

*The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History*, edited by Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray. *Midwestern History and Culture Series*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. vii, 261 pp. Map, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth.

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Devotees of Iowa history will be both delighted and, on occasion, frustrated by the fine anthology, *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History*. Frustrated because, while the book charts the protean boundaries of the Midwest in both a geographical and sociohistorical sense, it pledges itself primarily to the territories of the Old Northwest: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The Old Northwest frontier receives badly needed and richly deserved historical attention in this brief collection's diverse essays. Indiana, Ohio, and "Kentuckiana," in particular, receive top billing, as three of the collection's first four essays (there are ten in all) draw heavily on historiographies of the Ohio Valley, making *The American Midwest* a logical acquisition for publisher Indiana University Press.

Despite its initial, and anomalous, parochialism, what makes this compendium particularly valuable to researchers and general readers alike is its clear-eyed, clinical deconstruction of midwestern regional narratives: narratives in the literal sense—suggesting the work of Willa Cather, Hamlin Garland, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Garrison Keillor, and others frequently cited in the volume—and the more philosophical, self-reflexive "master narratives," often airbrushed, that we midwesterners tell about ourselves.

Bound to surprise the general reader is the racism, sexism, and exploitative capitalism of a region that, historically, claims for itself title as the moral heartland of America. In his essay "Pigs in Space; or What Shapes America's Regional Cultures?" Purdue historian John Lauritz Larson describes fly-by-night pioneers who were not so much homesteading earned lands as "searching for an eligible place where they could impose their will and live out their private story of getting and spending" (71). Larson rewrites Jacksonian America's self-congratulatory creation stories to include "greedy, narrow, selfish, individuals running riot through the Indians' domain, consuming what they wanted, laying waste what they did not, scattering claims and 'rights' in all directions" (71).

Larson's tough-minded analysis is in keeping with the objectives set forth by editors Andrew Cayton and Susan Gray in their compre-

hensive, historically valuable introduction, namely "analyzing and participating in an extended conversation involving the narratives and counter-narratives of both nineteenth-century Midwesterners and their historians past and present" (5). Indeed, the volume, originating in a conference held at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, does feel dialogically intimate, although general readers should be advised that the ten essays collected here, informal as they may be as histories, do not approach the level of reader friendliness offered by popular histories or personal essays. The book, which here and there suffers from a kind of potluck redundancy often seen in retooled conference proceedings, otherwise reads as a carefully orchestrated and well-documented regional history, made all the more valuable by a full index and exhaustive, eclectic endnotes.

Iowa readers will note with some pride a more positive regional "master narrative" of enterprise, education, and entrepreneurial spirit emerging in the final two essays, written by historians R. Douglas Hurt and Jon Gjerde. Hurt's essay, "Midwestern Distinctiveness," arguably best achieves the editors' stated aims: historical scholarship blended with regional personal narrative. Hurt is expansive in his take, quoting animal husbandry advice from the influential, Wisconsin-based *Hoard's Dairyman* as easily as he makes concise and revealing previously thorny regional settlement patterns. Hurt's research turns up such definitive historical gems as Meredith Nicholson's 1918 statement: "Iowa goes to bed early but not before it has read an improving book" (168).

Similarly, Jon Gjerde's "Middleness and the Middle West" is spot on in its discussion of midwestern defensiveness stemming from the region's alleged mediocrity. (Gjerde cannot resist pointing out that the Latin root of mediocrity encompasses *medias*, suggesting to the latter-day reader the region's mundanity.) Of particular interest to *Annals of Iowa* readers is Gjerde's quotation from about 1903, wherein the *Annals* editorial board takes up the question of whether Iowa's history was sufficiently dramatic and "worthwhile," while offering its regionally insecure readers these Iowa sour grapes: "The spectacular, the war-like, the lurid, the mysterious, the terrible, are not the only things in history" (189). Gjerde's chapter concludes with the fascinating tale of the staggering number of Iowa expatriates who moved to California in the early twentieth century, prefiguring the exodus that has troubled midwestern governors ever since. A California resident native to Iowa, Gjerde writes insightfully and compellingly about the so-called California "seacoast of Iowa," the annual West Coast Iowan picnic reunions—which drew 150,000 people in certain years during the 1920s

— and the 38 percent of Iowa-born Americans who had left the Hawkeye State by 1970.

In the end, Gjerde's concluding chapter makes it hard to overlook the fact that nearly half of the book's ten chapters are written by historians teaching at colleges and universities outside the Midwest, although the introduction is careful to state that all of the contributors consider themselves midwesterners. While this fact alone does not diminish this expert volume, it does, inevitably, infuse it with the very contemporary tensions and historical ambiguities that the editors claim characterize the real Midwest.

*The Mormon Vanguard Brigade of 1847: Norton Jacob's Record*, edited by Ronald O. Barney. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2005. x, 398 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$44.95 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

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Norton Jacob, a member of the first company of Mormon pioneers to enter the Great Salt Lake Valley, began his journal in May 1844 and ended it in February 1852. The first years were devoted to his proselytizing mission, working as a carpenter on various buildings in Nauvoo, and building wagons for the journey across the Iowa prairies. On June 17, 1846, Jacob wrote: "left the bank of the Mississippi for the camp of Israel to the west" (75). A month later, "wee had good weather the whole rout & arrived at Council Bluff near the mouth of the Great Platte on the Missouri" (75). The major portion of the journal is devoted to Jacob's journey with the Mormon vanguard company led by Brigham Young, beginning in April 1847. "About noon I left my family and Started on the great expedition with the Pioneers to the West" (98). For 111 days Jacob recorded the daily vicissitudes of the vanguard company. Roughly the last quarter of his journal deals with his return to Iowa in the fall of 1847 and his second and final journey to Utah in 1848 and his life in Utah.

Ronald O. Barney, editor and winner of the Mountain West Center for Western Studies Evans Biography Award (2002), provides readers with an abundance of well-researched footnotes adding historical context and useful information about people, places, and events mentioned in the journal. In the appendix, Barney offers a short family history of Jacob Norton and biographical sketches of many of the individuals he mentions.

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