

the preference for a dyadic love bond and internal struggles within almost all households. With few exceptions, one cowife will become the “favorite wife,” most often because of her deeper emotional bonds with her shared husband. Through force of will, one will become the “power wife,” while the others accept their subordinate position.

Those wanting to learn about lesser-known aspects of plural marriage, particularly the various actors’ experiences with it, will especially enjoy Jankowiak’s book. Chapters delve into the views of and relations between children, sons and fathers, and mothers and children (biological and those of cowives). The work also explores Angel Park’s unique placement marriage system, attitudes about sex, wives’ attitudes toward their shared husband, and relations with the outside society. Far from the harmonious family ideal, Jankowiak finds that competition reigns supreme in Angel Park—between cowives, between siblings, and between economic status groups.

The author concludes that in Angel Park, there is a strong preference for “emotionally monogamous” bonds that stymies the religious and community goals of creating one big harmonious plural family. Overall, Jankowiak’s book provides a timely and nuanced study of the inner workings of one polygamous community whose practices are more progressive and vary considerably from those of the well-known FLDS.

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Wallace Stegner’s *Unsettled Country: Ruin, Realism, and Possibility in the American West*

Edited by Mark Fiege, Michael J. Lansing, and Leisl Carr Childers

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I am not a westerner, but I did live there for some time. When I arrived in Utah in 2007, I learned, early on, that I was an outsider. I did not dress like a westerner, lacked the proper appreciation for specific spaces and parks, and did

not revere the right authors, including Wallace Stegner. Even so, I couldn’t miss his presence in my new home. His name was everywhere: museum exhibits, historical placards, university centers, and endowed professorships. This is due in large part to the author’s role in inventing the West. I don’t mean the combination of organic and inorganic material that gives the space its shape. Rather, I refer to “the idea” of the West as a distinct region. Stegner’s West was not the old, snooty East. Nor the mundane Midwest. Certainly no one could confuse the West for the South—everyone knew of that region’s sins. Stegner’s West was something different, something set apart. In the rugged terrain, great vistas, and ever-present aridity, the author found “a geography of hope.”¹

But Stegner’s West is gone—or at least rapidly vanishing. Twenty-first-century capitalism chips away at public lands and public governance. Climate change threatens already fragile ecosystems, making life harder for humans and countless other species. So, the question is, does Stegner offer anything for twenty-first-century readers who are watching his West slip away? That is the driving question of *Wallace Stegner’s Unsettled Country: Ruin, Realism, and Possibility in the American West*, edited by Mark Fiege, Michael J. Lansing, and Leisl Carr Childers. As coeditor and contributor, Mark Fiege writes, “Each author uses Stegner as a means to an end: to envision something beyond him in a world more just, fair, and stable than the one in which he lived and died and which we are rapidly leaving behind” (29). This collection is not a hagiography, it is a reckoning.

Each author is honest about Stegner. They know of his shortcomings; they’ve read his critics.² This straightforward approach allows many of the contributors to contend with the legacies of his writings. An essay from Alexandra Hernandez examines Stegner’s troubling work in laundering Japanese incarceration for the federal government and American audiences. Other essays from Michael J. Lansing, Flannery Burke, and Nancy S. Cook examine how Stegner’s words defined an entire region and created a western canon of writers. In an effort to break away from the stodgy and hierarchical publishing circles of the East Coast, Stegner simply established new ones on the West Coast.

Still, others find hope in Stegner's words. Leisl Carr Childers and Adam Sowards contemplate the author's commitment to public lands—an increasingly novel idea in the neoliberal age. Melody Graulich believes that Stegner's advocacy is a tool for education, a way to show students the power of prose for political causes. Essays from Robert B. Keiter, Paul Formisano, and Robert M. Wilson each reflect on Stegner's advocacy, hope, and ideas of adaptation as tools for our many multifaceted and modern crises.

So, does Wallace Stegner offer us something for this particular moment? Personally, I am not so sure. Even in his most political writings, his ideas fall short of the broader democratization of society (economic, political, environmental) that I and others would like to see. Despite his conservationist bona fides, I don't think Stegner is all that controversial as a political figure. For the environmentalist, his conservation work will continue to be a source of inspiration. For the cowboy-cosplaying corporate executive, Stegner's rugged prose is assuring. Nostalgics, too, grasp for Stegner in an effort to retrieve something lost. In short, his large corpus offers a little something for all of his readers. That is not Stegner's fault. That is the nature of art.

This also means that Wallace Stegner's work is not going anywhere, anytime soon. He will continue to be assigned in courses and purchased at bookstores. But as readers encounter his prose, they would be better served to understand the fuller context surrounding the writer and his impact on western culture, politics, and society. Perhaps there is something to glean from his writings—some bit of hope to drastically alter our current trajectory. But in order to do that, we need to know Stegner the man, not Stegner the sage. For this reason, *Wallace Stegner's Unsettled Country* is an important and valuable work.

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Notes

1. For a rich conversation on that phrase and its varied meanings, 183–212.
2. Mentioned several times throughout the collection, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner, and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).