Saving the Heartland: Catholic Missionaries in Rural America

by Jeffrey Marlett

xi+233 pages, notes, bibliography, index.

"[A] well-organized rural parish," Monsignor Edgar Schmiedeler wrote, "stands today like a rock of Gibraltar in the midst of the restless and shifting sea of modern life" (p. 30). Schmiedeler's admiration for the rural Catholic parish encapsulates Catholic agrarians' optimistic belief that the problems of the Church and nation could be solved in the fertile fields of the American Midwest. Religious studies professor Jeffrey Marlett's new book Saving the Heartland: Catholic Missionaries in Rural America examines the origins of Catholic agrarianism, tracing its progress from the Great Depression to the 1960s. According to Marlett, Catholic agrarians' efforts to build the Church in rural areas enjoyed only mixed results.

Like many Americans, Catholics responded to post-World War II anxieties over urbanization, immigration, and modernization by searching for traditional American values in rural landscapes. What made Catholic agrarianism different from secular back-to-the-land efforts, however, was its commitment to finding a truer form of Catholicism in America's rural counties. Led by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), agrarian-minded Catholics believed the Church faced a crisis. A decline in the urban Catholic birth rate threatened to weaken the Church, while the proliferation of modern values threatened to secularize all Americans. The problem, however, was not simply an urban one. Catholic agrarians also feared that rural Catholics lacked both the sacraments and sufficient education in their faith. A lack of priests in the country left the rural flock vulnerable.

Catholic agrarians sought to solve these problems by developing strong Catholic rural communities. Groups like the NCRLC supported a host of colonization efforts to place Catholics on the land and strengthen rural parishes. Colonization efforts promised to provide immigrants with a stable life, while convincing skeptical Protestants of immigrant Catholics' Americanness. Rural life would also strengthen families by reconnecting them with the wholesome life of farming. Moreover, establishing strong rural parishes would reach isolated Catholics and potentially gain converts. In short, Catholic rural settlement programs aimed to bolster Catholic identity, save the Church from urban decay and modernism, and bring the "word" to rural Americans.

Despite a wealth of clerical enthusiasm, however, the Catholic rural life movement sputtered. While the Catholic Work-

er movement and the NCRLC praised the simple austerity of farm life and extolled the natural connections between farming and Catholicism, rural Catholics were less enthusiastic about developing self-consciously Catholic communities. Many found that ethnic ties or the shared experience of rural life gave them more in common with their Protestant neighbors than with their urban co-religionists. Rather than emphasize their Catholic identity, many rural Catholics wished simply to "blend in."

While the Catholic rural life movement did succeed in bolstering rural Catholic identity through groups such as the Knights of Columbus, often Catholic endeavors served to break down religious barriers rather than foster a self-consciously Catholic identity. The NCRLC's promotion of rural devotions, for example, were popular among Catholics and non-Catholics alike and their popularity often rendered the local Catholic Church more a point of cultural intersection than a religious bulwark. The demystification of Catholicism through the creation of cultural points of contact was likely Catholic agrarians' greatest, if unintended, accomplishment.

The strengths of Marlett's study lie in the connections it makes between Catholic agrarianism, theology, and culture. For example, Catholic agrarians envisioned ecologically sensitive bio-dynamic farming as a means of appreciating God's gifts, acknowledging the connectedness of all life, and integrating the earthly and the spiritual. Marlett is equally strong in fleshing out the cultural roots of Catholic "motor missions." Street preaching employed an approach that not only embraced technology all Americans appreciated—cars, radios, films—but drew on a Protestant evangelical tradition of itinerant preaching to reclaim wayward Catholics and attract converts.

The book suffers, however, from a lack of clarity. Marlett's chapters jumble together information that might have been dealt with exclusively in separate chapters. The use of too many examples compounds the problem. Using a handful of Catholic colonization efforts to speak to a broader colonization program would have solved this problem. Finally, Marlett, and many other historians of Catholicism, need to explain peculiarly Catholic terms. While he defines the Country Life Movement, Marlett leaves non-Catholic readers stranded with passing references to Thomism. Until we Catholic historians make our studies user friendly to non-Catholics, Catholic scholarship will have an unnecessarily narrow readership.

Reviewed by Penelope Adams Moon, assistant professor of history, Bethel College, North Newton.
Land Grant Universities and Extension into the 21st Century: Renegotiating or Abandoning a Social Contract

by George R. McDowell

xvi + 198 pages, references, index.

