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,