

A Journey Through the 51st State: The Elusive State of Jefferson. By Peter Laufer. 2013. Guilford, CT: Morris Book Publishing. 215 pp. Paperback \$18.95. ISBN: 978-0-7627-8836-1

The State of Jefferson is not an uncommon response when the rural people of southern Oregon and northern California are asked where it is they consider home. To search for such a state in any atlas would be futile, as the lengthy ontogeny of Jefferson has never resulted in any official entity. Yet the imagined toponym can be found painted on the sides of barns, embroidered into flags and shirts, as well as emblazoned on posters, parade floats, cars, and even official road signs. In his 2013 book, *A Journey Through the 51st State: The Elusive State of Jefferson*, Peter Laufer, professor of journalism at the University of Oregon, explores the bucolic landscape astride California and Oregon in search of those calling themselves Jeffersonians.

In a bid to demystify the nature and character of what has often been dismissed as “myth,” a “legend,” or a “state of mind,” Laufer takes his reader on a journey to discover the modern and historical hearths of the State of Jefferson. His penetrating interviews, personable commentary, and insightful historical research presciently illuminate the marrow of what has since matured into a rapidly expanding grassroots movement aimed at fulfilling the highly normative pursuits of justice, liberty, and happiness. Wishing to be left alone, at least from the grips of current governance arrangements, the provincial patriots in northern California and southern Oregon seek salvation from what they view as an insidious state by placing their hopes, their dreams, and their livelihoods into the long-held myth of a State of Jefferson.

Although the region has seen multiple calls for separation, most salient in the collective consciousness was a movement in 1941 that also sought to realize Jefferson as a new state, then what would have been the 49th state of the United States. Having been jettisoned while on the brink of fruition after a dramatized campaign, the movement, its capital, and its symbols remain relevant and paradigmatic fables in the minds of many Jeffersonians, in spite of stark contradictions. Aiming to characterize the “elusive state,” Laufer begins his journey in “the obvious place...Yreka, the once and perhaps present capital city of the presumptive state” (p. 1). Scouring multiple archives in the region, Laufer’s inquiry into the 1941 movement reveals events that divulge not only the separatists’ grievances and demands, differing greatly in nature from those of the contemporary movement (the 1941 movement was driven by the desire for an improvement, expanded road network, i.e. greater government involvement, while today’s would-be separatists oftentimes echo the “government is bad” trope espoused by Tea Partiers throughout the US), but also the caricatured nature of their campaign, evoking questions of the processes capable of so heavily altering a people’s desires. The emphasis Laufer invests in the historical composite of the region is manna in understanding the worldview of the rugged individualists, painting a picture of the exposed reality of those who husband the dream of a State of Jefferson. In this facet, Laufer’s lengthy, impressive background as a working journalist whose body of work transverses the globe, proffers a firm and panoptic insight that rewards the reader with a foundation that makes this book highly accessible.

As a veteran journalist turned academic, Laufer is able to articulate broader understandings and perspectives. His previous work in such places as the US-Mexico border and the former Yugoslavia, as well as a lifetime of personal experience stateside, makes Laufer an ideal guide as he is able to characterize the Jefferson drama as a tale taking place in the rural frontier between two urbanized regions. While touching on more theoretical approaches to understanding Jefferson, Laufer makes evident his professionalism and tact as he grounds his

approach by urging his subjects to expound clearly their perceptions and reflections surrounding their politically charged reality.

Academically, Laufer's fascination with borders, both real and imagined, is explicit throughout the book. With alacrity, he brings to the fore their ability to play ambiguous roles as both centrifugal and centripetal forces within a society, furthermore accenting this dualism by personally connecting the dialogues of otherwise entrenched and embittered groups of environmentalists, indigenous tribes, and industrious individualists. Moreover, Laufer's uncanny ability to empathize with these otherwise contentious groups begets a work in itself free from an increasingly volatile rhetoric; instead, punctuations of distilled sentiments allow the reader an unencumbered—yet fully embodied—perspective of the salient issues fueling talks of secession.

Laufer makes plain in his preface the paradigm he explores in *A Journey Through the 51st State*, adding to the broader dialogue that “enforcing an existing social and political union that brings together divergent types can be difficult at best, disastrous at worst” (p. xvii). Nowhere is this paradox explored more than in interviews found in the latter half of the book. The intimate perspectives of residents, so split along industrial and postindustrial sentiments, highlight the role this contrast plays in mobilizing and characterizing either side. The focus on the many condensation points of disaccord is indeed a mainstay of this book, allowing readers their own windows into the world into which Laufer delves.

