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Review of *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region* edited by Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna

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The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region. Edited by Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna. Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press, 2010. xxv + 435 pp. Illustrations, photographs, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paper.

From 1969 to 1990 the Western Canadian Studies conferences brought together researchers interested in the history of a region defined as “the Prairie West” or simply “the West,” often at the University of Calgary. In large measure the conference was an outgrowth of the fractious regional politics of the late 1960s. The range of topics participants explored, however, ultimately went well beyond the limited theme of “western alienation” and made an important contribution to the regional historiography; fourteen volumes of conference papers, usually edited by University of Calgary scholars, were published between 1970 and 1993.

In June 2008 a group of historians at the University of Alberta tested the possibility of reviving Western Canadian Studies with a conference titled “The West and Beyond: Historians Past, Present, and Future.” The organizers believed it was time for scholars in the field to “rise up, evaluate, and appraise the state of Western Canadian history, acknowledging and assessing the contributions of historians of the past and present while at the same time showcasing the research interests of the next generation.”

Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna’s edited collection *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region* presents the results of the Edmonton conference. The volume’s eighteen essays include innovative new research from both well-established and emerging scholars as well as investigations into larger historiographical and meth-

odological questions in the field. In the latter category are the contributions by Gerald Friesen (“Critical History in Western Canada, 1900–2000”), Lyle Dick (“Vernacular Currents in Western Canadian Historiography”), and Winona Wheeler (“Cree Intellectual Traditions in History”) that together constitute the book’s first section, “Frameworks for Western Canadian History.” The other fifteen papers are grouped into four thematic sections addressing aspects of Aboriginal history, working-class history, racial and gendered identities, and cultural history.

The editors employ an expansive definition of “the West” that includes not only prairie Canada, but also parts of the Far North, British Columbia, northwestern Ontario, and the Canada-U.S. borderlands. The collection’s best example of a comparative transborder approach is Elizabeth Jameson’s “Two Wests, One-and-a-Half Paradigms, and Perhaps Beyond,” which explores how individuals moving across the 49th parallel navigated changing economic conditions and legal and administrative regimes on either side of the line. Other papers in the collection situated firmly in the Great Plains context include those by Susan Joudrey (“The Expectations of a Queen: Identity and Race Politics in the Calgary Stampede”), Jeffrey Taylor (“Capitalist Development, Forms of Labour, and Class Formation in Prairie Canada”), and Valerie J. Korinek (“A Queer-Eye View of the Prairies: Reorienting Western Canadian Histories”).

It is disappointing that environmental history is largely absent from the volume, especially since it was represented prominently at the conference and produced some memorable sessions. At least, as the editors note, those papers are available online in podcast form from NiCHE—the Network in Canadian History and Environment. Many have already been published elsewhere.

This notable omission aside, the depth and breadth of the essays in *The West and Beyond* indicate a renewed vitality in Western Canadian history, reconstituted as a field rooted in a particular geographic space, but at the same time attuned to broader sets of processes and other spaces.

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