
Book Reviews

Edited by Christopher J. Huggard

Rodman Wilson Paul. *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848-1880. A Revised, Expanded Edition by Elliott West.* (University of New Mexico Press, 2001. First published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963.)

The University of New Mexico Press has reissued Rodman W. Paul's out-of-print classic *Mining Frontiers of the Far West, 1848-1880*. This book has been a must-read for two generations of mining historians and other scholars of the West, and this reissue with additional chapters by Elliot West provides an opportunity to revisit Paul's work in light of Western scholarship today.

Nearly forty years ago Rodman Paul stood in California, looked east, and said, bluntly, that the West was different from the East, that the history of Western development could not be explained by theories of Eastern development. He set out to demonstrate it through the study of western mining, possibly the most important component in the history of the West. He argued that there was not one constantly westward-moving frontier throughout U.S. history, as Frederick Jackson Turner had claimed in 1893. Instead, Paul argued that there was never a single mining frontier, nor a frontier line in the West, writing "it is more accurate to think of the mining West as constituting a series of frontiers, sometimes successive, sometimes widely separated geographically and chronologically, rather than [as] a single entity." (p.11) Rodman Paul was among a small group of scholars chipping away at Turner's "frontier thesis" in the early nineteen sixties, a project the New Western History has engaged in vigor-

ously in the last fifteen years. Paul ran into problems with Turner's frontier thesis as he followed the mining booms from California eastward. Paul's mining frontiers were not a gradual development, but instead were powerful urbanizing booms. While conveying his respect for Turner's ideas in his opening chapter, Paul's book helped push Turner's thesis east of the 100th meridian.

Paul identifies distinct periods in the history of Western mining, beginning in California (1848-1858), moving to Nevada and the Comstock Lode (1859-1880), Colorado (1859-1880), and on to the Pacific Northwest and Southwest (1860-1880), and ending in the Black Hills in the late 1870s. In these chapters, Paul explores mining history and its relationship to the development of the West as an interpretive scholar. He explores opposites—large capitalists and hardscrabble miners, the remote mines of the country and the financial markets of the city. He concerns himself not with tall tales of the West but instead explores topics, such as the nature of ores, the processes for the recovery of metal, how men developed and used tools and technology, and, to an extent, the social organization of mining communities.

In this new edition, Rodman Paul's work has not simply been reprinted. Senior Western historian Elliott West of the University of Arkansas has added three chapters (eighty plus pages) to Paul's classic work. The original is reprinted in full in the new edition, and then is followed by a few transitional pages entitled, "The Mining Frontier-Another Viewpoint." West then proceeds with his three additional chapters: "Breaking and Building Communities," "The World's Conven-

tion,” and “Worlds of Work.”

West's chapters contrast sharply with Paul's original work. West tells stories illuminated by anecdotes that create an overall tone for the reader, a tone that emerges as complicated and rich. West writes a general social history of the region based in the scholarship of the forty years since *Mining Frontiers of the Far West* was first published. In “Breaking and Building Communities,” for instance, West presents the devastation of Native American communities and the development of mining frontiers not simply as counterpoints, but as closely interconnected relationships. These chapters are overviews of more recent thinking on Western history applied directly to the mining context. For the well-read scholar, West's work is most useful in raising questions for additional research. For the general reader who may not read other books on Western history, West's additional chapters provide historical context.

Various approaches could have been taken in a new edition of Paul's book. His history could have been extended by time or by place. As well, new knowledge from the last forty years of scholarship on Western mining could have been added in keeping with Paul's original themes. West, however, is modest in his intent, and this may be the best solution—don't tamper with a classic. West adds social and historical context, allowing us to consider the original work with new eyes, and he also updates Paul's original annotated bibliography. West is an excellent storyteller, and his writing contrasts with Paul's, leaving no doubt that two authors are at work. Spelling out the authorship on the “Contents” page, however, might be in order.

In his 1963 review in the *American Historical Review* historian Clark Spence predicted that the “richness of ideas and interpretations” in Paul's work would create a book that endures. Spence's insightful prediction has proven true. With this edition Paul's work is readily available

to a new generation, enriched by Elliot West's thoughtful and non-intrusive additional chapters.

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Roberto R. Calderón. *Mexican Coal Mining Labor in Texas and Coahuila, 1880-1930*. (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1999.) 316 pages. 17 b&w photos. Bib. Index. Cloth \$39.95.

Thousands of Mexican coal miners and their families earned their livings from mining coal on both sides of the international border between 1880 and 1930. Those entering the United States sought greater opportunity, fleeing the undemocratic government of Porfirio Díaz and the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution, often staying and becoming an important segment of the working class in Texas and the greater Southwest. As Roberto Calderón shows in *Mexican Coal Mining Labor*, this was part of a transnational process spurred mainly by United States capitalists and the coming of American-owned railroads heading south and west from Texas into north-east Mexico. The coal mines were dug in large part to service the railroads, and so the first mines in the North Texas Coalfield emerged due to the advances of various rail lines. The emerging coal companies sought Mexican workers to mine the coal to fuel the railroads and smelters as well as utility and other industries to change the industrial landscape of northern Mexico and Texas. These growing industries gave rise to a new industrial workforce, and coal drove industrialization. With the digging of the first shafts came workers' efforts to organize, and Calderón shows that Mexican miners developed grassroots efforts in Mexico, joined national organizations, and also played a significant role in the unionization of Texas mines throughout the hand loading period studied here. After that, oil displaced coal and a new era began.