

and other camping areas “ought” to be like. While this kind of analysis might be beyond the scope of this particular volume, I hope there is a follow-up volume.

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Robert Aquinas McNally. *The Modoc War: A Story of Genocide at the Dawn of America's Gilded Age*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. \$34.95.

*The Modoc War* is a devastating history of defiant indigenous resistance during the Gilded Age of the nineteenth century. McNally's fast-paced, blow-by-blow account chronicles the daring actions of Modoc freedom fighters, treacherous U.S. soldiers, genocidal American settlers, and hubristic military leaders that scarred the West during the “Indian Wars” of the post-Civil War era. But this is more than simply a long-overdue accounting of broken treaties, broken promises, and tragic removal in California. McNally also shines a mirror at us, demanding a reckoning for the demographic and cultural genocide that occurred in the Klamath Basin and across the American West.

Like our best historians, though, McNally never explicitly makes this demand. Instead, he simply weaves together an immensely complex set of cultures, characters, places, and histories, placing the Modocs at the center of this neglected yet important American story. In this effort, he picks up where other recent historians have recently taken us—the essential works of Benjamin Madley (*American Genocide*), Boyd Cothran (*Remembering the Modoc War*), and Brendan Lindsay (*Murder State*) come to mind—raising the issue of state-sponsored genocide against Native Californians. Genocidal intent, as these historians reveal, is evident in the racial terror unleashed by Gilded Age Californians, journalists, politicians, and soldiers. McNally employs these voices brilliantly but also evenhandedly in this riveting page-turner.

Broken into four parts, *The Modoc War* consists of a series of thirty-four short, punchy chapters that frame the short conflict (1872–73) but also the longer, deeper geographical and cultural contours of the Klamath Basin. McNally also takes us through the violent and tragic aftermath of the war, which amounted to the calculated near extermination of the Modocs. At every step along the way, he takes us deep into Modoc history as they retreated away from the U.S. Army and into “the Stronghold”—the cavernous, difficult terrain shaped by lava beds resulting from the Medicine Lake Volcano that bordered Tule Lake in Northern California. But this forbidding place was not just a strategic hideout, McNally writes. For the Modocs, “This Stronghold was more than strong. It was sacred” (16). The very name Modoc, in fact, is derived from *móatak* (tule lake). Thus, as with other indigenous nations who had their own strongholds resisting white incursions in the late nineteenth century (Canyon de Chelly for the Navajo or the Black Hills for the Lakota, for instance), the Modoc Stronghold provided both defensive advantages and deeper cultural meaning.

The Modoc War was roughly situated in the middle of the Indian Wars of the West, but as McNally shows, it served as one of the most captivating and consequential despite its isolated terrain. The war acted as a conduit for sensational journalism featuring war correspondents reporting in real time, thanks to the power of the telegraph. The outnumbered but recalcitrant

Modocs numbered no more than a few dozen warriors to the one-thousand-strong army (plus local militia). This story enticed East Coast journalists but also embarrassed the Grant administration, which touted a “Peace Policy” with western Indian nations that encouraged removal to reservations. The Modocs abruptly threatened this policy, and the army aimed to brutally and quickly end such intransigence. Their hubris, McNally reveals, led to a series of missteps and, ultimately, the death of Brigadier General Edward Canby at the hands the Modoc leader Kientpoos—otherwise known as Captain Jack. Canby was the highest-ranking military officer ever killed by Native Americans. His murder shocked the (largely white) American public and quickly turned Canby into a martyr.

Thanks to McNally’s account, we learn that Canby’s experience with Native communities reached back to the second Seminole War of the 1830s. Canby took part in the forced removal of the “Civilized Tribes” to Oklahoma and similarly skirmished with Navajo communities during the 1860s. These earlier experiences, McNally argues, led Canby to hold a paternalistic attitude toward Native communities that espoused the blessings of white civilization. This superiority complex, McNally shows, proved fatal. Kientpoos and his Modoc resisters would have none of Canby’s empty promises. But neither would an American public steeped in the Gilded Age rhetoric of manifest destiny tolerate Modoc freedom—especially after striking such a blow. By 1873, the Modocs had lost and the survivors were sent to the Quapaw Reservation in Oklahoma. The government tried and hung Kientpoos (the only Native American leader ever charged with war crimes). President Grant pardoned some of the Modocs, but not Kientpoos. The murder of Canby required vengeance, and McNally’s heart-wrenching chapter “Strangled Necks, Severed Heads” uncovers the truly bloodthirsty nature of that vengeance.

Remarkably, without missing an angle or character, McNally deftly navigates the lives of multiple participants and their fateful collision in the lava beds of the Stronghold. His account is all the more powerful because it doesn’t offer a neat conclusion laced with a silver lining. It ends, in fact, with the draining of Tule Lake and the dying of the Modocs’ Lost River. As he concludes, “In the end and in our time, Lost River has been lost all over again.” McNally’s powerful account adds to recent historical reexaminations of California and Oregon genocide, and hopefully, in our time, events like the Modoc War will be found again.

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