

**Final Sabbatical Report (2019)**  
**Steve Estes “Rebel Swell”**

In the spring of 2019, Sonoma State University granted me a sabbatical to work on a project entitled “Rebel Swell,” which chronicled the history of surfing in the American South. This report outlines the goals that I accomplished during the sabbatical and the impact of this research leave on my teaching in the SSU history department.

Before my sabbatical, I took two research trips throughout the South to interview approximately fifty surfers in seven states. These oral history interviews focused on surfing but also covered many aspects of the interviewees’ lives. The conversations let interviewees ponder the relationship between surfing and southern identity.

During the sabbatical, my first task was to work with a student assistant to transcribe and edit these interviews. This painstaking process took several hundred hours to complete. Once the interviews were transcribed and edited, I used them as the primary source base for two academic essays that I submitted to peer-reviewed journals. One article distilled the insights that I had on using the methodology of oral interviewing to study sports history. I submitted this piece to the *Oral History Review* and presented a version of the methodology analysis at a surf studies conference at San Diego State University in April 2019. I submitted the second essay “Suring in the Sunbelt South” to the *Journal of Southern History*.

While awaiting the peer reviews on these article submissions, I worked on a book manuscript based on the research trips and interviews. Near the end of the summer after my sabbatical, I completed the first draft of that manuscript—tentatively titled “Rebel Swell: A Southern Surf Odyssey”. At just under 100,000 words, this manuscript offers a mix of history, travelogue, and memoir. It is aimed at a popular audience. I added the most polished chapter of this manuscript (one focusing on surfing along Florida’s Space Coast near Cape Canaveral) to a book proposal. A literary agent is reviewing this proposal now. I hope that she will soon shop it around to trade publishers, although I realize that this is an ambitious goal.

The peer reviews for my two article submissions came in near the end of the summer after my sabbatical. Unfortunately, the methodology piece that I hoped would find a home in the *Oral History Review* was rejected by the journal. Although the editor encouraged a resubmission of the piece, the peer reviews made it clear that such a submission would require nearly starting from scratch. By contrast, the reviews for my submission to the *Journal of Southern History* were much more encouraging, requesting modest changes and additions of secondary sources. I am working on those revisions now in the hopes of resubmitting that piece before the end of this semester.

Let me briefly address how the sabbatical informed my teaching at SSU. First, working with a student assistant on the oral history transcription and editing was very rewarding. I am hopeful that my student assistant will go on to grad school (for public policy). Second, the oral history work that I did directly influenced a unit on interviewing in my public history class this semester. Third, I invited a new colleague that I met at the surf studies conference (Kevin Dawson, UC Merced) to speak on campus this semester about his book on swimming, diving, and surfing in the African Diaspora.

Finally, I would like to thank Sonoma State for the opportunity to spend time focused primarily on research. It was an extremely productive and rewarding semester.