

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

a massive and encyclopedic two-volume compendium that finally appeared in 2004. In addition, Stanford's career has received considerable and detailed treatment in the various histories of the Central and Southern Pacific railroads, biographies of his three associates, particularly Collis P. Huntington, and collective portraits of the Big Four. In short, Stanford's life, with all its attendant triumphs, tragedies, scandals, and achievements, is well-trod scholarly ground.

Nevertheless, De Wolk insists that his subject somehow remains "a largely misunderstood and forgotten man" (xvi). For this, De Wolk faults his numerous predecessors. Although he fails to identify any of them by name or to provide specific examples of their alleged blunderings, De Wolk dismisses entirely the "handful of attempts" to tell Stanford's "astonishing story," which "have largely relied on limited and capriciously collected bits and pieces of sometimes questionable data" (xvii). In his prodigious and even heroic efforts to clean up after his forebears, De Wolk has not only corrected their errors but often "reverse-engineered assertions made by others to get to the provenance of their stated facts. More than a few times," he laments, "I have been bitterly disappointed that the source was misused or not existent at all" (265).

Luckily, these many labors have not been in vain—since, as De Wolk triumphantly assures his readers, they have enabled him to see the ultimate source of Stanford's significance in American and, indeed, in world history: not the completion of the transcontinental railroad and the resulting achievements of the far-flung Southern Pacific monopoly, but rather "his role in the creation of Silicon Valley" (x). In De Wolk's telling, by founding his great university at Palo Alto, Stanford became, long after his death, the "unwitting godfather to the information economy" (xvi) and the "infamously disruptive" (xvii) entrepreneurial geniuses who run it, such as Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook, "Scott McNealy of Sun Microsystems, Steve Ballmer of Microsoft, Elon Musk of Tesla, and of course, Sergey Brin and Larry Page of Google" (223–224). Given this formidable progeny of brash and innovative "disruptors" of modern culture, De Wolk's conclusion seems inescapable: "Today it is fair to assert that Leland Stanford was and remains the authentic American disruptor" (224).

Unfortunately, in light of the chronological distance between Stanford and Google, De Wolk's dubious thesis remains unpersuasive and never amounts to anything more than a clever way of repackaging and selling an old product. Only in his brief but breathless five-page prologue and his thirteen-page concluding "requiem" does De Wolk advance his case for Stanford as "American Disruptor," and he does so mostly by repeated assertion rather than evidence building. Sandwiched in between are eighteen chapters that offer instead a surprisingly old-fashioned "robber baron" portrait of Stanford that easily could have been penned by Matthew Josephson back in 1934.

Indeed, perhaps most striking about *American Disruptor* are its repeated failures to update key events in Stanford's life. One very telling example should suffice to illustrate the larger problem. No standard robber-baron rendition of the Big Four can afford to omit the iconic Mussel Slough tragedy of 1880, the fatal gun battle that quickly became a potent political symbol of railroad tyranny over frontier family farmers and subsequently provided Frank Norris with the factual grounding for his powerful anti-railroad novel of 1901, *The Octopus*. Sure enough, De Wolk takes up Mussel Slough in chapter 11 but, remarkably,

derives nearly his entire account of the famous episode from just two, very antique, secondary sources from 1948 and 1958. In so doing, he overlooks completely an extensive body of excellent scholarly analysis of Mussel Slough that includes books and articles by Richard Orsi, Richard Maxwell Brown, Tony Beers, John Larimore, William Conlogue, David Bederman, and others.

Hoping, perhaps, to compensate for his insufficient research and to enliven a blandly outdated story line, De Wolk spices his narrative with frequent resorts to provocative hyperbole and suggestive titillation. He hints slyly at the rising plutocrat's "sybaritic life" that increasingly found Stanford "living more ostentatiously than maharajas" while "building overwrought mansions" and "acquiring vast tracts of land" (xv). A "larger-than-life figure out of central casting," Stanford "enmeshed himself in scandal after outrageous scandal" (xvi). A great man who nevertheless "had many of the characteristics of an ordinary flimflam man," Stanford embodied so many seeming contradictions that he remained an enigmatic "cipher to his contemporaries" and, to modern observers, presents "an American koan" (xvi). Perhaps, but the evidence actually presented rarely lives up to the inflated rhetoric that, early on, dramatically overstates Stanford's achievements as "dwarfing those of Vanderbilt, Carnegie, and Rockefeller" (xvi).

On his public website, De Wolk introduces himself as one "of a new breed of historians" who "alloys the disciplines of serious, documented history with vivid, relevant storytelling" to produce "unusually strong, enduring and arresting sagas."¹ Judging, however, from the example here provided by *American Disruptor*, De Wolk's "new breed" appears far too eager to subordinate sober and diligent history to tale spinning and audience entertainment.

Michael F. Magliari

NOTE

1. See <http://rolanddewolk.com/>.

Jane H. Hong. *Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019. 280 pp. Paperback \$32.95.

Opening the Gates to Asia masterfully chronicles how, over the course of less than a century, a transpacific movement transformed the United States from a country that barred Asians from immigration and citizenship to the nation that receives more immigrants from Asia than anywhere else in the world. The postwar shift of U.S. empire-building strategy in Asia was at the heart of this evolution. Asian exclusion at the end of the nineteenth century coincided with American expansionism in the Pacific, while the movement for the repeal of exclusion was aligned with the development of the United States' new informal empire in Asia after World War II. Drawing from sources in American, Indian, and Philippine archives, *Opening the Gates to Asia* persuasively demonstrates that U.S. ambitions in postwar Asia forced a symbolic reopening of its borders to Asians as part of the price