

BOOK REVIEWS

So Rugged and Mountainous: Blazing the Trails to Oregon and California, 1812-1848. By Will Bagley. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. Bibliography, illustrations, maps, index, and notes. xv + 458 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Barry Alan Joyce, Associate Professor of History, University of Delaware.

Some stories, it seems, never grow old, especially those so woven into the American mythic fabric as the tale of westward movement. Will Bagley has parlayed his National Park Service research into the initial volume of a compendious four-volume study of the trails leading to Oregon and California in the nineteenth century. Volume One--*So Rugged and Mountainous: Blazing the Trails to Oregon and California; 1812-1848*--details the whys and hows of the opening act in this great American saga. Bagley's goal is to "recast the tale in a new and more complete fashion," (p. xvii) by providing a reinterpretation of the classic American migration epic. To do so, he references many new trail narratives that, according to the author, were unknown to historians before 1988. These accounts, as well as his attempt to place "previously neglected people" such as American Indians and migrants of color "at the center of trail history," attest to his desire to compose a richer history of this migration west. While few new ideas are actually posited in this work--western historiography, after all, has undergone a transformation in the twenty-three years since those new narratives surfaced--Bagley's well written volume is not without considerable merit. Weighing in at 458 pages, *So Rugged and Mountainous* is a valuable reference work for students of the American West, as well as for history buffs who never tire of rereading the tales of the great American migration.

Bagley sets the scene for the development of these trails, then proceeds year by year through the 1840s, with occasional chapters sandwiched between the chronology on topics such as Conestoga wagon design and debates over of the efficacy of horses versus oxen. A clear message emerges from Bagley's story: today's readers are incapable of comprehending the risks and challenges weighed and considered by those first migrants who blazed the trail. Virtually nothing was known about routes, available supplies, distances from point to point, topography, and, if they succeeded in traversing the continent, what awaited them in Oregon or California. In fact, the concept of "blazing" a single trail is a misnomer. Instead, the movement west should best be characterized as an uncoordinated yet inexorable

surge toward the West Coast, marked by countless proposed cutoffs, shortcuts, and other sub-trails. It amounted to a trial and error process that often led to tragic consequences. "Yet Americans had the will," Bagley reminds us, "and where there were willing Americans, there was a way" (p. 80). The articulation of these trails into the main roads that emerged in the late 1840s should be looked upon as an achievement at least as impressive as the construction of the transcontinental railroad twenty years later, when tracks were laid over pathways already trod by adventurous Americans of the prior generation.

Bagley skillfully uses the stories of three characters in the second half of the book to emphasize these points. Two--John Frémont and Narcissa Whitman—are familiar names in the migration tale. A third historical figure, Lansford Hastings, is more obscure. His important story reminds us that not all pioneers were noble and intrepid, and that "a sizable contingent of ne'er-do-wells and outright scoundrels" (p. 126) left their marks on the trail.

So Rugged and Mountainous marks an attempt to refocus the historian's gaze upon the epic journey westward. While the book succeeds in providing an incrementally more complete image by introducing new vignettes to the grand tale, the greater story remains essentially unchanged. Perhaps a true transformation of our understanding of the westward movement in the nineteenth century is now in the hands of those disciplines and perspectives (for instance, geography, economics, the "hard" sciences, and comparative studies) less wedded to both our historical and mythic national narrative.

Bandido: The Life and Times of Tiburcio Vásquez. By John Boessenecker. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. Bibliography, illustrations, index, and notes. xix + 471 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Clare V. McKanna Jr., Lecturer, Department of History, San Diego State University.

California historians have longed for a biography that would examine the life of the legendary Tiburcio Vásquez and, more importantly, dispel the myths about nineteenth-century banditry. In the past historians had to rely upon the biographies of George A. Beers and Eugene Sawyer and other secondary sources that tended to glamorize the life of Vásquez and other Hispanic bandits. Now John Boessenecker has provided what should prove to be the definitive biography on this famous and often misunderstood Californio bandit. The author has

dissected the myths and legends that have prevented us from really knowing what Vásquez was like and why he has become a social hero to some modern-day Hispanics. Boessenecker has collected and examined an impressive collection of court documents, prison records, newspapers, and secondary sources to write this remarkable chronicle.

