deep reflections about the importance of family; they wrote about it constantly, and an expanded analysis of those letters would have strengthened Frank's already convincing position. In addition, while one of the strengths of Frank's approach is his willingness to embrace the complexity of the roles of fathers, that inclusiveness can, at times, weaken the force of his argument. Because there are no hard and fast transitions from one style of parenting to another, because there are all kinds of blurry overlaps between active and passive and stern and companionable fathers, at times it seems as though Frank is undermining his own thesis by saying that, while some fathers did this, others did that, and some did neither. Although the fluidity that characterizes the reality of fathering may make it hard to nail down exactly when certain trends rose to prominence, this non-linear analysis of the development of parenting is an extremely useful portrayal of nineteenth-century men, women, and children coming to grips with their worlds.

Provincial Lives: Middle-Class Experience in the Antebellum Middle West, by Timothy R. Mahoney. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. x, 334 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. $54.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY SUSAN S. RUGH, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

A sequel to *River Towns in the Great West* (1990), which explained the making of the regional urban economy, *Provincial Lives* tells the story of the construction of regional urban society in the Upper Mississippi River Valley between 1800 and 1860. Like its predecessor, *Provincial Lives* sets local developments within a regional context, probing the connections between the two to explain the dynamics of middle-class urban society. Mahoney does not abandon the structuralist approach that made *River Towns* so successful, but he employs case studies of people and groups to enliven and explain larger historical trends. Thus his "analytic narrative" advances the development of social history, weaving structural analysis together with the particularities of human experience. Not simply a social history of one community, the book's regional scope allows broader applicability than a narrow study.

Mahoney argues that the construction of a regional social system took place in a series of stages, each of which is explained in chapters that unfold chronologically. Initial settlement of the valley by French, mixed blood, and eastern families involved with the fur trade gave way to family-based enclaves that laid the foundations of genteel society. In

the second stage of urban development, newcomers constructed male subcultures in which vigilantism and rowdyism created social solidarity. The more genteel members of society accommodated the male subculture to build a booster system as a means of furthering their own interests. After a wave of eastern settlers arrived in the 1840s and 1850s, society became more hierarchical as urbanites practiced genteel social habits to secure their social position and take leadership of urban affairs. Ultimately, the arrival of the railroad and the aggregation of elites into a regional social system diminished the importance of the river towns and, consequently, the power of the provincial elites. Mahoney portrays this fracturing of local community as a lost opportunity to construct a distinctive midwestern society and culture, but argues that those who left the river towns led the modern industrial order that arose.

Mahoney supports his argument with case studies of elite men and women of the various towns, from a sensitive portrayal of middle-class domesticity to a detailed analysis of the social rituals that greeted the arrival of the railroad. He makes clever use of family and legal records to draw broader conclusions, as when he analyzes a pattern of social calls to derive a social hierarchy. Readers not acquainted with the habits of social history may be put off by charts of this "social arithmetic," but through the use of such apparatus Mahoney displays his methodological versatility. The book is not without its faults. The author does not define what he means by "gentility," nor does he sufficiently explain the role of Christianity in the construction of an urban middle class.

At its heart this is a story of men on the make, and while Mahoney does include women, the book contributes greatly to our understanding of a gendered world constructed out of a variety of masculine forms. His discussion of the use of nicknames to assign status is fascinating, and one can only chuckle at the pranks and practical jokes that Mahoney argues were used to set social boundaries. Mahoney explains why respectable men sanctioned the vigilantism that plagued the early western frontier, enlarging our understanding of border wars and the Mormon conflict. His brilliant dissection of the professional culture of small-town lawyers is a tutorial in how men such as Abraham Lincoln climbed their way into national political prominence.

Like Mahoney's first book, *Provincial Lives* lays bare the overarching regional structures and processes that help us place local communities into a broader context. Serious students of the Midwest will want this on their bookshelves, as will scholars of nineteenth-century Iowa and Illinois. Its length and use of social science terminology may

limit its appeal to the general reader or undergraduate, but advanced students will find much of value. Its strongest contribution is to the urban history of the period, because it moves us beyond nostalgic portraits of Main Street to consider the implications of the shift in power from the river town to the metropolis.

Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad, by David Haward Bain. New York: Viking/Penguin, 1999. xvii, 797 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. $34.95 cloth, $18.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY MARK WAHLGREN SUMMERS, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Building the first transcontinental railroad was so heroic an achievement that it seems only fair to expect heroic exertions from readers wanting to know about it. David Haward Bain's magnificent *Empire Express* gives them their chance: more than seven hundred pages of drama, daring, and devious behavior, as promoters joined the Iowa prairies to the Pacific.

The author of *Sitting in Darkness,* a provocative study of American involvement in the Philippines, Bain has the best of help in crafting a good story: a cast of thousands, including madmen, dreamers, rogues, and finaglers. Told many times before, the story still dazzles: how visionaries, beginning with Asa Whitney and "Crazy" Theodore Judah pressed home the idea of building a passage to India by rail; how California shopkeepers and New England shovel-makers induced a nation to endow the project; how the Central Pacific and Union Pacific built their roads across a daunting landscape; and how, to a burst of cannon in eastern cities and a fanfare of publicity nationwide, the two lines met on May 10, 1869, at Ogden, Utah, and the last spike was driven. Irish and Chinese laborers battled the elements and, every so often, each other. They tunneled and inched their way through the Sierras, sometimes only inches a day, and laid rails across forty miles of desert in a fortnight. At the same time, high-placed allies with military influence (among them Iowan Grenville Dodge) helped pacify and, indeed, empty the land of Native Americans by treaty, prisoner exchanges, and intermittent war. Trains were ambushed, brakemen were shot, and a telegraph repairman, surviving one attack, came out with his scalp intact—though, having been removed, good for nothing except a spot on display in the children's section of the Omaha Public Library. Major Frank North, Buffalo Bill, friendly Pawnee and hostile Cheyenne, cholera, smallpox, whores, cannibalized railroad engines—what more can one ask of an epic?

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