Land Grant Universities and Extension is not a history of either land grant universities or extension. McDowell, a professor of agriculture and applied economics, is concerned about the future of both institutions, not their past. His book is both a critique of current university and extension policies and a plan of action for how to correct the problems he identifies. As such, the book is relevant to agricultural historians as well as to all people interested in the future of higher education.

McDowell’s basic argument is that the land grant universities were established to serve the public in their state both through educating the youth (which he does not discuss) and through outreach. The extension service aimed to bring the agricultural work of the university to its farming constituents. This proved effective, according to McDowell, during much of the twentieth century, but its efficacy has declined during the past twenty-five years. McDowell identifies two main reasons for this.

As the agricultural population in the country has dropped, an extension service focused on agricultural issues has become increasingly moribund. McDowell argues that extension needs to reinvent itself to reach more than just farmers. It must renegotiate its social contract and re-engage with its constituents. He gives examples of extension departments that have done this, however, he contends that generally farm interest groups have taken extension “hostage,” lobbying for continuing extension expenditure for only agriculturally related topics (p. 72).

At the same time, extension and its employees have become marginalized within universities, as professors have captured the research agenda from the administration. According to McDowell, university administrators still want practical research defined by problems in their constituency, where solutions would enhance the university’s local reputation and state funding. Instead, individual professors now dictate their own research agendas based on standards within their discipline, chances of outside funding, and the dictates of tenure.

To solve these problems, McDowell offers a number of interrelated solutions. These include redefining scholarship and tenure requirements to incorporate extension faculty fully into the university, having extension faculty in each department working on discipline-appropriate outreach, wresting control of extension away from the farm lobby groups, and returning the research agenda to the university administration. McDowell’s intention is for his audience to think about the future of land grant universities and extension, and he certainly succeeds in that. His book is interesting and provocative. Like other broad-sweeping analyses, however, it has its problems. McDowell is not a historian, and his historical assessment of extension is simplistic. Extension was never universally welcomed by all farmers, as he indicates in his introduction, and it certainly never served all farmers. In fact, extension is partly responsible for the declining number of American farmers. As extension helped increase agricultural efficiency and made farming more a part of the capitalist economy, farmers without capital or with differing views of their relationship with the land were forced out or bought up.

Additionally, some of his projections are problematic. He anticipates extension agents in each department doing outreach in their discipline, using the example of a history department. In this fictitious department, the extension faculty would “provide[e] assistance . . . to local historical societies . . . carry out programs on historical preservation . . . teach . . . programs . . . about recording oral histories [and] . . . on small museum management and operation” (p. 169). These programs exist already in virtually every history department in the country that teaches public history. This begs the question that, while outreach is conceptually sound for any university, does it have to be done under the umbrella of extension, an entity that McDowell himself sees as almost hopelessly flawed?

Finally, McDowell argues that university administration supports outreach to leverage state funding. While this is true, administrative support will not extend to redefining the institutional research agenda. Universities need state funds, but increasingly they depend on outside funding brought in by individual professors. As this source of income becomes more important, the desire to please a constituency of taxpayers will fade even further. This will undermine the need for McDowell’s social contract and maybe, indeed, lead to its abandonment.

Reviewed by Claire Strom, assistant professor of history, North Dakota State University, Fargo.
"This is America?": The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas

by Rusty L. Monhollon


Rusty Monhollon's study of Lawrence, "This is America?: The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas, presents the diverse perspectives of participants in the black freedom struggle—moderate and radical community conservatives, campus activists, and "street people"—through hundreds of quotes culled from local newspaper archives, letters to members of Congress, and oral interview transcripts.

Lawrence, home of the free-state movement of 1854, a small town only 5 percent black, was in the 1960s predominantly conservative and not welcoming toward its black population, despite its pride in its radical anti-slavery heritage of a century earlier. Conflicting understandings of self and nation contested against the backdrop of the Cold War and conservatism maintained its potency throughout the decade.

In Lawrence in 1960, black median income was only a third that of whites. The black middle class that existed in the early twentieth century was gone—no black doctors or lawyers, virtually no blacks in retail sales, and neighborhoods were residentially segregated. The Republican majority's anticomunism "flourished throughout the 1960s and 1970s" (p. 26) and was communicated through the Lawrence Journal-World editorials, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, radio station KLWN, and the Save America from Communism Council.

