across the Atlantic World, black life was ultimately shaped by the cultural confines of the regime in power. Moreover, as the editors assert in the introduction, such an exploration of urban slavery can help scholars further understand the complexity of rural slavery since “urban institutions maintained connections to enslaved people in the countryside, serving as crucial sites for the development and transmission of syncretic cultural traditions” (p. 18). By illuminating the dynamic world of the urban Black Atlantic, this volume will undoubtedly set the agenda for future scholarship on urban slavery and black life in the African diaspora and Atlantic World.

Fernando Purcell, ¡Muchos extranjeros para mi gusto! Mexicanos, chilenos e irlandeses en la construcción de California, 1848–1880 (Mexico City and Santiago: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2016), pp. 251, pb.

The history of the California Gold Rush has attracted widespread attention from chroniclers, public scholars and professional historians, but only a few have looked at it from the perspective of its diverse workforce. In this book, Fernando Purcell offers us a carefully researched and well-written narrative of the history of California from 1848 to 1880, with a particular emphasis on the experience of immigrant workers and communities. Building on transnational historical approaches, migration studies as well as the tools of social history, Purcell tells the compelling story of the many men, and few women, who arrived in the Golden State to search for gold and the material difficulties and embedded racism they encountered. Purcell’s most significant contribution is his analysis of horizontal relationships. To overcome material obstacles and especially discrimination, Purcell argues, non-white immigrant workers such as Mexican and Chilean peons developed horizontal relationships, a complex web of economic, social and cultural inter-exchanges that wove immigrant communities together for decades.

The book is an example of the possibilities of transnational history when brought together with the perspectives and methodologies of social history. Fernando Purcell has a long academic trajectory in social and transnational history. In his research into rural society, migration, the Cold War and the Peace Corps, he has demonstrated that the analysis of the everyday experience of ordinary people offers a unique perspective to comprehend global processes. In Too Many Foreigners, based on his doctoral dissertation (UC Davis, 2004) and an exhaustive analysis of sources including letters, memoirs, newspapers and judicial documents, Purcell reconstructs the transnational history of California from below. With the sensibility of a social historian, he digs deep into archival records and pieces together forgotten stories such as the attack on Chilécito (1849) and the execution of a Mexican woman named Juanita. In his account, the history of the Gold Rush comes to life in the stories of how people navigated differences in race, culture, language and nationality as they followed golden streams.

The book is structured in six chapters, focusing on the experiences of three groups: Chilean, Irish and Mexican nationals. The author starts with a detailed description of how immigrants first heard about the Gold Rush and, then, travelled and settled in northern California. Not only capitalism, the author contends, but also local conditions shaped transnational migration. Chilean entrepreneurs formed companies and
recruited their own work force, but while Chilean labourers sailed north bonded by contract, many broke those ties once they arrived in California. Mexicans from Sonora escaped the semi-colonial and abusive system of work of the hacienda, while the Irish migration was more dispersed and part of the larger diaspora that had started with the potato famine. Next, the author turns to the City of San Francisco, showing the racial conflicts that permeated all social and economic relationships. Life was challenging and violent for most non-white immigrants, far away from the equal society portrayed in frontier accounts. Indeed, white settlers and adventurers resented the presence of non-white immigrants, whom they saw as a competition and obstacle toward their dreams of richness.

Like other nineteenth-century communities, California used the law, the administration of justice and public punishment to establish order. In Chapter 3, the book demonstrates how public executions not only became a public event, but contributed to consolidate white supremacy in California. Purcell’s comparative analysis on how different immigrant groups resisted and adapted to racial discrimination and violence is one of the most compelling sections of the book. In Chapter 5, he develops his central argument: immigrants established horizontal relations and support networks to confront racism and adapt to a society in motion. He presents the case of Chileans and Mexicans, showing how language and religion, as well as similar cultural practices such as gaming, brought the two communities together. However, in the end, it was the common experience of racial discrimination that became the basis of a long-term solidarity.

In the aftermath of the Gold Rush, California was a diverse and multi-ethnic society, but nativism, the influence of Manifest Destiny, racism and violence affected all immigrant groups. Violence also reached those groups who had considered themselves white and tried to adapt and integrate, as was the case for the Irish immigrants. There were ‘too many foreigners for my taste’, wrote John Baker to his wife in 1854, a statement that many still considered true in the 1870s. In the following decades, immigrant communities continued to try to find a place and make a living in a changing economic environment. Pushed to the social and spatial margins of Californian society, non-white immigrants maintained their identity, developed long-term relationships with their home country and confronted racial stereotypes.

In sum, this is a fascinating book, and an English translation would make the book accessible to a wider audience, especially Californian historians. It is a transnational history that tells the story of migration, of how California became a diverse society, how and why workers moved, and how people’s place of origin continued to shape their identity, politics and choices as well as alliances. It is also a social history that reveals how power relations were established in a nineteenth-century frontier society, and how communities of colour navigated an oppressive and discriminatory environment. The book raises many questions for future research. For example, the author barely touches on the question of gender, the experience of women, and the extent to which family and marriage contributed to the process of community formation. Also, his model of horizontal relations could be extended to include the arrival of new immigrant groups such as the Chinese migration in the last decades of the nineteenth century. More importantly, the book tells a story that is relevant today in California, a society that is still battling the legacies of racial violence and inequality.

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