
R E V I E W S

The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History

by Jon K. Lauck

166 pages, notes, index.

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013, cloth, \$35.00.

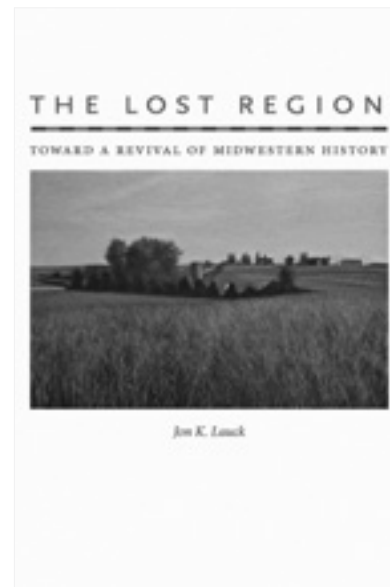
Along with Jon Lauck's many other friends, I have long been impressed by his erudition, energy, and passion. All of those qualities are displayed in *The Lost Region*. At bottom, this study is a plea for recognition by historians of the national and international significance of the Midwest and for a renewed commitment to studying the region's history.

As Lauck effectively demonstrates, in the first half of the twentieth century, midwestern history was a vital and prominent field. The "Prairie Historians," as he calls them, mostly midwestern-born students or admirers of Frederick Jackson Turner, created the Mississippi Valley Historical Association as a counter to the elitist American Historical Association, built vital state historical societies and university departments, and created journals to feature regional scholarship—most notably the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, now the *Journal of American History*.

In their scholarship, R. Carlyle Buley, John D. Hicks, Merle Curti, Frederic Paxson and the other Prairie Historians emphasized midwestern—often Turnerian—themes, such as the national and international significance of the region and its central contribution to the development of American democracy and civic cultural vitality. They were not generally theorists, but were objective, empirical researchers devoted to making their work accessible to a broad public.

After World War II their influence waned. As early as the 1920s they were beset by elitist critics from the East such as H. L. Mencken, and by the 1930s Turner and his followers were increasingly attacked by younger scholars from outside the region. After the war the mainstream of the profession changed course, increasingly embracing social science theories, focusing attention on issues of race, class, and gender, and moving away from the economic and political history emphasized by the Prairie Historians. As this happened, the regional historical identity—never as vital as in the South, West, or New England—melted away. The regional journals—most notably the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*—were lost or transformed. And midwestern colleges and universities dropped regional history and even state history from their course offerings.

As a pigs-is-pigs historian who spent thirty-six years teaching and writing in North Dakota, I found myself nodding enthusiastically when reading Lauck's condemnations of arrogant eastern elitists and the history profession's interpretive hegemony. But sometimes he crosses the line between analysis and polemic. There is special pleading in places here, and even



a bit of self-pity. Yes, the elitists on the coasts derogue the Midwest, but that goes both ways. Has a midwestern political candidate ever lost a vote by beating up on Wall Street bankers or the "Hollywood liberals?" And sometimes Lauck sounds like a conspiracy thinker, as when he warns of the "underlying cultural Marxism" (p. 77) in the profession and its nefarious purposes.

The main weakness in *The Lost Region* is that Lauck oversells his case. The history of the Midwest and of the states of the region is not taught much in colleges and universities, and that shameful omission should be rectified. But midwestern history continues to appear in journals, and historians continue to produce good work on the region and to supervise graduate students writing dissertations on midwestern topics. Lauck concedes as much, but he seems to want the kind of history Frederick Merk or Everett Dick did to be done again, and that is not going to happen. Nobody echoes U. B. Phillips's style of history anymore, but southern history has not gone away. Midwestern history is being done—it's just not the self-conscious and regionally chauvinistic midwestern history turned out by the Prairie Historians.

That being said, Lauck's call for a renaissance of midwestern history is clear and timely. The Midwest is a difficult region to define, but its significance is central to what the United States is about. As Jon Lauck demonstrates, we have to do a better job of telling that story, and that effort needs to begin in the Midwest itself.