The first collision came in 1960 over the absence of a swimming pool in Lawrence that would admit blacks. Getting the city to construct a public pool open to all took seven years, as did a city ordinance banning discrimination in housing, both passed in 1967. The conservative majority articulated its opposition to civil rights not as racism but as support for individual liberties—the right to private property and free association.

Campus activism catalyzed in response to the black protest and initially targeted race discrimination on campus: the campus newspaper accepting racially discriminatory advertising, the campus housing office referring students to segregated rentals, fraternities and sororities excluding nonwhites, the school of education sending student teachers to segregated schools, and barbershops and restaurants refusing to serve blacks. By March 1965 the leading campus civil rights organization, now led by blacks, staged a sit-in at the chancellor's office—150 students, most of whom were black. The students were arrested and suspended. Only after the protests continued did the chancellor agree to most of their demands.

Following the sit-in the Student Peace Union sponsored pickets at the Lawrence draft board, a blood drive for "the victims of LBJ's war," and teach-ins about the war. In chapter 6 Monhollon details campus activism in 1967, the year Lawrence experienced its first Vietnam fatality.

Monhollon's analysis of Black Power in chapter 5 is especially strong. Black Power "changed the terms of the community's discourse on race, terms now set by both blacks and whites, ... challenged not only Lawrence's dominant free-state narrative and the racial status quo but also the identities that most whites in the town had created for themselves. ... [Whites in Lawrence hardened their defense of the town's traditional racial boundaries and their own sense of who they were]" (p. 85). Racial disparities and divisions were the heart of much of the conflict Lawrence experienced in the 1960s, but that whites in Lawrence rarely identified race as the cause of conflict, preferring to blame "outsiders" (e.g., Leonard Harrison), communists, and the war in Vietnam (p. 136).

In 1969 and 1970 conflict intensified, fed by several controversies: KU's hiring of black radical Leonard "Shooby Do" Harrison to teach one course, two KU professors denouncing the verdicts in the Chicago Seven trial and subsequently being denied promotions, police discovering several homemade firebombs around the town, and black high school students making demands to their principal and being suspended. When the KU Student Union was gutted by arson, the governor ordered a dusk-to-dawn curfew in Lawrence that lasted for three days. The next month University of Kansas students threw rocks at the military science building and blocked the major north-south highway through Lawrence with their bodies, demanding the campus be closed in protest against Nixon's secret bombing of Cambodia. The new chancellor allowed students to finish classes or take the grade they had thus far accumulated and stop attending class in order to participate in teach-ins or other programs.

In July 1970 a white police officer shot and killed Rick "Tiger" Dowdell, a nineteen-year-old black man. Lawrence erupted in rioting that brought death to another nineteen-year-old, a white male, Nick Rice, killed presumably by police. The governor put Lawrence under curfew for six nights when an all-white panel exonerated the officer of wrongdoing in the death of Dowdell. Lawrence Support Your Local Police Committee collected 1,673 signatures on petitions supporting the officer. White vigilantes promised to use guerrilla warfare to silence the militants. By December 1970 the Black Student Union was calling for a strike at KU, students vandalized the chancellor's office, and a white student who tried to stop vandalism on campus was shot by a black student.

Monhollon's final chapter considers twenty women's successful occupation of a campus building in February 1972 for one day, resulting in establishment of an Office of Affirmative Action for Women with staff and a Program of Women's Studies, the
University's clinic dispensing birth control, and the opening of Hilltop Child Development Center. "This is America?" is well written, ambitious in scope, and anecdotal, but it relies overmuch on the editorials and articles of the Lawrence Journal-World, a newspaper Monhollon acknowledges was edited and published by "ardent cold warriors," for its analysis of highly contested events like the 1970 riots (p. 25). Statements such as "Grassroots communism in Lawrence remained strong throughout the 1960s" (p. 29) stretch credibility. Monhollon's exploration of the views of those who wrote to Congress or the press is perhaps the greatest contribution of this study, a useful addition to community studies of the 1960s.

Reviewed by Gretchen Cassel Eck, associate professor of history, Friends University, Wichita.

Elmer McCurdy: The Misadventures in Life and Afterlife of an American Outlaw

by Mark Svenvold


It is not uncommon for a person of notoriety to become famous after he or she is dead; but it is rare, even unique, for a virtual nonentity and failure to become notorious, even famous, after death. But such is the case with Elmer McCurdy, and erstwhile outlaw who accidentally found fame. His story is compiled and told for the first time in its entirety in Mark Svenvold's Elmer McCurdy: The Misadventures in Life and Afterlife of an American Outlaw.