Tiburcio, one of ten children, was born in Monterey in 1835. He learned the skills of riding, roping, and shooting, all the characteristics of a *vaquero*, and lived during a chaotic period of history when some Hispanics turned to banditry as a way to resist or attack the new Anglo-dominated social regime. Historian Leonard Pitt coined the phrase “decline of the Californios” to identify what happened during the second half of the nineteenth century. It was an era when Anglos, who did not respect the rights of the founders of California, gained control of the government and the court system. Vásquez apparently became obsessed with women and this may have been the beginning of his troubles. While attending fandangos in the early 1850s he became involved in fights with Americans who came to dance. Thereafter, he began to associate with a tough crowd of young Californios like Anastacio García and Mariano Hernández. In February 1857, Vásquez and two comrades stole cattle from a ranch in Los Angeles County. He was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to serve time at San Quentin. During this era San Quentin housed a substantial number of Hispanics including first offenders and hardened criminals. In June 1859, Vásquez escaped from prison but was soon captured. He was an unlucky bandit who would spend over ten years of his life in prison. Eventually, after serving three terms in prison, he was released in 1870.

For the rest of his bandit career Vásquez became involved in a series of robberies including thefts from stores in isolated towns. His *modus operandi* included tying up the victims, taking their money and jewelry, and casually consuming oysters, cheese, crackers, and wine before leaving. His techniques created the image of a “good natured” bandit who was not especially violent; however, the 1873 Snyder’s Store robbery in Tres Piños destroyed that myth. In this particular robbery his men rounded up the people, tied them up, and began robbing them. Although accounts differ as to what happened next, there is no doubt that the theft turned into a bloody encounter that left three people dead. From that point Vásquez ceased to be the “gentleman bandit” and turned into a hunted killer who had to be captured. In 1875, Harry Morse, sheriff of Alameda County, tracked Vásquez into Los Angeles County; however, it was William R. Rowland, the local sheriff, who captured the famous bandit. While incarcerated in a jail in San José numerous reporters and writers interviewed Vásquez and their stories helped to create the myth that he was forced into a life of crime. Despite his claims that he had killed

no one, Vásquez was quickly tried, convicted, sentenced to death for murder, and hanged.

In his epilogue Boessenecker notes that “numerous scholars have identified Tiburcio Vásquez as a social bandit” (p. 372). The author’s critique of social banditry explains why this Californio does not fit Eric J. Hobsbawm’s vague concept. Vásquez may have been charming and a lady’s man but he could hardly be labeled a Hispanic “Robin Hood.” The author notes that “Hobsbawm’s view is naively romantic. He fails to recognize that the outlaw hero is...a creature of folklore, not history” (p. 374). Despite his self-serving stories that highlighted his abuse at the hands of Anglos, there is no credible evidence that the local Hispanic population supported Vásquez. In fact some Californio ranchers must have been angry when he robbed them and stole their cattle. One would have to conclude that Vásquez did not fit Hobsbawm’s criteria for social banditry. Perhaps Boessenecker’s quote from John Steinbeck says it best: “Everybody thinks Vásquez was a kind of hero, when in reality he was just a thief.” Boessenecker has provided us with an excellent biography that will be welcomed by western historians. It is highly recommended.

Reflections on the University of California: From the Free Speech Movement to the Global University. By Neil J. Smelser. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. Bibliography, index, and notes. 380 pp. \$50.00 cloth. \$19.80 eBook.

Reviewed by Sandra Cook, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs, Enrollment Services, San Diego State University.

