

German émigrés were among those persecuted for their leftist political leanings. Salka herself, whom Rifkind identifies as “a vaguely socialist liberal” (379), faced FBI surveillance and interrogation as a “fellow traveler” for her friendships with the more radical refugees. Most absurdly, authorities accused her of “premature anti-fascist” (read: pro-communist) activities, such as having joined the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, cofounded by Warner Bros. Studios in 1936 when the United States was neutral and uncommitted in the looming European conflict (187–188). The postwar government-sponsored persecution, along with the country’s generally antidemocratic mood, prompted an infuriated response from Viertel, one that Rifkind clearly means to resonate with the right-wing turn of the Trump era: “Fascism is here. I couldn’t give a damn about freedom of the press and thought in a world where lies and brutality are tolerated” (384).

But reclamation, not damnation, is the overarching theme of *The Sun and Her Stars*. It leaves us with a portrait of a complex, multifaceted *Lebenskünstler* (artist of life) (91) who was one of legendary MGM producer Irving Thalberg’s “Scheherazades” (13), whose wonderful memoir itself was and remains a “House of Leaves” (414), but who was also “the anchor,” “the shelter,” “the chief ambassador,” and “the social glue for the exile community” (89, 265, 277, 426), and whose still-standing house on Mabery Road “built an intentional community that was as passionately committed to social support as the local ashrams” (399). No, Salka Viertel was not a prophet, a saint, or a swami, but as Donna Rifkind brilliantly conveys, she was one hell of a human being.

Vincent Brook

NOTE

1. Katharina Prager, “*Ich bin nicht gone Hollywood!*”: Salka Viertel—Ein Leben in Theater und Film (Vienna: Braumüller, 2007).

Richard White. *California Exposures: Envisioning Myth and History*. Photographs by Jesse Amble White. New York: W.W. Norton, 2020. 326 pp. Hardcover \$45.00.

California Exposures reads like a conversation with Richard White, the prizewinning historian of large parts of the history of the West, a conversation that draws upon photographs taken by White’s son, Jesse Amble White, and upon their rambles to take the photographs.

At the outset, Richard White makes clear that he and Jesse White see photographs differently. Where the photographer sees a photograph as “an artifact of a moment,” the historian sees a photograph as leading to searches in archives and libraries to place the photograph not just in space but also in time: “A photographer composes a picture as a whole, but a historian fractures it, divides it into different elements that lead to different regions of the past” (137). Richard White draws upon Jesse White’s photographs to tell stories, and he stitches together the stories to make what he calls a “peculiar and very partial history” (xiii) of California. And, just as his son’s photographs involve making an

exposure, White's essays draw upon archival sources and the work of previous historians to expose the motivations behind the state's major creation myths and "the role of monopolists in California" (261).

Those familiar with California history will encounter familiar themes: European arrival, the missions, the dispossession and genocide of the First People in the 1850s, the development of agriculture and industry, the rise of monopoly capital, conflict between labor and capital, the development of Los Angeles, and the central significance of water. Regarding the conflict between labor and capital, White laconically notes, "Capital won" (115).

White addresses these themes through microhistories—studies of particular places, particular individuals or families, all framed around Jesse's photographs and, sometimes, historical photographs. This approach gives familiar themes a new freshness and sometimes results in a different or deeper understanding of the larger theme. Four locations recur throughout the book: Point Reyes (western Marin County), the Los Angeles area, the region around the site of Tulare Lake (mostly Kings County), and the Delta.

The book is partly about myths, which White describes as "timeless stories that differ from history" and "are not so much falsehoods as explanations." In the early part of the book, he addresses "three mythic stories about the origins of California": the landing of Sir Francis Drake, the Spanish missions, and the gold rush. All of these, he concludes, are "just variants of a larger Anglo-Saxon myth of California that is remarkably hard to shake" (xv).

