BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Eugene P. Moehring, Professor of History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Aimed primarily at the general reader and based partly on material published in two of her earlier books, Iris Engstrand’s newest survey of San Diego’s history covers a wide variety of topics and noteworthy incidents. Supporting the narrative are numerous photographs, maps, drawings, and other visual evidence. The early chapters tracing the role of native peoples and the clash of colonial cultures are informative, as are the pen portraits of leaders who helped shape the city’s history. Alonzo Horton, Major Reuben Fleet, Pete Wilson, and other influential figures are all there along with a concise summary of their contributions to San Diego’s growth. Engstrand devotes considerable space to the Panama-California Exposition, city promotion, transportation links, and downtown revitalization efforts. The latter involves discussions of park expansion, historic preservation, retail center development, and tourism. The author’s coverage of water issues, suburbanization, education, and professional sports are all satisfying, although not all subjects are of equal importance. Sometimes the desire for balance needs to be sacrificed. Subjects like the vital role of defense spending and particularly the navy – what Roger Lotchin has called “the metropolitan-military complex” – in shaping west coast urban development in places like San Diego, require more space. Moreover, a discussion of the role of defense spending in San Diego’s development demands some mention of Congressman Bob Wilson.

Although wide-ranging and instructive, Engstrand’s narrative is at times too episodic. For example, she follows a section describing San Diego’s response to the September 11 terrorist attacks with coverage of the city’s water crisis. At other times, she attributes ideas and reforms to locals without placing the subject in its broader context. For instance, her discussion of Alonzo Horton’s 1867 plans to build a grand city park should recognize that New York’s recently-opened Central Park (1865), with its positive effect upon adjacent land values, inspired myriad park-building projects across urban America at that time. In the same vein, Engstrand correctly credits chamber of commerce President G. Aubrey Davidson with suggesting that San Diego hold a Panama-California Exposition to exploit the opening of the Panama Canal, but she should note that San Francisco businessmen were already working on the same idea for their city. The author’s prose chronicling San Diego’s triumphal march to greatness is largely celebratory in nature. Most readers will not object to this tone, but there are places where a more critical approach to policy is warranted. There is, for instance, little critical coverage of discrimination against the city’s minorities in housing, education, employment, and public places.
Overall, however, Engstrand has provided an up-to-date overview of San Diego’s emergence as America’s seventh-largest city. The book is packed with useful information and dates. Her maps, photographs, and chronology of events will be especially helpful to local students and to those largely unfamiliar with the city’s past. This work contributes to our general knowledge of a Sunbelt city that, for some strange reason, still lacks much of a scholarly literature.

_All Aboard for Santa Fe: Railway Promotion of the Southwest, 1890s to 1930s._ By Victoria Dye. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, and index. 163 pp. $24.95 cloth. $17.95 paper.

Reviewed by Marisa K. Brandt, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, University of Minnesota.

The American Southwest has been a popular tourist destination throughout the twentieth century. Its environment, architecture, and culture have provided tourists with a wide variety of reasons to visit the Southwest. Victoria Dye argues that the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT&SF) Railroad’s relentless promotion of the Southwest during the early twentieth century was a crucial element in the development of tourism in the region. Dye’s _All Aboard for Santa Fe: Railway Promotion of the Southwest, 1890s to 1930s_ provides a lively view of the AT&SF’s advertising strategies during this time period. Her concise monograph chiefly examines the city of Santa Fe itself and also provides a short discussion of Albuquerque.

_All Aboard for Santa Fe_ begins with a whirlwind summary of the region’s history and swiftly moves on to a discussion of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad and its development. The bulk of the book focuses on the Railroad’s marketing strategies. The AT&SF’s advertising materials describe a southwestern culture that had melded its Spanish and Indian history into a romantic retreat from modern life. The mythologized (and heavily sanitized) cultural story that the AT&SF used in its materials emphasized the uniquely American aspects of the area. Railway literature skillfully combined copy that touted the Southwest’s healthy environment with promotion of southwestern culture.

Dye contends that the city of Santa Fe is emblematic of the region. Its success as a tourist draw “may be seen as testimony to the unprecedented use of regional motifs and cultural icons” by the AT&SF (p. 4). The Railroad initially promoted the town as a health resort (primarily for tuberculosis patients) but by the 1920s had collaborated with the Fred Harvey Company in opening and advertising hotels and other attractions that focused on the region’s cultural heritage. The Harvey Company also began running “Indian Detours,” a series of sight-seeing trips in the region. The company designed these excursions to provide a reason to stop in the Southwest during an otherwise less-than-exciting trip from the East to the West Coast and also as tourist destinations in and of themselves. Dye maintains that Albuquerque benefited from the AT&SF’s efforts, although to a lesser extent than Santa Fe, and she spends some time describing the effects of AT&SF’s advertising
on “The Town Down The Tracks: Santa Fe’s Rival” – Albuquerque (ch. 5).