Neil Smelser’s *Reflections on the University of California* is a personal and documentary history of his long and distinguished relationship with the University of California, Berkeley. He served as distinguished professor of sociology and in other academic roles (chair, Academic Senate, and committees). However, the opportunities that allowed him “to touch many parts of that special elephant” (p. 1) began in 1965 when he was appointed special assistant in the Chancellor’s Office during the Free Speech Movement, and continued with his involvement in myriad task forces, committees, commissions, and special assignments until his retirement. This book reflects on the university’s journey through three decades of change and challenge by combining a retrospective on the Free Speech Movement with documents and reports that Smelser authored while serving in these various capacities.

Smelser refers to his tenure in the President's Office during the Free Speech Movement, the Obscenity Crisis, and Vietnam Day Events as "the most educational and exciting of my life" (p. 55). These were times of unprecedented student political conflict throughout higher education. Applying his sociological research to practice, Smelser advised the administration on how to cope with political conflict proactively. In 1973, at the request of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, Smelser wrote an essay about "Berkeley in Crisis and Change" that looked back on the events that preceded and precipitated the conflicts.

In two of his previously published essays on diversity and affirmative action, Smelser addressed the dichotomy of the research universities' tradition of meritocracy and the push for diversity for its own sake, acknowledging the politics and complexity of the issues. Smelser discussed the "Problematics of Affirmative Action" from the historical, political, and cultural context and pointed to the ambiguity of implementing such programs. Smelser, never shy about addressing politically sensitive subjects with a brutally straightforward analysis, suggested that the main problem is not implementing affirmative action, but rather addressing the racial, ethnic, and gender struggles themselves.

California's multisegment system of higher education, the result of the 1960 Master Plan, has tried to strike a balance between excellence and access. Smelser reflects on what he considers to be future challenges to this model in light of increasing costs and student enrollment and decreased funding. Hired to be an advisor on long-term planning in the Office of the President in 1993, Smelser felt compelled at the end of that experience to write a memorandum on "Governing the University of California" that he sent to the president. In this document, published a decade later, Smelser shared his wisdom and experience regarding the essentiality of keeping the traditional values of the university at the core of all decisions.

Smelser's ability to marry "analysis and action" is highlighted in the final section of the book. He chaired a commission to review the failing School of Education, led a Task Force on Lower Division Education, and chaired the Chancellor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics. Throughout each assignment, Smelser kept the core values of the university central to the outcomes.

Smelser's "commitment to and affection for" the University of California resulted from his multifaceted involvement and the freedom and trust bestowed upon him by the university throughout his involvement. Through this collection of documents, the reader is offered a glimpse into the Free Speech Movement from a new vantage point, the complexity of the political issues faced throughout the last several decades, and a peek into the future (the "looming problems" of which

appear uncomfortably contemporary). The complex and symbiotic relationship of this man and this institution is at the very heart of *Reflections on the University of California*.

Unless one is a scholar or student of higher education (or somehow involved with its inner workings) the academic culture and politics contained in the book will be baffling. Additionally, Smelser's erudite writing requires a careful consideration of virtually every word to absorb completely the depth and scope of his thinking. That being said, this book is a significant contribution to the history and sociology of higher education because it reminds us that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas. By Rebecca Solnit. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010. vii + 157 pp. \$49.95 cloth. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewed by William Issel, Professor of History Emeritus, San Francisco State University.

Writer Rebecca Solnit and twenty-nine artists and photographers, novelists and poets, cartographers and geographers teamed up to produce this rendering of the "imaginative possibility" they discovered in their individual and collective readings of the city of San Francisco at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. *Infinite City* is not the first work to approach a city as a text, but it is certainly one of most successful and generous of such endeavors, beginning with Solnit's acknowledgment of the project's indebtedness to the magical realism genre. Two giants of that post-realist perspective, Jorge Luis Borges and Italo Calvino, appear in the introduction, which also contains an admission of the book's "arbitrariness" and a genuflection to Borges's "infinite libraries" concept and Calvino's notion that every actual city contains an infinite number of imaginative "magical and strange cities." These concepts provided the inspiration for the book, as well as its title, as Solnit explains: "Maps are always invitations in ways that texts and pictures are not; you can enter a map, alter it, add to it, plan with it. A map is a ticket to actual territory, while a novel is only a ticket to emotion and imagination. *Infinite City* is meant to be such an invitation to go beyond what is mapped within it" (p. 8).

