

actress Helen Hayes. “They survive as truth rarely does.” This reflection is one that professor emeritus of history at Dakota Wesleyan University James D. McLaird undoubtedly would agree applies to his recent study of fabled fur trapper Hugh Glass. In *Hugh Glass*, McLaird skillfully explores the various chronicles that promoted this otherwise obscure fur trapper into a legend in his own time—a designation that endures into the present day.

As he located all material available on the subject, McLaird discovered that because so few facts about Glass’s life are known, authors have taken a fair amount of artistic license, creating an interesting, albeit confusing, array of narratives. McLaird, along with other historians, believes that were it not for Glass’s epic survival of a near-fatal grizzly attack after being left for dead by two of his companions, he most

likely would not have been remembered as a larger-than-life hero. With the skill of an expert sleuth, McLaird nimbly peels the man from the myth in this captivating investigation into the numerous variations of the Hugh Glass story—all of which blurred the boundaries of fact and fiction.

Beyond analyzing the stories on their own merit, McLaird also compares the stories side by side, revealing much about how oft-told yarns develop into myths and mature into well-entrenched legends. While these tales made exciting reading for impressionable eastern audiences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they present a quandary for present-day historians attempting to decipher the real history of dramas such as Glass’s. In view of that, McLaird adds another intriguing element by examining how other historians have perceived and portrayed Glass.

Looking at Hugh Glass through narrative themes such as animal attack, survival, revenge, and forgiveness, the author effectively bestows upon the reader a view into nineteenth- and twentieth-century American culture and society. Perhaps equally as significant as the human side of the story, McLaird’s chapter “And What About the Bear?” adds an important element, the grizzly bear. One of the great takeaway lessons of this book is how to read, study, and analyze the myths and lore but still tread lightly on the treasured legends. McLaird’s inclusion of an extensive bibliography and detailed footnotes makes this a book that will fascinate as well as enlighten a wide readership, from serious historians to lovers of western folklore.

Elizabeth A. Watry

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Losing Eden

AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY
OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Sara Dant

Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, Massachusetts, 2016.
\$84.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

In *Losing Eden*, Sara Dant, Weber State University professor of history, succeeds in melding western history and environmental history into a seamless whole. While these two fields have long overlapped, primarily due to the importance of natural resources

and the constraints of the physical environment to the history of the American West, Dant approaches her subject as a single, unified topic.

Although intended as a college text, *Losing Eden* has a narrative style and a wide-ranging scope that make it accessible to the general reader. Weighing in at just over 200 pages, it offers the most concise and straightforward overview of western environmental history available, standing in stark contrast to Richard White's comprehensive 630-page tome "*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own.*"

Throughout the book, Dant develops three themes essential to understanding the environmental history of the West. Foremost is the development and effect of market capitalism in the region and the subsequent plunder of its timber, water, minerals, wildlife, and soil. Similarly, the "tragedy of the commons" theme accurately describes how the availability of open-access resources, rendered accessible by government policies, led not only to environmental degradation but also to the creation of national parks and forests as a response. Finally, but receiving less attention in the book, Dant addresses the theme of achieving sustainability.

Losing Eden takes a "deep history" approach, beginning with the environmental constraints faced by the first Americans during the Pleistocene Era. This theme continues with a discussion of the Columbian Exchange, which introduced to the inhabitants of the New World unfamiliar lifeforms, both beneficial (domesticated animals such as horses and chickens) and destructive (diseases and feral pigs). Likewise, the expansion of commercial enterprises such as the fur trade resulted in both positive and negative impacts to Native Americans. Nor were white settlers immune to environmental conditions; as Dant points out, "the realities of place dictated the course of westward migration for Euromerians" (p. 45).

Dant takes great care not to treat the West as an isolated entity but rather continually details the ways in which national policies and broader events impacted the western environment. For example, she points out how the Civil War "created heavier demands for natural resources" in the region (p. 66).

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Following a consideration of the ecological destruction of the nineteenth century's "Great Barbeque," Dant examines the competing impulses of conservation in the Progressive and New Deal Eras, during which the federal government sought to assert control over the commons both through preservation and development, which occurred primarily in the form of irrigation and hydroelectric projects.

Dant concisely recounts the familiar trajectory of western history, augmenting the standard narrative with recent research and new additions. For example, she highlights both the landmark Echo Park dam controversy of the 1950s and also the much lesser-known 1958 "Oxbow Incident" that underscored the environmental costs of dam building on western rivers. Dant also contributes some of her original scholarship on Frank Church, the former

Idaho senator who shepherded the passage of the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The discussion of the influence of western politicians on national environmental policy is an important contribution, and hopefully the emphasis on Church will stimulate interest in other western congressional leaders, such as Lee Metcalf, Mike Mansfield, Henry Jackson, Mo Udall, and Wayne Aspinall.

Frank Church's electoral defeat in 1980 coincides with the "Environmental Backlash and the New West," *Losing Eden's* penultimate chapter. Dant concludes with a discussion of climate change's impact on the West, an already arid environment in which drought and climate have played a significant role in constraining human activity for more than ten thousand years. Although the book's title poignantly reflects the history of environmental exploitation in the West, it also, as Dant notes, suggests that we must abandon any remaining illusions about the region's ecological order and our place within it in order to adopt a culture of sustainability.

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New Deal Cowboy

GENE AUTRY AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Michael Duchemin

University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2016. \$34.95 cloth.

In *New Deal Cowboy: Gene Autry and Public Diplomacy*, Michael Duchemin, former historian and curator at the Autry National Center in Los Angeles, examines the singing cowboy's support of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal and Good Neighbor policies from 1932 to 1942. By studying Autry's audio recordings, motion pictures, and radio broadcasts, Duchemin argues that Autry's support of the Roosevelt administration emerged as an intentional form of "soft-power public diplomacy." This book is an extension of Duchemin's museum exhibition *Gene Autry and the Twentieth Century West: The Centennial Exhibition, 1907-2007* and offers a compelling analysis of both the entertainer's public persona as America's singing cowboy and the ways in which the federal government used his talent to support President Roosevelt's policies at home and abroad.