Reviewed by David B. Danbom, independent scholar, Loveland, Colorado.

The Geography of Resistance: Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad

by Cheryl Janifer LaRoche

xviii + 232 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.
Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014, cloth \$85.00,
paper \$25.00.

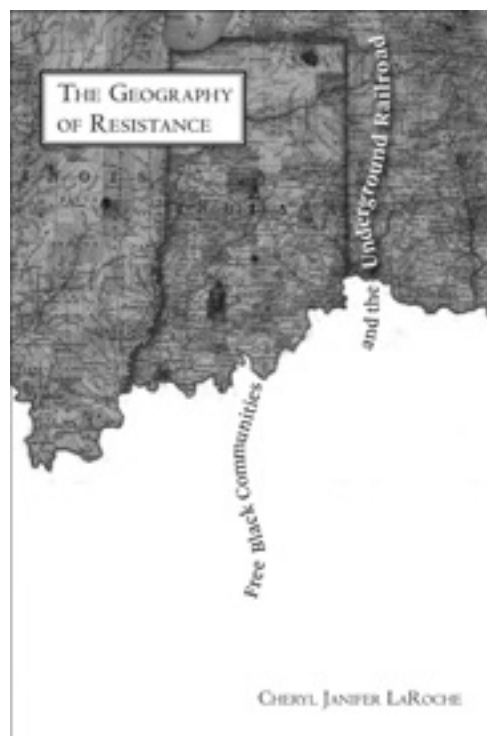
Cheryl LaRoche's *The Geography of Resistance* provides a timely addition to our growing knowledge of Underground Railroad activities in the North. Using free black communities in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio as an outlet for investigation, she examines the connections between free black communities and escaped slaves seeking freedom. Her experience as a public historian allows her to incorporate techniques from historical archaeology and maximize use of oral histories and community studies, making this study truly interdisciplinary and of interest to lay readers and scholars alike.

LaRoche's goal is to foreground the black perspective and challenge traditional narratives of the Underground Railroad, which generally privilege white "conductors" as the paragons of selfless sacrifice, an interpretive framework that ignores the ways that free blacks in the North were central to the movement's success. She argues that black communities, in particular institutions such as churches and fraternal organizations, were key orchestrators of slave escapes, offering refuge to fugitives as well as guidance on how to adapt to life as free people of color. More specifically, she contends that these networks to freedom were intimately tied to established black denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, whose members used their own routes and safe houses.

The Geography of Resistance is organized in three parts. The first section offers case studies of four locations on the Underground Railroad. Chapter one focuses on Rocky Fork, Illinois, a rural community near Alton, Illinois, home to an especially rich oral tradition of black resistance. The next two chapters home in on Miller Grove, Illinois (a previously unrecognized site), and Lick Creek, Indiana, as they highlight the importance of interracial organizations like the American Missionary Association and the Quaker Church in building freedom operations. Chapter four focuses more intently on black operators in Poke Patch, Ohio, who first gained attention through Wilbur Siebert's extensive research at the turn of the twentieth century.

Part two, comprising chapters five and six, explores the "geography of resistance" that runs central to her narrative, providing a synthetic perspective to contextualize the previous case studies. These two chapters discuss how landscapes were key to the Underground Railroad and how blacks interacted with their surroundings, using their knowledge of the terrain to their advantage. Waterways, caves, iron forges, established black churches, and well-traveled routes through the countryside were literal, traceable pathways for black migration.

The third and final section focuses on black communities, particularly black churches and fraternal organizations, that



worked for the antislavery cause. Chapter seven ties family, community, and religious establishments together as pillars of black communities, sites of collaboration and, more importantly, socially acceptable cloaks for Underground Railroad activity. This chapter includes two particularly useful maps that help readers visualize these communities' locations along established routes. Chapter eight expands the analysis to fraternal organizations, such as the Freemasons, and interracial conventions for racial equality that promoted black self-help and the adoption of middle-class values. LaRoche's final chapter reinforces her interpretation that black churches, and the black settlements of which they were a part, were a significant force in shaping black migration on the Underground Railroad.

