

spelled out. However, several factors come to mind: recent writers are more familiar with the prairie and its images; they recognize the uniqueness and the beauties of a landscape of space; and they begin to find a language that describes the prairie meaningfully and helps bring some order to its apparent chaos. These generalizations could be applied to any region except for the limiting term *space*. It is space that Europeans could not find a language for, and it is space that contemporary writers, artists, historians, and psychologists must confront when challenged by prairie life and its consequences.

*The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America*, by Carl J. Guarneri. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991. xvi, 525 pp. Illustrations, tables, figures, maps, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$32.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DANIEL WALKER HOWE, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

Fourierism, a form of utopian socialism, generally has not been regarded as a major force in nineteenth-century America. All the more surprising, then, that it should be the subject of a major book. Carl J. Guarneri tells an exciting story here, one that brings together high intellectual analysis and the social history of the common people. It is the story of the Frenchman Charles Fourier and his American disciples, of ideas that span the Atlantic and the prairies, linking Paris and New York with Iowa, Wisconsin, and Texas. No one, after reading this book, will ever look at nineteenth-century American society in quite the same way. And no informed student of American history will ever again patronize or dismiss the utopian socialists.

Charles Fourier (1772-1837) was heir to a distinguished tradition of thinkers who nurtured modern social science within the womb of moral philosophy. Like such eighteenth-century moral philosophers as Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith, Fourier believed that human beings were dominated by their passions. Unlike most eighteenth-century thinkers, however, Fourier believed that the passions should be indulged rather than limited and controlled. He constructed a social science based on the principle that a rationally constructed community could satisfy the passions of each individual without danger to the others.

Fourier drew up detailed plans for model socialist communities called "phalanxes," which would provide every member with proper fulfillment in a context of harmonious labor. After his death, his vision of these phalanxes was carried on by his disciples in Europe

and America. Fourier's intellectual system was both comprehensive and practical, providing a theory and praxis that purported to subsume all other reforms. In this respect it resembled Marxism—which explains why Marx and Engels so relentlessly attacked it: Fourierism, so long as it was popular, blocked the way to the acceptance of their own philosophy. Fourier believed his socialism could be attained peacefully, while Marx and Engels insisted only violent class struggle could achieve their goal. It was the Marxists who labeled Fourierism as "utopian," and the disparaging epithet stuck.

Carl Guarneri describes the implementation of Fourierism in the United States under the leadership of a diverse group of advocates who included Albert Brisbane, Horace Greeley, and Parke Godwin. He shows how various aspects of Fourierism appealed to different groups of Americans—to radicals as well as reformers, artisans as well as intellectuals, Democrats as well as Whigs—to feminists and paternal philanthropists, to Transcendentalists and evangelical Christians. Sometimes labor leaders enlisted under the banner of Fourier; in Lowell, Massachusetts, for example, Fourierism appealed to Sarah Bagly in her struggle to organize female mill workers. Elsewhere, middle-class professional people provided the core of the movement. What had existed in Charles Fourier's mind as an integrated and grandiose philosophy became in America a looser, more experimental cause. To distinguish their own outlook from the rigid and rigorous system of the founder, the American Fourierists called themselves Associationists.

Fourierism was the fad of 1843. While the leaders, mostly in the Northeast, intended that phalanxes should be founded only after sufficient capital had been raised to operate them, impatient Americans, disillusioned with the prevailing economic system by the depression of the early 1840s, rushed to found Fourierist communities all across the free states. The communities were invariably undercapitalized with untrained, unscreened, unbalanced work forces, often situated on poorly chosen sites. The Iowa Pioneer Phalanx, for example, tried to support fifty people on 320 acres of Mahaska County farmland and lasted only one crop year. Guarneri carefully compiles such statistics about each of the Fourierist communities and recreates with vivid anecdotes the quality of their daily life, their charms and frustrations. He makes interesting comparisons between the phalanxes and other utopian communities, religious and secular, of the time.

It was the very extent and diversity of Associationism's appeal, ironically, that doomed it. Fourierism had been oversold by its own propaganda, so that many prospective phalanx members came expecting relatively easy prosperity. Although most phalanxes were

primarily agricultural, too many of their hastily assembled members came from other occupations and knew nothing of farming. By the time the eastern leaders of Associationism were ready to begin, followers around the country had already tried the Fourier experiment and failed at it. Associationism, if it were to work, required careful planning. But the society of Jacksonian America, amorphous to the point of anarchy, was not amenable to careful planning. Although Guarneri himself does not make the point this way, his story shows the failure of grass-roots enthusiasm as a substitute for organization and capital.

Eventually Fourierism became caught up in the spiraling vortex of the debate over slavery. Originally, its advocates had tried to sidestep the issue, claiming that their doctrine showed the way to avoid both the coercion of slavery and the competition of the free market in the practice of cooperative socialism. But this proved an untenable position. Despite the affinities between Associationism and the social philosophy of certain southerners such as George Fitzhugh, the humanitarianism of most Fourierists dictated an antislavery stance. The critique of slavery, however, became bound up with a celebration of northern free enterprise capitalism that undermined the appeal of utopian socialism.

This book is beautifully written, carefully thought out, and massively researched. It combines social relevance and moral commitment with broad learning, scholarly integrity, and sound judgment. While sympathetic to the Associationists' critique of the injustices of modern civilization, Guarneri also shrewdly points out their contradictions, shortcomings, and disappointments. Though he demonstrates empathy for ideologues, Guarneri never becomes doctrinaire himself. And in the course of explaining the rise and fall of Fourierism, he has given us a panoramic portrait of America in the middle period. With this book, Carl Guarneri takes his place as one of the leading American historians of his generation.

*Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and the Public Lands before the Civil War*, by James W. Oberly. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990. xii, 222 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$28.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KENNETH J. WINKLE, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

Historians have long debated the equity of federal public land policy during the nineteenth century and have puzzled over the dramatic mid-century transformation of party positions on the land issue.

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