
April Summitt offers a well-written political and policy history of the Colorado River. This is a large topic encompassing seven US states in the Colorado River basin and two states in northern Mexico. In eight chapters, Contested Waters examines the Colorado River’s oft-told history of water rights, efforts to “tame” the river with dams and aqueducts, and farming and urban water use. Summitt adds important discussions of Indian water rights and settlements, US-Mexico river relations, and an evenhanded examination of the costs and benefits of water markets to deal with an overallocated and diminishing water supply. Contested Water’s most significant contribution is that it brings together some of the most important topics related to this river, accompanied by a treasure trove of factual and statistical data.

Summitt argues “that while prior appropriation law drove the overallocation of the Colorado River, power relationships shifted over time from one group to another and have democratized what was once a river of empire” (p. xii). She repeatedly urges rural-urban and state-tribal cooperation and basin-wide collaboration to manage this overtaxed river.

Contested Waters has many valuable attributes, namely a broad synthesis of scholarship and the incorporation of numerous state and federal reports, written primarily after World War II. Most of the federal sources were mined from the Bureau of Reclamation manuscript and online archive and a handful of archival collections located in different states. The vast majority of state, federal, and nonprofit
reports after 1980 are available online. Statistics on these websites, however, are sometimes unreliable. For instance, Summitt took a statistic from one website to note agriculture in the Colorado River basin “generates approximately $1.5 billion in revenue each year” (p. 31). That amount is incorrect, since Yuma County, Arizona, alone grossed almost $1.3 billion in 2010.

Another noteworthy aspect of this study is its emphasis on US-Mexico Colorado River relations. Summitt points out how US states selfishly battled each other to claim as much water from the river before other states and Mexico could put it to beneficial use. Summitt weaves into her story Mexico’s perspective and notes recent US-Mexico cooperation to manage the river. That being said, she did not include Mexico’s nineteenth-century treaty rights concerning the river. The author acknowledges, however, that “an equitable relationship between the United States and Mexico over water is highly unlikely” (p. 240).

Although this interpretation of the history of the Colorado River is commendable, it has shortcomings. Except for a few passages, *Contested Waters* gives the perspective of white men, predominantly representing the federal government. Tourism, recreational use, the river’s ecosystem and habitat, activists, and local voices rarely enter this story. *Contested Waters* also presents an unbalanced history of the river. The lion’s share of the book focuses on California and Arizona. Nevada and Colorado are discussed in some detail; New Mexico, Wyoming, and Utah make only cameo appearances. Regrettably, the book lacks illustrations or maps to guide the reader through the maze of river tributaries, dams, canals, water districts, cities, and Native American land.

Moreover, for a study reliant on a sizable list of published sources, there are noteworthy omissions. For instance, the best studies of the lower Colorado River—Godfrey Sykes, *The Colorado Delta* (1937) and Charles Bergman, *Red Delta* (2002)—are not consulted. Also absent from the bibliography are Reuel Leslie Olson, *The Colorado River Compact* (1926), William deBuys and Joan Myers, *Salt Dreams* (1999), and David DeJong, *Stealing the Gila* (2009). In addition, Summitt did not reference documents laying out the Law of the River located in *Reclamation, Managing Water in the West: The Colorado River Documents* (2008). Finally, Congress holds frequent hearings on various aspects relating to the Colorado River. Yet the author only cited a few congressional hearings.

*Contested Waters* is a timely addition to the history of the Colorado River. It will be a welcome resource for academics, policymakers, upper division and graduate students, and those concerned about the
impact of climate change and debilitating drought in the American Southwest.

**Benny J. Andrés**

University of North Carolina Charlotte
doi: 10.1093/envhis/emv082
Advance Access published on July 29, 2015

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*Resettling the Range* explores aspects of the history of one of the northwestern most natural grasslands in North America, the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of British Columbia. “This book,” John Thistle explains, “is a lot about the choices some early British Columbians made when faced with complicated environmental problems that were also complicated social problems” (p. 8). Focusing on a “war on wild horses” and a campaign against grasshoppers, both of which Thistle portrays as virtual proxies for “war on Aboriginal people,” the book argues that British Columbians’ simplistic solutions to environmental/social problems victimized those who had already been disadvantaged and dispossessed (p. 161). The book certainly contributes to our understanding of choices made by non-Aboriginal people, but it is weakened significantly by its superficial approach to complicated choices, especially those made by Aboriginal people.

Thistle argues that, because the colonial official, Peter O’Reilly, allocated Indian reserves in the late 1880s “as quickly as possible, usually with very little input from Native people and with no specific knowledge of local conditions or the wider environmental setting” (p. 47), those reserves had inadequate resources for their residents. To support this argument Thistle cites O’Reilly’s “minutes of decisions” only. However, twenty years ago, Ann Seymour argued that O’Reilly’s field notes show that he often visited locations several times before he allocated reserves, often “consulted with the Natives and, despite occasional reluctance, more often than not, granted their requests,” but he was often perplexed by his inability to convince communities to choose fertile over inferior land (Anne Elizabeth Seymour, “Natives and Reserve Establishment in Nineteenth Century British Columbia,” master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1995) (pp. 45–47; quoted passage, p. 46). We know that, in other locations in Canada,