

Book Reviews

Mining America: The Industry and the Environment, 1800-1980, by Duane A. Smith. Development of Western Resources Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987. xiii, 210 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$25.00 cloth.

In *Mining America*, Duane A. Smith has assigned himself the ambitious task of examining "the evolution of mining's attitudes toward the environment" (xi) from 1800 to 1980. His "objective is to give an inside view by letting mining speak for itself" (xi). Smith, a professor of history at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, is the author or editor of numerous books on mining and the West. This particular volume is part of an interdisciplinary series, the Development of Western Resources, edited by John G. Clark of the University of Kansas.

Despite the subtitle, *The Industry and the Environment, 1800-1980*, Smith does not intend this book to be a comprehensive examination of the developing relationship between mining and the environment. Smith made a number of chronological and topical decisions in order to accommodate the entire nation for nearly two hundred years, a range of minerals and environmental conditions, and the increasing complexity of his story in the twentieth century. These choices set the focus and determined both the strengths and the weaknesses of the book.

Chapters one through five, which constitute nearly half of the 170 pages of text, address the nineteenth century and concentrate on mining in the West. Smith justifies the western emphasis by arguing that western mining attracted most of the public's interest and created most of its national impact. While the attraction of western mining is undeniable, the reader is left wondering about the importance of minerals such as eastern and midwestern coal and iron in the development of America as an urban, industrial nation. Most of the first five chapters are devoted to analyzing the attitudes of the mining community toward the land, water, and air, including the corollary issue of smelter smoke. The author explains that mining has to be considered in the larger context of attitudes toward resource development, and he warns that in the nineteenth century people did not think of environment in the post-World War II sense. Nonetheless, Smith uses the word envi-

ronment so many times in describing the attitudes of nineteenth-century miners that readers are apt to forget his earlier caveat. Beyond the issue of terminology, the attitudes of miners changed so little during the nineteenth century that devoting so much text to the subject results in a repetitious narrative.

Chapters six through eight cover the twentieth century from the conservation movement of the Progressive era through the end of the 1950s. Smith examines the degree to which mining embraced conservation, defined as efficient use and prevention of waste, and he discusses the growing public clamor against the worst of mining's assaults on air, land, and water: dredging, smelter smoke, mine drainage, and strip mining. He concludes that despite some changes, nineteenth-century attitudes toward the "environment" continued to dominate in the mining community throughout the 1950s.

Chapters nine and ten, which together add up to twenty-five pages, address the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. These chapters are followed by a brief epilogue on the 1980s. Most readers will find themselves wishing that the author had devoted more space and more analysis to the environmental politics of the mining industry, key pieces of federal and state legislation, significant mining-related environmental issues, and regional differences in environmental conditions that had an impact on politics, legislation, and issues since 1960. These chapters do, however, have quite a bit to say about the strip mining of coal in Appalachia and in the Midwest, thus balancing treatment that had tipped westward in the first half of the book.

The strongest sections of *Mining America* deal with western mining in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book also raises some significant historical and methodological questions. In the introduction, Smith denies that he is writing environmental history, a statement that will leave many readers wondering, if this book is not environmental history, then what is? Smith's goal of "letting mining speak for itself" brings up the issue of the role of the historian and the question of whether or not a historian should allow any subject to speak for itself. Finally, the author's examination of mining's "reaction to the environment and to environmental criticism" (xii) only partially answers three key questions: What is mining? Who speaks for mining? How have these things changed from issue to issue, place to place, and time to time?

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