

Although his book focuses on an urban context that is not directly related to the history of Iowa, Scranton argues forcefully for a more sophisticated understanding of industrialization in the Midwest. Borrowing from the literature of historical and economic geography, Scranton maintains that midwestern industries did not simply mimic eastern models. Rather, the Midwest experienced an "agro-industrial revolution" (133) based on links and exchanges among agricultural resources, rural customers, and regional manufacturing. On one level, rural Americans' demand for staple and inexpensive goods made the Midwest a logical home for mass producers such as Henry Ford. On another, the Midwest became a locus for agro-industrial processors and other specialty manufacturers that found niche markets in the "underappreciated" "Middletowns" (140) of the region. The furniture industry in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for example, took off in the 1880s after local firms established the Grand Rapids Furniture Manufacturers' Association. Interfirm alliances helped maintain control over the skilled labor force, negotiated for favorable railroad rates, colluded on pricing strategies, and successfully marketed the city's reputation for fine quality furniture. In brief, the case illustrates the dynamism of the midwestern economy and shows that there was more to America's industrialization than interchangeable parts, management flow charts, and cutthroat competition.

Scranton's narrative is both dense and nuanced. The text is packed with enough persuasive examples and clear signposts to keep readers focused on the thesis, although there are somewhat lengthy digressions into taxonomies of the various subsets of specialty producers. As a whole, the book is an impressive achievement that should prompt other historians to follow Scranton's call to search for the synergy of smaller firms and inconspicuous industrial regions. In time, even popular histories of American industry, technology, and business will devote more attention to the specialty producers that Scranton has celebrated, and rethink the role of Henry Ford.

*Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood*, by Gary Cross. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997. vii, 283 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PAMELA RINEY-KEHRBERG, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Some books just beg to be read. Gary Cross's *Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* is one of those books. With its blue cover and colorful Romper Room lettering, featuring an enor-

mous FAO Schwarz bear, the book demands the reader's attention. Fortunately, the book delivers nearly all that the cover promises, providing readers a fascinating glimpse at the past hundred years of the American toy industry.

Cross's narrative follows the development of American toys from simple diversions driven by parents' needs, to toys intended to teach children adult roles, to the fantasy toys of today driven by children's television-inspired desires. An intriguing set of illustrations graphically depicts this journey, from the bisque dolls and miniature kitchens of the last century to the Garbage Pail Kids and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles of our own era.

Cross examines the effects of a number of different factors on the development of toys. Technology is an important part of his analysis. It shaped the making of toys, as well as the means by which toys have been advertised, from early catalogs to movies, radio, and television. Changing perceptions of childhood have also influenced the number and type of toys that parents purchase. The movement of children out of the work force and into a modern (economically useless) conception of childhood was essential to the development of the toy industry in the United States. Additionally, toymakers and advertisers have tailored their appeals to the ups and downs of the economy and to the changing politics of the American people. Changing racial sensibilities have resulted in the end of some toys, such as the "Alabama Coon Jigger," and the beginning of others, such as dolls with a variety of skin tones and facial features. Interestingly enough, feminism seems to have had less of an impact on the marketing of toys than has increased racial sensitivity. Cross successfully conveys the message that children's toys are anything but simple playthings.

The book does raise some unanswered questions. Should rural children and their toys have been lumped together with the urban middle class, as Cross did, or were rural children's experiences with toys more like those of the urban poor? A more global question is also intriguing. As much as parents and toymakers attempted to manipulate children's desires, did they actually succeed? How much of children's play with toys subverted the intentions of their elders? Such questions suggest perhaps the greatest weakness of the book: *Kids' Stuff* is not the story of children and their play, but of the collective impact of parents, teachers, toymakers, researchers, and advertisers on toy making and marketing. This limitation is an understandable one, given the lack of available sources revealing children's thoughts about their playthings.

Even so, *Kids' Stuff* is a marvelous read. It is a fascinating topic, presented in a readable, enjoyable manner. The author has done an excellent job of researching how all sorts of adults have attempted to mold the wants and desires of American children. The book will find a niche in the classrooms of those teaching the history of the family, popular culture, and even American history surveys that incorporate the history of childhood. Equally, the "average" reader, simply wanting a stimulating book, or a journey back into his or her own childhood, will find *Kids' Stuff* well worth the effort.

*Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life*, by Tom Lewis. New York: Viking Penguin, 1997. xiv, 354 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY TRACY A. CUNNING, MARION, IOWA

*Divided Highways* is the companion book to a documentary film of the same title, which was produced by the author and Larry Hott of Florentine Films (Ken Burns's outfit) and aired on PBS in October 1997. As a result, *Divided Highways* shares several characteristics with its motion picture sibling. For example, Lewis adopts Ken Burns's typical approach to history. The development of the American interstate highway system and its effects on our culture and landscape are told as a story, through the written equivalent of a series of snapshots and descriptions of the actions of several key characters and a few minor ones. The story unfolds chronologically, but unlike the film, the book's narrative is dense with details gleaned from the huge array of documents, images, and oral interviews assembled by Lewis and his research assistants. Given the book's few endnotes, however, much of this information does not appear to be cited.

*Divided Highways* summarizes the evolution of the interstate highways from the Good Roads Movement, through the creation of the federal highway system in the 1920s and the divided highway prototypes of the New Deal era, to the post-World War II boom that led to the creation of the present interstate system in 1956, and its expansion in the ensuing decades. Throughout the book, Lewis focuses on the critical interaction between public sentiment and legislative and bureaucratic decisions about the highway system. Americans have always loved their cars. Since the 1910s the highway departments have played a perpetual game of catch-up: as they expand and improve the road network, more people buy cars. When construction of the modern freeways began in 1957, many hailed them as solutions to prob-

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