Recent Books in Review

Contested Boundaries

A New Pacific Northwest History

DAVID J. JEPSEN AND DAVID J. NORBERG

(Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley and Sons, 2017. xxi, 392 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. $34.95)

This book certainly fills a void. The second edition of the classic *Empire of the Columbia: A History of the Pacific Northwest,* by Dorothy O. Johansen and Charles M. Gates, appeared in 1967, and the revised edition of Carlos A. Schwantes's *Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History,* in 1996, more than two decades ago. *Contested Boundaries* lacks the ambition and interpretive sweep of these earlier works, but it is a serviceable survey.

The book is not very focused. As its title implies, the organizing theme of *Contested Boundaries* is that the Pacific Northwest has been characterized by struggles over "political, economic, and social barriers" (p. xx). The theme surfaces repeatedly throughout the volume but is so broad that it could describe most any historical development or interaction in any North American region. Indeed, the authors are much more concerned with conveying factual information than with supporting an interpretive thread, a weakness exacerbated by the lack of a conclusion. Demanding readers may be left wondering what all of these facts and stories add up to and what, if anything, has set the Pacific Northwest apart from other regions. This book sticks with the standard definition of the Pacific Northwest as comprising Washington, Oregon, and Idaho without making much of a case for it. British Columbia has arguably had more in common with Washington and Oregon than Idaho has.

The coverage is uneven. Washington receives a great deal of attention, Idaho very little. In a book of well over 300 pages, there is little or no treatment of the social and economic elements of settlement or early mining, a development that was particularly important for Idaho. One chapter ends with Indian treaties from the 1850s. The next starts with transcontinental railroads. The chapter on the last half of the 20th century has a fine treatment of Latinos and other people of color but not much else. The introduction notes that the book "is a hybrid that merges an edited collection of essays with elements of a traditional text" without explaining why the authors attempted this awkward marriage (p. xx).

But the volume is well written and engaging. Chapters begin with telling vignettes that draw the reader into their themes. The authors commonly provide a national context for the region's history. Chapters end with extended treatments of particular people or developments, such as Sacagawea and the building of the Hoover Dam. The book features nearly one hundred illustrations and has a strong bibliography as well as extensive notes. The index is detailed.

Contested Boundaries does not fully realize the promise of its subtitle: *A New Pacific Northwest History.* It breaks little if any new ground, interpretive or otherwise. Specialists in the region's history will learn little that they did not already know and are not challenged to think about the region in new ways. But in a more literal sense, this is, in fact, a new history inasmuch as it incorporates the substantial scholarship that has appeared in the past two decades as well as a strong closing chapter on the 21st century. People of color, especially, and women receive extended treatment. The book also includes features that younger students of history will appreciate, such as liberal illustrations and timelines. It is available as an e-text.

This book is seldom more than the sum of its parts, and it lacks the intellectual and interpretive heft of its distinguished predecessors. But it is a useful and welcome survey.

David Peterson del Mar
Portland State University

Nature's Burdens

Conservation and American Politics, the Reagan Era to the Present

DANIEL NELSON

(Logan: Utah State University Press, 2017. x, 312 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. $31.95)

Nature's Burdens is the latest work exploring the aftermath of America's postwar environmental awakening. Older scholarship tends to portray things like the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the creation of new national parks as largely unambiguous triumphs after years of activism. But the devil is in the execution, and Daniel Nelson is interested in the fate of those conservation victories, especially in wilderness preservation,

forestry, national parks, and wildlife management. What happened after the great greening of the 1960s? The short answer is a general defense of previous gains and the birth of new motivations and strategies in the midst of a determined antienvironmental backlash.

Three broad developments marked conservation history in the late 20th century, Nelson argues. First, environmentalists "successfully defended the legal status quo" from vigorous challenges by the resources industry and ideologically conservative allies, and even strengthened the status quo in some cases. "The legacy of the 1960s and 1970s proved to be as resilient as the heartiest of threatened species," Nelson writes, even if it did not always feel that way to conservationists in the moment (p. 8). Second, scientists brought new arguments for biodiversity to battles over wilderness preservation, stressing large protected areas connected to one another and repopulated with predators ("cores, corridors, and carnivores," in a popular shorthand phrase). Third, private efforts at preserving landscapes and ecosystems emerged to complement official ones. The federal government originally provided not only the tools but also many of the rationales for, and much of the energy of, land conservation. But the Reagan administration and its allies forced environmentalists to adjust. Thus emerged new tools like the conservation easement and the land conservancy, whose successes paled in comparison to the federal efforts but were hardly inconsequential.

Nature's Burdens is a work of synthesis, drawing almost exclusively on secondary sources. Nevertheless, its coverage is impressive, as Nelson ranges from Alaska to the Everglades in tracing political debates and bureaucratic wrangling over the fate of wilderness surveys, roadless areas, buffer zones around national parks, fire-suppression policy, and on and on. Readers of this journal will appreciate the Pacific Northwest's large role in the book, as the fate of the famous Alaska wilderness bill, redwoods, spotted owls, and the Tongass National Forest feature prominently. Nor does Nelson forget the East, offering an extended analysis of preservation debates in the Adirondack Mountains. In the end, Nelson's take on the era is largely positive. The future is another matter, however, as climate change threatens to nullify even the most stirring of conservationist victories.

Graduate students and specialists in American environmentalism will appreciate Nelson's work as a "one-stop" resource for late-century conservation efforts. One of its particular strengths is the way *Nature's Burdens* enhances our understandings of modern wilderness debates. Older critiques of wilderness have accused modern preservationists of uncritically rehashing old "virgin land" stereotypes and ignoring the legacy of Native Americans, poor people, and others. But this is an accusation that has never quite meshed with the lived experience of most of those activists. However the myth of virgin wilderness might have shaped them, pragmatism has always been their main concern. Nelson's detailed analysis of scientists' role in wilderness preservation is a great example. Conservation biologists spent little if any time defending "untouched" wilderness; on the contrary, they accepted active management of wilderness as vital to the preservation of biodiversity. Meanwhile, other champions of wilderness dealt with the practical issues of boundaries, private inholdings, fire management, grazing, timber, mining, and so on. For these activists, the virgin-wilderness ship sailed long ago, a fact not always appreciated by scholars unfamiliar with the movement's more recent history.

Brian Allen Drake
University of Georgia

Shaping the Public Good

Women Making History in the Pacific Northwest

SUE ARMITAGE

(Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2015. 349 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. $22.95)

Throughout history women have played a pivotal role in the formation of culture and society. In *Shaping the Public Good,* Sue Armitage beautifully illustrates the contributions of women to the evolution of Pacific Northwest history. The book takes readers from the precontact period to the present, providing fresh insight into the untold stories of women who helped form the societies and cultures that make up this beautiful region. The author aims to shift contemporary understanding that women were minor characters in the making of this region when in fact they were major influences.

Armitage begins the book with an analysis of the contributions of early Native women. "Scholars who have studied the Native groups of the Pacific Northwest," Armitage points out, "generally agree that equality, or more accurately, complementarity, was the rule" (p. 34). Unfortunately, this stood in stark contrast to the dominant European perspective of women as subservient to men, leading to cultural conflicts when settlers and missionaries arrived in the region.

The book then moves on to the growth of the Pacific Northwest as settlers flooded the area and the sometimes devastating impact this influx had on local Native communities. Interestingly, Armitage explains, though thousands of settlers arrived in the 19th century, many experienced culture shock when encountering local Native inhabitants. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties of an ever-changing society, through industrialization and the modern era, women, "each in their own sometimes conflicting ways, worked to