

Joss Whedon's *Firefly* series with the evolving ways that science fiction literature, like the New Western History, has examined the social, cultural, and moral complexities of homesteading and planetary colonization.

Filled with insightful readings of a wide variety of texts and suggestive thoughts on the connections between urban, western, and cultural history, *Imagined Frontiers* is a valuable collection of essays. Yet, the disparate nature of the topics undermines the clarity of Abbott's argument. A brief introduction and final chapter on science fiction's engagement with historiography do not unite the essays enough to capture the complexity of his ideas. Still, Abbott has succeeded in showing that the frontier remains a valuable concept with which scholars, like creative artists, should continue to engage.

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As Precious as Blood: The Western Slope in Colorado's Water Wars, 1900–1970. By Steven C. Schulte. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016. xv + 286 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$41.00.)

Steven C. Schulte's *As Precious as Blood* examines the often-bitter twentieth-century controversies that encompassed water resources development in Colorado. In this now familiar theme of contestation over western resources, this study discusses how the "sparsely populated" West Slope fought off continuous attempts by the more "politically powerful" Front Range in its efforts to quench a seemingly never-ending need for water. West Slope political and business leaders put up ferocious defenses against large-scale trans-mountain diversions such as the Colorado–Big Thompson and the Fryingpan–Arkansas projects to ensure water remained

in their region for future growth. Schulte argues that these water wars forced West Slope communities to form their own political and legal institutions to safeguard their rights to waters originating west of the Continental Divide. Schulte notes, however, that sectional unanimity arose to protect Colorado's water resources against the interstate divisions of the Colorado River. Even during these moments of solidarity, the West Slope took the brunt of what it saw as its water being allocated to out-of-state interests. Although continuously threatened by more powerful forces, the West Slope had powerful guardians in congressmen Edward Taylor and Wayne Aspinall. Schulte points out that these powerful congressional leaders ensured that the western Colorado retained some measure of water security, while at the same time protecting Colorado's interests against interstate threats. Not until the late 1960s and early 1970s would Colorado see any semblance of unity in water matters, brought on by the combination of an emerging environmental movement and shrinking federal budgets that practically ended large-scale water resources development.

Despite being the perennial underdogs in Schulte's work, West Slope communities proved incredibly resourceful in protecting their interests. With the help of powerful congressional leadership, western Coloradoans became adept in obtaining some security against the desire of Denverites and other Front Range communities. Less recognized in Schulte's study is the fact that West Slope water users greatly benefited from federal water projects throughout the twentieth century. While the Front Range usually got its way, in terms of trans-basin diversions, the West Slope reaped enormous gains. These accomplishments certainly point to a region that was more than able to stand up to pressures brought by its powerful neighbors. Schulte's

study also shows that gaining these benefits were never easy and that suspicion and envy ruled water development in Colorado. Schulte reminds us that water resources development was a regional affair, where local concerns and desires outweighed broad-based unified efforts. So-called water wars flourished throughout the American West during the twentieth century, as regional sections did battle to obtain water security. While one looks for villains, western recognition of the prior appropriation doctrine fashioned the contentiousness of water development throughout the West. These controversies retarded growth by piecemealing water development projects, creating greater distrust and animosity. Schulte successfully demonstrates that in Colorado the “first in time, first in right” creed enconced in state water laws did exactly this, doing little to bring about a cohesive and unified program of water resources development in the state.

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Eavesdropping on Texas History. Edited by Mary L. Scheer. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2017. 342 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95.)

Who among us has not, at some point or another, wished to be a “fly on the wall” in order to witness some pivotal historical event firsthand and unobtrusively? That is the premise of this interesting volume of collected essays. The editor gathered fifteen notable Texas historians and has allowed them to explore being a hidden observer at several momentous occasions in the past. This entertaining and thought-provoking collection achieves the editor’s stated goal of demonstrating that “history is inherently interesting, intriguing, instructive, and fun”

(p. 1). While one essay is dedicated to trying to answer the perennial question of the exact nature of Davy Crockett’s death at the Alamo in 1836, several of the essays push beyond well-known anecdotes involving famous persons and bring stories from previously marginalized groups into discussion. Was a primordial-looking lake on the Texas-Louisiana border the result of the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811 and 1812 (very recent in geographical time scale) or had it been in existence much longer? What issues weighed most heavily on Texas Governor Sam Houston’s mind as he resolved not to take a loyalty oath to the newly established Confederate States? What really sparked a gun battle on New Year’s Eve, 1877 between a handful of Texas Rangers and former Buffalo Soldiers? Imagine what went through Panhandle citizens’ minds in 1935 as they watched a towering black cloud of eroded soil turn day into night, giving the region the unwanted appellation: “dust bowl” (p. 166). What was it like, in 1946, when a bright, young, African American man presented his application to the University of Texas law school to the university’s president? In this latter instance, the result was the founding of Texas Southern University as a liberal-arts college and professional school (e.g. law and medicine) for blacks in Houston, Texas.

Anthologies like this can be at once entertaining and frustrating. With fourteen chapters, there are many varied topics to appeal to readers. Conversely, readers may wish for fewer chapters in favor of a deeper, more thorough exploration of a given subject. There are also a few problems with consistency of editing and writing styles. However, these are minor detractions; and overall, each essay is well-written, accessible to a wide range of readers, based on primary research, and includes endnotes and a selected bibliography. The inclusion of citations increases this volume’s possible use for classroom instruction, for either secondary or