Unfortunately, the book’s brevity prevents in-depth discussion of the region as a whole. Although Santa Fe is clearly an important part of the Southwest’s tourist industry, a discussion of the Grand Canyon would have added greatly to Dye’s analysis and would have helped to place it in the broader context of the region. The AT&SF spent a great deal of time and money promoting the Grand Canyon. The company also extensively developed its tourist attractions and, in collaboration with the Harvey Company, dominated tourism at the Canyon during the early twentieth century. Similarly, the Indian Detours were not specific to Santa Fe – although they were explicitly southwestern – and they were a central focus of the AT&SF’s regional advertising efforts. A more regionally-based analysis would allow Dye to draw some further-reaching conclusions about the effects of railway promotion of the Southwest and would show her readers the long reach of the Railroad in developing the region’s image. Nevertheless, All Aboard for Santa Fe is an accessible and useful examination of the AT&SF’s efforts to build regional tourism through the promotion of their idea of southwestern culture. Dye examines this under-explored topic from a new angle, providing an in-depth case study of its effects on the city of Santa Fe. All Aboard for Santa Fe will be a useful resource for anyone wishing to know more about the development of tourism in the Southwest; the extensive appendices and bibliographic notes are especially valuable.


Reviewed by Nicole Dawn Goude, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, University of California, Riverside.

Through his work as an editor and contributing writer for a regional journal in Los Angeles, Charles Fletcher Lummis extolled the beauty of the Southwest and called for the preservation of indigenous culture. He founded the Southwest Museum and was instrumental in the conservation of the California Missions. One of the first historians to document the legacy of this fascinating figure was Edwin R. Bingham, professor emeritus of history at the University of Oregon. Although it was written over fifty years ago, this monograph by Bingham remains one of the few texts dedicated to the life and work of Charles Fletcher Lummis. While this second printing does not deviate from the original text or give a new introductory note, it does provide the reader with a wealth of regional history in a relatively compact volume.

Bingham provides a short biography before exploring the professional editorial career of Lummis. He draws on a large body of information regarding the life of Lummis, including published works, diaries, letters, and reminiscences of others, which he makes an effort to discuss without dwelling on any particular point. In recounting the life of Lummis, Bingham allows the exciting and somewhat lurid details to come through, such as the “immoderate use of tobacco and alcohol”
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(p. 11) and womanizing that led to the failure of two marriages. These details are skillfully retold so that the reader is interested in a man who dropped out of Harvard, hiked from Ohio to California, and was afflicted with a sudden, if temporary, onset of paralysis – all before the age of thirty. In later chapters, Bingham relates how these early events affected Lummis’ career as a writer and editor of The Land of Sunshine (renamed Out West in 1902).

While one might expect the rather dry statistics relating to the business of the magazine (such as advertising revenue and circulation rates) to be mind-numbing, especially after the thrilling account of Lummis’ life story, Bingham manages to weave this information into colorful anecdotes to create a fascinating read. This technique, however, comes at a cost. In the non-biographical portion of the work, he does not tell the history chronologically, so that from one paragraph to the next he jumps from Out West (1902) back to The Land of Sunshine (1895). A reader attempting to determine what contributed to the success of the magazine in a given year (whether it was Lummis himself, the advertising funds, circulation rate, or contributing writers) would have to flip back and forth to find the requisite information.

It is somewhat regrettable that no revisions or additions to the original text have been made. This second printing would have benefited from an afterword that addresses the impact of Lummis’s works on the indigenous populations with whom he was so concerned. For example, Lummis founded the Sequoya League to “make better Indians and better treated ones” (p. 116), but Bingham did not include the native reaction to the Lummis’ efforts to aid in the welfare of the tribes. Additionally, the text contains some outdated and inaccurate material: “…the Chumash, the Gabrieliño, the Luiseño, and the Juaneño are now wholly extinct” (p. 114 n. 27). As we know, these tribes are not extinct, although their numbers have been drastically reduced. Ironically, these very tribes have actively conferred with one of the institutions established by Lummis, the Southwest Museum, in blessing the new exhibits.

Nevertheless, this text remains a well-researched and engaging treatment of Lummis and his involvement with the preservation of the American West. Bingham’s work is still a valuable resource for the study of the Southwest and retains its relevance to the growing field of Los Angeles regional history.