Twenty-two maps, each of which occupies two adjoining pages in the seven-by-twelve-inch atlas, beckon readers to use their imaginations while contemplating the "compendium of perspectives" that make up the book. In 1978 British historian James Burke, in the celebrated television series *Connections*, startled a trans-Atlantic audience into an illuminating new way of understanding the history of invention

and technology. Now Solnit and her team introduce a kaleidoscope of thought-provoking vignettes about “the un-American place where America invents itself” (p. vii) by way of the connections visible within the exquisitely detailed maps themselves, and the connections suggested by reading the maps along with the accompanying essays. Map 2, for instance, gives us “Green Women: Open Spaces and Their Champions” and an essay on “Great Women and Green Spaces.” Map 7, “Poison/Palate: The Bay Area in Your Body,” is paired with an essay on “What Doesn’t Kill You Makes You Gourmet.” Map 18 is “The World in a Cup: Coffee Economies and Ecologies,” which appears with an essay on “How to Get to Ethiopia from Ocean Beach.”

The essays and the maps contain material both demonstrably real and cleverly conjectural, and all of them are grounded in stories plucked by the authors from their personal experience, literary and artistic invention, and studious research. *Infinite City* is a spirited *tour de force* assembled with obvious enthusiasm and affection that documents the historical and contemporary range of personal identities, social diversities, cultural possibilities, and political complexities that are possible to imagine existing within the forty-nine-square-mile place known to current residents of the San Francisco Bay Area as simply “The City.”

Listening to Latina/o Youth: Television Consumption within Families. By Kristin C. Moran. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011. Appendix, notes, reference, and index. x + 215 pp. \$33.95 paper.

Reviewed by David González-Hernández, Ph.D. Student, Department of Communication, University of California, San Diego.

Kristin C. Moran’s *Listening to Latina/o Youth: Television Consumption Within Families* is a synthesis of scholarly research on media and culture, Latino youth market and consumption reports, and insightful examinations on what it means to be represented as a Latina/o in relation to English-language mainstream media. Moran analyzes such diverse themes as Latino audience studies, the development of Spanish-language television, the methodology of subject interviews, the *telenovelas* phenomena, and the risks associated with Latina/o media representations in the United States. Two principal aims of the book, the author writes, are to discuss “the ways in which the mainstream media industry have responded to the growing numbers of Latina/os living in the United States” and to think “more broadly about representation” (p. ix).

Moran, a communications professor at the University of San Diego, is an experienced investigator of media texts created for Latino audiences as well as the reception process of these audiences in southern California. This experience, it would seem, has prepared Professor Moran to critique the tendency of mainstream media to reify and contain a Latina/o identity that is then sold back to youth in ways that limit their agency. Understanding these processes, Moran suggests, provides an opportunity “to change the way Latina/o youth are conceptualized, and listening to them is the first step” (p. 33). While this book certainly does advance that argument, I think its greatest strength is in the diverse voices and personal insights that it brings together and cultivates in its readers a deeper, broader understanding of the interrelationship between media and the Latino/a experience.

Though each of the six chapters stands by itself, the book is one that must be read from beginning to end for the reader to fully understand the conclusions. The first two chapters provide a foundation for understanding the current media environment. An important contribution is Moran’s historical investigation of the development of Spanish-Language television with a national, local, and international/border scope. Here the author underscores the powerful Spanish-language media and their ability to compel English-language media to take notice of the Latino audience and push the creation of bicultural programming. This portion of the book develops a theme that is reinforced throughout the volume: Latinos’ relationship with media is intertwined with market forces.

