very few. The myths of Whitman's life, some of which — like his six imaginary children — he perpetuated himself, are already well known. All biographers report that Whitman's three months in New Orleans in 1848 are crucial to his emotional and artistic development, but whether this is on account of a love affair or not simply cannot be known, and it is to be hoped that Loving's work will put a stop to further speculation on the subject. Loving is the first biographer I am aware of who suggests that 'Ellen Eyre,' the writer of a seductive love letter to Whitman, is Ada Clare, a famous Charleston beauty and 'the Queen of Bohemia' at the literary gatherings in Pfaff's beer cellar. But even here, Loving, careful biographer that he is, can only say that Clare is 'a reasonable guess' (260) for the author of the letter. Reading Loving's account of Whitman's meeting with Oscar Wilde in 1882 I was acutely aware that I had read virtually the same account in Allen's biography, right down to Wilde's comment on Whitman's dubious elderberry wine: 'If it had been vinegar I should have drunk it all the same.' Loving's account of Whitman's life is the most scrupulously researched of the biographies to date, but it is not the most readable (which for me is Kaplan's). Loving seems to wish to pack each sentence with as much information as possible, and the following is not typical of his no-stone-unturned style:

He told Jeff, who had just helped his mother and wife move into the latest Whitman family quarters, at Portland Street near Myrtle Avenue (the spot today absorbed by the thirty-eight-acre 'Walt Whitman' low-income housing project), that he had had 'a very fair time' in Boston, finding its citizens 'friendly' and 'generous.' (240)

However, what does emerge from Loving's biography, as with former biographies, is a renewed sense of the integrity of Whitman and of his central importance to twentieth-century poetry. A tireless self-publicist (offering glowing newspaper reviews of his own work, for example), he persisted, despite mockery and abuse from critics and the general public, in his conscious life-long task of writing a 'New Bible' for the American people, namely Leaves of Grass. The standard of the day was rhymed verse, the genteel primitivism of Longfellow's Hiawatha being the popular favourite, but as Pound wrote it was Whitman's free verse which 'broke the new wood,' redefining the criteria for what we understand as poetry. A minority of readers responded to Whitman's work in his lifetime — interestingly feminists were among his strongest supporters — whereas today his influence seems immense.

Mark Shackleton  
University of Helsinki


Up until the 1970s, our ideas about the history of the American West were dominated by a unitary vision which connected that history to a grand mythical narrative about the progress of Euro-American civilization across the continent. In the later part of the
nineteenth century most historians described this movement as an aspect of the fateful conquest of the world by Anglo-Saxon Christian democracy and its institutions. This, for example, was the vision which activated Theodore Roosevelt's great saga of Tlze Winning of the West (1889), itself reflecting the romantic nationalistic sagas of George Bancroft and other mid-nineteenth century American historians. Frederick Jaclton Turner's frontier thesis largely took the place of the Anglo-Saxon germ theory in the early twentieth century, but the frontier thesis also offered a synthetic, quasi-mythical vision of western history. Turner's followers continued to envision the form of that history in terms of grand narratives of the westward movement of Euro-Americans. Among these were major syntheses like Ray Allen Billington's Westward Expansion (1949), Frederick Merk's History of the Westward Movement (1978) and Walter Prescott Webb's The Great Plains (1931) and The Great Frontier (1952).

However, the generation of western historians who came of age during the terrible ambiguities of the Vietnam War increasingly saw that history in a very different way. The world of this group constituted a fundamental revision of the Turnerian approach to western history. Many of these revisionist historians were trained by Howard Lamar at Yale. Lamar's own work, especially his important Dalcota Territory, 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics (1956), adumbrated the new western history by eschewing grand narrative for more limited regional studies and by de-mythicizing Turner's vision of the pioneer by focussing on conflicts and ambiguities between groups contending for control of the West. The world of this new generation of western historians was exemplified in such influential works as Patricia Limerick's The Legacy of Conquest (1997), Richard White's 'It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own' (1991), Donald Worster's Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West (1994) and Michael Malone and Richard Etulain's Tlze American West: A Twentieth Century History (1989). These historians de-mythicized the grand theories of the past by concentrating instead on the complex conflict of cultures in the West, on the role of race and gender in western history, on the ecological impact of the westward movement and on more recent periods of western history.

