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Review of *Atlas of the New West: Portrait of a  
Changing Region* Edited by William Riebsame with  
maps by James Robb

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**Atlas of the New West: Portrait of a Changing Region.** Edited by William Riebsame with maps by James Robb. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997. 192 pp. Notes, maps, index. \$35.00 cloth (ISBN 0-393-04550-1).

What do Dallas, Los Angeles, Omaha, and Seattle have in common? All are situated outside the New West, according to the creators of the *Atlas of the New West*. Should readers of *Great Plains Research* bother with this latest entry into the New Western genre? Yes. The book's effort to come to an understanding of a contemporary, identifiable region of the United States is commendable. Anyone interested in the study of western history and culture will find something to add to his or her understanding of the western region in this atlas. On the other hand, many readers will quibble with the boundaries established by contributors (after much wrangling, according to the editor), which hug the front range of the Rocky Mountains in the east and run along the crest of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the west, thus excluding the entire Plains region as well as the central valley of California and the

entire Pacific coast. The volume leaves out many self-identified "western" people and regions.

The atlas originated out of a sense of loss felt by the editor and contributors over the west's "fast-paced, place-uprooting, and disquieting transformation." The region's "newfound, upscale trappings" left them perturbed and anxious. At first the eclectic group of scholar gathered and exchanged "droll" musings. As the project matured, it "took on a seriousness of purpose well wide of its genesis" (12-13).

Opening the volume and setting its boundaries is Charles Wilkinson's essay, "Paradise Revised." Wilkinson, defining the West in the traditional Webbian way as beginning at the "line of aridity" at the 100th meridian, addresses many of the atlas's themes, including issues involving the environment, Native Americans, urban centers, and land use. He also exemplifies the personal involvement the contributors feel with the New West, the anecdotal "I" appearing regularly.

Following Wilkinson's essay, forty-six maps, twenty original photographs, and text appear in seven chapters. Cartographers define the region in the first chapter through maps in the traditional vein of topography and population density, providing the justification for the atlas's focus on the "interior" or "intermountain" West, a region of "blank spaces," low population densities, and few metropolitan centers. Wilkinson's essay had previously mentioned the New West's ruralness as a formative characteristic, on a level with its neighbor to the east, the Great Plains, the two "most rural areas in the continental United States" (27). The blank space theme continues in the second chapter, "Infrastructure for the New West," which identifies the region as a "corporate void," generally lacking in Fortune 500 firms and dependent on capital from outside the area. Maps in this chapter depict such information as the region's Internet connections, the location and number of private jet airports, and the more prosaic occurrence of roads and highways. The third chapter, "Water for the New West," describes the predominantly dry region and the reclamation efforts to "quench" the thirst and "drench" the fields. In this chapter, "Jurassic Pork" refers to a proposed reclamation project in the Four Corners territory that links traditional Bureau of Reclamation initiatives with Native American water rights. Subsequent chapters address demographics ("People in the New West"); culture and lifestyles, including a map indicating the number and location of micro breweries ("New West Lifestyles"); pollution and hazardous waste sites ("The Ugly West"); and issues related to the Sagebrush Rebellion, contemporary local control, and "county supremacy" movements ("Visions for the Next West"). The last chapter also discusses "A Wild Future" for the New

West, examining the sometimes fractious politics of environmental protection and preservation.

The book concludes with Patricia Nelson Limerick's "The Shadows of Heaven Itself," its title taken from a 1994 pastoral letter by Denver archbishop Francis Stafford. Limerick describes the New West as largely a creation of Babyboomers acting out their childhood Cassidy-Rogers-Autry fantasies. She also addresses the traditional image of the West as a remedy for society's ills, with the New West region now in need of a remedy itself. New Age practitioners, most likely at home in the New West, speak explicitly in terms of remedies and, as the reader might expect, fall victim to Limerick's sharp wit.

The most glaring criticism of the atlas is, of course, its boundary. Many western residents and regions, absolutely convinced of their western status, are left out. The atlas admirably describes the interior portion of the New West, but never convincingly explains its rationale for excluding so much. **Michael F. Logan**, *Department of History, Oklahoma State University*.