

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

ranked states in terms of rail mileage. It is trite, then, to say that there is an inseparable bond between the history of the state and the history of its railroads. Nevertheless, it is true.

This book, *Ups and Downs of Iowa's Railroads*, employs a "from-the-back-porch" approach; the view is from Marshall County, State Center, and Marshalltown in particular. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a full-fledged study of the state's railroad history. The value of the book derives from the author's warm and vivid recollections of railroading in the time of his youth. Indeed, he has captured the essence of small-town railroading and the changes that have occurred therein during this century. Yet because of its restricted scope, its anecdotal form, and the absence of exactitude the book has limited utility. Local history buffs and railfans will enjoy it but more serious scholars will find little of value in it.

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America's Frontier Culture: Three Essays, by Ray A. Billington.
Foreword by W. Turrentine Jackson. College Station, Texas:
Texas A & M University Press, 1977. pp. 97. \$5.00.

The author of this slim volume is recognized as the leading scholar on Frederick Jackson Turner and his ideas. That invites an examination of the three essays in the collection for what they say about the frontier experience as a contributor to the uniqueness of the American character and American institutions. Such an examination produces mixed results and a discernible progression away from a Turnerian interpretation over the twenty-year period in which the essays were produced. "The American Frontiersman" is ardently Turnerian; "The Frontier and American Culture" is moderately so; while "Cowboys, Indians, and the Promised Land" is at best indirectly Turnerian since it argues that writers, publicists and settlers fashioned images about the American West which any reader of the essay should detect as Turnerian.

Book Reviews

The essays were all initially oral presentations delivered to different audiences so their varied character and content may have been consciously fashioned to appeal to the particular interests of each group being addressed. That does not necessarily explain the intriguing differences among them on the central elements of the Turner Thesis. Only Billington can provide clues for answering that question.

The first essay, originally delivered in 1954 at Oxford University as the inaugural Harmsworth Lecture, concentrates on the fur-trapping mountain men as the best representatives of a "reversion to the primitive." Billington acknowledges the selection of that group for analysis because it best illustrates the influence of the wilderness environment upon Americans who went West.

The statement and restatement of the "reversion to the primitive" theme produces a finely crafted discourse containing persuasive, colorful, and sometimes explicitly gory illustrations. The essay possesses the virtues and flaws of simplicity of interpretation which may have been appropriate for the purpose of the lecture and the audience addressed.

"The Frontier and American Culture," presented to the California Library Association in 1964, recognized the interests of that body by dealing with cultural agencies, including libraries, and the reading patterns of the pioneers. It argues that most early residents of the West possessed property and sought to duplicate the cultural patterns of the more refined eastern and European societies. After establishing the widespread and frequent presence of cultural organizations and institutions in western communities, Billington examines the reading habits and literary preferences of the people on the frontier. He concludes that, in spite of the effort by the settlers to establish cultural agencies, and to obtain and read more traditional literature, the environment exerted a pronounced negative impact on cultural endeavors.

In 1975 Billington addressed the Fourteenth International Congress of the Historical Sciences using the title "Cowboys, Indians, and the Land of Promise." There he dispensed with the opening summary of the Turnerian position included in the two earlier papers and turned to how Europeans, and even the

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Japanese, have adopted behavior patterns based upon a "Wild, Wild West" image of the United States. He saw that current image of the United States growing out of a pair of images created in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The first of those historical images left the impression that the frontier environment reduced its residents to semibarbarians; the second persuaded Europeans that the frontier promised material prosperity, equality and personal freedom. Billington's evidence ascribes much of this image-making to European writers, travelers and settlers in the American West who imbedded those views in the European mind by the end of the nineteenth century. In this essay, Billington briefly lapses into what could be considered a "Great Frontier" interpretation as he muses on how the image of the American West as a place of freedom and equality could have contributed to liberal reform efforts in Europe at the turn of the century.

These essays can be approached as separate entities since each treats a different aspect of the frontier; they can also be approached as a collection since they provide an opportunity to speculate about shifts in Billington's stance on the Turner Thesis. Each essay has sufficient documentation for the theme being explicated and all are clear, straightforward and move easily from segment to segment. Certainly these are qualities that historians should emulate and readers should appreciate.

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Dodge City: The Most Western Town of All, by Odie B. Faulk.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. pp. ix, 227. \$9.95.

The Twentieth-Century West: A Potpourri, by Gene M. Gressley.
Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1977.
pp. 196. \$12.00.

Faulk's *Dodge City: The Most Western Town of All* and Gressley's *The Twentieth-Century West: A Potpourri* represent two different approaches to Western American history,

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