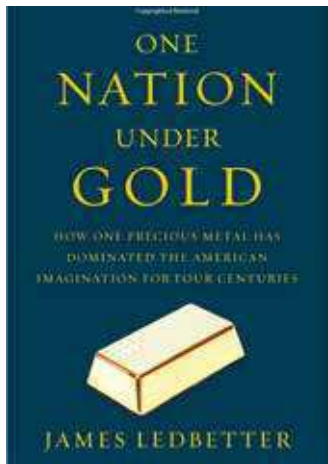


BOOK REVIEWS

One Nation Under Gold

James Ledbetter (2017)



Back around 1980, an acquaintance of mine received a fortune from a wrongful-death settlement involving the deaths of his parents. That person decided that the best place in which to invest the settlement funds was gold.

The price of gold at that time had risen to more than \$800 an ounce, which would be somewhere around \$2,400 an ounce at today's value.

After his investment, the nightmare began. Gold prices rose like a sizzling Sahara Desert heat wave, then dropped like an arctic blizzard, from which they have never recovered. I don't know whatever happened to this person—like an old prospector, he vanished from town.

I do know that the value of gold plummeted to around \$250 an ounce. Now, 38 years after my friend's investment, an ounce of gold is worth around \$1,350.

On talk radio, one hears a never-ending onslaught of ads to "Buy gold now. The world is ending soon. Maybe the day after tomorrow." Or something like that. So *One Nation Under Gold*, by James Ledbetter, whetted my curiosity because of the above-mentioned B-movie story line.

Ledbetter lays out a great narrative about the history of gold in America. With the exception of slavery, no other issue tormented the country in the nineteenth century more than the question of what form our money should be. Paper money was hated by most people, but gold is a bulky metal and, as Ledbetter says, must be mined, refined, measured, stamped for purity, and heavily guarded against theft. An especially limiting factor is that there is only so much gold.

Even George Washington wished that "states would adopt some vigorous measures for the purpose of giving credit to the paper currency and punishment of speculators, forestallers, and others who are preying upon the vitals of this great country and putting everything to the utmost hazard."

According to Ledbetter, silver coins were issued, but they were worth more melted down than as currency at the start of the Civil War. Between 1837 and 1863, hundreds of banks were launched that printed their own paper money. That didn't fare well because if the bank went bust, paper money from that bank was worthless. But I do love some of its names: "red dogs," "stump tails," and my favorite, "smooth monkeys."

The first gold rush in America happened in 1799 when a 17-pound gold nugget was found in Cabarrus County, North Carolina. Gold then fueled great expansion in America with the 1848 California Gold Rush, 1859 Comstock Lode in Nevada, and the 1898 Alaska Klondike Gold Rush.

In 1890, European investors started a run on gold in the US Treasury by cashing in dollar investments for gold. This was followed by a crash in the international commodity prices, leading to the panic of 1893, which would become the worst and longest depression the US had seen. By 1895, the country's gold reserves were well below the \$100 million required by law. Things had gotten so bad that it took the most powerful man on Wall Street, J.P. Morgan, to come up with a plan to save the government from complete meltdown. Morgan couldn't help when the next depression came in 1929.

Ledbetter covers the pros and cons of (1) being on a gold standard (whereby the US government backs paper money with gold), (2) President Franklin Roosevelt's move to outlaw Americans' right to own gold, (3) President Nixon's act of taking the dollar off the gold standard, and (4) the current debate of going back to the gold standard.

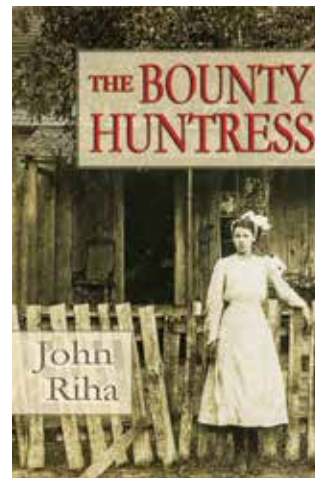
Whether you're a "gold bug" (pro gold) or not, this book is worth picking up to learn about the historical watershed events related to America's fascination with gold.

If history books were written even half as interestingly as *One Nation Under Gold*, a lot more people would be fans of history. A superb read.

