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Review: The Hanford Plaintiffs: Voices from the Fight for Atomic Justice, by Trisha T. Pritikin

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The Hanford Plaintiffs: Voices from the Fight for Atomic Justice. By Trisha T. Pritikin. (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2020. 364 pp.)

In 2005, after fifteen years of extensive work by attorneys, plaintiffs, and advocates, a Washington state judge listened to the testimony of citizens exposed to radiation from the Hanford nuclear production site. At that trial regional residents related devastating health effects they believed were caused by extensive radiation releases into the air and Columbia River over three decades of plutonium production at the site. Author Trisha T. Pritikin was one of those testifying, and this important new book features oral histories from all twenty-four of the Hanford bellwether plaintiffs. The attorneys for the plaintiffs and investigative journalist Karen Dorn Steel who broke the story of the Hanford radiation releases in the early 1980s provide thoughtful first-hand introductions to the book. Pritikin provides thoughtful and concise historical context for all of the oral histories and the evolution of atomic litigation at Hanford in relation to parallel efforts by downwinders in the Nevada Test Site region.

The Hanford Plaintiffs joins Carole Gallagher's *American Ground Zero* (1993), Sarah Alisabeth Fox's, *Downwind: A People's History of the Nuclear West* (2014), and the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project (2010) as a landmark oral history documentation of the civilian costs of America's nuclear weapons program during the Cold War. Unlike the much better-known downwinders of the Nevada Test Site (NTS), Pritikin and her fellow Hanford plaintiffs learned of their exposures later and spent longer, nearly two decades, working to have their testimony heard in the courts. A lawyer herself, Pritikin clearly explains the complicated legal maneuverings of government agencies, attorneys, medical experts, and the judges tasked with determining both nuclear health effects and legal liability. Like the earlier oral histories of the Nevada Test Site, Pritikin's compelling series of testimonies from the Hanford plaintiffs greatly enhances our understanding of the lived experience and human cost of nuclear weapons development and testing.

Even more than the NTS downwinders, those living in the agricultural region and small towns surrounding Hanford were kept almost completely in the dark about accidental and purposeful releases of radiation into their environment. The plaintiffs only began to discover information about extensive releases—like the notorious December 1949 “Green Run,” an experimental release of irradiated material directly into the Columbia River—when

Steele published a series of stories in the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* following U.S. Department of Energy public hearings. All of the Hanford plaintiffs were already experiencing cancers and thyroid issues by that point and many had lost close family members and neighbors. The oral testimony of the Hanford plaintiffs mirrors that of the Nevada and Utah downwinders, mostly patriotic rural Americans willing to make sacrifices for the Cold War but devastated that they were not told the truth about the environmental and health consequences of nuclear activities.

Timely and powerful, *The Hanford Plaintiffs* is passionate and reasoned, meticulously researched and accessible. An essential addition to the ongoing effort to reconstruct the history of atomic secrecy and reveal the stories of those who experienced the Cold War as a personal reality rather than a distant geopolitical abstraction. ■

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American Tacos: A History and Guide. By José R. Ralat (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2020. 288 pp.)

This book is divided into eight chapters that describe the different variations of the taco in the United States. Writing in the first person, José R. Ralat offers ethnographic elements to approach the phenomenon of the American taco. As taco editor for *Texas Monthly*, Ralat has the experience to select life stories, recipes, places, and preparation processes that reveal the historical, cultural, political, and symbolic dimensions that every American taco has.

It is well known that the taco is originally Mexican, but once it crossed the border it would begin to develop in such a way that it no longer resembles its Mexican ancestor. The difference between Mexican tacos and American tacos is not only in the shell, sour cream, and lettuce. Throughout the chapters, the types of tacos—Tex-Mex, Cal-Mex, Sur-Mex, Kosher Taco, Alta California—tell the story behind of the founding and development of this nation.

For example, Ralat writes of Mexican migration to the southern United States and how it brought tacos, and specifically details the migration of converted Jews who centuries ago had arrived in New Spain (what is known today as Mexico), and how they preserved religious, cultural and culinary customs which today give life to kosher tacos. Ralat also writes of the colonialism that forced the Native Americans to prepare and eat fry bread as a consequence of their expulsion into Arizona territories, and their current