Reviewed by Lori Pierce, Assistant Professor of American Studies, DePaul University.

It is one of the more interesting historical anomalies that the United States, a country which proudly regards itself as multicultural, is also so relentlessly monolingual. Our cultural diversity masks a deep suspicion of linguistic diversity. Noriko Asato’s Teaching Mikadoism explores an early episode in the history of our linguistic paranoia, the controversy over Japanese language schools in Hawai‘i,
Teaching Mikadoism attempts three difficult tasks: first, the book describes a narrow slice of the history of Japanese language schools in Hawai‘i, California and Oregon by focusing on eight years of public debate. Second, the author attempts to “reframe” the controversy by comparing and linking the situation in these three locations. Finally, the book expands our understanding of Japanese American history by providing more insight into the Issei (first) generation of immigrants by utilizing Japanese language resources, particularly newspapers, periodicals, and the reports of the Japanese consular authorities in the United States and the Territory of Hawai‘i. In order to fulfill these aims, any historian would require a volume of double the length and twice the density. Teaching Mikadoism succeeds in introducing these problems but not in resolving these issues.

The book is arranged into four substantive chapters, two of which focus on Hawai‘i and two of which describe developments in California and Washington. In each case, Asato argues that the controversy over language schools was symptomatic of a larger political battle between the Nikkei (Japanese) and white American communities. The attacks on language schools were an excuse to advance more far reaching efforts to control the political and social advancement of the Japanese community.

Asato describes two facets of the language school debate in Hawai‘i: the internal struggle between Buddhists and Christians in the Japanese community to control language schools and how the battle over language schools became a part of federal efforts to oversee education in order to promote and enforce assimilation. In the second chapter, Asato focuses on the 1919 Federal Survey of Education which led to the passage of Act 30 (later overturned by the Supreme Court) which made foreign language schools subject to control by Hawai‘i’s Department of Public Instruction. The national attention garnered by this survey and the campaign for Act 30 influenced the way that Asian exclusionists in California framed the debate over language schools in that state. Exclusionists in Washington then copied Californians, using the vague threat of “mikadoism” to fan the flames of bigotry and gain support for white control over Japanese language schools.

Each case is an intriguing example of how the forces behind Asian exclusion movements manufactured the controversy over schools to further other political goals. In Hawai‘i, Territorial authorities, plantation owners, and religious groups vied for influence over the Japanese community, the largest single ethnic group in the islands. In California, exclusionists saw control of the schools as a way to thwart the growing economic power of the Japanese community in the agricultural industry. And although the Japanese population was relatively small, the white community in Washington seemed to take a preventive approach, attempting to keep the Nikkei from gaining any power as they had in California and Hawai‘i.

Asato covers no new ground in this work. As she acknowledges, the study of Japanese language schools has been the subject of numerous theses and dissertations and is a standard part of the teaching of Japanese American history. She adds to our knowledge by working with Japanese language documents and thereby introducing new perspectives to the historical record. This is evident in her descriptions of the reactions of the Issei and the role of the Japanese consular officials in these controversies. This is valuable, elementary historical work which
globalizes Asian American studies in a way that is long overdue. Good history, however, requires sound interpretation in addition to the amassing of facts. As an analysis of the Japanese language school controversy, Teaching Mikadoism is less successful. Chief among the lapses is the lack of a sustained discussion or definition of “mikadoism.” At no point does Asato define or interpret the phrase for a contemporary audience. She refers to Valentine McClatchy’s “Theory of the Mikado doctrine” (p. 55) which argued that Japanese schools and churches were an inherent threat to America because the Japanese government was using immigrants to colonize the United States. Her descriptions lead us to infer that mikadoism meant emperor worship or Japanese nationalism, but the reader longs for a clear, cogent definition or theory of mikadoism from the point of view of the researcher. And although there seems to be some connection between Buddhist-Christian rivalries in Hawai’i’s Japanese community (explored in Chapter 1) and the accusation of emperor worship by Asian exclusionists in California and Washington, Asato does little to make explicit these connections in a way that truly “reframes” the controversy over Japanese language schools.


Reviewed by Steven P. Erie, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Urban Studies and Planning Program, University of California, San Diego.

The Failure of Planning is a study of so-called “progressive planning” in the San Diego region during the last three decades of the twentieth century. Richard Hogan argues that progressive regional planning has failed to restrain suburban sprawl and produce a better quality of life in San Diego, not because of failures of implementation, but because of a deficit of political and economic imagination.

