

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

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Volume 68 | Number 4 (Fall 2009)

pps. 475-478

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## Industrializing the Corn Belt: Agriculture, Technology, and Environment, 1945–1972

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Woods, Thomas A. "Industrializing the Corn Belt: Agriculture, Technology, and Environment, 1945–1972." *The Annals of Iowa* 68 (2009), 475-478.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1400>

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civil rights to ducking shells and bullets and to shooting people who were considered second-class citizens in the United States. "So, for many 93rd Division GIs and their families," Jefferson concludes, "neither patriotism nor the desire to fight for the four freedoms enunciated by Franklin Roosevelt guided their wartime struggles" (151).

Nonetheless, the war dramatically shaped their lives and political sensibilities. Having endured the horrors of training and battle as well as the army's racist policies and practices, which included a draconian legal system that severely punished any African American who appeared to break the unwritten rules about gender, sexuality, and race, World War II black veterans returned home to carry on a struggle for dignity that was an influential part of the postwar civil rights movement. As one 93rd Infantry Division veteran put it, "I got through fighting in the P.T.O. (Pacific Theater of Operations) and now I've got to fight in the S.T.O., U.S.A. (Southern Theater of Operations in the United States)" (244).

*Fighting for Hope* is a marvelous book. It is based on a mountain of primary sources, most of which Jefferson dug up himself. Particularly impressive are the oral history interviews and his correspondence with the veterans. Jefferson has done yeoman work for the profession. That said, I do wish that he had done a little more prosopographical analysis and provided an expanded historiographical section. Additionally, the home front side of his narrative is a tad weak as he lets the NAACP do most of the talking. More information on groups such as the National Urban League and individuals such as A. Philip Randolph would have likely strengthened his argument. And a bit more background information about African Americans and the military before World War II might have been beneficial. Regardless, this is a fine addition to the literature about African Americans in the age of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

*Industrializing the Corn Belt: Agriculture, Technology, and Environment, 1945–1972*, by J. L. Anderson. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009. x, 238 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$32.95 cloth.

Reviewer Thomas A. Woods is president of Making Sense of Place, Inc., a history consulting firm. He has experience researching and writing about agricultural history as well as administering living history farming experiences.

A graduate of Iowa State University and a veteran of Living History Farms in Urbandale, Iowa, J. L. Anderson guides readers through the industrialization of rural Iowa from 1945 until 1972. During that period, farms in Iowa and throughout the upper Midwest changed dra-

matically with the introduction of chemical agriculture, confinement and mechanized feeding and manure handling systems for livestock, and the technological revolution in harvesting and storing corn, small grain, and forage crops. As a result of these changes, the rural landscape of small family-owned and -operated farms that dominated the countryside came to a gradual end, replaced by a more lightly populated, industrialized agricultural landscape.

Anderson divides his book into two parts. The first part focuses on the chemical revolution. Individual chapters on insecticides, herbicides, fertilizer, and growth- or health-enhancing feed additives take readers through the major areas of chemical use on farms. The second part, on how machinery changed agriculture, contains chapters on automated materials delivery systems and their impact on livestock feeding, manure removal and dairying, haying with pickup balers and forage choppers, the replacement of the threshing machine with the combine, and the advent of the corn picker, corn picker-sheller, and the versatile combine with exchangeable heads for different crops. In each of these chapters Anderson talks about the implications for farm buildings, labor, capital investment, and work organization.

In his introduction, Anderson sets himself a difficult task. He sets his book within the tradition of Allan Bogue's classic 1963 book on Illinois and Iowa farming, *From Prairie to Corn Belt*, which traced mid-western farming up to the 1880s. Bogue relied heavily on period agricultural press and farm diaries to tell the story of the Iowa farmer "with dirt on his hands and dung on his boots — about the problems and developments that forced him to make decisions about his farm business" (9). Telling his story from the "perspective of the people who raised the crops and livestock" (9), Anderson takes up the story from World War II and projects it forward to 1970. Although he uses a variety of sources, he relies heavily on *Wallaces' Farmer* and *Successful Farming* for much of his account of agricultural change.

