

The Oxford History of the American West, edited by Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. xiii, 872 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, chronologies, bibliographic notes, index. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DOUGLAS FIRTH ANDERSON, NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE

Probably few people, if any, would question that Iowa is a part of the Midwest. Many people, probably most, would hesitate to consider Iowa as a part of the West. Regions, though, are as much rooted in culture and time as they are in space, so regional boundaries are usually permeable as well as mobile. James Shortridge, for one, has made this variability plain regarding the Midwest (see his *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* [1989]). The editors and authors of *The Oxford History of the American West* have provided students of Iowa's history with an abundance of material for rethinking the state's relationship to the West, although Iowa or even midwestern historians are not, of course, the only intended audience for the volume.

The volume is neither a unified narrative nor a comprehensive reference work. Rather, it is a series of interpretive overviews of major topics in the history of the American West that are intended to recast the field. The book is divided into four sections, the first three of which are roughly chronological. Section one deals with topics important to the shaping of the American West prior to 1800: Native American history, Spanish and Mexican borderlands, Atlantic-based European imperial outposts, and the westward movement of the Anglo-American frontier. The second and third sections treat, respectively, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The former addresses the role of federal initiatives, a globalizing economy, the commodification of animals, agriculture, families, religion, and violence in the American West; the latter covers business and labor, the federal presence, political developments, urbanization, Alaska and Hawaii, the natural environment, and racial and ethnic diversity. Section four covers the visual West, the literary West, the West of popular myth, the historiography of the West, and comparative frontier history.

As some of the topics suggest, the book is a product of what some have termed the new western history. A new generation or two of historians with a new set of questions or new angles on old questions has been reshaping the field of the history of the American West in the past few decades, and the volume under review is an impressive monument to the coming-of-age of this scholarship. Several strengths of the book are worth comment. The twentieth century is given full attention in relation to earlier centuries. Moreover, gender, race, class, and world-system theory as analytical tools are wielded

with even-handedness throughout the book. Also, four themes pervade the volume and help provide a persuasive interpretive warp for the woof of particular chapters: the persistence of native peoples; the "astonishingly large role" of the federal government "in a region supposedly characterized by personal freedom and rugged individualism" (5); the tension between the exploitation of the West's natural abundance and subsequent social and environmental costs; and the ongoing role of the West as an international borderland, a "zone of exchange and conflict" between diverse peoples (116). The bibliographic notes at the end of each chapter are, on the whole, up-to-date guides to the relevant secondary literature, and the illustrations are impressive both in quality of reproduction and in complementarity to the text.

There are few significant weaknesses in the book. The introductions and the chronologies to each section are uneven in their integration with what follows. At least one more traditional topic that deserved greater attention is transportation. More troubling, though, are the differences in the topics treated for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Why is the consideration of agriculture, animal husbandry, families, religion, and violence essentially limited to the nineteenth century (section two)? Certainly these are ongoing aspects of the twentieth-century West (section three), yet one would not know it from this volume.

Where does Iowa fit in all of this? Iowa is clearly identified as part of the trans-Mississippi West in the endmaps, but it is otherwise virtually invisible, with three exceptions. Iowa does make a significant appearance in the chapter on agriculture in the nineteenth century, written by Allan G. Bogue. It is also, albeit less explicitly, a part of Richard White's treatment of the commodification of animals—buffalo, cattle, sheep, horses, etc.—in the West of the 1800s, and of Kathleen Conzen's account of families' westward migrations. Does this mean that Iowa is, at best, peripheral to the American West? One's conclusions about Iowa's relationship to the West depend, at least in part, on how the West is defined. The book emphasizes the West as place, with an eastern boundary no farther—perhaps not as far as—the Mississippi River, and going as far west as to include Alaska and Hawaii. Further, the volume persistently identifies what amounts to a set of distinctives of the West-as-place, consisting of the four themes mentioned above together with the frontier process. Setting aside the problems and ambiguities of this less than fully explicit definition of the region, Iowa's historical experience is, to invert Iowa-born western writer Wallace Stegner's words, western only less so. Iowa certainly underwent frontier conquest by mostly Anglo-American settlers, and

the federal government has played a key role in this state that has prided itself on its embodiment of the yeoman farmer ideal, from the initial Louisiana Purchase to the removal of native peoples to the surveying and sale of land to more directly, especially in the twentieth century, supporting agriculture. Yet the relative homogeneity of Iowa's post-frontier population has softened overt racial or ethnic conflict compared to that in other parts of the West, and the social and environmental costs of an intensive agricultural economy tied to the world system also seem more muted — or perhaps deferred — than in other areas. Considering, then, this volume's main themes for the historical experience of the West, Iowa, especially that portion that is part of the Missouri River basin, has a clear claim to be considered a part of the West, or at least a borderland of the West.

All readers can be rewarded by delving into this book, since, as Martha S. Sandweiss put it, "Western history has long been a kind of participation sport" (671). The book does not resolve what constitutes the West, nor does it present even the outline of a complete picture of the West. Perhaps these will always remain elusive ends. Nevertheless, it is a magnificent volume. It effectively and compellingly presents the newly dominant historical perspectives on the American West. In addition, it provides a potentially stimulating context for understanding Iowa's history afresh.

On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History, by Wilbur R. Jacobs. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. xviii, 342 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, appendixes, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY LEO E. OLIVA, FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY

Wilbur R. Jacobs, professor emeritus of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, probably knows more about Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) and his influences on the writing and interpreting of the significance of the frontier in American history than any other living historian. He is also one of the finest writers of the professional craft. Jacobs has spent much of his academic career pursuing "Turner's trail," and this is the third volume in a trilogy, following *The Historical World of Frederick Jackson Turner* (1968) and *Frederick Jackson Turner's Legacy* (1977).

Turner's famous frontier thesis, stated in 1893, was probably most applicable to the Midwest. In time, however, it became the most compelling explanation for the development of America's unique democracy, individualism, and nationalism. Later, to the present day, American historians divided into pro- and anti-Turnerians, traditional-

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