Svenvold is poet-in-residence at Fordham University in New York, and his poetry and nonfiction has appeared in national publications. His current book is a masterful job of research and travel written in a tongue-in-cheek style. The author used the few secondary sources such as the book by Richard Bas- gull, a University of Kansas professor, and what primary sources he could find. He found many. He also traveled to the sites described in the text.

Certainly bizarre, at times macabre, Elmer McCurdy traces the outlaw from his youth in Maine to the mines in southeastern Kansas and southwest Missouri. McCurdy eventually enlisted in the U.S. Army and became a demolitions specialist—albeit apparently not a very good one—serving at Fort Leavenworth with a young Douglas MacArthur. After his discharge, McCurdy embarked on an abbreviated criminal career in St. Joseph, Missouri, and in Chautauqua, Kansas, where he tried to blow a bank safe. He finally joined a small amateur gang of train robbers hoping to steal the cash being delivered by rail from a trust fund maintained by the federal government for the Osage Indians. A sheriff's posse shot him dead.

As Svenvold so eloquently relates, death was not the end of McCurdy's biography. When no one claimed the body after an undertaker pumped it full of arsenic to the point of mumification, Elmer was propped up in a funeral home, sold to a traveling carnival, spent time in a wax museum, was hauled across the country in a depression-era coast-to-coast footrace, and was hung in an amusement park fun house. Even after finally being discovered and interred in an Oklahoma grave, the outlaw remained the source of controversy after a bed-and-breakfast owner's "Elmer McCurdy Murder Mystery Weekend" caused an uproar in 1991.

The reader does not know whether to chuckle at the humor in Svenvold's book or feel sorry for the events during its subject's lifetime and treatment after his death. This biography is incomparable not only because of its remarkable story but also because Svenvold shares insight into such peripheral topics helpful to understanding the events that unfold (or for Elmer, unravel) as embalming practices, carnies, 1930s entrepreneurs, Oklahoma politics, forensic science, and Midwestern tourism to spin this nonfiction yarn. While photos of McCurdy in life are scarce, the book is illustrated aplenty with photos telling his story after his death. An imaginative and skillful recounting, Elmer McCurdy will be a rather remarkable addition to the western library—a recommended curiosity.

Reviewed by Roy Bird, historian and author, Kansas State Library, Topeka.
The Bizarre Careers of John R. Brinkley

by R. Alton Lee

xvii + 283 pages, notes, bibliography, index.

The illegitimate son of a North Carolina minister, John R. Brinkley became one of America's wealthiest quacks. He began work as a telegrapher, but dreamt of being a doctor. In 1907 Brinkley married Sally Wike and set up as a medicine show doctor.

Brinkley studied for three years at an unaccredited medical school, but left without a degree. He then bought a diploma and practiced as an "undergraduate physician" licensed in Tennessee. In 1913 Brinkley married Minnie Crawford, without divorcing Sally, and that same year was arrested for practicing without a license.

In 1914 Brinkley attended another unlicensed school, specializing in prostate problems. The Missouri State Board of Health would not license him, so Brinkley took the exam in Arkansas. Because Kansas accepted Arkansas credentials the Brinkleys moved there, ending up in Fulton.

In 1917 Brinkley joined the army as a doctor. He later claimed extensive army service, but records show that he served only a month before being discharged. He then opened a practice in Milford and began to perform his goat-gland operations.

Brinkley claimed that transplanting goat gonads into impotent men restored their sexual powers. By 1919 so many patients wanted the operation that he built his own hospital. He promoted the operation with the skills from his medicine show days. In 1923 he founded radio station KFKB to enlarge his clientele. Brinkley claimed that he ran no ads, but his mix of music, health advice, farm news, and biblical inspiration was dedicated to promoting his practice.

In his broadcasts Brinkley played on popular resentment of doctors, claimed that only he cured ills, and even diagnosed and prescribed over the air—prescriptions that could only be filled by his own druggists.

Brinkley's unorthodox methods and radio attacks riled Kansas doctors and the American Medical Association. In the late 1920s the state, the Kansas City newspapers, and the AMA attacked, aiming to revoke his medical and broadcast licenses. In June 1930 the Federal Radio Commission ordered KFKB shut down for broadcasts contrary to the public interest. Later that summer the Medical Board revoked Brinkley's medical license.

