Book Reviews and Notices

The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America, by Greg Grandin. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019. 369 pp. Notes, index. $30 hardcover, $18 paperback.

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Greg Grandin's *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* insightfully considers how an "expansionist imperative" shapes the United States (2). A winner of the Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction and a finalist in the History category, Grandin's book has rightfully garnered extensive praise. While Iowa is not considered in detail, this book should still be of immense interest to *Annals of Iowa* readers as it re-contextualizes the meaning of expansion from the pre-Revolutionary period to today.

Grandin contends that to understand the United States, we must see the link between the frontier myth that has animated much of American history and "America's new myth" of the southern border wall (9). A key connection is the central role, historic and ongoing, of race-based violence. From the "removal" of Native Americans to the Minuteman Project and the Border Patrol, Grandin explores vigilante and state-sponsored brutality. Additionally, while the U.S. border moved "as a quality of its being," this "didn't haunt the United States" but "animated it, giving life to its history as an exceptional nation" (31). This view was encapsulated in Frederick Jackson Turner's idea of the frontier's crucial role in creating and recreating American democracy and liberty. Even as physical expansion was curtailed, politicians like Ronald Reagan still used the rhetoric of limitlessness. By focusing outwardly, whether in land-taking or military and market expansion, the United States avoided confronting its own social problems and saw itself as a moral force for good. Currently, Grandin argues, the Mexico-U.S. border has become the "repository of the racism and the brutality that the frontier was said . . . to leave behind through forward motion" (166), even as it is a kind of rejection of the previous sense of limitlessness.

In fewer than 300 pages of regular text, Grandin masterfully covers much geographic and conceptual ground. He attends to comparative and linked developments, especially in other parts of North and South America. Chapter 2, for example, juxtaposes Thomas Jefferson's and Simón Bolívar's conceptions of territorial expansion. Chapter 9 clarifies both Mexico's and the U.S.'s strategies to shape the early twentieth century border, while Chapter 14 gives similar context around NAFTA. Grandin's story is richer because he provides a history of the United States that is attuned to the broader global context.

As the subtitle ("the Mind of America") indicates, Grandin's purview is intellectual history, but this book is also grounded in concern for how ideas and myths affect people's lives. Grandin additionally counters the popular conception that expansion within what would become the United States is separate from the later military and economic expansion that was most often "overseas." This is a crucial contribution because by illuminating the conceptual and practical connections between these efforts he shows that the process of expansion was not simply natural or inevitable. Yet, even as Grandin links the "internal" and "external," he also focuses on the edge of the expansion at any given time, which means he deemphasizes stories once people were brought or forced inside of the U.S. This is seen in the coverage of Native Americans, so central to early chapters but who rather recede in the later ones, even though Native stories and struggles are ongoing. Thus, Grandin does not show the full extent of the cost of American expansion. While Grandin does not endorse Turner's rosy exceptionalism, he does work within Turner's frame, which argues that the edge is the place most worthy of attention to understand how America is constituted. It is also worth noting that the southern U.S. border is of primary interest to Grandin. Given his thoughtful work with comparisons overall, hearing more about how it compares and contrasts to the northern one would have been additionally illuminating.

Grandin's engaging prose guides the reader to understand the ongoing impact of the "country's founding paradox: the promise of political freedom and the reality of racial subjugation" (138). He draws on a vast array of primary and secondary sources, including evocative use of literary texts, to show the development of these stories over time. However, through editing errors, unfortunately there are some gaps in his citations (examples on pages 90, 103, and 159).

Overall, *The End of the Myth* is both thoughtful and thought provoking. Grandin helps his readers confront the realities of our country's past because he wants us to see how the great social project that is the United States can best move into the future. As Grandin notes in the

Epilogue, in accepting there are limits to growth, building a wall is not the only option. Instead, Grandin suggests we pick up a social democratic thread from the past, one that was evidenced in the Freedmen's Bureau and the New Deal, in order to move into the future with more justice for all.

Great River City: How the Mississippi Shaped St. Louis, by Andrew Wanko. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 2019. 308 pp. Images, maps, bibliography, index $35.00 paperback.

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In this beautiful and affordable coffee table book, public historian Andrew Wanko puts the Mississippi River where it belongs: at the heart of the history of St. Louis. This book is a "remedy," Wanko states, because St. Louisans "don't spend much time pondering how the Mississippi River seeps into our daily lives" (7). The book's origins are in a museum exhibit; the layout of big, colorful images alongside succinct text keeps it feeling like a browsable exhibit full of historical eye candy. In over fifty short chapters containing hundreds of images—maps, photographs, art, documents, and material culture—Wanko spans centuries to broadly tell this river city's social, cultural, economic and environmental history.

Readers realize that a lot has disappeared. The first city to thrive at the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers was Cahokia, the crown jewel of the Mississippian mound builders. Though Cahokia was abandoned by the fourteenth century, St. Louisans of the eighteenth century integrated the mounds into their city. These elevated earthworks became landmarks and one hosted the city's first waterworks. Mound removal required reverse engineering—hauling dirt away with human and animal power—in order to flatten the landscape. In one poignant set of photographs, a half-domed Big Mound overlooks its own dismantling for a railroad passage (12–13).

Growth and manipulation erased caves, sinkholes and islands from the landscape. The sandy isle of Bloody Island was used for dueling contests, and Quarantine Island hosted the infected during the 1849 cholera epidemic. That same year, a disastrous fire destroyed ships and buildings alike, but within a decade, the rebuilt city hosted up to five