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## **Review of *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* by William Wyckoff**

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**Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940.** William Wyckoff. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. xiv+336 pp. Figures, maps, photos, notes, bibliographical references, index. \$35.00 cloth.

The history of Colorado has been well portrayed, but most often in geographical bits and pieces. What has been missing from this literature is a comprehensive view of how these constituents coalesce into a coherent picture of the formation and evolution of the state's geography of human production, settlement, movement, power, and meaning. William Wyckoff's *Creating Colorado* provides a panoptic view of Colorado's geographical history rendered in broad strokes and a fluid, eloquent prose.

Concentrating on the years 1860 to 1940, Wyckoff organizes his study around the genesis and development of five distinctive regions within the state; the themes of location, place, and landscape figure prominently within each of the regional chapters. Wyckoff examines the social attributes and landscape features of particular places and regions, at the same time situating each region in relation to expanding transportation and communication

networks and to social, economic, and political forces operating on broader scales.

After a brief overview of the human and physical geography of the pre-1860 period, Wyckoff examines the creation of new mountain geographies—a process based entirely on the rush to extract the mineral resources of the Rocky Mountains—exploring with care the boom and bust character of Colorado's mining industry, the ebb and flow of mining settlements, and the dramatic impact mining had on the natural landscape. Next, he discusses the piedmont heartland where the state's major cities arise in close association with mountain development. Detailing the emergence of Denver and Pueblo as centers of trade and industry, the author also includes a look at the process of rural settlement in the northern part of the piedmont, paying particular attention to the importance of agricultural colonies and their irrigation schemes.

The remaining three regions are dealt with in a somewhat more abbreviated manner. Wyckoff's chapter on the eastern Plains focuses on the division of the rural landscape into two types: a densely settled zone of irrigated agriculture in the river valleys, and a more lightly settled zone of drought-plagued dry land farming in the uplands. The southern periphery chapter delves into the Spanish and Mexican heritage of the San Luis Valley, examining the transformation of that earlier cultural landscape as Anglo farmers and merchants reshaped the valley in the late nineteenth century, as well as the creation of the state's coal mining belt near Trinidad and Walsenburg. Finally, the chapter on the western slope offers an extended treatment of the violent story of Native American removal and then details the creation of a new landscape of agriculture and farm support towns based upon federally-sponsored irrigation projects.

One might quibble with some of these regional designations; for instance, is there really a piedmont region or is it simply fabricated to keep Denver and its front range urban neighbors from being lumped into the less glamorous Great Plains? Overall, however, Wyckoff's study is remarkably inclusive, successfully resisting the tendency to collapse Colorado history as a whole into the history of mountain-based mining and recreation, thereby giving less well-known parts of the state their due. The book is carefully researched and nicely illustrated with maps, historical photographs, and drawings.

*Creating Colorado* makes an important contribution to the study of the Centennial State and the American West, one that builds upon recent work in environmental history that puts the capitalist exploitation of nature at the center of the story. Wyckoff may not provide an extended engagement with

the conceptual issues surrounding the study of the West's resource-based capitalism in the manner of William Robbins or Donald Worster, but he does provide a rich and detailed analysis of the new social and spatial character imposed upon the region as it was incorporated into an expanding global economic system during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. **Brian Page**, *Department of Geography, University of Colorado at Denver*.