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Review of *Historians and the American West* Edited by Michael P. Malone

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BOOK REVIEWS

Historians and the American West. Edited by Michael P. Malone, Foreword by Rodman W. Paul. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983. Index. x + 449 pp. \$24.95.

The seventeen essays in this volume are intended, as Michael Malone says, "to describe what has been done, how well it has been done, and what needs to be done" in western American history. Historians will no doubt approach them as a comprehensive assessment of western historiography, but many *Great Plains Quarterly* readers will come to them as I have, in search of a research tool for the nonspecialist with a limited range of questions to which the historians may have answers.

Together the essays provide an invaluable guide for the nonspecialist, but some offer clearer guidance than others. While all are bibliographically copious, the volume is "not meant to be an annotated bibliography," and the essays that make their subjects most accessible are those that go furthest in providing conceptual frameworks, in defining issues, and in selecting and evaluating available writings.

The nonspecialist, of course, requires more guidance than may be welcomed by the historian. Herbert T. Hoover's "American Indians from Prehistoric Times to the Civil War," for example, provides a comprehensible path through Indian history, well marked by his frank assessments of the writings. Dennis E. Berge gives dramatic shape to his "Manifest Destiny and the Historians" by analyzing (rather than describing) contending positions in the debate over the subject. Kenneth N. Owens, in "Government and Politics in the Nineteenth-Century West," is particularly helpful in providing a sense of the complex history lying behind the historiography. W. Turrentine Jackson, in "Transportation in the American West," identifies standard works, indispensable

sources, and reading with which the student should begin.

Richard Etulain's "Shifting Interpretations of Western Cultural History" and Frederick Luebke's "Ethnic Minority Groups in the American West" stand out among the most helpful of those guides. Luebke's essay is especially notable for its lucid conceptual framework and Etulain's for its rigorous selection, which relegates much of its bibliographical fullness to footnotes.

Some of the essays are disappointing to the nonspecialist. Gilbert Fite's "The American West of Farmers and Stockmen" provides bibliography but little analysis or assessment. Gordon Dodd's "The Fur Trade and Exploration" and Clark Spence's "Western Mining" clearly emphasize the principal works but could have offered more analysis of the issues. Donald Cutter's "The Western Spanish Borderlands" could have done with more selection and assessment. F. Alan Coombs's "Twentieth-Century Politics" leaves no clear idea of the issues to be addressed, while William Lang's "Using and Abusing Abundance" identifies no issues except the obvious ones. Sandra Myres's "Women in the West" leaves the disappointing impression that there is not yet much to be said on the subject.

The choice of seventeen topics to represent the proper divisions of western historiography must be, in itself, one of the most important statements this volume makes about western history, and the choice of topics also determines how conveniently a user can be guided to appropriate readings. The remaining essays in the volume are Robert Carriker's "The American Indian . . . to the Present," Richard Maxwell Brown's "Historiography of Violence," Bradford Luckingham's "The Urban Dimension of Western History," and Thomas Alexander's "Toward the New Mormon History."

Assessments of how thorough these seventeen essays are, how penetrating their analyses, how reliable their judgments, and how original their formulations of the historiographic questions involved I will leave to specialists in the field.

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