The chief bêtes noires are San Diego Mayor and later California Governor Pete Wilson at the local and state levels and Governor and, later, President Ronald Reagan at the state and national levels. In particular, President Reagan made the “New Federalism” a supposed cover for marginalizing grassroots radical movements spawned by the sixties and co-opting both liberals and conservatives into managerial coalitions whose agendas were ultimately dominated by big developers. The builders had the resources and staying power to pay for and shape “managed growth” and “smart growth” policies that have amounted to seeming Band-Aids on cancer, at least according to Hogan (pp. 31, 135).

The anti-Mira Mesa backlash of Wilson’s early years in City Hall gave way to a more accommodative managed-growth paradigm that was challenged in the 1980s by the environmental and slow growth movements. However, the post-1989 recessionary collapse of the speculative housing market muted political pressures for less development, more affordable housing, and greater habitat preservation until 1996 when a new speculative boom began and “smart growth” became the reigning mantra. According to the author, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) facilitated the process by co-opting the
slow growth movement into the regional planning process. Governor Wilson’s Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) initiative was adopted, the federal Endangered Species Act gave protection to the gnat catcher, yet suburban development rolled on inexorably.

Rather than embrace the conspiracy theory popular among liberal environmentalists and slow-growth advocates that progressive planning has been thwarted by a planners’ sellout to developers, Hogan advances the view that the result was inherent in progressive planning’s inability to think beyond a bourgeois market society with private property in land and a bias toward homeowner politics. Land-use decisions in San Diego are made according to “the carnival model, with multiple authorities anxiously currying favor with constituents through endless meetings and an endless struggle toward consensus” (p. 101). “Ballot box” initiatives that sought to curb development only complicated the land-use process in ways exploited by big developers (p. 95).

The book’s practice of hiding behind pseudonyms of the actual names of suburban communities studied and key informants interviewed in order to protect the innocent (or the guilty) is irritating. Also off-putting are the ideological effusions and excessive self-revelations. Does one really need to know that Hogan’s own preference for radical-anarchist “eco-politics” apparently led him in 2000 to vote for neither George Bush nor Al Gore nor Ralph Nader? (p. 128). The author grew up mostly in San Diego, but minces no words about his happiness in no longer living there. He loathes life in automobile-driven San Diego compared to a bucolic bicycle-centric “college town in the Midwest” (p. 139).

Notwithstanding such criticisms, the book’s underlying model of historic progressive planning in San Diego as a sorcerer’s apprentice in thrall to developers and a boom-bust housing market has something to recommend it.


Reviewed by Joshua Paddison, Ph.D. candidate, Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles.

“The number of churches in San Francisco implies either great devotion, or immense necessity for prayer,” observed British author J. G. Player-Frowd during a visit to California in 1872. Within a few square blocks he counted two synagogues, a Catholic church, two Swedenborgian tabernacles, and a variety of Protestant congregations including a branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The tremendous religious variety noted by Player-Frowd has increased exponentially in California in the years since his visit, and today the state is home to an unparalleled panoply of denominations, sects, and creeds. For The Visionary State, writer Erik Davis and photographer Michael Rauner visited dozens of California’s sacred sites, producing a fascinatingly idiosyncratic exploration of the state’s religious history.

Not interested in the mainstream churches, mosques, temples, and synagogues
attended by the vast majority of observant Californians, Davis and Rauner focus on “visionary” groups and individuals who have occupied the mystical margins of the religious landscape. San Diego, for example, is represented by photo-essays of Mission San Diego de Alcalá, the Mormon San Diego Temple, Spiritualist mansion Villa Montezuma, Theosophist buildings at Point Loma (now owned by the Church of the Nazarene), and First Church of Christ, Scientist. Pursuing the “great polytheistic collage” that makes up what Davis terms “California consciousness” (p. 9), the book’s creators include within their purview a dazzling range of “new” religious groups, from Mormons, Scientologists, Christian Scientists, and the Vedanta Society to many lesser-known ones such as the Self-Realization Fellowship, Church of All Worlds, and Ordo Templi Orientis. Accounts of famed California seers Thomas Starr King, Aimee Semple McPherson, Aldous Huxley, and Paramahansa Yogananda abut stories of largely forgotten spiritual seekers such as mystic Thomas Lake Harris, Bohemian poet Elsa Gidlow, Zen leader Shunryu Suzuki, and Tantric sensualist Penny Slinger.

