



*The first comprehensive history of political change
and stability in the modern American West*

Color Coded

Party Politics in the American West, 1950–2016

By Walter Nugent

The now–staunchly red state of Texas was deep blue in 1950 and had virtually no functioning Republican Party. California, on the other hand, was reliably red. Today, both states have jumped to the opposite end of the political spectrum. Texas is one of the most conservative states, while California has become one of today’s most liberal bastions. These are the most dramatic cases, but notable shifts in voting patterns have occurred throughout the western states in recent decades—shifts so varied and complex that they have, until now, eluded the attention focused on the drastic examples of the South and Northeast. Bringing clarity to the remarkably mixed yet poorly understood map of America’s red, blue, and purple western half, *Color Coded* presents the first comprehensive history of political change and stability in the region between 1950 and 2016.

The West, in Walter Nugent’s analysis, includes nineteen states: the thirteen that the U.S. Census Bureau calls the Western Region—roughly from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, as well as off-shore Alaska and Hawaii—plus the six Great Plains states from North Dakota south to Texas. Consulting official voting results of more than 5,300 state and national elections, as well as newspaper reports, oral histories, public documents, and other sources, Nugent reveals the ever-shifting patterns that have defined western politics in modern times. Geography, culture, history, political trajectories, and the charisma of key political actors have all played their part in these changes—and will, Nugent asserts, continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

A powerful, exhaustively researched study of modern political organization, party development, and shifting voter blocs in the West, *Color Coded* deftly charts, as well, the profound red-blue tensions that have defined modern America.

Returns for the 5,300-plus elections on which the book is based, covering the nineteen western states between 1950 and 2016, are compiled in the book’s appendix.

Walter Nugent is Professor Emeritus of History at Notre Dame University and past president of the Western History Association. He has published two hundred articles and numerous books, including *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* and *Into the West: The Story of Its People*.

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