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Review of *One West, Two Myths: A Comparative Reader* Edited by Carol Higham and Robert Thacker

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One West, Two Myths: A Comparative Reader. Edited by Carol Higham and Robert Thacker. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2004. xxi + 183 pp. Notes, index. \$44.95 paper.

Collectively the eight essays in *One West, Two Myths* provide readers with a solid introduction to the comparative approach to historical study. The forty-ninth parallel serves as the volume's focus. And though the surrounding region has had, and retains, certain social, cultural, and economic commonalities, the book clearly argues that the international border is real and meaningful—despite its geographical arbitrariness.

The lead essays, by three senior historians of the Canadian and American Great Plains (Elliot West, Donald Worster, and Gerald Freisen) provide what are essentially historiographical engagements with the region as viewed through the prisms of social geography, the myth of development, and the NAFTA agreement, respectively. In three of the volume's subsequent case studies, Beth LaDow, Michel Hogue, and Sheila McManus place race at the center of their analyses to show the significance of the "medicine line" not only in the policies of the U.S. and Dominion governments, but in the political/economic strategies of various indigenous people.

Indigenous agency and colonial manipulation get balanced treatment in discussions

of Sioux and Métis spaces of sanctuary and oppression (LaDow), cross-border Cree travails (Hogue), and Blackfoot displacement (McManus). Following these, Molly Rozum and Peter Morris critically engage aspects of the history of newcomer settler communities in their chapters “‘The Spark That Jumped the Gap’: North America’s Northern Plains and the Experience of Place” and “Fort MacLeod of the Borderlands: Using the Forty-Ninth Parallel on Southern Alberta’s Ranching Frontier.”

The editors refer to the volume as an “appetizer,” and undergraduates should find the lucid writing of all the authors, especially Beth LaDow’s skillful turns of phrase, both engaging and inspiring. Hungry readers, however, should know that “West” here is very much defined as east of the Rockies and west of the Mississippi and Hudson’s Bay. The Pacific Slope is generally omitted, as is the Arctic, and this latter instance is especially odd given how the book’s introduction points out that within Canadian historiography “north” came for a while to be synonymous with the Turnarian notion of the American “frontier.” In this light, the absence of a reference to Walter Sage’s seminal 1928 essay “Some Aspects of the Frontier in Canadian History” is as puzzling as is the lack of citation of the anti-Turnarian ideas posited by Earl Pomeroy in his 1955 classic “Toward a Reorientation of [American] Western History: Continuity and Environment.”

Moreover, in setting up the Metropolitan thesis as the principal historical foil of the Frontier thesis, the editors miss the opportunity to introduce readers to the subfield of western cultural history known as the “myth and symbol school.” The ongoing popular appeal of frontier mythology, despite the thesis’s rejection as a genuine explanation for western historical experience, has spawned a rich and genuinely fun-to-read body of scholarship. The inclusion of one or two additional essays that engaged this literature by contrasting, say, the manifestation of cowboy mythology at the Calgary stampede with its use in recent White House foreign policy statements, or the juxtaposed notions of masculinity among prairie cowboys, West Coast

loggers, and Arctic miners, might have given the collection the appeal of a buffet sampler rather than an appetizer alone.

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