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Review of *Visions of Paradise: Glimpses of Our Landscape's Legacy* By John Warfield Simpson

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temporary setting.” Readily conceding that “other academics provide the original scholarship” he offers here, Simpson holds nonetheless that his “snapshots synthesize that scholarship across many disciplinary boundaries to clarify and find general meaning in the landscape story. . . .” Simpson is as good as his word. *Visions of Paradise* is a lucid and readable overview of Euro-American contact with, and thus understanding of, that portion of the North American continent that became the United States. He surveys a broad range of sources, personalizing them in ways that both add to his exposition and assert his commitment to landscape values; and in doing so he achieves the synthetic multidisciplinary synthesis he seeks. Particularly effective is his singling out of James Kilbourne, a Connecticut man who, in the first years of the nineteenth century, bought a large tract of land in central Ohio for the Scioto Company and moved to the town he helped found there, Worthington. Returning to Kilbourne periodically throughout his analysis, Simpson uses him to demonstrate that “since Kilbourne’s day American landscape values have remained remarkably constant at their core.” That is, he details the numerous ways Euro-Americans have altered the land by seeing it, like Kilbourne, as “a virtually limitless source of potentially valuable natural resources.”

Nevertheless, there is very little beyond the contextual for the serious student of the Great Plains in *Visions of Paradise*. The three chapters devoted to the region’s exploration and settlement are, if not exactly perfunctory, then just diligent recitations of well-known analyses (DeVoto, Smith, Stegner, Webb). Simpson offers only the usual happenings, people, and places—exploration, the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails, the destruction of the buffalo, Benton and Gilpin boosterism, the cattle trade, railroads, and the failure of the Homestead Act on the Plains. Evidently, Simpson needed to get from Ohio—the history of which he clearly knows—to the Great Basin explorations of John Wesley Powell and to John Muir’s Yosemite. (Together with his discussion of

Visions of Paradise: Glimpses of Our Landscape’s Legacy. By John Warfield Simpson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. Illustrations, notes, works cited, index. xi + 387 pp. \$35.00.

In this book’s first pages, Simpson dissects its title and says his use of “glimpses” there “indicates that this is not the complete story of the landscape. Instead, it is a set of snapshots of formative forces over the past two hundred years that . . . most shaped our con-

George Perkins Marsh, the overview analyses of Powell and Muir are especially good, as is Simpson's skepticism toward Transcendentalist understandings of land as natural environment.) As usual, then, the Great Plains seems here to be in the way of the main point. Even so, Simpson integrates the region appropriately within the whole of his analysis, itself one that impresses by its readability, the multidisciplinary scope of its sources, and its author's evident commitment to a radical shift in American landscape values through a deeper understanding of their historical bases.

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