The book begins with Richard and Jesse tramping along the Point Reyes coast, past the ruins of D Ranch, toward the site where Drake may have landed in 1579. White then reflects on the reasons why so many Californians in the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth century spent so much time trying to determine the exact location of Drake's landing, and why Drake's landing was memorialized or celebrated, among other ways, by a sixty-foot-high cross placed in Golden Gate Park in 1894. That cross, he explains, should be understood as a declaration of the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant origins of California. He concludes that section with an account of the bogus plate of brass.

White's discussion of the missions focuses on two in the Los Angeles area, the San Fernando and San Gabriel missions, and on the mission preservation movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially the activities of Charles Lummis. He concludes that the current, reconstructed or preserved, Spanish missions mostly "celebrate the Americans who have preserved them" (33) rather than conveying the history of their founding and heyday as missions.

One of the mission Indians, a man named Francisco, later appears as leader of one of the Yokut groups in White's account of the dispossession and genocide of the Tachi and other Yokut peoples in the region around Tulare Lake. White continues with the history of that area, describing its transformation by agriculture. Though he detours to other topics and regions, he returns to Kings County repeatedly, for the Mussel Slough shootings, the quite different but nonetheless similar development of the towns of Allensworth and Corcoran, the growth of cotton cultivation in the southern San Joaquin Valley, and the 1933 cotton strike. Late in the book, he returns to that area again to consider the significance of water, the state's great water projects, and the current ecological—and human—disasters that face that region. "Water projects," he observes, "inevitably transfer not only

water, but wealth. They are usually Robin Hoods gone bad—they tax everyone, including the poor, and deliver much of their profits to the wealthy” (216).

White returns several times to D Ranch (where the book begins) and Point Reyes, which, over several nonconsecutive chapters, he uses to discuss first land monopolization and farm tenancy and then the transition of Point Reyes to a national park.

As the father-and-son rambles approach the sites relevant to the recent past, White returns to the L.A. area to explore the development of that city, especially the manipulations over the San Fernando Valley and the development of the San Gabriel Valley (locations of the missions he analyzes early in the book). Among the developers of the San Fernando Valley was Hobart J. Whitley, introduced earlier as the developer of Corcoran. White remarks, in regard to the San Fernando Valley operations, that “Whitley had joined men not to be trusted, but he was familiar with such men. He was one himself” (205).

The book sometimes becomes a very personal history. White ruminates in a few places on his own experiences growing up in Southern California. And he concludes with his discovery of the connections between some of the monopolists he has skewered and his own endowed chair at Stanford: “I thought I examined the beast from above, but I was reclining comfortably in its belly” (261).

Given the many color photographs, the publisher has printed the entire book on the heavy, glossy paper that is usually limited to a separate color section. The book includes a number of excellent, specially prepared maps. My only criticism is that the publisher chose to present many historical photographs and maps on such a small scale that I found it impossible to discern details.

Robert W. Cherny

Roland De Wolk. *American Disruptor: The Scandalous Life of Leland Stanford*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019. 299 pp. Paperback \$26.95.

In this terribly disappointing book, self-described “journalist and historian” Roland De Wolk promises much but delivers little that is new (299). In eighteen opinion-laden chapters, De Wolk retells the well-known story of California governor and U.S. senator Leland Stanford, the great corporate railroad mogul who helped build the nation’s first transcontinental railroad. As the most publicly visible quarter of the immortal Big Four, Stanford presided with his partners over the Southern Pacific railroad empire that dominated California’s economy and politics during the second half of the nineteenth century. Amassing a colossal personal fortune, Stanford capped his career and ensured his legacy by founding Leland Stanford Junior University, named in honor of his one and only child, the fifteen-year-old son he lost in 1884, nine years prior to his own death at age sixty-nine.

A towering and controversial figure in California history, Stanford has always drawn the attention of fascinated biographers, starting with the venerable Hubert Howe Bancroft and continuing with George T. Clark, Edwin P. Hoyt, and, most notably, Norman Tutorow, who followed his serviceable one-volume biography published in 1971 with