In his forty-three short, wide-ranging essays, Erik Davis draws upon previously published histories, journalism, and biographies to guide readers down seldom-traveled paths. Though his writing style veers toward slang – Native American tribal leaders are called “fat cats” (p. 12); Charles Manson is a “shrimpy antichrist” (p. 184) – Davis’s intelligence, ardor, and omnivorous interests elevate The Visionary State above the standard coffee table book it resembles. That said, his lack of footnotes is inexcusable, especially given the extraordinary subject matter into which he delves. Michael Rauner’s photographs are elegant and formally precise, but his decision to exclude all people from the sites he documents makes them seem—to me, at least—sterile and trapped in the past. The book suffers from a disconnection between Davis’s text, crowded with colorful people and messy stories, and Rauner’s photos of deserted, perfectly lit buildings.

It feels odd to read about Tantric orgies, LSD hallucinations, arcane magic rites, and secret Spiritualist societies in the pages of an attractively designed, full-color, carefully edited, expensive tome published by Chronicle Books. Though attempting to celebrate the “restless, heretical edge” of California’s religious culture (p. 9), Davis and Rauner cannot help but tame the unruliness of their subject matter. Of course, anyone who studies or writes about religion struggles with understanding and capturing someone else’s transcendent experience. Davis and Rauner are not fully up to the challenge, but their ambition and passion make The Visionary State as singular as the people, stories, and sites it documents.
defiantly confront multibillion dollar corporations, speak straightforward truths in the face of imminent danger, seek food and dignity for their impoverished children, forge alliances in unlikely places and, above all else, inspire others to follow in their footsteps. The struggles documented in David Bacon’s book illuminate the impact of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement on labor activists, agricultural families, meatpackers, industrial workers, and independent trade unionists in Mexico and the United States.

Their stories might have been covered in U.S.-based newspapers if such mass media were equally concerned with labor and business topics. Since labor concerns have been neglected in such outlets, Bacon had to devote years collecting the narratives that comprise this disturbing account of social destruction wrought by the North American Free Trade Agreement. Personal stories from many distinct places reveal courage, dignity, and determination. At the U.S.-Mexico border, we meet a young man making $8 per day who was allowed only a ten-day leave when he fractured his right forearm while welding steel for Hyundai subsidiary Han Young. In Mexico City, we meet a lawyer who sews his eyelids shut for several weeks to dramatize the public protest of privatization by an independent bus drivers’ union. We meet workers in several locations who publicly declare their support for an independent union despite forceful intimidation campaigns. Most disturbing of all, we meet countless, nameless children who are harvesting onions and field crops because their parents’ salaries simply do not provide the bare essentials. In the twelve years since NAFTA was enacted, the Mexican government has turned a blind eye to the illegal use of child labor and many other labor law violations.

Bacon’s riveting account of diverse labor struggles provides grim details of which many people (especially in the United States) are completely ignorant. His focus on personal narratives and specific struggles is compelling. While Bacon does not claim to be comprehensive, his analytical approach forcefully demonstrates the way in which many workers (and their families) have been irreparably harmed by the refusal of NAFTA negotiators to anticipate the social dislocations the treaty unleashed. In particular, Bacon’s book provides an indictment of NAFTA’s labor side agreements, showing that union activists, lawyers, and workers alike have spent considerable time and energy pursuing grievances in a good faith effort to hold NAFTA accountable. Over the years it has become increasingly clear that NAFTA’s complex labor grievance procedures are a waste of time because there are no enforcement mechanisms.

This is an accessible book on a timely topic. Bacon suggests that cross-border labor organizing has been difficult yet the NAFTA experience has forced workers and activists to forge new kinds of cross-border alliances and new organizing strategies, especially in the US and Mexico. Thus, while the book is full of devastating details, it also highlights collaborations that are educational, transformative, and far-reaching. The black-and-white photographs in this book reinforce the compelling narrative. A six-year-old onion picker looks up from her tasks and gazes coolly and knowingly from the page. The young Hyundai welder mentioned above displays his outstretched arms on the front cover, revealing permanent deformation of his right limb. In a 1993 photograph, Tijuana workers stand before a table where they must declare out loud which union they support. A 2002 photograph shows activists in Omaha, Nebraska, handing out union
Bacon's book is refreshing for its unapologetic stance in telling the human story behind the North American Free Trade Agreement. Methodically unraveling NAFTA's central contradiction – that goods and investments are free to move while people are not – he weaves together many stories of people in diverse places. In my view, the real strength of the book is the comprehensive way in which Bacon treats cross-border relationships. That is, the ravaged lives that Bacon documents are also meaningful lives, where individuals, unions, and community activists have insisted on the simple priorities of human dignity and social justice.

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