Far from a harmonious cadre, the would-be Jeffersonians comprise a rather contentious group, each often painting the other in atavistic terms. Laufer, although sympathetic to each group's plight, shows no trepidation in presenting curt comments and questions of the opposing side in his interviews, if only to gauge the response of the subject. Many of the questions posed by Laufer, often taken directly from the opposition, are blunt and not rarely comical. Questions such as “Why do you want to ruin my life...prevent me from earning a living...and destroy my business?” (p.196) represent the at-times loaded accusations that Laufer deftly incorporates to provoke his respondents, cutting through the posturing common when addressing a sympathetic ear. This, coupled with an unmatched reflexivity, yields an incredible mosaic that reveals a coherent drama and imparts a sense of the acute and serious nature of a people locked in what they see as a struggle for survival. In fact, the local condensation of disaccord that Laufer explores in his research, conducted from late 2011 to early 2013, has since erupted into a movement that has generated substantial tangible support in both the real and virtual worlds.

The original namesake of this ambiguous, amorphous state remains unknown, as Laufer documents; however, today there is little deviation from the belief it was after the third US president, Thomas Jefferson. As the drafter of the US Constitution, a document deified by many in the current State of Jefferson movement, President Jefferson plays the role of figurehead in a jingoist movement such as the current secessionist movement in northern California and southern Oregon; but the deified president may represent more than just a fundamental patriotism espoused by some in the fabled Jefferson region. Often described as “the ‘American Sphinx’ because of the contradictions and inconsistencies” (p. xiv), perhaps Jefferson is more accurately representative of all who call this mythical state home.

As a populace, the people of the State of Jefferson comprise of a variety of groups, each struggling to be heard, fighting for the right of representation. That power is presently determined by long-established—and unlikely to be altered in any foreseeable future—state borders that bisect mountains, deserts, valleys, and coasts of this geo-cultural frontier. It is evident in Laufer's telling that as long as the strings of the state flow from their urban

puppeteers into Jefferson, there will always be those who dream of cutting them. Written in a wonderfully approachable, reportorial, and reflexive fashion, Laufer's *A Journey Through the 51st State* acts as a personable and knowledgeable guide on a shared journey to explore the depth inherent to dreams.

Connor Mullinix
cmj96@humboldt.edu

***Trouble in the Forest: California's Redwood Timber Wars.* By Richard Widick. 2009. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 353 pp. Paperback \$25.00. ISBN 978-0-8166-5324-9**

Richard Widick's *Trouble in the Forest: California's Redwood Timber Wars* is an in-depth content analysis and empirical research project aimed at understanding the cultivation of the redwood social imaginary. He focuses on public perception, land use, property rights, and the culmination of such forest practices in Humboldt County, located in the northwest corner of California, where giant redwoods thrive. This far western frontier was one of the latest sites of development and exploitation in the US. The relatively short history of Euro-American colonization began in 1850 when explorers and settlers first landed in Humboldt Bay.

Widick begins *Trouble in the Forest* with an overview of the historical makings of outside migrants landing in Humboldt Bay, providing deep detail on who was part of the initial settlements and how rapid the extrapolation of natural resources occurred. Logging was not the only form of investment in the land—farming and mining also turned into landholding stakes. In the Introduction, Widick mines archival print media as he runs through many of what he identifies as the most important events in this story. He labels the Indian Island massacre of 1869, the Great Lumber Strike of 1935, the foundation of the company town of Scotia, the death of David “Gypsy” Chain, and the Luna tree sit as sites for developing the forest social imaginary in Humboldt.

Trouble in the Forest is structured around each of these events and their surrounding epochs in Humboldt (for example, the Great Lumber Strike of 1935 is included in a chapter discussing all of the preceding and subsequent labor struggles—what organizations were involved, who took part, and what they participated in are discussed in detail). Much effort was taken to grasp how these events came to be and their outcomes. Public perceptions as they were archived in various print media or through interviews were analyzed to provide comprehension of the social imaginary created in Humboldt.

Widick spent two years in Humboldt County researching what the redwood struggle transmitted. Some of his questions include the following: how and why did the timber wars originate and sustain themselves, where are they leading, and what do they tell us about globalization and our nation? “My method is to combine the cultural theory of social imaginaries with elements of media studies and environmental sociology in the writing of social history” (p. 37), he declares. By analyzing mass media representations and primary historical sources, Widick provides insight into the foundational and challenging social imaginary (shared