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Review of *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century* by West. Gerald D. Nash

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The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West. Gerald D. Nash. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999. xv+214pp. Notes, references, index. \$40.00 cloth (ISBN 0-8165-1863-7), \$17.95 paper (ISBN 0-8165-1988-9).

Without question, the federal government created the twentieth-century West. It built dams and distributed water to farmers and urbanites, constructed federal highways that permitted the development of the region's natural resources, established navy, army, and air force installations, and provided contracts for the post-World War II military-industrial complex and aerospace industry. By so doing, the federal government made an indelible imprint on the Western landscape, in much contrast to the nineteenth century when individual enterprise gave the region its economic, social, and political identity.

Gerald Nash has written an excellent survey of the economic history of the twentieth-century West. By relying on the theoretical constructs of Nicolae Kondratieff and Joseph Schumpeter, who argued that economic change occurs in waves as particular innovations drive the development of a society until new inventions replace them, Nash has given system and order to the complex development of a region rich in natural and human resources.

He begins his study by tracing the federal contribution to the West's transportation infrastructure that began with the Highway Act of 1916 which helped integrate the region into the national economy. He also surveys the investment and regulatory role of the federal government during the 1930s as it introduced a host of economic relief and recovery programs. Nash considers World War II the great watershed in the economic relationship between the federal government and the West. During the war years, the federal government invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the defense industry, created tens of thousands of jobs, and helped change the West from a colony of the East, based on extractive industries, to a technologically oriented region and economy dependent on federal expenditures. After the war, the federal government further changed the Western landscape by fostering a construction boom through the Federal Housing Authority as well as creating scientific and industrial parks, often linked with universities. After the 1960s, its reliance on the computer chip contributed to the federal government's support of the aerospace, defense, and computer industries that drove the economy for the remainder of the century. Nash concludes that federal investment created an economy that could not have

emerged from private capital investment alone. Instead, the twentieth-century West was a complicated mix of government and private enterprise.

Today it is impossible to view the West without seeing the imprint of the federal government in the form of cities, national parks, military installations, and research and development centers. Given Nash's systematic description and analysis of the economic development of the region, it would be hard to argue that the West was not a creation of the federal government. Anyone interested in the American West will find this economic overview an essential place to begin. **R. Douglas Hurt**, *Department of History, Iowa State University*.