Brinkley fought in court, telephoned his radio commentaries to Mexico for rebroadcast, and launched a write-in candidacy for governor. He claimed to have been persecuted by the government, and he proposed free schoolbooks, free medical care, and state pensions. Brinkley made daily political broadcasts on his revived station and used his limousine and plane to attend rallies across the state. Brinkley won twenty-eight counties but came in third.

Defeated in Kansas, Brinkley moved to Texas and put the radio station in Mexico. His hospital prospered, but the high wattage station had problems with the Mexican and American authorities. In 1938 Brinkley moved to Arkansas, but the government and the AMA were closing in. By 1941 he was bankrupt, under indictment, and losing the station. Brinkley died in May 1942, leaving his wife Minnie in dire straights.

Brinkley's fabrications and checkered career make his life fascinating and difficult to follow. R. Alton Lee has assembled an impressive array of facts and myths about the "goat gland doctor," but the author has not combined them into a coherent whole. The narrative jumps back and forth and from place to place, making it difficult to know when events occurred without re-reading passages. Small but avoidable errors also mar the book. For example, the St. Louis World Fair was in 1904, not 1906 (p. 30); the World War I influenza epidemic originated in Kansas, but it struck in 1918–1919, not 1917–1918 (p. 34); and Woodrow Wilson was not yet the ex-president in 1920 (p. 40).

Bizarre Careers records an interesting chapter in Kansas's history and paves the way for further scholarship on John R. Brinkley, the Kansas "goat gland doctor."

Reviewed by Duncan Stewart, librarian, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City.
The Saga of the Pony Express

by Joseph J. Di Certo

ix + 244 pages, photographs, maps, appendices, bibliography, index.

When William F. Cody first rode for the Pony Express he was all of fourteen years old. But then, he had started herding cattle for Alexander Majors, one of the three principal investors in the Pony Express, at the age of nine. As Joseph Di Certo observes, some of the exploits of the future "Buffalo Bill" were the creation of dime novelists and publicity agents, but "there is no doubt about the courage and dedication he showed while in the service of the Pony Express."

Cody's story is just one of the many legends, facts, details, and lives that emerge in this solidly researched, well-written, witty, and entertaining account of the tumultuous eighteen-month history of the Pony Express. Even the ponies get well-deserved attention. Russell, Majors & Waddell, which bankrolled the enterprise, initially purchased five hundred horses for $87,000, or an average of $175 a piece. Some superior stock from Kentucky and Utah Territory cost $200 a head. The lives of the riders, to say nothing of the success of the venture, depended on these mounts.

Di Certo treats the saga of the Pony Express as a phenomenon of its time and place. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of fast-paced industrial growth and social upheaval in the United States and Europe. Immigration to America swelled, feeding the westward expansion of the nation. Communication with remote western regions was difficult, whether by land or sea. The discovery of gold in California increased the pressure for swift and reliable contact between the East and West Coasts, if for no other reason than the need for national unity. And then the Civil War loomed, not only highlighting the importance of California to the Union, but also disrupting overland stagecoach and wagon routes to the Pacific.

Attempts at overland mail service, based primarily on stagecoach service, began and faltered throughout the 1850s. One route ran from Independence, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The other was that of the great Butterfield Overland Mail Company, which covered twenty-seven hundred miles from St. Louis via New Mexico and Arizona to Los Angeles and then to San Francisco. Climate, topography, interference by Indians, and ultimately the outbreak of the Civil War, doomed these efforts.

The Pony Express began carrying mail on April 3, 1860, with the dispatch of a rider headed west from St. Joseph, Missouri, and a steamboat headed east from San Francisco to Sacramento, where riders took over. In the next year and a half more than two hundred riders completed 308 transcontinental runs for a total distance of 616,000 miles. They delivered 34,783 letters. Nonetheless, Russell, Majors & Waddell lost nearly two hundred thousand dollars on its investment, sometimes incurring a deficit of thirteen dollars per letter delivered. These losses, plus a financial scandal involving William Russell and, in the end, the completion of a transcontinental telegraph line, heralded the demise of the Pony Express. The riders delivered their last letters in November 1861.

The wealth of detail Di Certo provides on the Pony Express is fascinating. He lists and chronicles the stories of the stations along the route, and the lives of the men who ran them. There were more than a dozen such stations in Kansas, for example. He takes readers with the riders as they dashed from station to station and comments on the exploits of many of the riders themselves. Numerous poignant photographs and contemporary illustrations of these young men are included, along with others of the express stations, landmarks, and trail personalities. Clear and concise maps cover the general route from coast to coast and locate every Pony Express station. For readers seeking further information, there is a list of "sites of interest" at the end of the book, along with an extensive bibliography.

