

Cold War in a Cold Land: Fighting Communism on the Northern Plains

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Rubini chronologically details the personal life of Mildred (Millie) Augustine Wirt Benson while also highlighting relevant Iowa history until roughly 1940, when Benson relocated to Ohio. Readers get a glimpse into early twentieth-century small-town life in Ladora, Iowa, before witnessing the growth of the University of Iowa campus and its academic programs in the early 1920s. Rubini explores Benson's development as a journalist and writer from a young girl growing up in Iowa through her time at the University of Iowa, which helped prepare her to ghostwrite for the Stratemeyer Syndicate as well as write and publish under her own name. By the mid-1950s, Benson parted ways with the Stratemeyer Syndicate but continued to pursue a career as a journalist, combining her love of travel, flying, and mystery.

Rubini's book is geared for younger readers, but the best part of the book is that Rubini slyly teaches children what scholarly historical research and writing looks like. She splendidly contextualizes changing gender roles, merges national and local history through such topics as the Great Depression, and explains the history of early to mid-twentieth-century writing and publishing. Furthermore, she uses footnotes and a bibliography to showcase an interesting array of primary and secondary sources.

Even though it is intended primarily for young readers, the book still offers much for adults in its insight into book syndicates and in the life story of an under-discussed but important author in children's literature. A few mysteries remain unresolved, however. Readers who are intrigued by passing mention of the "challenging" relationship between Benson and her daughter never learn more about the topic, including what became of Benson's family after her death in 2002. Although Benson seemingly played an integral role in interpreting the Nancy Drew character, Rubini does not analyze Benson's development of Nancy Drew in comparison to the outlines created by the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Doing so would have added depth to Benson's contributions to the legacy of the Nancy Drew character. Still, the secret case of the Nancy Drew ghostwriter is one worth exploring.

Cold War in a Cold Land: Fighting Communism on the Northern Plains, by David W. Mills. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. ix, 300 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

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According to David Mills, people in the northern Great Plains states (South Dakota, North Dakota, and Montana) "enthusiastically supported

the federal government's effort to combat Soviet communism" (4) during the Cold War in spite of the region's isolationist sentiment during the period between the world wars. Those efforts included programs to combat communist subversion at home and to defend the United States from attack by the Soviet Union. The latter, in particular, affected the northern Great Plains states in the form of nuclear missile sites (which brought economic benefits) and the Ground Observer Corps. People in the northern Great Plains states also participated enthusiastically in religious activities infused with anticommunist messages and in patriotic programs such as the Freedom Train, the Citizens Food Committee, and the Crusade for Freedom.

Yet Mills does not find the permeating collective sense of fear among people in the northern plains states that other historians of the era have described. For example, "people in this region generally did not participate in civil defense measures, demonstrate against military construction projects, or demand anticommunist legislation from their state and local governments" (4). Communist hunting "was not pervasive" on the northern plains (57). Overall, Mills maintains that "citizens on the northern Great Plains often did not see the Cold War as frightening or traumatic but as a source of [economic] opportunity" (237). The dichotomy is a false one; the two perspectives, of course, are not mutually exclusive.

Mills argues that regional authors have treated the northern Great Plains as a colonial economy, which he defines simplistically as "extracting more resources from an area than a controlling interest contributes" (6). At various points, Mills claims either to invalidate or to refine that interpretation. He emphasizes that federal spending exceeded taxation on the northern Great Plains during the Cold War and asserts that the Cold War thus enabled the states of the northern Great Plains "to reverse the trend of colonialism" (236). He acknowledges, however, that such a pattern had begun at least as early as the Great Depression.

Factual errors damage the book's credibility. The Dies Committee did not "cease to exist" during World War II (26). Richard Nixon never chaired the House Committee on Un-American Activities (35). The infamous "spy queen" was Elizabeth Bentley, not "Barkley" (66).

Further, the book displays a less than sure mastery of the period and a lack of reading in the general literature. Important works about the Red Scare and about the Cuban Missile Crisis are missing from Mills's notes and bibliography. Mills's limited and selective reading either accounts for the book's pronounced bias or reflects the author's preconceived notions. Mills tends to cast the role of liberals in the most favorable light possible. With respect to the Red Scare, he tends to excuse liberals and place responsibility exclusively on the political right.

For example, he writes that Truman established the President's Temporary Commission on Employee Loyalty only because he "had to" after the Republican sweep in the elections of 1946 (26) and that the Truman administration initiated the prosecutions of leading members of the Communist Party under the Smith Act in response to Republican charges that Truman was soft on communism (34). In fact, Truman needed no excuse to go after communists or to violate civil liberties in the process. Mills's ideological blinders lead him to miss the significance of important information he uncovers. For example, he quotes Lee Metcalf, a Democratic senator from Montana, to the effect that many members of the John Birch Society in that state were Democrats (56); Mills offers no elaboration or analysis. Similarly, Mills states that Republicans red-baited Mike Mansfield during his bid to unseat a conservative Republican senator, Zales Ecton, in 1952, but Mills ignores the fact that Mansfield engaged in some red-baiting of his own. Regarding other issues, Mills's description of Eisenhower's New Look defense policy on page 116 is a caricature; Eisenhower did not "leave little alternative to nuclear war in dealing with any military crisis." A more sensible account on page 189 still overstates the case. The historical record does not bear out Mills's unequivocal assertion that John F. Kennedy had no idea before he entered the White House that the missile gap was a myth (200).

The book's prose is plodding, tedious, and sometimes ungrammatical. Even aside from factual errors and poor writing, the book has an amateurish quality. For example, Mills reports that Senator Karl Mundt, despite his strained relationship with Dwight D. Eisenhower, asked the president to campaign for him in 1954, but Mills never tells readers whether Eisenhower did so (54). Mills writes that the phrase "in God we trust" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance "at the direction of President Eisenhower" (62); later on the same page he acknowledges that this was done by an act of Congress. In a more serious instance, Mills asserts that an unidentified professor at the University of Montana lost his job after being accused of communist sympathies (40). The footnote cites only a letter to Mundt and admits that no newspaper account confirmed this.

The book adds to the literature on the Cold War some specific information about the domestic Cold War on the northern Great Plains. Perhaps its most significant contribution is the discussion of the Ground Observer Corps. Catherine McNicol Stock's marvelous study of the northern Great Plains during the Great Depression demonstrates that there is much to be learned by studying the region. Mills's book unfortunately falls far short of her example.