programs, which reinforces the political side of political economy.

It is easy for Follow the Money to pull you in, comparing programs, places, and periods. Every click leads to another, and each dataset prompts questions, like all good history.

Adam M. Sowards
University of Idaho


Follow the Money seeks to explore the historical underpinnings of in-lieu federal payments to western counties, diving into ten federal payment programs and the amount each western county received per year between 1906 and 2015. The research is presented through an interactive piece of digital history, deftly combining an interactive map and explanation to explore the transfer of federal payments to Far Western counties.

The core of the project uses an interactive map to explore ten programs and the payments western counties received over time. Readers can interact with this map in multiple ways. The main interaction is to select a payment program (such as Forest Service Revenue Payments) and a year from the timeline, which then provides readers with a choropleth map shaded by the amount of money counties received. Below the map, a line chart displays the median values received under a payment program by all western counties; selecting a county on the map also displays that county’s payment history alongside these overall values.

In addition to the interactive map, the map also provides explanatory text, a history of why the payment programs exist, and descriptions of each payment program to help contextualize the information being shown to the reader. The narrative alongside the map is divided into two sections, “Description” and “Key Trends.” Description provides a brief historical overview of a selected payment program, while key trends discern which areas of the West were most influenced by the payment program. Readers can select Full Description & Sources or navigate to a program from the Program Descriptions navigation from the top of the page to receive more detailed explanations. In this way, the project is nicely laid out—providing a wealth of material, descriptive information, sources, and additional map views that further contextualize funding agencies and their influence on western lands. Given the complicated patchwork of federal land management agencies that exist on western lands, this kind of descriptive information and additional maps is helpful in explicating how different agencies distribute funding across the West.

The technical underpinning of the project is built on the open-source Javascript library D3.js—short for Data Driven Documents, a widely popular library used for data manipulation and visualization by companies and institutions as wide ranging as the New York Times and Netflix. Using an actively-maintained and widely-used Javascript library means that the project should persist for some time rather than succumb to technological change. Using an open source library means the project can continue to iterate even as technology changes, rather than fight proprietary systems that might stagnate, disappear, or lock the project into a single approach.

Even so, should the project’s interactive aspects fail in the near future, the project team has made it relatively easy to recompile the visualizations. The project openly provides the data that underpins the
interpretation. All of the financial data is provided in two tabular data formats, as nominal dollars and as 2015-adjusted dollars. The data comes with a FIPS code for each county, allowing anyone to match the data against the FIPS identifier in the University of Minnesota’s National Historical Geographic Information Systems shapefile datasets. The information for using and accessing this data is helpfully detailed on a Data Notes page that also explains how the data was compiled and linked with historical county boundaries.

Follow the Money is a considerable feat of digital history. The interactive visualizations, descriptive information, availability of sources and data, and summary statistics combined with a pleasant design provide readers with a tremendous variety of interpretive and visual explanations of western in-lieu payment programs.

JASON A. HEPPLER
University of Nebraska at Omaha


Historians are fond of explaining why events occurred at the temporal juncture in which they did. Blood in the Water, not to be confused with the 2016 film of the same name, is historian Heather Ann Thompson’s prize-winning book on the Attica Prison uprising and its aftermath. Thompson took on the unenviable and ambitious task of chronicling the most famous prison riot in the twentieth century. Unenviable because she had to get it right. Ambitious because if she got it right, she would assume a position along with some of the most influential American historians. It took her ten years to complete this book, and she definitely got it right. One of the many successes of this narrative and analysis is Thompson’s exhaustive use of interviews, archives, and previously undiscovered primary sources. The latter, as she admits, occurred nearly by chance. She also pulls off the “why now” that historians love to do by evidencing the growing and inevitable climax and confluence of events and people that culminated in the uprising. Therefore, the book is more than a portrait of a prison riot; it is also a biography of an era.

It would accomplish little to simply provide a chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the events surrounding the riot in this brief review. Most of those reading this know what happened at Attica, and the ensuing black eye for American corrections. However, before Thompson’s book, there was little proof that New York engaged in a systematic cover up of the heinous actions by the state. This revelation is perhaps the book’s greatest appeal and its accomplishment on a societal level. The book is not merely an excellent history as many historians can produce, it is also a mirror held up to American democratic values at a time when it is again possible to envision the state concealing egregious actions from the public.

While southern prison farms are often singled out for appalling slave-like conditions, Thompson details the grisly and inhumane conditions in Attica—malnourished inmates deprived of basic medical care overseen by correctional officers with unchecked monopoly of physical violence over inmates. Eventually, this situation led to a misperception of a threat of violence by the inmates that probably engendered the five-day uprising and its tragic ending when correctional agents stormed the facility killing prisoners, hostages, and their own.

Another strength of this work is that Thompson takes the reader beyond the events of the uprising that only lasted several