to the field of comparative American civil rights history.

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**Mercury and the Making of California: Mining, Landscape, and Race, 1840–1890.** Mining the American West Series. By Andrew Scott Johnston. (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013. xi + 284 pp. Illustrations, maps, charts, tables, notes, bibliography, index. $45.00.)

Andrew Scott Johnston has written a wonderfully eclectic book. In *Mercury and the Making of California*, Johnston makes the case that mercury mining and its associated social and economic practices played a more important and long-lasting role in the shaping of California than the more famous and more extensively studied gold mining, for which the state’s origins are legend.

Johnston’s book is, in fact, two studies in one. The first three chapters focus on mercury mining as an economic and geographic activity. The second three chapters study the social order organized around the practice in nineteenth-century California.

Johnston argues that mercury production was central in understanding the rise of European empires and leading families from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. He shows how this crucial role did not change in California’s economy. At the heart of mercury’s power was its necessity in the processing and production of gold and silver, and as such, “Whoever managed to control both the production and the commercial use of mercury was on the way to tremendous riches” (p. 39).

Johnston shows how mercury’s critical importance to the more lucrative gold and silver mining also meant that when it arrived in California in the late 1840s—unlike gold mining—it was modern and industrial in scale. This sociotechnological fact shapes the second study in this book. Being industrialized is not so much a function of having advanced technologies as it is a function of organizing people into systematic work roles. Johnston shows how the European model of production, first implanted in California alongside the rough-and-tumble gold rush camps, quickly took on a social hierarchy mirroring the state’s racial hierarchy. Most interesting is Johnston’s finding, reflecting the pioneering work of Tomás Almaguer, that “race, not class” played the most important role in shaping the work and the living landscape around the mines (p. 139). His study details the stability of this hierarchy through several regimes of mercury mining.

As a mining historian myself, I have some quibbles about his desire to make mercury mining practices seem distinct in their uncertainties from other metal mining work. I also wanted to know more about the ore and its natural origins. But this is generally a solid study with some broad and interesting insights. Johnston’s larger point is well made and indisputable and suggests, as many of the best new mining history studies have done, that we live today in a culture and society shaped by the way we mine our metals and the metals that we mine.

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**River City and Valley Life: An Environmental History of the Sacramento Region.** History of the Urban Environment Series. Edited by Christopher J. Castaneda and Lee M. A. Simpson. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013. viii + 406 pp. Illustrations, maps, table, notes, index. $27.95, paper.)

In the epilogue of this anthology, Ty O. Smith notes “that in Sacramento nature pushed people and that people pushed back,”