



**Brenden W. Rensink.** *Writing Westward Podcast*. Provo, UT: Redd Center For Western Studies-Brigham Young University, 2018-2020. Podcast series

**Reviewed by** Jennifer Brown (Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi)

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**Commissioned by** Robert Cassanello (he/him/his) (University of Central Florida)

*The Writing Westward Podcast* is a monthly new book podcast covering academic and popular writings on the North American West. Launched in 2018, the podcast is hosted and produced by Brenden Rensink. As he puts it, he's the "host, producer, sound engineer, publicist, and just about anything else." [1] The podcast represents part of the public programming for the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University, where Rensink serves as the associate director in addition to being an associate professor in the history department.

The *Writing Westward Podcast* takes the familiar shape of a new book podcast. Each episode starts with Rensink providing a brief review of the book. His reassuring voice introduces listeners to the topic and how it fits within western history and studies. The brief review is followed by conversation with the author, which sounds largely unedited. As such, episode length varies. Most run about an hour, but can be as short as forty minutes and as long as seventy-five minutes. In the early episodes, the authors tend to reflect Rensink's background as a historian. As the show progresses, he interviews anyone from journalists and sports writers to poets and climatologists. Rensink comes prepared with thoughtful questions, but interviews unfold more like conversations.

In picking books, Rensink strives for a range of topics. His choices instruct listeners to the diversity of the North American West and the messiness of concepts like place, region, and identity. Locations covered so far include the Intermountain West (the geographic focus of the Redd Center), Hawaii, the Great Plains, and the United States-Mexico borderlands. The book topics vary as well. In the episodes, authors discuss topics such as fire, the Civil War in the West, immigrant experiences, weather, Indigenous dispossession, outdoor recreation, and rodeos. Early episodes take a somewhat academic tone, focusing on historiography and using academic language. As the podcast develops, Rensink finds greater success in his attempts to make it accessible to a broader audience. Rensink's approach and choice of topics is commendable, particularly since other western podcasts glorify colonization and the "Wild West." *Writing Westward* offers nicely nuanced coverage of western history and culture.

The podcast's production quality leaves more to be desired, but is entirely understandable given the many constraints of being a one-man show in an academic setting. Although rarely distracting, the audio quality and editing varies by episode, especially in the early episodes. Rensink acknowledges this at times. On the podcast's website, he states, "Episodes are recorded via Skype or in per-

son and amateurishly engineered by Rensink.” For a beginning producer, production hiccups are expected, and Rensink certainly improves over time. Additionally, the theme music composed by local Utah musician Micah Dahl Anderson is noteworthy.

The podcast boasts a nice [webpage](#) connected to the Redd Center. It has individual episode pages with links to authors’ websites and Amazon book pages. The podcast is found on at least ten different platforms including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Play, Stitcher, and YouTube, just to name a few linked on the page. The lack of episode transcripts, however, represents a major technical flaw. The YouTube version does create auto-generated captions, but they are largely inaccurate. Since *Writing Westward* is primarily a book podcast, this seems like a big oversight that will hopefully be corrected to improve accessibility in the future.

With that said, Rensink has done western history and western studies a service by producing a unique new book podcast. It’s worth a listen, particularly for academics, graduate students, and avid readers of western history and culture.

#### Note

[1]. Kenneth F. Dewey, Dan O'Brien, and Larkin Powell, “Great Plains Weather, Bison, & Birds,” episode 25, September 2020, in *Writing Westward*, produced by Brenden W. Rensink, podcast, <http://reddcenter.byu.edu/Blogs/redd-center-blog/Post/writing-westward-podcast-025--dewey-obrien-a>.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-podcast>

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