

planned and coordinated by a disloyal society. After all, the popular protests that forced American withdrawal from Vietnam were not organized, either.

We are indebted to Klement for revising the history of the dark lantern societies, as well as for earlier works revising the image of Copperheads. But study of antiwar sentiments and activities in the North before Lincoln's reelection is more imperative than ever.

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*Railroads and the Character of America, 1820-1887*, by James A. Ward. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986. xii, 200 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$14.95 cloth.

It should come as no surprise that as America's first large business, railroads and their leaders wielded considerable impact upon the developing nation. Not only did this network of iron and steel shatter the country's isolation and hasten the process of industrialization and urbanization, but the image of this new and wonderful form of transportation had a profound impact upon the citizenry. James A. Ward, professor of history at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, has written what he describes as "a series of essays, each examining a broad spectrum of railroad literature on a topic that illustrates prominent aspects of the character of America" (10). A dozen chapters, all related to the overall theme of railroads and the national character from the 1820s to the enactment of the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, constitute this work.

The earliest decades of the railroad in America reflected the widespread popular belief, boomed, of course, by company officials and other enthusiasts, that the iron horse would both unite the Republic and yield a remarkable prosperity to those it touched. Railroads, however, would do more than fatten pocketbooks; they would even advance education, morality, and health. Just as William Miller, a charismatic Baptist minister, energized tens of thousands of Americans in the early 1840s to expect Christ's impending return to earth, so, too, did railroad promoters see their work as fostering millennial perfection for the masses. While the cross then symbolized to many Christ's Second Coming, the steam locomotive represented to an even larger number the marvelous life that railroad service would bestow.

Yet the images changed. As the Gilded Age dawned, Americans no longer universally saw the railroad in a wholly positive light. Following the Civil War railways expanded at a phenomenal rate. The 1880s witnessed the heyday of new line construction. More miles of track were built

at that time than at any other period. As the decade began, the American rail network stood at 93,267 miles; ten years later it soared to 163,597, an impressive 43 percent gain. Companies, through consolidation, became regional and in a few instances even interregional in scope. Americans became nervous about the increased power railroad executives possessed. And they were bombarded with stories of "corporate wars" that erupted between fierce rivals. According to Ward, the Civil War itself inspired metaphors that reflected this bitter rivalry: "Competitors became 'enemies' and sometimes 'pirates.' Railway forces mounted 'attacks' or launched 'incursions' to gain 'spoils' or even 'indemnities.' Businessmen negotiated 'alliances' to obtain 'allies' before setting out to 'fight' a 'war.' They sought to 'slaughter' or 'destroy' their opponents on the field of 'battle' in order to obtain a 'victory' and a favorable 'treaty'" (153). Gone were the old efforts at showing that railroads "built," "bound," and "nurtured" the nation.

James Ward has given readers a thought-provoking work. His dozen essays are meaty and offer thematic unity. This is not a general history of American railroading for its first fifty years; that was not Ward's intent. Rather this book is a skillful analysis of how railroads promoted themselves through colorful imagery and how the enterprise itself mirrored nineteenth-century life. The bloodbath that was the Civil War left its indelible mark; understandably, then, railroad leaders used war metaphors to describe the competitiveness that was so much a part of the American railroad scene, especially during the 1870s and 1880s.

One joy that readers will discover in this book is Ward's exceptionally fine prose style. This is another reason why his study succeeds; he captures nicely the rhetoric of a bygone era and casts it in an appealing format.

No book, though, is perfect. Although Ward has not made any egregious factual errors, he might well have explored additional topics. The one that stands out is the lengthy debate for transcontinental railroads. That issue attracted public attention for decades and reflected concern with such matters as "Manifest Destiny," the extension of slavery, and urban spheres of influence. The design faults are not Ward's responsibility: the publisher has chosen to use some extremely poor-quality illustrations that detract from the book, and the layout employed is wholly unimaginative. Nevertheless, *Railroads and the Character of America* will take its place of honor alongside such solid American studies-type books as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and John Stilgoe's *Metropolitan Corridor*.

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