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Review of *Politics in the Postwar American West* edited by Richard Lowitt

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This volume is a welcome addition to the sparse literature on western politics. Its approach is threefold. First, it views postwar western politics from a historical perspective as opposed to that of political science or economics; and editor Richard Lowitt has gathered together mostly historians to write the chapters. Second, instead of examining western politics comparatively by themes or by major events affecting political developments, the book unfolds state by state. There are a total of nineteen chapters coinciding with the volume’s definition of the West as the nineteen states from the Great Plains to the Pacific Ocean, including Alaska and Hawaii. Third, in most cases the chapters examine a specific aspect of the state or a central event as opposed to attempting an overall assessment of state politics since 1945. The chapter on Alaska, for example, considers the interaction between oil companies and environmentalists; the chapter on Nevada looks at the gaming industry and politics; and the Wyoming chapter examines the role of the media in politics in a state where politics is of the “friends and neighbors” variety afforded by a small state population. Some chapters, such as those on North and South Dakota and on Oklahoma, take a broader perspective, however, and attempt to cover basic themes in state politics.

The approach has both strengths and weaknesses. For the most part, the chapters are well written and offer interesting insights into each state’s postwar politics. Some authors of narrowly focused chapters, moreover, do attempt to place their subjects in the broader context of state politics since 1945. The chapters on Montana and Washington are particularly credible in this regard.
If, however, the book's intended readership is the academic community, both scholars and students, its weaknesses outweigh its strengths. It exhibits many of the problems of edited volumes: without a central theme or organizing principle, it becomes no more than a set of disparate essays on largely unrelated topics, some so narrowly focused that their relation to the broader developments of western politics is never clear. At a minimum the editor could have offered an introductory chapter to apprise the reader of the major developments in western politics during the period, linking these to the subjects and observations in the various chapters. Furthermore, what many scholars consider the major political developments in the region since 1945 are either ignored or only cursorily touched on. These include the weakening of political parties; an increase in professionalism in politics among elected and appointed officials, coupled with an erosion of personalized or "friends and neighbors" politics as state populations increase; the changing role of federal-state relations; the massive expansion in the role of state governments, coupled with increased interstate cooperation; and the increased role of minority groups. Admittedly, the book does not claim to be a comprehensive look at major developments in western politics since 1945. But the title, *Politics in the Postwar American West*, does lead one to believe that the book is more than it turns out to be. **Clive S. Thomas**, *Department of Political Science, University of Alaska, Juneau.*