Di Certo notes in his introduction that the drama of the Pony Express has burned an indelible imprint in the American imagination, but also that as a consequence there are many misconceptions concerning its history. This study dispels those misconceptions without sacrificing one drop of the drama.

(Histories of the American Frontier Series)
Racial Frontiers: Africans, Chinese, and Mexicans in Western America, 1848–1890

by Arnoldo De Leon

ix + 150 pages, photographs, notes, bibliography, index.

As implied by its title and subtitle, this work sets the ambitious goal of synthesizing the experiences of three minority groups in a seminal period of Western history, all within the confines of 107 pages and in a package suitable for undergraduate classrooms. Few writers can pull off this feat as well as Arnoldo De Leon, a leading scholar of borderlands and Chicano history. De Leon situates his narrative between the annexation of Mexican lands and the Northwest in 1848 and the end of the conventionally defined “frontier” in 1890. De Leon examines the experiences of those major “nonwhite” groups—blacks, Chinese, and Mexicans—in the context of their immigration to the West, and how each negotiated the racial boundaries established by Anglos. His premise is that the region’s sparse population and segregated society allowed for the formation of ethnic enclaves that kept the original cultural identities of immigrants intact, albeit with modifications for their new environment. In De Leon’s words, “the frontier took the shape of many colors” (p. 107).

Like most immigration studies, Racial Frontiers explores the dual “push–pull” factors that prompted all three groups into the West, nicely supplemented with personal stories and population tables. Each entered the region with its own unique set of advantages and obstacles. African Americans, for instance, knew the language and customs of the white majority, while Hispanics—having settled in areas most familiar to their ancestors—understood the natural terrain better than other newcomers. In contrast to traditional interpretations that depict Chinese migrants as poor and oppressed, De Leon includes revisionist findings that show them as skilled entrepreneurs who made calculated decisions to relocate to North America. Most amazing for a study of this brevity is the complexity with which De Leon depicts his subjects, painting them neither as passive victims nor as predictable racial actors but as individuals whose decisions were informed by their class, national, gender, as well as racial, backgrounds. While many elites within minority groups emerged as “race leaders,” others distanced themselves from fellow people of color and attained positions of influence through the patronage of powerful whites.

Ostensibly pluralistic in its approach, Racial Frontiers offers some evidence to suspect that the “melting pot” analogy of American society may not be quite dead. On one hand, the minorities whom De Leon describes sought to re-create the customs and perceived heritages of their original homelands, a fairly easy task given the fact that white authorities—with some exceptions—had little interest in regulating the internal affairs of nonwhite communities. On the other, the frontier provided an “equalizing force” (p. 105) whereby immigrants adopted the theoretical ethos of democracy and opportunity that encouraged them to resist systems of oppression they had known previously. What emerged from these tensions was a set of “dual identities” that integrated the ethnic loyalties of old worlds with the optimism of new. As De Leon points out, such practices “did not deviate substantially from the practice of Anglo Americans, who similarly attempted to sink old roots in new environments” (p. 107). Few western historians could successfully refute De Leon’s main point that racial boundaries and their accompanying identities remained well entrenched after 1890. But they would do well to consider his secondary point that minorities and whites shared important similarities, including an eye for western conquest, the prospect of capitalistic gain, and even the potential for interracial rivalry as blacks, Mexicans, and Chinese competed with each other for jobs and limited resources.

Consequently, it seems odd that De Leon limits his scope to these three groups. Most Native Americans also were immigrants to the West in the nineteenth century, and they too had to forge new identities and customs in the region's expanding racial framework. And despite naive claims that the history of Anglo Americans has been exhausted, whiteness studies of the past decade have revealed a complex heterogeneity within the West's majority group that shows “white” identity to be as much a social construct as any other category. Racial Frontiers could easily incorporate Indians' and whites' experiences without seriously complicating its premise or lengthening its narrative. Likewise, the advent of New Western History has rendered the concept of “frontier” suspect to the point that it deserves more analysis than provided here. De Leon defines “racial frontier” as the collision ground of different races, a sufficient definition on its face but clearly in need of further elaboration. These limitations aside, De Leon has delivered the best synthesis on race relations in the West to date. His writing conveys the topic's complicated, multifaceted nature in a straightforward style that is accessible to both specialists and beginning students.

Reviewed by James N. Leiker, assistant professor of history, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park.