

Russell Cobb. 2020. *The Great Oklahoma Swindle: Race, Religion, and Lies in America's Weirdest State* (2020) University of Nebraska Press. 272 pages

Russell Cobb, an associate professor in Latin American studies and creative writing at the University of Alberta, offers a view of his home state that is not particularly flattering, but it's a well-written tome often historically overlooked in textbooks, even today. I know from my experience and talking to historians, both of what Cobb, calls "swindles," the Tulsa Massacre and the Osage Murders were both barely, if ever, taught in our schools before the 1990s.

Cobb begins unabashedly by saying: "This book is about how one state in the union—Oklahoma—was founded and maintained on false information and broken promises from its very beginning. Rather than seeing fake news as a contemporary media problem, in other words, I see it as the touchstone for our political culture. A swindle was at the heart of Oklahoma's state-building project."

He even describes the state's beginning as a "forced marriage" between Indian territories and Oklahoma itself in 1907. The statute still stands in front of the Oklahoma Territorial Museum in Guthrie, Oklahoma. He details another swindle in the robbing of Native Americans their land allotments after oil was discovered on their land.

Cobb even writes about the nearly lost history of how the state started out as a Socialist stronghold through its dismantling by the KKK. He also describes Crazy Snake and his militate as well as far-right preacher Billy James Hargis. Later, he describes the burning down of "Black Wall Street."

But, even today a former Governor Mayor Fallin found prayer a

solution to social problems as well as former attorney general who denies climate change-swindles all. As Cobb says, “the state of Oklahoma was built and is still maintained on a bedrock of lies.” I think this is a much-needed, yet critical supplemental text, especially as a reader for an Oklahoma state and local class. In an interview, Cobb stated he wrote the book because Oklahoma is where he grew up. Even then it was at the bottom rung of states in education, but yet in the top for incarceration. Cobb was writing an article after the book was published, he said: “I started to think of it like a failing state. After I wrote that article, it became clear to me that the next step was to understand how it got that way. How is it possible that a place that is so wealthy – it sits on one of the richest oil deposits in the world, it used to be known as the oil capital of the world – can have so many miserable social and health indicators?”

Few books in Oklahoma ask this question, but they should. After legalized swindle after another, Cobb writes that by “disavowing the Great American Swindle” we can toward a “new way forward.”

I recommend this book to be taught alongside a state and local government of a history main textbook. It would give a competing view of our often-forgotten history.

The fact is Oklahoma, not unlike America itself, is a flawed state with a flawed history. Really, this is not something to be ashamed of, but rather something we need to embrace. Only when we reflect, understand and accept our flaws, “warts and all,” can we learn and grow and move forward.

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