

The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Volume 4, Global America, 1915–2000, by D. W. Meinig. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004. xvi, 467 pp. Illustrations, maps, charts, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer David Blanke is assistant professor of history at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. He is the author of *Hell on Wheels: The Promise and Peril of America's Car Culture* (2007) and *Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest* (2000).

In his fourth and final volume of *The Shaping of America* series, D. W. Meinig adds additional depth and substance to his claim that history and geography are mutually reinforcing disciplines; both “by their very nature” are “analogous, complementary, and interdependent fields.” Yet, in spite of their similarities, there remains “little evidence of significant interaction and convergence between them in common American practice” (xiii). Meinig’s ability to correct that imbalance while spanning no less than five centuries has generated richly deserved praise for his astonishing contribution to both fields. Generously illustrated, clearly written, and methodologically sound, the books should find a place in most libraries and will serve students of the United States for many years to come.

Meinig prefaces this book with a quote from folklorist Henry Glassie, who holds that “history is not the past, but a map of the past drawn from a particular point of view to be useful to the modern traveler” (vi). Meinig’s particular point of view in this volume is what scholars once termed the American Century, and is here divided into three broad sections. The first examines the technological changes affecting Americans’ understanding of national space and identity. The second probes the “morphological” shifts caused by human migrations and the resulting policies that affected a national consciousness. The last surveys the assertions and impositions made by Americans as the nation gained political and economic hegemony across the globe.

The ambitious scope of the work opens the book to charges of over-generalization. Indeed, many fundamental social categories, such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity, are not treated systemically in Meinig’s formulation of national consciousness. Moreover, the book slights most environmental aspects of geographic history, such as climate, topography, water resources, and other natural determinants. By and large, for Meinig, the intersection of geography and history is best understood within the traditional realms of the marketplace (including technology and engineering) and national and international politics. But within those limits, Meinig provides a compelling and

generally persuasive narrative of the key changes to twentieth-century America.

In the first section, on technological and market shifts, the author synthesizes a fairly traditional narrative covering the modern transportation revolution, including automobile, rail, air, and water transit. The emergence of a federated system for national planning and large-scale market efficiencies determined the geographic transit patterns seen today. The sequential influence of cities, suburbs, and edge cities throughout the twentieth century explains most of these patterns. Meinig uses numerous maps and charts to show an emerging transportation network that anticipates our contemporary appreciation of the transit and technology hubs—such as Chicago, Atlanta, Dallas, and Denver—that affect national commerce. Given the repeating patterns, for example between national rail and air travel (57, 59, 76), I would have preferred a more nuanced discussion of urban determinism—along the lines of William Cronon’s “logic of capital”—to the all-inclusive narrative provided by Meinig. But his inclusion of more recent shifts in information technologies, local air service, and massive corporate mergers makes such a close analysis an unwarranted luxury. Certainly, his valuable synthesis of television, telephony, and the internet into the broad national narrative justifies his choice.

The arrival of new technologies, market forces, and transportation services lays the foundation for Meinig’s second and, in my view, most important section of the book. Here the author details the various migration streams, immigration policies, and multiple “doorways” whereby people responded to the changing technological footing of the country. Scholars of Iowa and the broader Midwest would do well to review Meinig’s assessment of regionalism in the middle decades. As he notes, “That the massive Core of the United States that had been firmly in place for a century could have become so eroded and countered in its power in so short a time . . . represented a drastic restructuring of the nation” (277). Here, Meinig effectively blends current urban and social history to show how the growth of cities, such as Chicago, St. Louis, or Kansas City, and the influence of immigration led to a relative weakening of regional identification and the markets that sustained them. Meinig adds the trajectory of several peripheral populations, including those in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and on Native American lands, to again tempt the reader to explore his many secondary references.

Although the concluding section sustains Meinig’s ambitious thesis, it seems the least compelling of the three. Perhaps the overlay of American hegemony and the nation’s assertions of global power fol-

lowing World War II are simply too similar to the geopolitical realms of the Cold War to engender any new or unexpected patterns. For much of this section, America and "the West" are one and the same. Again, geographically peripheral areas, such as the "polar confrontation" of the Cold War, offer the most compelling and thought-provoking reactions to the nation's "victory" over communism.

But these criticisms are trifling compared to Meinig's overall contribution. This is a text that deserves wide circulation and one that compels others to heed his warnings about excluding geography. Without this perspective it is doubtful that anyone can fully understand America's national contours.

Wisconsin Politics and Government: America's Laboratory of Democracy, by James K. Conant. *Politics and Governments of the American States*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. xx, 415 pp. Maps, tables, graphs, bibliography, notes, index. \$70.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer John D. Buenker is professor emeritus of history at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. He has written extensively on American political history and culture and is the author of *The History of Wisconsin*, vol. 4, *The Progressive Era, 1893-1914* (1998).

The most important feature of Wisconsin society, government, and politics in the twentieth century, according to James K. Conant, was its "progressive nature": issue-oriented politics, scandal-free government, efficient and effective administration of policies and programs, consistently large voter turnout, and citizen involvement "in political activity in ways that extended beyond elections." Such an orientation "seems to correspond with the democratic ideal posited by Alexis de Tocqueville in his classic work *Democracy in America*," and differentiates it from most other midwestern states. Conant is quick to point out, however, that it has not always been that way and that, by the end of the twentieth century, "some of the Progressive premises or boundaries" were "severely tested or broken" (xv-xvii).

To explain this bipolar pattern, Conant posits an ongoing conflict between the "marketplace" and "commonwealth" conceptions of society and divides Wisconsin's history into "four major periods of experimentation." In the former, politics is a struggle for power and tangible rewards among private interest groups, while the purpose of government is to aggrandize those interests and professional politicians. In the latter, the purpose of politics and government is to protect citizens and public resources from exploitation by those same interests and professional politicians.