Although LaRoche's research is extensive, the book had room for improvement. LaRoche often uses terms like "landscapes of freedom" and "geography of resistance" without clearly defining or explaining them. The inclusion of case studies also means that the book sometimes lacks a cohesive voice, although it is in these four case studies that one sees her most effective use of archaeological methodology. In addition, some portions could have benefitted from more convincing evidence and deeper analysis. Despite these criticisms, however, anyone fascinated by the Underground Railroad and black resistance more broadly will profit from this volume.

Reviewed by Kristen K. Epps, assistant professor of history, University of Central Arkansas, Conway.

Global West, American Frontier: Travel, Empire, and Exceptionalism from Manifest Destiny to the Great Depression

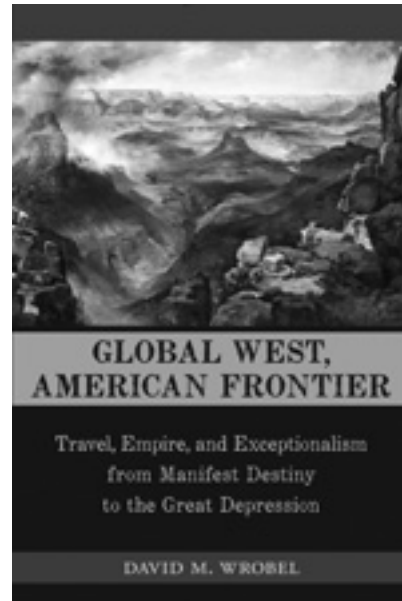
by David M. Wrobel

xv + 312 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.
Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014,
cloth \$39.95.

The American West has provided a destination for generations of travelers in search of dramatic landscapes and novel cultural experiences. In *Global West, American Frontier*, historian David M. Wrobel deploys an encyclopedic knowledge of the travel narratives visitors left behind in order to illustrate that they approached the West laden with contemporary concerns about the region and the world. The study is oriented around two premises. First, Wrobel argues that nineteenth-century visitors entered the West within the context of global voyages of exploration. In the second half of the book, Wrobel surveys the experiences of twentieth-century visitors who approached the West within a more confined regional or national context—seeking to find an authentic place in an age of modernization and standardization. This periodization drives the broad outlines of this book and offers some structure for the author’s expansive synopses of dozens of travel narratives.

The volume is compiled from a series of lectures that began with Wrobel’s 2003 Calvin Horn Lecture at the University of New Mexico. Each chapter explores familiar themes in western history by weaving travelers’ accounts through the text. The first chapter, “Exceptionalism and Globalism,” counters the idea that western travelers engaged with the region expecting an inherent “exceptionalism” in the West. Here Wrobel uses travel narratives to argue that it is better to approach this moment within a global imperial context, in keeping with developments in the rest of the world during this period. “The World in the West, the West in the World,” highlights the expansive perspective of most travel writers during the nineteenth century. By merging seemingly disparate explorations in Africa and the arid West, Wrobel illustrates that travelers often experienced the West as part of a global set of landscapes and cultural phenomena. Here as elsewhere, however, the author’s enchantment with the genre of travel writing and his penchant to summarize unfortunately lead him to neglect the interpretative threads that might bind together this disparate volume of essays.

In the book’s second half, Wrobel turns to the early twentieth century, suggesting that the perceived closing of the American frontier drew a new generation of visitors who traveled to the region in search of an “authentic” West. The third chapter, “No, Adventure is Not Dead,” suggests that these travel writers “helped keep the western frontier alive in the public consciousness, thereby fortifying the storehouse of American western exceptionalism” even “in the face of the forces of first modernization and then globalization” (p. 85). The travels of



Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Muir, and Theodore Roosevelt provide color and texture, as each explorer situated his own adventures within the context of continuing to explore the farthest reaches of an ever-shrinking world. A brief fourth chapter, “The End of the West,” examines the writings of automobile tourists in the West. Automobilitists’ accounts reinforce the author’s assessment that “the frontier era, the great age of western and southwestern distinctiveness, had passed away as the crush of commerce and modernity arrived” (p. 125). A long final chapter, “Rediscovering the West,” surveys the Federal Writers’ Project guides to the western states, providing an incongruous last section. These New Deal–commissioned guides portray a different approach to surveying the West, and Wrobel’s expansive summaries of their content are incongruous with the travelers’ texts upon which the remainder of *Global West, American Frontier* is based.

