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Review of *Researching Western History: Topics in the Twentieth Century*, Gerald D. Nash and Richard W. Etulain, eds.

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Researching Western History: Topics in the Twentieth Century. Edited by Gerald D. Nash and Richard W. Etulain. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997. Notes, bibliographical references, index. ix + 220 pp. \$50.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Between bookend pieces by Earl Pomeroy and Gene M. Gressley, this anthology of hopes comprises essays on economic history by Gerald D. Nash, environmental history by Thomas R. Cox, urban history by Roger W. Lotchin, political history by Robert W. Cherny, women's history by Glenda Riley, cultural history (mainly literature) by Richard W. Etulain, and mythic history (mainly film) by Fred Erisman. The authors vary in the degree to which they emphasize historiography (what already has been done) or the historical agenda (what they think ought to be done), but the formula is much the same throughout: scan the recent literature on the twentieth-century West, then point to the holes in it. The expectation seems to be that soldiers will rush in to fill them like the First Minnesota at the Peach Orchard.

Which they may, though recent history does not indicate History moves that way. Nash and Etulain introduce the volume with comments about the striking developments in the general field since 1960, asking, "What influences brought about these changes?" Public pessimism, social consciousness, and literary deconstruction, they answer. Notice they do not say that a generation ago a group of far-sighted scholars got together and told the field where it should go. Without gainsaying the creditable works of the essayists here represented, I think the record shows that History will move according to the same moon and stars that have moved it heretofore: the requirements of changing societies and the idiosyncrasies of passionate scholars.

Scholars of the Great Plains will take particular interest in Etulain's essay in which he both chronicles and extends the concept of regionalism. Regionalists in their pre-World War II heyday, he notes, "strove to show how

postfrontier western settings and experiences shaped the histories and lives of westerners." After the war, however, the country entered the period of postregionalism, a time of "neither frontier nor region" and a multiplicity of voices. Notable also was the rise of "western subregionalism" that "counter[ed] the tendency of other scholars to homogenize the West into one sprawling region." Logically, this was the period in which four university centers for the study of the Great Plains were established. Still another notable point of Etulain's piece is his call for international comparative work—work that transcends the constraints of the old comparative-frontiers approach and that boasts archival research at both ends of the comparison (a rare attribute indeed).

The rationale for *Researching Western History* may be unduly positivist, but it is a useful work, and one that graduate students cramming for comps will bless.

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