Chapters 3–5 report the primary findings. This section of the book is intended to pay critical attention to how Latino audiences actively negotiate with media. A central rationale for this investigation, the author explains, is that “there is no one way to define the Latina/o audience. Audience members are conditioned by multiple layers of influence that manifest in a myriad of ways... Latina/os in the United States find themselves pulled in several directions since the media may position them as immigrant, outsider” (p. 157). Considered here, for instance, is the priority of a hybrid reality for many young people and children who see themselves as typically American in their media use. “However, the availability of domestic U.S. production, both news and entertainment, in Spanish complicates the puzzle” (p. 65). For example, in chapter 4, Moran analyzes the appeal of *telenovelas* as a way Latina/os may maintain cultural connection to an “imagined home.” Chapter 6, “(Re) Imagining the Latina/o Audience,” wraps up the significant findings and suggests paths to pursue in future research, as well as possible questions for researchers.

Listening to Latina/o Youth cautions us about the media tendency to use “Latinidad” as a commodity: a stereotype that it is made for sale in the marketplace because

it can turn a profit. Moreover, Moran is able to go beyond representation and further illuminate such themes as heterogeneity, hybridity, and transnationality by studying multiple affiliations – even within individual Latina/o families – and disruptive identity positions. Moran challenges the stereotypes associated with Latina/o audiences, and reaffirms Latina/os as a heterogeneous cultural group, creative and dynamic. Finally, the focus on youth is not gratuitous; these Latina/o youth, bicultural and cosmopolitan in their perspective and experience, are the very audience media targets yet fails to comprehend fully.

California Crack Up: How Reform Broke the Golden State and How We Can Fix It. By Joe Mathews and Mark Paul. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2010. Prologue, acknowledgements, notes, and index. 224 pages. \$50 cloth. \$21.95 paper. E-book \$21.95.

Reviewed by Casey B. K. Domínguez, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of San Diego.

Part history, part policy brief, part political science lesson, this colorful and engaging book argues that California is running on a DOS operating system in a Google world. The book is written for two audiences: concerned California citizens who know something is very wrong with state government but aren't sure what it is, and more knowledgeable citizens and activists who know what is wrong and are already supportive of serious reform. The authors' goal is to persuade both groups to support not just a serious, but a *radical*, overhaul of California's "operating system." Their diagnosis of the problems with the state's governance structure is spot-on accurate, and their proposed reform is well-researched and sophisticated. It leaves this reader wishing they had included a political blue print for enacting their proposed reform as detailed as the reform they propose.

The first third of the book is devoted to describing California's current governance structures, how we got them, and the problems that they cause for us. The state Constitution, as they correctly observe, is a conglomeration of many disparate rules, all of which served the interests of the dominant political majority at a given point in time. The stories they tell about these origins, with the exception of sympathy for the plight of homeowners prior to Proposition 13 in 1977-78, emphasize the dirty side of the state's political history. The 1849 Constitution was cribbed from Iowa's by a bunch of lazy miners. The 1879 Constitution was

written under the influence of the anti-Chinese Workingman's Party. The state lottery was the brainchild of a petition company that wanted to drum up business. Mathews and Paul want to dispel any myths Californians might have about the sacredness of their state Constitution, and they do a good job of it. Their approach is reminiscent of Robert Dahl's *How Democratic is the American Constitution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), although perhaps due to the material, a little more crass.

In part 2, the authors begin with a more detailed diagnosis of the problems with California's government, beginning with its budgeting process. There is no shortage of research to back up their claims about the damage done to local governments, to the state's budget, and to policy, by various well-meaning initiatives. They could have gone even further to substantiate the claims that Proposition 13 has not solved problems with spending and debt, and that Proposition 98 has not improved education, by including better and more detailed comparisons to rules used in other states. Still, most neutral observers would agree that their overall diagnosis is correct. The "shackles and chains" imposed on state policymakers by the initiative process have done more harm than good. In their indictment of our state government, they also explain how budget stalemates are brought about by both supermajority rules and by political polarization and its roots in residential patterns. Throughout, they paint a picture of policymaking in Sacramento that is dominated by interest groups and public employee unions, and a picture of local governments that are emasculated and hopelessly and needlessly complex.