In some ways the sweeping purview of this book diminishes its effectiveness, and while it provides an excellent introduction to the vast travel literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it does not achieve the systematic textual analysis that readers might have expected. Overall, however, this study provides a provocative overview of the meanings of the American West during the period between the 1840s and 1940s, and, perhaps most importantly, it “offers a new ear to some old voices that deserve another hearing” (p. 4). As David Wrobel has so ably observed, travel writers from across the globe who reflected on the nature of the West offer a new perspective on the mythic region and its cultural history, and students of Kansas and the broader West would benefit from a reintroduction to these compelling texts.

Reviewed by Sara M. Gregg, associate professor of history, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

Sunflower Justice: A New History of the Kansas Supreme Court

by R. Alton Lee

xii + 388 pages, notes, index.

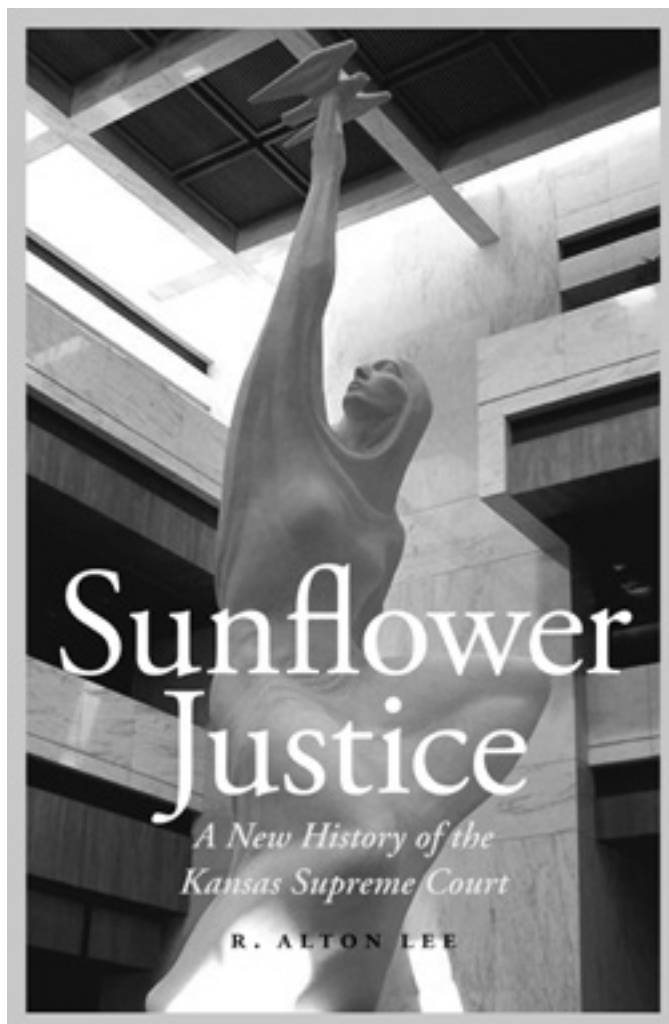
Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2014, cloth \$65.00.

Professor R. Alton Lee, Professor Emeritus of American History at the University of South Dakota, has put every legal historian, historian of the American West, and Kansas lawyer in his debt by writing *Sunflower Justice*, a historical survey of the development both of the Kansas Supreme Court and of Kansas law generally from the beginnings of the state in its territorial period to the present day.

The nine principal chapters of the book proceed chronologically, and each contains brief biographies of the justices of the period as well as extensive discussion of those cases that Lee judges most significant in the development of the law of Kansas. Importantly, Lee does not simply recite the bare bones of the cases he mentions but puts these cases in their social and historical contexts. He also relates these Kansas cases to legal trends in the broader nation, both judicial and legislative.