Now in a new anthology, Over the Edge: Remapping the American West, we encounter the first stirrings of a still younger generation of western historians and critics and can get some idea of the directions in which their new interests and methodologies are leading them. These directions are quite diverse. From the beginning, Over the Edge signals this diversity with a dialogue between the two editors, a Japanese-American woman historian and a gay white male literary critic and popular culturalist. With such an introduction, it's not surprising that the essays also range considerably in subject, methodology, and stance.

Some of the essays grow directly out of the revisionist history of the last three decades and thus furnish a kind of transition between that work and the explorations of younger historians. Appropriately enough, the lead essay is a commentary on the significance of tourism in the West by one of the leading revisionist historians, Patricia Limerick. Others like Susan Lee Johnson's 'Domestic Life in the Diggings: The Southern Mines in the California Gold Rush,' Virginia Scharff's 'Mobility, Women, and the West,' Peggy Pascoe's 'Race, Gender, and the Privileges of Property: On the Significance of Miscegenation Law in the U.S. West,' and Valerie Matsumoto's 'Japanese American
Women and the Creation of Urban Nisei Culture in the 1930s' continue the interest in ethnicity, gender and cultural conflict in the West so characteristic of the revisionists.

Somewhat more of a departure from revisionist approaches are a number of essays which explore in line with the anthology's title, *Over the Edge*, the implications of Blake Allmendinger's dictum that 'today, although the West may be settled, its meanings and boundaries remain unfixed and unsealed' (4). One of the most interesting of these essays is Jesús Martínez-Saldañia's 'La Frontera del Norte.' Martínez-Saldañia makes the important observation that 'The American West does not exist only in the collective consciousness of this country. It is also present in the imagination of peoples of other nations' (376). He then analyzes three different meanings of the American West to Chicanos: as *el territorio yerdido*, the unknown but much celebrated portion of the national territory lost through an unjust war to the aggressive forces driven by Manifest Destiny; as *el viejo oeste*, a site inhabited by fictitious blond-haired, blue-eyed cowboys valiantly creating a society of law, order, and progress amidst the instability fomented by war-mongering, uncivilized *pieles rojas*...and wicked outlaws; and as *el norte*, the temporary or permanent destination of millions of Mexicans who have been forced to cross the northern border into the United States, at times searching for political stability and refuge, but generally seelcing better economic opportunities than those found in the nation of origin: *la patria.* (376) Other essays of particular interest are Mike Davis's discussion of the scientific and military devastation of large sections of the American West in 'Dead West: Ecocide in Marlboro Country,' Douglas Flamming's study of the interplay of African-American myths of the South and the West in the life of the writer Arna Bontemps, and Blake Allmendinger's analysis of the way in which the myth of the West shaped even a biblical best-seller like Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*.

At first glance, the essays in this volume are so diverse in subject and method that it's difficult to see what links them aside from the fact that they all deal in some way with the western part of the United States. Perhaps, this is a necessary corrective to the deceptive sense of unity created by imaginative syntheses of western history like the frontier thesis and other grand myths of the past. Yet in spite of the most conscientious efforts by younger historians to liberate themselves from the simplifications of traditional western mythology, the one common theme which emerges in many of these very diverse treatments of the American West is the continuing influence of the mythical West, no longer construed as reality, but as the imaginative perception of what it means to cross the frontier. One of the editors remarks in the course of the introductory dialogue that 'though I reject western cliches, I know that I do so while at the same time embracing pastel cow's skulls, tin sheriff's badges, and politically correct items of clothing including anything that wiggles when it moves' (1). Even as it approaches a condition of postmodernity, the American West remains one of the great cultural myths of the modern world. As an executive quoted in *Fortune* put it, 'Silicon Valley is the Wild West of private enterprise' (375).

John G. Cawelti
University of Kentucky