to California, but the rest of Pfaelzer's alleged direct quotation appears nowhere in the May 9, 1849, issue cited. If we presume that this was not an instance of deliberate fabrication, there is no question that it is the product of extremely careless citation or quotation.

More problematic handling of sources, compounded by other errors, leads to another misleading representation of evidence a few pages later. In this instance, the author purports to quote directly from a well-known article in the *Californian*, an early Bay Area newspaper, which expressed distaste for slavery and African Americans. Pfaelzer's account has Sam Brannan as a delegate to the California Constitutional Convention of 1849 and editor of the *Californian*, in which capacity he wrote an article urging fellow citizens to "reject 'any degree of slavery, or even the importation of free Blacks. We desire only a white population in California'" (p. 134). Nearly all of this information is wrong. First, Sam Brannan was not a delegate to the constitutional convention, and he never wrote these words because he operated a rival newspaper, the *California Star*. Second, the quoted text is from nearly

a year-and-a-half before the convention because it appeared in the March 15, 1848, issue of the *Californian* (which Pfaelzer mistakenly cites as March 18, 1848, in the endnotes). Finally, the alleged direct quotation is actually cobbled together from two different passages, several paragraphs apart, and in reverse order of how they appear in the original.

While it might be tempting to write off these errors as trivial, persistent mistakes and misquoting can play havoc with the life stories of California's enslaved people that the book is trying to reclaim. One notable example is the story of Frank, a young Black man who was among the first escapees from slavery in California in 1851. Frank's story has been told by multiple historians, including myself, so the details of the case are fairly well known. Pfaelzer gets some of the context right, but she erroneously reprints two runaway slave advertisements from 1855 from a completely different case of an enslaved child named Frank, which she then presents as evidence from the 1851 case (pp. 145–46). She does this even though her own endnote citation confirms that the advertisements are actually from 1855. The inaccurate conclusions that she draws from using the wrong evidence are compounded by removing key context, which in turn leads to misrepresentation. The runaway advertisement for the child, Frank, seemingly reprinted in full on p. 146, allegedly shows (in Pfaelzer's words) "Wells Fargo and Company complicit in collecting the reward" for the child's return. In actuality, the original advertisement, which appeared in the *Sacramento Daily Union* from July 18 through July 21, 1855 (not July 6 or July 10, 1855, as stated in the endnote) is only reproduced in part on this page. Pfaelzer cuts out lines of text in which the enslaver, H.W. Roberts, asks the *San Francisco Chronicle* to reprint the ad for him and to send him the bill for publication via Wells, Fargo & Co. This is not minor massaging of a primary source. The editing of the advertisement completely changes the role of Wells, Fargo & Co. from a bill courier for newspapers to a broker of reward money among slave hunters. Together, all these errors in under two pages of text turn the enslaved Frank of 1851—an eighteen-year-old who was one of the first people successfully to use the state courts to win his freedom—into a twelve-year-old boy being hunted down with help from Wells Fargo.

Similar problems and distortions happen with the retelling of the story of Biddy Mason, the famous Los Angeles woman who won her freedom from slavery in the courts and became one of the city's leading entrepreneurs. Details about the origins of Biddy Mason's enslaver, Robert Smith; the circumstances under which Smith purchased Mason; the date of the incident

that led to her court case; and even the identity of the person who filed the writ of habeas corpus that resulted in her freedom, are mostly incorrect. The most embarrassing error occurs on p. 157 with the inclusion of a purported photograph of Bidly Mason. Anyone who is familiar with the case of Bidly Mason would likely point out, at first glance, that the photograph is not of her. A quick Google search reveals that it is a portrait of her daughter, Ellen.

In all, Pfaelzer deserves praise for trying to write an ambitious new history of California, but that ambition should have been counterbalanced by a rigorous attention to detail, veracity, and the ethics of historical research. Researchers should appreciate Pfaelzer's passionate storytelling and her earnest desire to uncover the horrors of California's past, but they would do well to use caution when citing or quoting *California, A Slave State* without thorough fact-checking first.

Oregon State University

STACEY L. SMITH

*Damming the Gila: The Gila River Indian Community and San Carlos Irrigation Project, 1900–1940.* By David H. DeJong. (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2024. 392 pp.)

Many Americans have only a broad sense of Indigenous history. To the extent that they think about it at all, it's often about the deep past, or calamities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with less attention paid to tribal communities in the twentieth century. David DeJong helps remedy this in *Damming the Gila*, the third of his planned five-book series on the Gila River Indian Community, the U.S. government, and the river itself. He makes a valuable contribution, but the book is a bit too intricate for a non-specialist reader.

Focusing on the period from 1900 to 1944, DeJong lays out the political history of irrigation water in the Gila River. At the start of the twentieth century, the federal government's goal was to make Native Americans into small farmers, applying the Jeffersonian ideal to Indigenous communities. But the Akimel O'otham, whose ancestors had actually farmed in what's now Arizona since well before the arrival of Europeans, had had their water stolen—the subject of DeJong's first Gila book—and, unable to irrigate their fields, endured starvation in the early twentieth century. The San Carlos Irrigation Project, centered around the 249-foot Coolidge Dam, was supposed to remedy the situation, but foundered amidst political machinations and problems with capital and infrastructure.