

Color Coded: Party Politics in the American West, 1950-2016

Cory Haala
Marquette University

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If the records were available, I would have appreciated more discussion of Dr. Jefferson or other nonwhite contemporaries who were part of the anti-abortion movement. Additionally, on occasion, Haugeberg's examples, though relevant and supportive, do not always align or coincide with the specific moment she's speaking about. These are minor points that do not distract from the fact that Haugeberg has produced a fascinating study of the early roots of the pro-life movement that should be read by anyone with an interest in women's history, or who wants to trace the genealogy of the modern pro-life movement.

Color Coded: Party Politics in the American West, 1950–2016, by Walter Nugent. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. x, 374 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Cory Haala is a Ph.D. candidate in history at Marquette University. He is working on a dissertation on midwestern liberalism in the age of Reagan.

If the 2016 elections shattered understandings of modern American political history, the 2018 midterms exacerbated the difficulty of piecing it back together. Yet, to University of Notre Dame professor emeritus Walter Nugent, over a half-century of elections necessitates a narrative characterizing the politics of the American West.

Using the U.S. Census definition of the West, plus the plains states from the Dakotas to Texas, Nugent surveys the political changes of America's western half since 1950 and groups each state into one of five categories: states turning Republican, such as Texas; "reliably red" Great Plains states; swing states Montana, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico; states becoming Democratic, such as Oregon and California; and thoroughly Democratic states (Hawaii and Washington). The result is a wealth of resources for scholars of western politics, including an appendix listing more than 5,000 electoral results for governorships, U.S. Senate seats, congressional races, and electoral votes. (State legislative control could have been given longer shrift, at least in similar tables in the appendix. For an example, see Michael J. Dubin, *Party Affiliations in the State Legislatures: A Year by Year Summary, 1796–2006* [2007].)

Nugent argues that two primary developments underlie these modern classifications. First, energetic party building by men like Oklahoma's Harvey Bellmon and South Dakota's George McGovern shifted power balances in one-party states. Second, incumbency and "the friendly drawing of district lines" reinforced political hierarchies in deep-red Texas and bright-blue California through processes like gerrymandering (255). Demographic shifts turned states like Colorado and

Arizona politically “purple,” Nugent argues, but the interior West is far from fully Democratic, a process completed in California and Oregon through entrenched identity liberalism and environmentalism in cities like San Francisco and Portland. Consequently, Nugent dismisses the notion that Texas—characterized by law-and-order conservatism, Reaganism, and “the spread of the Religious Right and its coalescence politically with the GOP”—will, as Democrats hope, “revert to blue or even purple any time soon” (64).

Nugent reaffirms the rural-urban divide in American politics. To explain Donald Trump’s 2016 victory through that lens, he notes that “the Rustbelt ‘misbehaved.’ . . . The West, however, did not” (259). Color-coding, Nugent argues, explains the political divergence of California and Texas through fundamental differences between identity liberalism and limited-government conservatism. More could be done to identify interests reinforcing this dichotomy, particularly big donors astroturfing Tea Party groups or extractive industries dominating resource-rich states. This also belies recent political developments: The elites of Phoenix’s Chamber of Commerce portended Barry Goldwater’s rise, leading to attacks on unions and the New Deal, but they did not represent the “Religious Right or social issues conservatism” (132–33). The post-1975 convergence of business interests, activists from the Sagebrush Rebellion, and nativists like Joe Arpaio, though, are underexplained. And suburbs and women are lost in the shuffle.

As such, *Color Coded* falters in the wake of the 2018 elections. Nugent bemoans how even “good treatments of ‘political culture’ avoid treating elections, parties, personalities, events, issues, organizations” (6). How, then, to understand a new generation of politicians, particularly female and Native, like Deb Haaland of New Mexico or Sharice Davids of Kansas? While “Hispanics were becoming an ever-larger share of [Texas’s] population,” race is not a final determinant for Nugent, except in already blue states like California, where “increase[s] in minority populations . . . have trended more and more strongly Democratic” (61, 229). But contemporary Native activism against pipelines and against disenfranchisement in North Dakota demonstrates how political history cannot just narrate party building and elections but must ask deeper questions of who is voting, who is mobilized, and who is excluded.

Scholars of the Midwest will note that the Farm Crisis of the 1980s goes unmentioned. The resultant Senate victories of Tom Daschle and Kent Conrad in the Dakotas, consequently, are left unexplained. North Dakota is “conservative” and not “purple,” yet elected Democratic-Nonpartisan League officials like Conrad, Heidi Heitkamp, Byron Dorgan, and Bud Sinner break with Nugent’s heuristic; Nebraska Democrat

Bob Kerrey's liberalism is aberrational. If plains states are "conservative" until proven otherwise, future studies might explore when and why voters abandoned those predilections.

Spurring such criticism is undoubtedly Nugent's intent. He admits that characterizing "the West" is challenging; like the Midwest, it "lacks the political unity of New England or the South" (7). But *Color Coded* implies that electoral oscillations should be studied to explain how, for 30 years, Iowa's senators were a progressive Democrat and a conservative Republican. Color-coding is a start, but political history requires focus on the voters themselves. As Nugent implores, "Historians and political scientists please note. There is plenty of good work yet to be done" (6).