J.D. Rogers • 541-846-7736

The Bounty Huntress

John Riha (2017)



A spunky girl brings outlaws to justice in this historical novel of Wild West Applegate.

The Bounty Huntress doesn't exactly open with a murder. That doesn't happen till the third page and, it turns out, is not the point of the novel but its background. The person we're interested in is Iris Greenlee, the daughter of the man who died. She was only five when her father was killed but immediately becomes the center of the action and psychology of this wonderful novel of life in the Applegate in the early twentieth century.

If the Applegate wasn't exactly lawless at the time, it also wasn't exactly lawful. There were those (men) who thought they could do as they pleased, whatever the law. Dexter Greenlee had only been fulfilling his responsibilities as game warden when he was shot for doing so. As Iris grows up in the shadow of that murder, she nourishes a passion for shooting on behalf of the law. Schooled in hunting by her stepfather, she eventually becomes a bounty hunter, bringing in wanted criminals for the reward, sorely needed in her family. She becomes, in the language of the day, a bounty huntress.

One of the fine things about this novel is its depiction of attitudes toward women in the West at the time. Iris doesn't want to work a "woman's job." She wants to use her skills as a hunter. She wants to ride (or drive) and shoot and pit herself against dangerous men. She faces ridicule and worse for being an unconventional woman, as in the job she chooses to do, the language she uses, and her unmarried status. We admire her for her spunk, her determination, her smarts, and her love for and responsibility toward her family.

Iris's mother, Emily, remarries after Dexter Greenlee is murdered, but her second husband dies in a mill accident. A flood destroys the pear orchard on which the family had pinned their fortunes, and Emily struggles to raise her two children, the irascible Iris and the younger

boy, Henry, who has what is probably autism. Iris helps the family by bringing in money and by being Henry's fierce defender. When they are children, she rescues him from drowning when an older boy throws him in the river (and then she practically kills the older boy with an axe handle at recess). In their adulthood, she rescues Henry from the mental hospital where he has been inappropriately incarcerated.

Iris has to convince her mother that being a bounty hunter (huntress), in spite of its dangers, is what she, Iris, should be doing. She has to convince the county citizens to vote for her as game warden. She has to convince the sheriff that a girl (she is only 19) can do the job she is seeking. She has to convince the men she is hunting that they should be taken to jail rather than resist her. The first man wasn't convinced, so the first lesson Iris learns is to be more cunning in her approach. It was a hard lesson to learn, paid for with the loss of her arm.

She also has to convince the young man who seems to like her that she wants him to take her virginity. It doesn't take much persuading.

The idea of writing this novel occurred to John Riha when, in December 2014, he read an article in the *Medford Mail Tribune* about the shooting of a game warden in Jackson County in 1914. The murder and the widow with two children are historical facts. Riha created the rest of the story from his imagination underpinned by detailed research about the weapons, cars and trucks, county jails, criminal justice, and language of the era. Riha seems to have gotten everything right, or at least right enough that we fall into the spell of the West at that time.

One of the best parts of the spell, for Applegaters, is reading about places we know—Mule Mountain, the Applegate River, Medford, Grants Pass. Riha, who lives in Ashland, puts us square in our own neighborhood as it was a hundred years ago and peoples our familiar landscape with remarkable characters. Reading *The Bounty Huntress* we are in familiar country in an unfamiliar time.

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— NOT TO MISS: ONLINE ARTICLES —

- Cantrall Buckley Park by Tom Carstens. Complete history, more photos and memories.
- *Stories on the Land*, excerpt 4, by Diana Coogle.
- And the Community Calendar.

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POETRY CORNER

Summer Solstice

by David C. Shiah

Sun rides high, commands the day
Warmth holds the land
Nature in full bloom
Quiet forest streams birth new life
Monarch butterfly floats on the soft zephyr
The timid fawn gazes in wonder
While the red-tailed hawk soars on the warm thermals
Sluggish turtles napping in secluded ponds as
Merry forest gnomes gleefully gather mushrooms
Twilight lingers, the lunar smile fading
Night sky soft, Venus and Neptune dance
Sitting in the forest, I marvel at nature's splendor
Welcome season of joy, hope
Ahh, the living is easy.

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