The title of The Mobilized American West might evoke a military history, but from the book’s beginning, John M. Findlay explicitly broadens the definition of “mobilized” and makes the term a sinew for this comprehensive twentieth-century regional history. Findlay does cover military matters in the West, starting in the decade of Japanese-American internment and Trinity. However, the buildup of military installations and industries during and after the Second World War, along with the associated voluntary and involuntary relocations of people, is simply the first of several thematic chapters. In subsequent sections, Findlay reveals how demographic shifts, popular media, and political movements demonstrate that the West hosted new people, received or generated new attention, and factored into national transformations during the middle and late twentieth century. An expansive definition of “mobilized” frames this account that affords full agency to the US West's peoples, places, and cultures.

The Mobilized American West is part of the History of the American West series from the University of Nebraska Press, a six-volume chronological survey of western history that began with Colin G. Calloway's One Vast Winter Count. Findlay has written the latest installment, the final one for now. This volume, which synthesizes scholarship on the twentieth-century West, is remarkable for how many secondary sources Findlay consulted and how well he weaves together works that span from the beginnings of the “new western history” through the past few years. This big-picture summary will nonetheless teach something new to any reader. Readers will come away remembering specific events and specific people, whether Bagwan Shree Rajneesh or Daniel Inouye or Sue and Jack Findlay, the author’s own parents. This effect is impressive considering the book's expansive coverage. It would make an appealing textbook for students of the modern West.

To look at who moved where within the twentieth-century West, Findlay needed to address the challenging and sometimes fraught question of which locations are and are not included in the region. He mostly delineates the West by the state
boundaries, in a chapter on demographics titled “Westerners” and another chapter on social and political movements titled “A Little More Wide Open.” For these topics, he considers both a core West, including thirteen states beginning on the Rockies’ eastern front, and a Greater West that adds the six Plains states from North Dakota to Texas. Findlay makes judicious regional generalizations while routinely noting internal variation. State demographics and laws often help in portraying the intraregional diversity. One example is the case of Nikkei Hawaiians who had, and made for themselves, a World War II experience that diverged from that of most Americans with Japanese ancestry living in the continental states. The spread of Mormonism in Polynesia and the conceptualization within the Chicano movement of a transnational Aztlán homeland are two more examples of how Findlay complicates the West’s borders in these chapters on populations and identities.

The next two chapters, both focused on how radical western politics affected the rest of the nation, include more geographic nuance that nonetheless helps define a region. In “Seized by Initiative,” Findlay chronicles how state ballot initiatives shifted from a proud cultural practice of direct democracy in many Far West states to a proxy for national referenda on issues like marijuana legalization. In “Armed Standoffs,” he compares and contrasts confrontations involving Native jurisdiction, anchored by an account of Pine Ridge, with the violent claims to county and personal rights that various ranchers made against federal and even state land management. In the latter chapter, Findlay further explores the region’s politics and economies that emerged from representations, and misrepresentations, of a historical context stretching back at least to the late nineteenth century. Findlay particularly attends to that phenomenon when telling of ranchers who contested Bureau of Land Management grazing fees in the 1980s while likening themselves to imagined rugged cowboys of the 1890s. This picks up a thread of westerners’ willful ahistoricism from cases in earlier chapters, such as the Las Vegas boosters, who tagged Las Vegas “still a frontier town” as they encouraged its nascent gambling scene and set up its first rodeo, or the screenwriter Carl Foreman, a victim of McCarthyism who decried that injustice through scripts set in an imaginary Old West.

Findlay draws from film, television, and literature sources throughout, but in the final chapter, “Region of the Imagination,” he considers these media as mobilizers themselves that both represented and influenced the twentieth-century West. The chapter begins by demonstrating changes in how Hollywood productions and television series depicted the West from the late 1930s into the 1970s. Findlay then chronicles how western writing changed over the same period, from Willa Cather and John Steinbeck to Wallace Stegner and William Kittredge. All these writers “challenge[d] mythic versions of the West ... producing their own more complex and realistic accounts” (p. 345). From there, Findlay documents the development of graduate writing programs at Stanford, Washington, and Montana, and in the final case emphasizes the opportunity seized there by Indigenous writers. Findlay then connects the growing influence of Debra Magpie Earling, James Welch, and others to an emerging consciousness in the 1980s among prominent historians, in particular Patricia Nelson Limerick, Richard White, and William Cronon. The chapter therefore constitutes something of an all-media-considered genealogy for western environmental history.

In addition to giving western history its due in the origins of environmental history, there are several ways that environment is explicitly at play. Findlay’s accounts of land disputes, whether singular events like Alcatraz or Malheur or prolonged situations like James G. Watt’s Department of the Interior administration, are also histories of cultures and economies rooted in landscapes and ecologies. The Atomic Age history, whether set in
desert basins or the Pacific Ocean, takes into account the topic's more-than-human factors. And in tracing the history of regional writing, considering the architecture of Catherine Bauer Wurster, or noting the long record of Mexican culture in California, Findlay clearly portrays how environments and geographies of the West were not only a setting for but also a contributor to the human history that took place there. While not primarily a work of environmental history, *The Mobilized American West* is a thorough and up-to-date overview of twentieth-century regional history that environmental historians and others would be happy to read and teach.

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