One of the most difficult tasks faced by anyone writing the history of a state court over more than a century and a half is sheer volume. The Kansas Supreme Court has decided tens of thousands of cases during its existence, and these cases deal with thousands of legal principles. The simplest method of dealing with this huge quantity of reports is to provide a survey of the main topics covered in the decisions and to select the most important cases for longer discussion. This is precisely what Lee has done. Thus, as one reads through the book one gets a strong sense of how the Kansas Supreme Court handled those matters of the greatest legal and social import, including everything from homestead laws to prohibition to labor law to criminal conspiracy. The danger of this approach, of which Professor Lee is well aware, is one of superficiality, but he avoids this by providing enough detail about the most important cases and footnotes that can direct the reader to more detailed accounts.

Professor Lee has a wonderful eye not only for picking out those cases of the greatest social and legal significance for discussion but also for choosing cases that demonstrate the nooks and crannies of every state legal system as well as the particular social characteristics of Kansas. His discussions of the ways in which the Kansas Supreme Court dealt with new technologies such as railroads, automobiles, and airplanes could stand as a model for anyone attempting to show how science and technology affect the progress of the law. Among the more interesting cases that highlight Kansas in particular is *Anthony v. Haldeman* [7 Kan. 50 (1871)]. In this election law decision, Lee writes, Justice David Brewer held that the effect of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution “worked to strike the word ‘white’ from the Kansas constitutional qualifications that limited suffrage to ‘every white male person’” (p. 43). In highlighting



cases such as *Anthony*, Lee gives readers a true picture of the Court and its justices.

In his introduction, Lee quotes James Willard Hurst, one of the greatest American legal historians of the twentieth century, who wrote that the task of a legal historian is to demonstrate “how the law has really worked in social experience.” Professor Lee has obviously taken this advice to heart and followed it in writing this wonderful volume. *Sunflower Justice* is an important book and should be read by every American legal historian interested in the development of the law at the state level.

Reviewed by M. H. Hoeflich, John H. and John M. Kane Distinguished Professor of Law, University of Kansas, Lawrence.

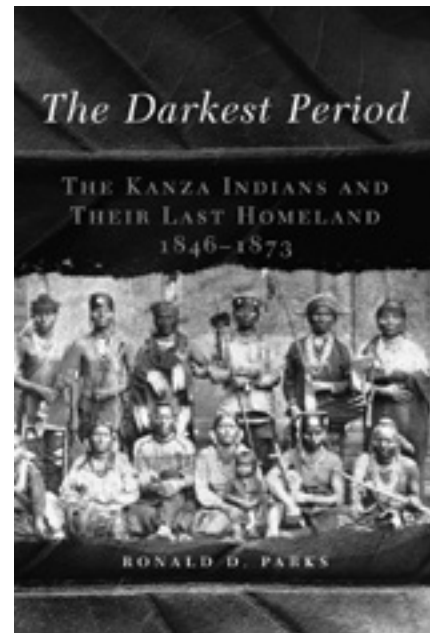
The Darkest Period: The Kanza Indians and Their Last Homeland, 1846–1873

by Ronald D. Parks

xv + 317 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.
Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014, cloth
\$34.95.

Open hostility, cultural miscommunication, greed, avarice, flashes of humanity, and the strength of an often maligned people fill the pages of Ronald D. Parks's *The Darkest Period: The Kanza Indians and Their Last Homeland, 1846–1873*. Parks's work covers a pivotal twenty-seven years in the development of not only the eventual state of Kansas but also of the Kanza people and their struggles to "exercise political autonomy while maintaining traditional social customs and subsistence strategies" (p. 7). In telling a story of two divergent world views and occasional cooperation, Parks crafts an intricate narrative that places the Kanza front and center in the story of Kansas's development and in the larger framework of western history during the period in which the Santa Fe, Oregon, and California Trails carried passengers, freight, and the ideals of Manifest Destiny from the cultured East to the uncivilized West. For Parks, the Kanza should not be viewed as victims, and above all he wants his readers to see the Kanza as human beings. Parks's work launches a salvo over the bow of conventional history and its interpretations of American Indian peoples, calling for a "necessary reenvisioning of the Kanza people of that time as valued companions in our deeply flawed human journey" (p. 8).

