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## Review of The American West: A Twentieth-Century History.

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*The American West: A Twentieth-Century History.* By Michael P. Malone and Richard W. Etulain. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989. Introduction, illustrations, bibliographic essays, index. 347 pp. \$31.50 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

"This is a little book about a big subject," wrote Gerald Nash in his introduction to *The American West in the Twentieth Century* (1973). Thanks to Michael Malone and Richard Etulain, we now have a second book on the same subject. The century is more advanced, but their volume is no bigger. Yet within the limits of a relatively brief text, the authors have provided us with an impressive survey of the region.

For Malone and Etulain, the West begins at the 98th meridian. The plains states are included in their analysis, while Alaska and Hawaii are not. The seventeen states share a common history, they suggest, which includes the dilemma of colonialism, the presence of large blocks of federal land, and the existence of a frontier past. The authors divide their study into seven chapters. Two chapters on the politics and economy of the first and last three decades are the bookends; in between are sections on the era from 1930 to 1945, social patterns, and culture in the West since World War II.

As with Nash's book, California casts a considerable shadow in *The American West*. There is, however, a conscientious effort made to present a more balanced regional coverage. Those with a particular interest in a particular state other than California may still feel their topic has received insufficient attention. The Plains were almost invisible in Nash's work; they emerge here, at least from time to time. Students of Indian, Mexican American, Mormon, or other group histories may also be grumpy, but in a volume of this scope such complaints are inevitable.

More appropriate criticisms may be lodged about the authors' reflections about certain subjects. Malone has been especially interested in

political and economic history and Etulain in cultural history. In these realms, they seem generally to be on sure ground. On such matters as Indian history there are more likely to be tremors of insecurity. Thus we read that the "Indians no longer roamed free," or were confined to "forlorn reservations," or possess a "tragic history."

It would be impossible to furnish a comprehensive study of the West, but there are several subjects altogether ignored. Frank Lloyd Wright is credited with a quotation about California, yet architecture is not mentioned. Film, music, and sports—all obviously central to the modern western scene—are also omitted.

A final issue which must be raised concerns the segregation of different groups from patterns of social, political, and economic development. Indians and other groups, ideally, ought to be incorporated into those more general discussions, for they share frequently in common dilemmas and aspirations.

*The American West* is nonetheless a fair and far-reaching synthesis. It is clearly the best single volume available on its subject. Malone and Etulain treat difficult topics in even-handed and often insightful fashion. And the book includes excellent bibliographical essays, well chosen photographs, and instructive tables. The O'Keeffe work, "From the Plains I," was a splendid choice for the cover. The next time I teach my course on the Twentieth Century West I will be glad to be able to have *The American West* available for required reading.

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