

Add “This America of Ours,” “White People on Vacation” and more to your TBR shelf this month

By **SANDRA DALLAS** | The Denver Post
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“This America of Ours,” by Nate Schweber (Mariner Books)

It’s a pity that Bernard DeVoto is all but forgotten today. A Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, DeVoto was, in the words of his biographer Nate Schweber, a “conservationist . . . teacher, free thinker, fighter, patriot.” DeVoto, he writes, was also “flawed, brilliant, provocative, outrageous, running scared all his life, often wrong, often spectacularly right, always stimulating, sometimes infuriating, and never, never dull.”

The same might be said for Schweber’s “This America of Ours.” Readers will be angered and appalled at how without DeVoto’s crusades, we might have lost much of our national spaces to land-grabbers.

A prodigious writer, DeVoto penned prize-winning history books, but his all-but-forgotten legacy was really in conservation. He exposed the chicaneries of corrupt politicians, who sold off public lands to their cronies. DeVoto’s opposition engendered the wrath of J. Edgar Hoover, Joe McCarthy and other prominent government and political figures. His final fight was against the Echo Park Dam. DeVoto won, and that led to the 1964 Wilderness Act.

DeVoto’s wife, Avis, was equally committed to conservation. She edited her husband’s writings and accompanied him on fact-finding trips. She entertained influential politicians at fabulous dinners that she cooked. It is ironic that Avis’ cooking may have made her more famous today than her husband. She was best friends with Julia Child and helped with Child’s French cookbook. Avis is a character in the Meryl Streep movie about Child.

“This America of Ours” shines light on one of America’s most revered conservationists and his fight against those who would destroy our public lands. The book emphasizes that those lands are not sacrosanct. Under the Trump administration, huge swaths of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments were removed from federal protection. DeVoto’s fight goes on.

“Communities of Ludlow,” edited by Fawn-Amber Montoya and Karin Larkin (University Press of Colorado)

Tourists intrigued by a highway informational sign about the Ludlow Massacre were sometimes disappointed when they arrived at the site to find out it wasn’t an Indian massacre but instead was where there was a deadly labor fight, writes a Colorado State University educator in “Communities of Ludlow.”

In fact, the 1914 Ludlow Massacre was the murder of two women and 11 children in a Southern Colorado labor war. The dead, hiding in a cellar under a tent, were asphyxiated and burned after members of the Colorado National Guard fired on a camp of striking coal miners.

Ludlow became an “icon of industrial conflict and a rallying call,” writes editor Karin Larkin. The strike marked “a turning point in the struggle for union recognition.”

“Communities of Ludlow” is both a history of the conflict and an attempt to bring contemporary recognition to Ludlow and its impact on the American labor movement. The Ludlow Centennial Commemoration Commission has restored the vandalized site, collected personal stories of massacre descendants and is educating the public on both Ludlow and labor history. The commission hopes its work will attract more tourists to Ludlow.

Much of “Communities of Ludlow” is dry stuff about the organization of the commission. What makes the book compelling are the stories of the strike participants. Linda Linville tells of her grandmother, Cedilena Costa. Cedi rallied women to support the strikers and refused to leave Ludlow and seek safety. Because she remained behind, both she and two of her children were killed.

Mary Petrucci survived but lost her children. She and her husband managed to put their lives back together after the strike and start a second family.

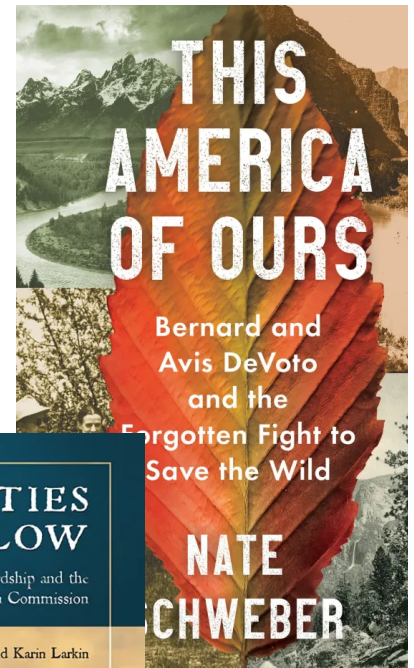
“White People on Vacation,” by Alex Miller (Malarkey Books)

So what does a jaded foursome of self-indulgent college seniors do when they’re bored? They go to Hawaii, of course.

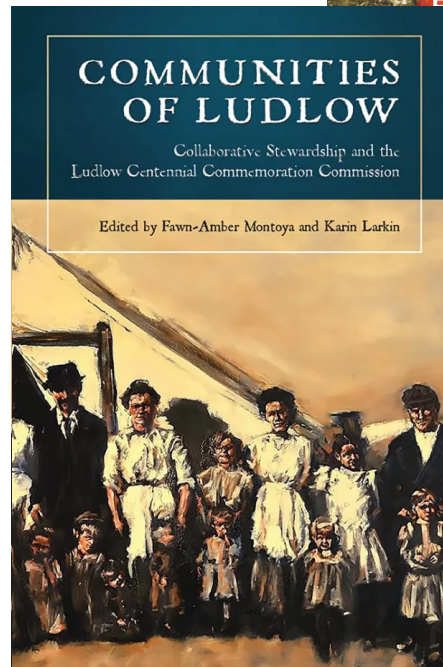
Avril vaguely expects to save the world. Foul-talking Roger hopes to hook up. Natalie and Nate, a couple since junior high, want to enjoy life on her rich father’s credit card. Little wonder things fall apart on vacation in this insightful novel about the current generation of twenty-somethings.

Nate is the narrator in Colorado author Alex Miller’s insightful “White People on Vacation.” Nate’s about to graduate but has no idea what he wants to do with his life. After all their years together, he’s bored with Natalie, whose main interest besides spending money is playing Candy Crush on her iPhone. After Natalie ignores him to flirt with a bunch of beach bums, Nate turns to Avril and, well, you can figure out what happens. Meanwhile, Roger disses the natives while checking out every girl he encounters, including Natalie.

Miller writes about what the publisher calls “a generation struggling to live meaningfully in the era of late-stage capitalism.” Maybe it is, but Miller’s strength is in portraying a group of entitled collegians who expect to find the good life amid the sun and surf, the sex and booze and drugs of a wonderland vacation. So much for meaningful.



Mariner Books)



Communities of Ludlow (University Press of Colorado)