Parks deftly interweaves several threads of historical narrative to show the complexity of the developing Kansas frontier and Kanza–white relations. His source material (government records, newspapers, personal accounts, missionary records, transcribed speeches, personal interviews, tribal sources) is vast and, when interpreted through the Kanza lens, becomes rich with their voice so long ignored by mainstream scholarship. Parks gives the Kanza of the nineteenth century a human, realistic presence in a rapidly changing world as they lost control over their connections to their homeland, the natural environment, and sacred spaces due to conflict with land-hungry settlers. No group is above reproach in his analysis. Neither heroes nor villains surface—only deeply flawed white Americans who advanced ethnocentric sentiments of the nineteenth century demanding racial purity and conformity to Judeo-Christian norms under the banner of progress. Parks implores his readers to consider the Kanza as human beings replete with goodness, cruelty, charity, and dignity despite the loss of their lands and way of life. By placing the Kanza at the center of his narrative, Parks challenges the reader to set aside conventional historical views of the pioneer narrative in Kansas history and reassess white settlers, traders, government officials, and religious clergy engaged with the Kanza as players in the process of Indian removal that devastated the Kanza in the 1870s.



For devotees of Kansas history, this 273rd volume from the Civilization of the American Indian Series explores Kansas and the West during a period of rapid change in which American Indian and white communities contested one another's spaces, resources, and ways of life. In the end, the competition between the two communities resulted in the birth of a state, the furthering of a frontier mythology and the attempted hegemonic destruction of the Kanza way of life. Parks's volume is an excellent companion to William Unrau's *The Kansa Indians: A History of the Wind People, 1673–1873* and Unrau's collaborative work with Craig Miner, *The End of Indian Kansas: A Study of Cultural Revolution*. Whereas Unrau covers the broadest expanse of Kanza history, Parks focuses on the most traumatic time for the tribe in its quest to survive and retain its culture and identity. Parks's focused approach allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of Kanza history, culture, and will to survive despite facing seemingly insurmountable odds. Perhaps Parks's analysis regarding the mistreatment of the Kanza would have been emboldened by comparing their relationships to frontier settlers and the United States government to those of other tribes removed from Kansas to Indian Territory (i.e., the Osage and Delaware). Such an approach would have given Parks additional points of comparison to show the extent to which the Kanza were mistreated and taken advantage of given their diminished circumstances by the time of their final removal. From the pen of an author who knows the Kanza and writes engagingly, this book tilts the scale closer to the truth about Indian–white relations in the historic West.

*Reviewed by Michelle M. Martin, adjunct professor of history,
Rogers State University, Claremore, Oklahoma.*

The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism, Second Edition

by Walter Nugent

xix + 231 pages, notes, index.

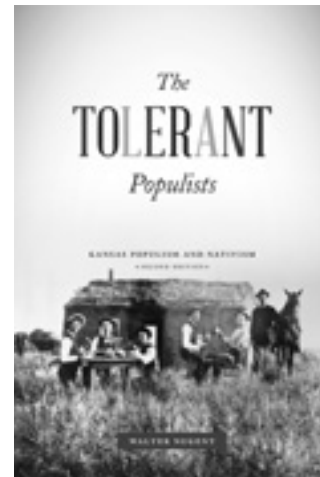
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, cloth \$25.00.

Fifty years ago, a young scholar mined the archival holdings of the Kansas State Historical Society and crafted an account of Kansas Populism that refuted the prevailing claims of the historical profession's luminaries that the men and women of that state's late-nineteenth century Farmers' Alliance and People's Party harbored a deep and seething hatred for immigrants, Jews, and foreigners.

