

Book Reviews and Notices

Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States, by John Lauritz Larson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. xv, 324 pp. Illustrations, tables, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Mark Wahlgren Summers teaches history at the University of Kentucky. He has written about railroad aid during Reconstruction and political corruption before and after the Civil War.

The road to just about anywhere was paved with good intentions in antebellum America, and, often enough, with government money. But those who fought to build the roads, canals, and, eventually, the railroads that bound disparate communities into a market economy were not just fighting for advantage or even to advance economic progress. As John Lauritz Larson's superb study, *Internal Improvement*, makes clear, they strove for what they saw as the soul of the republic.

Without government aid, the infrastructure of an expanding nation would have gone unbuilt. Public projects, not private enterprise, built the Erie Canal and the National Road. But from the first, every plan set off a fight. To many of the Founders, any scheme that dipped into the Treasury was more an *infernal* improvement scheme, a chance for rulers to buy the people's love, to undermine their independence, and to corrupt the political process, the better to amass powers that no free government should be allowed to have. Suspicious republicans saw the big spenders as liberty's nemesis, inspiring greed where freedom depended on people putting their sense of the common good foremost, and fostering local ambition where concern for the general welfare should have been. And they were right! From every locality that got less than what it deemed its rightful share of the golden shower came howls of resentment, masquerading as treatises in political economy. Gratify everyone, and there would be public works without end: something of an *eternal* improvements policy. So from the first, any systematic design became both indispensable and impossible. Comprehensive plans turned into catch-alls and grab bags. State governments took up where the national government left off, with disheartening results. Out of rapacity, resentment, disillusionment, and republican fears arose a new, liberal ethos: the less the state meddled in public works or in the economy, the better. Privatization came by

way of canals that wouldn't pay, magnificent designs built on fantasy, and what looked like a four-lane highway into the Treasury.

Larson's book is more than a cautionary tale, of course. In its emphasis on how policy was made and on ideological contingencies, it has a very different brief than Carter Goodrich's landmark study of the way in which public works met eternal impediments. It is a gracefully written story of how politicians, unfettered by principle, used the internal improvements question to advance their own ambitions, and tempered it to suit party constituencies. Very few heroes appear here (though President John Quincy Adams comes close). The classical republicans pout and fret, the economic liberalizers, all unknowing, bind America hand and foot to the Robber Barons yet to come and to market forces every bit as capricious as any form of government planning. An account putting the focus back on the politics of internal improvements is long overdue. A quibbling reviewer might wish that, for the period after 1820, the author had used newspapers as sources, or, after 1833, manuscript collections—or, after 1850, just about any primary sources. But Larson's account rings true, and the sweep of his coverage is prodigious. Readers can only wish, on completing the book, that American policy in Jackson's day had had the scope and the command over resources that *Internal Improvement* has.

Chief Daniel Bread and the Oneida Nation of Indians of Wisconsin, by Laurence M. Hauptman and L. Gordon McLester III. The Civilization of the American Indian Series. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. xviii, 213 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Patrick J. Jung is adjunct professor of history at Marquette University. His research interests include American Indians in the Great Lakes region.

The Oneida tribe of Wisconsin has had arguably the most tumultuous history of any in the Midwest, involving as it did fraudulent land cessions in New York, forced removal westward, and controversies with other tribes in Wisconsin. Yet, despite voluminous primary sources, only a few scattered secondary works relate the Oneida exodus. The authors' first collaborative project, *The Oneida Indian Journey* (1999), did much to fill this historiographical gap. The work reviewed here presents an even richer treatment of the topic and provides a much needed biography of a central figure in Oneida history.

Daniel Bread spent his first 29 years at Oneida Castle in New York. A "pinetree chief," he achieved his station due to his strong leadership abilities rather than through birth into a hereditary clan. As a member

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