

# UC Berkeley

## California Journal of Politics and Policy

### Title

Introduction

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/41b951j7>

### Journal

California Journal of Politics and Policy, 6(1)

### Author

Robinson, Jennifer

### Publication Date

2014

### DOI

10.5070/P29016

Peer reviewed

## Commentary

Jennifer Robinson\*

# Introduction

**Keywords:** public policy; regional; West.

---

\*Corresponding author: Jennifer Robinson, Center for Public Policy and Administration, The University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA, e-mail: robinson@cpga.utah.edu

In 1969 the University of Utah press published *Politics in the American West*. The authors of *Politics in the American West* found a common interest among the western states – water. While water remains a crucial issue in the West, many other issues have become important to these states and the people living in the region. This edition of the *California Journal of Politics and Policy* will explore the growing importance of the West including federal-state relations, public lands, water, energy use and development, demographic changes, the role of nonprofits in the western region, and the politics.

What do we mean when we discuss the West? Are we discussing the land itself or the people who live on it? In many ways it is so much more than just a description of the lands, but one cannot deny that the land certainly shapes who lives here and the politics of the place. Wallace Stegner’s depiction of the West, which remains as relevant 46 years later as it was in 1967, helps explain what we mean when talking about the West:

*It is the highest land in the US, also the lowest; the driest, also the wettest; the newest, also the oldest. It is shortgrass plains, mountains, forests, lava beds and scablands, sand and sagebrush, alkali flats, red stone, ocean shore. It is lonely ranches, industrialized, super farms, cities, slums. It is at least six regions and as many different histories, one of them 80 years older than Plymouth Rock, and others nearly encompassable within the memories of living men. It is two major folk figures, the mountain man and the cowboy, and several lesser ones; and for each of these there is a vast literature and a developed mythology that continues to shape the present. It is ways of life as different as San Francisco’s North Beach joints and Salt Lake City’s sedate ward houses. It is likewise a series of notions, all of which have the intention or effect of turning this multiplicity back into unity: the notion of the frontier as mystically-*

---

### States in the West

---

Alaska  
Arizona  
California  
Colorado  
Hawaii  
Idaho  
Montana  
Nevada  
New Mexico  
Oregon  
Utah  
Washington  
Wyoming

---

*shared experience, the notion of a western character shaped by that frontier, the notion of western literature exploiting this most native experience and this large and essentially heroic character.*

As Dave Patton and I note in the first article of this series, the West is as politically diverse as any region in the US. And, like other regions, there are unique regional threads that run through its political fabric. Our article, “Politics in the West,” examines the political culture of these 13 states and takes a closer look at several issues that continue to bind the region.

We continue with an article devoted to the demographic changes. “Demography of the Western States: Past, Present and Future” provides a description and analysis of the thirteen states that comprise the West. The authors, Alicia Brown, Ken Smith, and Tucker Samuelsen provide a clear understanding of the changing population in the western states; specifically, how the population has changed in terms of age, race, and ethnicity, in-migration and out-migration changes, and where the population growth is occurring.

The issues of the West, the land of course being one of the central ones as Stegner noted, have grown over the past several decades. These include the relationship between the federal and state governments, in large part due to the large amount of land in the western states owned by the federal government. Federal land ownership has created a multitude of problems that are explored throughout the articles, but most particularly in the piece written by Governor Cecil D. Andrus and Marc Johnson. In “Federal-State Relations: A Matter of Balance” Gov. Andrus and Mr. Johnson address the issue that is key to a host of other political issues in the region (land use, water, energy development) due to the large amount of federally owned land in the western states. Thus, we follow-up with several articles that focus in on these very issues.

While public lands can be a controversial issue in the West, there is probably no issue more divisive in the region than water. Andrew Fahlund, Janny Choy, and Leon Szeptycki explore western water management and governance in their article “Water in the West.” The authors take a close look at several issues impacting future management of this scarce resource, including preparing for a changing climate, ecosystem services, water markets and transfers, connections between water and energy, advances in knowledge and technology, and water infrastructure finance.

We continue with “The Administrative Presidency and Public Lands Regulatory Change” by Charles Davis and Zachary Wurtz bach, who focus on President George W. Bush’s efforts to alter the direction of several federal land policies administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service through administrative and rulemaking processes.

Historically, the American West was developed and sustained by natural resource exploitation. However, there is clearly an evolution occurring from the “Old West” to the “New West” with attendant conflicts over resource development vs. environmental protections, extractive jobs vs. green jobs, and traditional energy vs. renewable energy sources.

We devote two articles to these issues, one delves into the energy policy in the region while the other focuses on fracturing. “U.S. West: The Next Energy Nexus,” by Sandra Davis and Andrew Kear, reviews the struggle of western states and citizens to balance increasing energy demand with the protection of western natural resources. One component of energy policy is the growth of hydraulic fracking over the past decade. Robert Forbis analyzes how executive branch actions have altered federal energy policies and their impact in the western states in his article, “The Political History of Hydraulic Fracturing’s Expansion Across the West.”

“Describing Charitable Nonprofits in the West: A Discussion of the Implications for Public Policies” by Nancy Basinger describes the existence, size, and scope of charitable nonprofits in the West and their potential importance in the public policy arena. She illustrates the regional dimensions of the nonprofit sector in the Mountain West and Pacific West including the density of the sector, the types of organizations in the sector, and revenue distributions and concludes with the implications of the nonprofits for public policies.

The American West often invokes thoughts of cowboys, rugged mountains, or vast open spaces. It certainly is all of this, but it is more. It is a heavily populated region with a great deal of racial and ethnic diversity. Its geography, from the deserts of the southwest to the rainforests of the Olympic Peninsula, coupled with the large tracts of land that are federally owned have resulted in many of the critical issues addressed in these articles, including federal-state relations, water, public land use, and energy development. We thank the authors for their contributions to the *California Journal of Politics and Policy*. They provide much needed insight on these issues and foster a more comprehensive understanding of the region.