When it appeared in 1963, Walter Nugent's *The Tolerant Populists* boldly attacked the accusations by Richard Hofstadter and other historians that the 1890s Populists were nativists and anti-Semites and that they inspired the twentieth-century nativism and anti-Semitism most famously expressed by radio priest Charles Coughlin in the 1930s and Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in the 1950s. Through its use as a descriptor for Coughlin and McCarthy, the word "populism"—with a small *p*—had gained a negative connotation during the mid-twentieth century. Although the original Populists were once seen as democratic and the predecessors of reform, the misuse of the label contributed to the decline of their reputation—especially following the 1955 appearance of Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*.

In contrast to Hofstadter, *The Tolerant Populists* revealed that the Populists harbored neither racist nor economic opposition toward immigrants. Instead, Nugent found that a significant number of immigrants lived in Populist counties and that members of the Farmers' Alliance, the precursor of the People's Party, sought the support of their foreign-born neighbors and that local, state, and national Alliance leaders emerged from diverse backgrounds. After political action superseded agrarian organization, the Populists viewed immigrants as potential voters and clashed with the nativist American Protective Association, even if they experienced a few missteps in their relations with immigrants—such as when the nascent People's Party alienated Germans with the nomination of former Republican and prohibitionist John F. Willits for governor in 1890.

While professing a desire for land, money, and transportation reform, the Populists, from the beginning, placed special emphasis on the platform's financial plank. The discussion of the "money question" led some Populists to speak of the "money power." A few believed that a conspiracy of Wall Street, English, and Jewish bankers and members of the American government existed to manipulate the currency at the people's expense. Those conspiracy-minded Populists spoke of "Rothschild" and "Shylock." Nugent argued, however, that even the use of those terms failed to indicate widespread anti-Semitism among the Populists.



Nugent did acknowledge some Anglophobia among the Populists. Some of the Populist Anglophobia may be attributed to Irish-American nationalism or sympathy for Irish resistance to English landlords. Although the Populists lamented the increasing amount of Kansas land owned by foreign individuals who lived elsewhere, syndicates, and corporations, the reformers welcomed individual foreign settlers who came to the state.

With *The Tolerant Populists*, Nugent was among the earliest scholars to rehabilitate the Populists' image—an effort that continues to the present. *The Tolerant Populists* is now available in a second edition from the University of Chicago Press. The only changes Nugent made for the new edition are updates to language and the addition of a new preface in which he acknowledges that, had the first edition appeared a few years later, he would have paid more attention to race, class, and gender. Despite these lingering deficiencies, Nugent writes that the second edition is necessary "to underline the misuses and perversions of the term 'populism,' with a small *p*" (p. xi). In the twenty-first century, Nugent observes, populism is "an all-purpose put-down" (p. xii). He also objects to using populism to describe the Tea Party. The Populists sought to use government to regulate business and alleviate the people's social and economic problems. "As statist," Nugent writes, "the real Populists were polar opposites of today's faux populists, the Tea Party people" (p. xi).

Even though the changes to the new edition are few, *The Tolerant Populists* remains relevant. Nugent delivers an interesting and accessible account of the Populist movement as he proves his argument. His writing skill—present even in this early work—makes the book a good starting point for anyone interested in the Populists—especially in Kansas—regardless of whether the reader is interested in the past or current historiographical debates over Populism and its legacy.

Reviewed by Jeff Wells, visiting assistant professor of history, University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Cold War Kids: Politics and Childhood in Postwar America, 1945–1960

