IN PRINT

“Showdown in the Big Quiet: Land, Myth and Government in the American West”  
By Dr. John Bieter

Outdoor writer and Idahoan Ted Trueblood gave Owyhee County its nickname, the “Big Quiet,” said John Bieter, a professor of history. The county is the largest landmass in the lower 48 states with the fewest number of people — a massive place that can be mysterious and unknown, even to a native Idahoan.

While researching another book, Bieter happened upon the story of Omaechevawarria v. State of Idaho, a case pitting Basque shepherders against cattle ranchers in a question over land use. When the case went before the U.S. Supreme Court, the court sided with the cattlemen.

Bieter continued his Owyhee inquiry and produced “Showdown,” a look at Owyhee County through six stories that resonate with characters and controversy. Three are stories of the “Old West,” pre-1918, including Omaechevawarria, as well as what’s been called the “last Indian massacre” in 1911, and a mining claim dispute from the 1860s.

Bieter’s stories from later decades include that of murderer Claude Dallas, of the Saylor Creek mining claim dispute from the 1860s.

A middle chapter serves as “connective tissue,” said Bieter. It explores the meaning and persistence of Old West mythology across the country and the world, and the ongoing dialogue between those ideas and the character of the West today.

“Postcolonial Theory and Avatar”  
By Dr. Gautam Basu Thakur

Gautam Basu Thakur’s book is part of the series “Film Theory in Practice,” which looks at popular film through literary theories. The editors matched Basu Thakur, assistant professor of English, with postcolonial theory based on his expertise in critical theory, previous publications on filmmakers Michael Haneke and Satyajit Ray, and research on globalization and neoliberalism. Basu Thakur chose the James Cameron blockbuster “Avatar” as his focus.

The first part of Basu Thakur’s book is an overview of postcolonial theory — what happens to indigenous peoples, to language, to culture, to civic systems, during colonization. What happens in its aftermath when a colonizer has departed?

The second part of the book concerns Basu Thakur’s postcolonial “read” of the popular film. On its surface, “Avatar” criticizes the colonization of the alien world Pandora and the exploitation of its natural resources. It even provides a heroic figure in the form of Jake Sully, a man from Earth who shifts his loyalties from the colonizers to align himself with Pandora’s native Na’vi. But in effect, with all of its romantic visions, the film’s anti-colonization resolution becomes kind of a balm, said Basu Thakur, that “makes us lose focus on the real thing.”

“Avatar” creates an illusion for viewers that all is well in the world outside the cinema, even as very real colonizers continue to exploit very real people.

“Film and Education: Capturing the Bilingual Communities”  
By Dr. Claudia Peralta

Claudia Peralta’s book details a documentary class that took place at Boise State during the summers of 2012-2014. Peralta, a professor in the Department of Literary, Language and Culture, Dr. Peter Lutze, former professor in the Department of Communication, and Fulvio Orsito, associate professor and director of the Italian and Italian American Program at CSU, Chico, worked with visiting filmmaker Fabio Caramaschi and graduate students from several disciplines. Under the guidance of the professors and Caramaschi, the students created documentaries that explore three sometimes marginalized groups in the Treasure Valley: Latinos, refugees and incarcerated youth.

“We wanted to bring together communication students who have studied film and bilingual students with strong foundations in diversity on a local and global level,” said Peralta. “Pedagogically, we also wanted our project to have a strong foundation by having students engage in collecting and analyzing qualitative data.”

Her book explores how the partnership between the professors, Caramaschi and the students came about and how it developed. Caramaschi, whose film and written work has focused on ethnological subjects including the nomadic Tuaregs of North Africa, encouraged students to conduct interviews at the university, but also to venture into the larger community, said Peralta.

The book, she added, will be a guide for educators who want to create a similar project using film to look at social issues and help students understand their communities.

Environmental Research Continues to Improve and Inform Our Lives

This issue of EXPLORE magazine highlights some of the depth and breadth of the research in ecology, evolution and behavior being conducted here at Boise State University.

The stories featured on these pages represent only a fraction of the many issues affecting the natural world that we tackle every day in our labs and in the field. You’ll find similar areas of emphasis in geological sciences, chemistry, physics and other disciplines where faculty and student researchers strive to understand and improve the physical world.

While many colleges and universities have environmentally based programs, at Boise State we are looking at issues that few others address. For instance, we do bird research like no one else, particularly the study of the raptors, songbirds and threatened species that call Idaho home.

And even though much of what we do is uniquely situated to our Intermountain region, the lessons learned are applicable around the globe. Based on their expertise and experience, our researchers often are consulted as international experts and are included in grants and projects far beyond our borders.

In the end, we want to inform the dialog about the diversity of life on Earth and how we can ensure a healthier ecosystem for generations to come.

— DR. MARK RUDIN, VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT