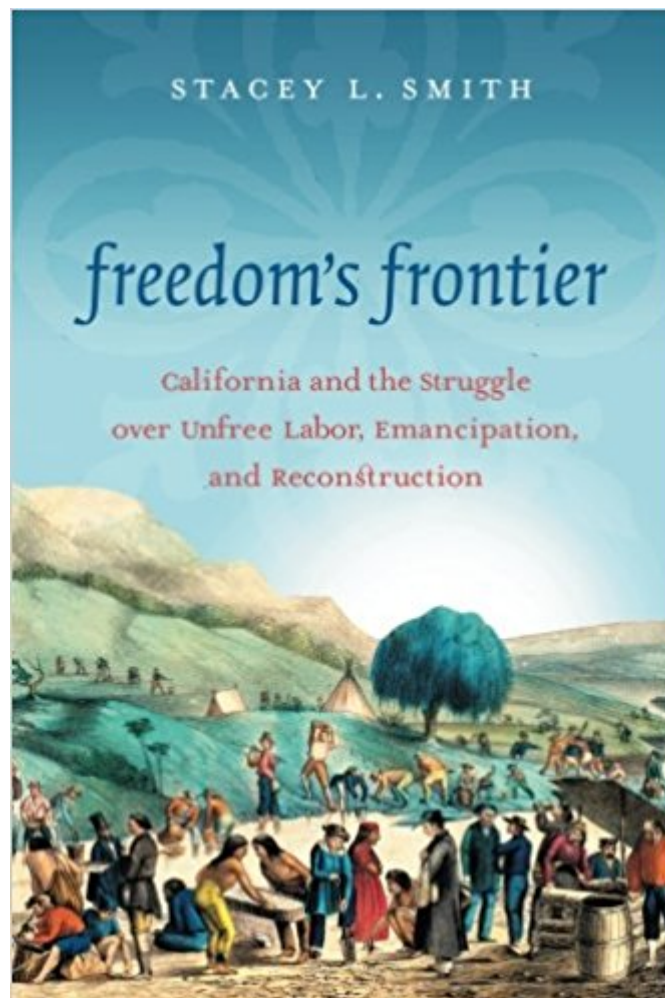




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Freedom's Frontier: California And The Struggle Over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, And Reconstruction



Synopsis

Most histories of the Civil War era portray the struggle over slavery as a conflict that exclusively pitted North against South, free labor against slave labor, and black against white. In *Freedom's Frontier*, Stacey L. Smith examines the battle over slavery as it unfolded on the multiracial Pacific Coast. Despite its antislavery constitution, California was home to a dizzying array of bound and semibound labor systems: African American slavery, American Indian indenture, Latino and Chinese contract labor, and a brutal sex traffic in bound Indian and Chinese women. Using untapped legislative and court records, Smith reconstructs the lives of California's unfree workers and documents the political and legal struggles over their destiny as the nation moved through the Civil War, emancipation, and Reconstruction. Smith reveals that the state's anti-Chinese movement, forged in its struggle over unfree labor, reached eastward to transform federal Reconstruction policy and national race relations for decades to come. Throughout, she illuminates the startling ways in which the contest over slavery's fate included a western struggle that encompassed diverse labor systems and workers not easily classified as free or slave, black or white.

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Customer Reviews

A pleasure to read. Smith makes a significant contribution to the growing literature on the antebellum West and the complicated story of human bondage that unifies western history with our national history of slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.--Oregon Historical QuarterlyA concise, thoughtful, and well-written work that highlights Californians' lived experiences. . . . A

foundation for future studies of child labor and the exploration of California's contributions to debates over land, labor, gender, and empire in the United States in the 19th century.--Journal of African American HistoryA long overdue and urgently needed synthesis. . . . A splendid example of traditional archival-based historical research.--Journal of Interdisciplinary HistoryRecommended. All levels/libraries.--ChoiceFreedom's Frontier is [not only] thoroughly researched, but it is also well written and a pleasure to read.--Oregon Historical QuarterlyAdds an entirely new dimension to California's history. . . . Recommended for classroom use as well as for researchers and the casual reader interested in California's diverse past.--Colonial Latin American Historical ReviewA welcome addition to both the history of California and the West and to the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction.--Southwestern Historical QuarterlySmith's analysis is cogent and detailed, and her arguments are solid. The book is a welcome addition to both the history of California and the West and to the history of the Civil War and Reconstruction.--Southwestern Historical QuarterlyIndispensable reading for historians of slavery, the Civil War era, and the American West."--Journal of the Civil War EraAn innovative and rigorous study of race, labor, and politics that skillfully addresses and integrates histories of slavery and the American West.--Journal of Southern History

A real winner: ambitious, thoughtful, and splendidly rendered. Smith peels back history to rework the labor landscapes of nineteenth-century California and reintroduce the state into dynamic, Reconstruction-era political and social debates.--William Devereaux, University of Southern CaliforniaIn the history of the clash between North and South, the Golden State has long seemed a world apart. But in Freedom's Frontier, Stacey Smith combines lucid prose, meticulous research, and compelling argument to reveal how the labor of unfree Indians, Chinese, African Americans, and others built a California that has for too long hidden behind its free state myths, even as it shapes modern policies of race and immigration control.--Louis S. Warren, W. Turrentine Jackson Professor of Western U.S. History, University of California, DavisA brilliant and long overdue examination of late-nineteenth-century California's complicated race and labor history. By comparing the stories of bound Native American, African American, Chinese, Latino, and Hawaiian workers, Smith reveals the complexities of California's racial and labor histories and goes even further to demonstrate the larger implications for the California experience for understanding national stories of abolition, emancipation, Reconstruction, and immigration.--Michael Magliari, California State University, Chico

Smith's book offers a fascinating rethinking of Reconstruction and the Age of Emancipation by looking at the battles over "unfree labor" that took place in California from the Gold Rush through Chinese Exclusion. She shows that California was anything but a "free state" and that its diversity of labor systems mattered on the ground in California as well as in national policymaking.

This book provided a lot of good information on California during the Civil War Period and beyond and how its view on race, color, and ethnicity shaped the national debate. My only caveat would be that the editors should have looked more close at the text. A lot of repeat information. So, once you recognize it is a story you read before, just skip over it. Could have saved at least a 1/4 of the book. However, it is worth a read if you are a history buff.

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