

The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, vol. 3, *Transcontinental America, 1850–1915*, by D. W. Meinig. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. xvi, 457 pp. Illustrations, maps, graphs, bibliography, index. \$50.00 cloth.

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Around 1850 the geographic structure of the United States remained relatively segmented and unstable. In spite of the "market revolution" and rapid urban development, the burgeoning national economy was a patchwork of local and regional economies only loosely connected by extraregional transportation and communication networks. Most Americans lived predominantly local lives, and most political activity was rooted in local and regional networks and power bases within a loosely defined federal realm. D. W. Meinig continues his four-volume history of the geographic development of the United States by examining how new economic, social, and political forces dramatically accelerated the pace of change and transformed a segmented national network into a highly integrated national system with a stable geographic structure by the year 1915. From a human geographical perspective, Meinig is interested in how the American people transformed the politically defined space with certain topographical and environmental characteristics into a geographic place. People do this not only by occupying, responding to, and understanding the land and environment at a specific location but also by connecting their activities at that location to those of other people in other places. Between 1850 and 1915 dramatic improvements in manufacturing productivity, management skills, and transportation and communication technology transformed extralocal or translocal, regional, and national interactions among people. A transportation and communications revolution enabled more and more people wherever they lived to interact with and affect the actions and responses of people elsewhere. By intensifying interaction across space—the dynamics of which Meinig does not explore, but assumes—the railroad and telegraph enabled the segmented networks that made up the national economic and social network of 1850 to coalesce into a highly dynamic, integrated, consolidated, and increasingly stable national economic and social system. By 1915, Americans everywhere, each with their own local sense of place, found themselves living in a newly constructed national systemically defined American place.

In 1850, it was far from inevitable that Americans would create an integrated national system within the "magnificent parallelogram" of transcontinental space they had recently filled out as a result of acqui-

sitions from the Mexican War. Aside from agreeing that the railroad would be the bond of Union, Americans were too deeply imbued with a competitive ethos that encouraged as many entrepreneurs as possible to enter a market, too ambivalent about powerful central government, and too divided by sectional feeling to decide on a single efficient transcontinental trunk system across the Plains and Rockies to California. Instead, they chose four, and eventually six transcontinental lines, each segmented into sections, divided by frustratingly slow links. Nevertheless, this system, though poorly built and inefficient, did become the skeleton of a network that physically connected the West to the East. By increasing East-West interactions, it laid the foundation for the development of a more efficient national system. This network not only provided a way for those already living in the West to attach themselves to the larger world, but also established the geographic patterns by which eastern society and economy would be extended into the West.

Those extensions formed a segmented skeleton of "many Wests" rather than one coherent West. Meinig employs the language of a core-periphery regional system model to analyze the creation of these distinctive American Wests. Euro-Americans from the east core, or "primary source region," encountered patchworks of indigenous or Mexican settlements in the different Wests. After establishing beachheads, outposts, or forts, they extended society and culture by either settling or exploiting the hinterland. Eventually, stages, freighters, riverboats, and railroads followed, transforming the core outpost into a regional trading entrepôt by connecting hinterland cities, towns, and camps and the settlers around them with outside markets. Such rudimentary urban economic networks would eventually evolve into regional "complexes" or "systems," with one or two cities in the interior developing into secondary regional entrepôts. These emergent western societies, each defined by their distinctive resources and environment and indigenous populations, now had the potential wealth to attract or connect themselves to the larger national economy through connections with the transcontinental railroads that together made up that "vast machinery for building empires" (83). By 1900, these western regions formed a coherent West. In the wake of Meinig's classic recounting of interpretations drawn from a career of research and writing about the West, most readers will find his tying together of all the parts into an integrated view of the geographic structure of late nineteenth-century America equally suggestive, but, because less authoritative, analytical, and clear, somewhat less convincing.

Although Meinig's narrative focuses primarily on white Americans constructing an American system, he incorporates the geography of native peoples and their responses to whites into the process. When the geography of the American system encountered traditional Indian population centers, interaction intensified, resulting in the gradual carving up of that land into reservations. Just as the West was integrated into the national economy and large parts of it came under the supervision of the federal government, so too the Indians faced the full brunt of the federal government's administrative power. By focusing on the persistence of Indians on traditional grounds rather than their scattering or removal, Meinig shows how Indian residential patterns interacted with American migrations, economic and social agendas, and administrative directives to forge a distinctive geographic aspect of the American West.

As he describes the emergence of a coherent West within the national system, Meinig also explores the partial and tentative connection of the South to the national economy by 1900. He then examines the impact of regional economies and specialization on the building up of industry in different combinations in different towns and cities depending on location in relation to resources, markets, and other towns and cities. He provides a fine summary of the development of the steel industry at the core of the geographic structure of this regional "Manufacturing Belt." In steel and other industries, increased efficiencies and economies of scale concentrated more power and production in fewer larger firms. In time, as competition continued to press companies to protect market shares, large companies producing vast output were compelled to create vertically integrated systems to acquire resources and then expand the market to the territorial limits of the United States and beyond. Undergirding the spatial expansion of the market and reinforcing the dynamics of centralization was an increasingly integrated railroad system, divided into a trunk line at the core and three regional systems: transcontinental, western, and southern. From the vortex of dynamic centripetal forces at the regional and national core of this system, reinforced by increasingly effective national institutions, financial arrangements, and administrative bureaucracies, centrifugal integrating forces extended across the West and South and created an integrated and coherent geographic structure of the United States by 1915.

Responding perhaps to critiques of earlier volumes that his synthetic geographic narratives tended to lack people, Meinig shows how these economic geographic forces shaped a hierarchical urban system that, by affecting migration patterns, shaped the ethnogeographic

pattern of the American population. He suggests that these structures undergirded the development of progressivism and formed the structures underlying the geopolitical patterns and dynamics of both federal and state power. Provocatively suggesting how geography does indeed shape social and political reality, Meinig succeeds in offering a compelling new geographic perspective on the economic, social, and political history of the United States through 1915. By doing so, Meinig provides the context in which the United States began to construct itself as a world power. How the United States became integrated into a world system in the twentieth century, and how that integration shaped American geography, will be the subject of the fourth volume of *The Shaping of America*.

Although Iowa is cited only six times in the index, it is central to Meinig's analysis. Indeed, one could argue that by heightening the reader's awareness of how anything occurring in any American system increasingly affected life elsewhere, one could read Meinig's account of different regions as an analysis of the geographic transformation of Iowa. Directly referred to more than 20 times in the text, Iowa, in Meinig's account of the creation of a national system, was successively transformed from a frontier fringe; to a transcontinental corridor, to the heart of the Corn Belt within a natural region called "Prairies," to the outer edge of the manufacturing belt. Iowa was also a place immigrants as well as railroads passed through regularly. Finally, Iowa was a cultural hearth, a place from which people left to go west or east. Iowans affected the society and culture of Oregon as well as the Southwest and southern California—where they joined settlers associations or state societies and gathered at annual "Iowa picnics." By following Meinig's analysis of the emergence of a national system, one can also discern, indirectly, how Iowa's shifting geographic position between an edge or center within the hinterland of the national system continually reshaped Iowans' own sense of place within the larger shaping of America.

Building an American Identity: Pattern Book Homes and Communities, 1870–1900, by Linda E. Smeins. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999. 335 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$52.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

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Much of the story of the expansion of single-family housing in the late nineteenth century that Linda Smeins covers in her new book is already well known: the construction of large numbers of picturesque Victorian houses, the battle between pattern book writers and profes-

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