

The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal, by David M. Wrobel. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993. x, 233 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JOHN R. WUNDER, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

The End of American Exceptionalism is intellectual history at its best. Rarely do historians articulate clearly how currents of thought permeate writers, political leaders, and policy makers, but David M. Wrobel is an exception to this literary rule.

His purpose is to discuss and document the American nation's attempt to deal with the closing of the American frontier. From the 1870s to the 1930s, the nation's movers and shakers worried about how to come to grips with the end of the great land bonanza. How would the lack of large blocks of real estate west of the Mississippi River available for settlement affect the American economy? Would a postfrontier society develop un-American traits? Could the American political system adjust?

Traditionally, the 1890s has been interpreted as a watershed decade. The director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census announced in the 1890 census that the frontier no longer existed, and in 1893 historian Frederick Jackson Turner propounded his thesis that was to revolutionize the teaching of American history. Turner interpreted the frontier as a process that provided the United States its uniqueness as a nation and Americans' exceptionalism as a people. What was going to happen to the United States, given the national epic dimension of the "frontier," once the frontier was past?

This book, which chronicles efforts by many individuals to recognize and explain this important national dilemma, is divided into three sections. First, the author shows convincingly that historians, writers, and a few political commentators had observed sometime before the census director and Frederick Jackson Turner did that the end of the frontier was coming and that it would require some significant readjustment on the part of the American nation. Most pre-1890s observers did not articulate what should be done, but they had begun the process of worrying. This section represents a new dimension to our thinking about this topic.

The second section explains immediate reactions in the 1890s to the closing frontier. It details how commentators sought both internal and external solutions. Historians have long noted the responses to the end of the frontier in the American West by Americans. Because many believed that the frontier served as a safety valve for immigration, the frontier's demise meant greater concern about who could enter the United States. Moreover, America sought new frontiers.

New lands were acquired aggressively, through the Spanish-American War, for example, and these actions encouraged imperialistic designs. The section on external solutions is not a new topic, but Wrobel weaves it skillfully into the narrative, and he offers new insights by juxtaposing it with internal responses.

The final section, five of the ten chapters, explains chronologically from 1900 to the 1930s the postfrontier anxiety that came to dominate historical, literary, and political commentary. These chapters are filled with interesting examples from many diverse sources, from Willa Cather and Jack London to Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Iowans will find Herbert Hoover's ideas on frontier anxiety revealing.

The end of the frontier meant different things to different people: it destroyed the myth of the garden; it led to the rise of corporate power and monopolies; it compressed and disorganized the labor market; it caused Americans to be less creative; it placed greater stress on the economy; and it allowed the North as a region to dominate the South and the West financially and culturally. These are worrisome considerations. By the time of the Great Depression, conservative commentators recognized some of these problems and tried to find solace in the individualism and idealism that they saw inherent in the American frontier experience. They wanted to encourage a return to those ideals. Liberal thinkers agreed with the values conservatives found in the frontier, but they saw government intervention as necessary to address those lost social and economic traits. The New Deal won out, and postfrontier anxiety was over, only to be replaced by other anxieties.

This book is a thoughtful summary of nearly a century of the history of ideas that attempted to place the meaning of frontier Iowa and the American West into the American psyche.

Cargill: Trading the World's Grain, by Wayne G. Broehl Jr. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1992. xx, 1007 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ALEX F. MCCALLA, WORLD BANK

This long and complex book chronicles the evolution of Cargill, Incorporated from its humble beginnings in Conover, Iowa, in 1865 to its emergence as the world's largest commodity trading firm in the 1960s. It is the story of three generations of Cargills and MacMillans and the roles they played, over a century of time, in leading the modern Cargill, Inc. to become a corporate giant still focused on commodity trading but doing many other things as well.

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