by Marilyn Irvin Holt

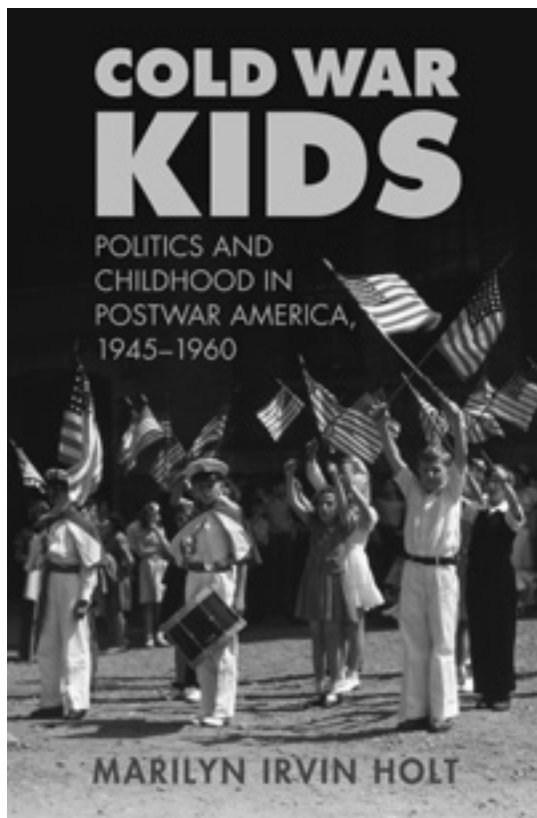
ix + 214 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014, cloth \$34.95.

For nearly seven decades, the baby boom generation has generated tremendous attention as a demographic and historical phenomenon. During the immediate post–World War II years, a national preoccupation with children and youth heralded notable shifts in American housing, education, child-welfare policies, and health care. In *Cold War Kids*, historian Marilyn Holt offers a broad lens for surveying this changing landscape, focusing on how the federal government enlarged its activities on behalf of children’s welfare, sometimes in tension with state and local governments, but more often as a welcome resource.

Much of the discussion in this volume treads familiar ground. The author opens with portrayals of two postwar White House conferences on children and youth, held in 1950 and in 1960, at which federal, state, and local officials gathered to discuss issues ranging from poverty and juvenile incarceration, to school consolidation trends, to lack of affordable daycare, to television’s portrayals of violence and their effects on children. At these conferences, representatives from federal agencies responded to societal pressures to provide leadership for enacting policies in children’s interests. The most notable change from similar conferences held during Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency and earlier, the author notes, is that *all* children’s interests were now paramount, not just the interests of economically disadvantaged children. By focusing on national policies positing that *all* children have rights, Holt offers a convincing argument that many Americans, by the 1950s, had come to embrace child-centered notions of family and cultural life that would continue through the second half of the twentieth century.

From the fields of education and health care, Holt cites two examples of policies enacted to benefit all American children, signaling unprecedented federal attention to the nation’s youngest citizens. In 1955 Congress authorized free polio vaccinations to all American children and teens. Reacting to the launch of the Soviet Sputnik satellite, the U.S. government funded educational programs intended to jump-start science, math, and engineering curricula in 1958. Although policymakers had to guard against propagandistic claims that universal child vaccinations and mandatory science education signaled a move toward “socialized medicine” and undermined school systems that had typically relied on local oversight and parental involvement, these two developments represented a new and relatively uncontroversial shift of policy-making, perceived widely as benefiting the nation as a whole.

By the 1950s, American children were regarded as “national resources” (p. 158). Holt tries to link the federal government’s attention in the late 1940s and early 1950s to broader Cold War–



era concerns with communism, national defense, and democracy. This notion is worth exploring, but the book’s scope is so broad that the author’s Cold War subtext is uneven and, in some cases, unconvincing. For example, the concluding chapter opens with broad claims from the era that America’s children were “the country’s next generation of military and citizen soldiers” (p. 147) but ignores nuances of American political and cultural dissent, even in the supposedly conformist era of the 1950s. Despite these flaws, the book offers an intriguing glimpse into the histories of midcentury federal policies affecting children, including thousands of newly arriving “displaced persons” from European countries beginning in 1948, and children of Spanish-speaking migrant farm workers throughout the postwar years.

Although this study is national in scope, it relies on source material of particular interest to readers of *Kansas History*. To illustrate her argument that “this period was a turning point for greater government involvement” (p. 10), Holt draws on documents and photographs housed at the Harry S. Truman Library, the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, and the Kansas State Historical Society.

Reviewed by Rachel Waltner Goossen, professor of history, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.