

Book Reviews

Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians, edited by Richard W. Etulain. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991. 374 pp. Notes, index. \$37.50 cloth; \$17.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY KATHERINE G. MORRISSEY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Frederick Jackson Turner's influence on western United States history is amply illustrated by this collection of thirteen historiographical essays. *Writing Western History*, which explores the lives and works of ten prominent western historians, sets Turner at the center of both frontier and regional interpretations of the western past.

The volume is divided into three sections. "Precursors to Frederick Jackson Turner" includes essays on Josiah Royce and Hubert Howe Bancroft by Robert V. Hine and Charles S. Peterson. Two separate essays on Turner, in which William Cronon and Michael Steiner explore his early writings and his regional writings, start off the second section. They are followed by four essays on Turner's students and contemporaries—Frederic Logan Paxson, Walter Prescott Webb, Herbert Bolton, and James C. Malin—contributed respectively by Etulain, Elliott West, Donald Worster, and Allan Bogue. Three recent historians—Henry Nash Smith, Ray Allen Billington, and Earl Pomeroy—are the subjects of the third section of essays by Lee Clark Mitchell, Patricia Nelson Limerick, and Michael P. Malone. Editor Etulain also contributes an introductory discussion of pre-Turner historians of the U.S. West and a concluding rapid survey of more recent interpretations of western history.

The uniformly well-written essays review a century of ideas about the West and contribute to the ongoing debate about its significance. The interpretations themselves reflect each author's stance on current issues under debate; the authors apply various litmus tests in their assessments. While Limerick takes Billington to task for his persistent Turnerianism, most of the other essayists find such attention to Turner praiseworthy. Regionalist Steiner highlights Turner's sectional thesis and his sensitivity to environmental concerns. Webb, Malin, and Royce are also praised for their ecological

interests. Among the other evaluative criteria are the level of sensitivity to racial diversity, attention to twentieth-century themes, professionalism, and originality. Little attention is paid—not surprisingly, perhaps, given the chosen subjects and authors—to issues of gender: Limerick and Hine devote a few lines to the role of women, and Etulain reviews the recent work of western women's historians.

Particularly remarkable, despite its numerous authors and differing interpretations, is the cohesiveness of the book as a whole. Together the essays create a substantial argument for the pervasive influence of Turner on several generations of western historians. They share a biographical focus and tell similar tales of individuals whose ideas were shaped by their regional roots and their professional training. This shared interpretative approach is partially the result of their assigned task: Etulain asked the authors "to treat the life, professional career, and major works of their subject . . . [and] to evaluate that historian's impact on the field of western history."

Many of these regional roots were midwestern. Turner, Bolton, Malin, and Billington were all born in the region, while Paxson, Webb, and Smith spent significant portions of their professional lives in the region. A number of the essayists, such as West on Webb and Steiner on Turner, comment interestingly on the complex ways in which autobiography and region enmesh themselves in the historians' scholarly endeavors.

Overall, *Writing Western History* complements a number of recent publications, including the more inclusive *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* edited by John Wunder and published by Greenwood Press, on interpretations of western U.S. history. While every reader will rue the omission of one or another significant western historian—my list includes Angie Deboe, Francis Parkman, and Wallace Stegner—no one will argue against the inclusion of the chosen subjects. This outstanding collection is a welcome addition to the ongoing work of writing western history.

Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays, edited by Maris A. Vinovskis. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. xii, 201 pp. Graphs, tables, maps, notes, index. \$39.95 cloth, \$10.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY DAVID L. FERCH, SIERRA COLLEGE

Maris Vinovskis has edited seven essays that investigate the social and demographic impact of the Civil War on northern society. Col-

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