

life, the author has to rely on a life-and-times approach that relates Cody's *probable* role in events when his specific role is unknown. For instance, chapters on his boyhood; his work for the freighting company of Russell, Majors, and Waddell; his service for the same firm's Pony Express; and his Civil War duties are aptly presented as general discussions of those events and institutions, with a sprinkling of Cody thrown in when precise biographical connections are known.

Another prominent theme of the book is Cody's innovative role as a businessman and showman. His Wild West Show of 1882 grew to enormous size and complexity. Throughout the rigorous travel necessary for the show, its star demonstrated unbridled energy, an uncanny ability to relate to all types of audiences, and an honest commitment to the welfare of his employees. Some critics charged that his restaging of Indian battles unfairly cast American Indians as savages from the past, rather than honoring their alleged rapid acculturation into mainstream society. Yet most of his Indian friends and employees apparently maintained their respect for him even into their twilight years.

Employing a fast-paced writing style that will please all levels of readers, Bridger has provided a worthy biography. In addition to the public man, we also see Cody's private moments, his personal doubts about his international image, and his relationship with his wife, Louisa Frederici, throughout the long separations in their lives. The well-chosen subtitle ("*Inventing the Wild West*") nicely ties the book together as the author ably documents the important impact Buffalo Bill had in defining Americans' and Europeans' concepts of what the frontier experience had been. Sometimes the public image was exaggerated and even manufactured, but the impact of that imagery was, nonetheless, overwhelming.

Those looking for new revelations about Cody will not find them in this book. By his own admission, the author has depended on the standard published record only, often relying too heavily on Cody's 1879 autobiography and Helen Cody Wetmore's 1899 story of her brother. Furthermore, the implication that this is a parallel biography of Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull misleads the reader, because this is overwhelmingly the former's story. Nonetheless, this book will find a large and appreciative audience for the life story of this native son of Le Claire, Iowa.

*The Virgin and the Dynamo: Public Murals in American Architecture, 1893-1917*, by Bailey Van Hook. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003. xxii, 240 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$44.95 cloth.

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to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals in the Great Depression (1982). Her latest book is *Debutante: Rites and Regalia of American Debdom* (2004).

During the years between the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and the First World War, public buildings—mainly in the East and the Midwest—covered themselves in a painted mantle of high culture and good taste. The mural movement of the Gilded Age gilded the glistening white classicism of the Chicago World's Fair and the Library of Congress, and then spread out into the plains and prairies—into Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the Dakotas—where new or extensively remodeled capitol buildings announced the cultural aspirations of places lately noteworthy for agricultural bounty and bad winters. Bailey Van Hook takes on the Beaux Arts mural movement with admirable courage. Rather than linking a particular lunette in Madison, say, with an exalted idea, or concentrating on the views of local committees charged with buying interior grandeur by the yard, she attempts nothing less than a bold historical synthesis tracing the development of mural themes from Greco-Roman allegorical females in cheesecloth to a male-centered modernity. Or, in the words of the title Van Hook borrows from Henry Adams, a movement from the virgin to the dynamo.

The Iowa statehouse murals incorporate a little of each. When the Victorian structure was rebuilt after a fire, murals were added in the very latest style. Edwin Blashfield, perhaps the most gifted of the artists who worked on the Chicago Fair, was called to Des Moines in 1905 to depict, in a grand staircase panel, the topic of *Westward*, or settlers flocking to Iowa. The painter himself described his contribution as "a symbolic representation of the Pioneers led by the spirits of Civilization and Enlightenment to the conquest by cultivation of the Great West." Meanwhile, in a series of eight quasi-historical lunettes (half-moon-shaped spaces), Kenyon Cox traced out the *Progress of Civilization* from *Hunting and Agriculture* to an apotheosis of sorts in *Art*.

The Blashfield panel is so crowded with cavorting nymphs in fluttery drapery that they all but obscure a Conestoga wagon and a family of more or less authentic Iowans on and around it. Blashfield's explanation of each one of the figures ran to what Van Hook calls "seven dense paragraphs," without which the onlooker would be hard pressed to tell "Steam" from "Electricity," or "Civilization" from "Enlightenment." The author asserts that it didn't really matter in the long run—that the arbitrary nature of the maidens was less important than their self-evident loftiness and good taste, celebrating the maturation of Iowa and its sister states and their aspirations to future greatness. At the same time, however, importing artists to make believe that Des Moines is Renaissance Florence neglects the real enough struggles of

Iowa's real pioneers. In all of these murals, there is not a whiff of a conflict with native peoples, of political squabbles, of the terrible ordeal of making a living in nineteenth-century farming. And surely somebody must have objected to a group of murals that puts art at the historical culmination of the state's toils and tribulations! Even Grant Wood, one suspects, wouldn't have gone quite that far.

Were there protests, like those that broke out in Kansas in the 1930s when John Steuart Curry painted a lethal tornado on the walls of the Topeka capitol, much to the displeasure of local boosters? Or is it true that the gilding obscured everything else—that if the public murals of the Midwest were sufficiently sparkly and fashionable, then it really didn't matter which silly nymph was Electricity? In short, Bailey Van Hook's fine book opens as many questions as it answers, especially for local historians seeking a window on the mind of Middle America in the Progressive era.

*The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon*, by Robert D. Johnston. Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America Series. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. xxiii, 394 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendix, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Robert E. Bionaz is assistant professor of history at Chicago State University. His dissertation was "Streetcar City: Popular Politics and the Shaping of Urban Progressivism in Cleveland, 1880-1910" (University of Iowa, 2002).

Robert D. Johnston's monograph features a fine historical narrative interrupted by unfortunate partisan forays into the thicket of Progressive Era historiography. He wishes to "rehabilitate" and "vindicate" the "middling" Portlanders whose democratic populism "has often represented a radical challenge to the authority of economic, political, and cultural elites," and "question[ed] many of the fundamental assumptions of a capitalist society" (xi, xii). He also wants to "reinvigorate . . . substantive historiographical debate" within the academy, and hopes his findings will provide "firmer grounds for an expansive democratic hope" (xiv). Focusing mainly on politics in Portland during the first quarter of the twentieth century, Johnston explores a range of issues: direct democracy measures such as the initiative and referendum, proposals for a unicameral legislature and proportional representation, the single tax movement, the controversy over smallpox vaccination for students, and a compulsory education bill. He also examines the ideas of some leading public figures of middle-class radicalism in Portland: mayor Harry Lane, city commissioner Will Daley, direct democracy advocate William U'Ren, and anti-vaccinationist Lora Little.

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