As their primary solution to all of these problems, Mathews and Paul suggest a major overhaul of California's electoral system. They argue that California needs a completely new, larger, unicameral legislature, with 2/3 of the seats elected from districts, as they are now, and 1/3 of the seats elected by proportional representation from large geographic regions. They also propose electing only the governor and the secretary of state, and making all other executive offices appointed by the governor. Finally, they suggest that we should move from an initiative-dominated to a referendum-dominated system, to empower our new, more democratic legislature. They also suggest doing away with most special districts, remaking local government, and remaking the prison system. These proposals to create a more democratic, accountable, responsive state government look very much like the consensus solutions around any graduate seminar table. People who spend a lot of time thinking about how governments work best, and most democratically, would approve of these suggestions. But these authors do not intend this to be an academic exercise.

However, they do not suggest an explicit path to getting to this reform. As the authors note, all entrenched interests have something to hate in their

proposals, and in the past, more modest proposals have been political non-starters. Nevertheless, the book is carefully written to serve as a model for a real political proposal. Propositions 13 and 98 are both indicted, providing grounds for a compromise in which both liberals and conservatives have to give something up. The promise of a more effective, accountable government is an enticing one, and people who are genuinely interested in that outcome should seriously consider what these authors have to say.

BOOK NOTES

The American West: Competing Visions. By Karen R. Jones and John Wills. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. vii + 344 pp. \$135.00, cloth; \$45.00, paper. Jones and Wills explore a variety of themes and topics in western history; their aim is to reassess western myths and historiography in the aftermath of the New Western history. The first two sections of the book investigate the "Old West" (of exploration, the westward movement, and Frederick Jackson Turner) and the "New West" (of the genocide of Native Americans, women's roles in the West, and environmental crises), while a third considers the position of the West in American culture and mythology.

Cities and Nature in the American West. Urban West Series. Edited by Char Miller. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010. Notes and index. vii + 278 pp. \$34.95 paper. This volume, edited and with an introductory essay by Pomona College professor and leading environmental historian Char Miller, brings together fourteen essays grouped into four parts: "Land," "Water," "Campground," and "City." The contributors explore the cultural, economic, and political dimensions of the connections between the cities of the West and the environments and resources that surround them.

Earning Power: Women and Work in Los Angeles, 1880–1930. Urban West Series. By Eileen V. Wallis. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2010. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. xiv + 248 pp. \$39.95 cloth. Eileen Wallis's study considers a broad spectrum of women--from native-born, Anglo American, white-collar workers to non-white immigrants in domestic work and the garment trades--and explores how women in Los Angeles contributed to labor activism, Progressive reform, and the suffrage movement.

Farm Workers and the Churches: The Movement in California and Texas. By Alan J. Watt. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. ix + 252 pp. \$48.00, cloth; \$24.00 paper. Dedicating a part to each of the two states under consideration, *Farm Workers and the Churches* investigates how a number of Catholic and Protestant churches took up the cause of economic justice and became active supporters of the movement among Mexican and Filipino farm workers.

Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles. By Jeremiah B. C. Axelrod. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. xii + 401 pp. \$25.95 paper. In this book, Jeremiah Axelrod explores how the competing visions of planners and utopians helped create the city that is, ironically, synonymous with unplanned sprawl. The key to understanding the “fragmented metropolis” of Los Angeles, Axelrod maintains, lies not in the post-Second World War expansion of freeways, but in the planning decisions made in the 1920s that placed the city on course to become an automobile-dependent metropolis.

Mendez v. Westminster: School Desegregation and Mexican-American Rights. By Philippa Strum. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010. Chronology, bibliographic essay, and index. xiii + 186 pp. \$34.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper. This book examines the legacy of the 1947 federal case in which California parents successfully challenged segregated educational facilities for ethnic Mexican children and anticipated the arguments that would be presented seven years later in *Brown v. Board of Education*.