Farmers sometimes have been portrayed as passive agents in the industrialization of agriculture or victims of the agro-industrial complex and government agents or programs. Anderson reframes the discussion. Paralleling Bogue's famous quotation, Anderson says that "it was farmers, people with grease under their fingernails and Atrazine and crop oil on their overalls, who industrialized the rural landscape" (193). Farmers had "allies" in the Cooperative Extension Service, farm magazines and papers, and chemical and equipment manufacturers, but they frequently defied professional and corporate advice and based decisions on what they thought was in their own interests, often relying on their own or their neighbors' experiences.

As controversial as it was and still remains, Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz's famous injunction to farmers in the 1970s to "get big, get better, or get out" summarizes what farmers did in the 1950s and 1960s. Agricultural change throughout much of the 1940s through the 1970s was rooted in the high cost of farm labor, low commodity prices during the early 1950s through the 1970s, and increasing land values. Between 1951 and 1956, for instance, commodity prices dropped 23 percent, yet nonfarm prices remained constant. Iowa farm income dropped from \$10,247 in 1953 to \$7,051 in 1955.

Several other factors convinced farmers to change their approaches to farming. Farmers wanted to reduce some of the drudgery that still remained in agriculture. Replacing the grain scoop shovel and manure fork with automated systems held great appeal for farmers who could increase their acreage or herds while reducing their physical labor. This trend continued and multiplied. As farmers mechanized, they farmed more land or raised more cattle, seeking greater efficiencies and profits to pay for capital improvements. Among other influences, government policies convinced farmers to change their approach or leave farming. The introduction of stringent Grade A milk standards in Iowa in 1951, for instance, forced dairy farmers to install bulk tanks. Some dairy farmers began abandoning stanchion milking for milk parlors, which allowed them greater control over the sanitation of their operation. Since that transition was not financially feasible for small dairy operators with a dozen cows or fewer, those who chose not to upgrade either contented themselves with less profitable Grade B milk, quit dairying, or gave up farming altogether.

Within the 30 years of Anderson's study, corn harvest was revolutionized as hand picking was replaced by the corn picker, the picker-sheller, and finally by combines with interchangeable heads. Related to these mechanical changes, farmers adopted hybrid corn varieties that significantly increased yields from 30 bushels per acre to more than 80 bushels by the 1970s. For hybrids to produce to their potential, they needed to be properly fertilized. Many farmers chose to apply a balanced starter fertilizer before planting in the spring, and then a side dressing of anhydrous ammonia, a source of nitrogen, during the growing season. At the same time, farmers increased their use of pesticides to eliminate weeds and corn borers or root worms that threatened their crop. Herbicides freed farmers from the previous routine of cultivating corn three times before laying it by until harvest.

Without judging the changes, Anderson describes their impact on the rural landscape. By 1970, the results of farmers' decisions were readily apparent. Many farmsteads were no longer occupied by farm

families. The symbolic buildings of mixed agriculture, such as barns, alleyway corncribs, and granaries — structures without a use — were often neglected or replaced. Large metal grain bins with their augurs and corn drying systems replaced corncribs and granaries. Industrial agriculture came under increasing criticism for its dependence on fertilizers, pesticides, livestock confinement, growth hormones, continuous corn on the same ground, and feedlots containing large numbers of animals producing huge quantities of manure, as urban and rural critics raised environmental, food quality, and moral concerns.

Anderson's book is well worth reading for anyone interested in the agricultural changes of the 1950s and 1960s. The impact of the revolution Anderson recounts affects all Americans and particularly those from midwestern farm states such as Iowa.

*Regionalism and the Humanities*, edited by Timothy R. Mahoney and Wendy J. Katz. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008. xxvii, 343 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$30.00 paper.

Reviewer James R. Shortridge is professor of geography at the University of Kansas. His books include *Cities on the Plains: The Evolution of Urban Kansas* (2004) and *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (1989).

Humanist scholars have a renewed interest in the concept of regionalism. In the past the idea implied either an all-powerful physical environment that strongly influenced cultural values or a futile retreat into rural folklore by people reluctant to face modern urban life. With the reality of globalized, postmodern society, however, an increasing number of writers now see regionalism in relational terms. Like race, class, and gender, it is a social construction that plays an important (though poorly understood) role in human identity.

In a way, the papers collected in this book represent official federal recognition of regionalism's new status. They come from a 2003 conference of Regional Humanities Centers, a network established a few years earlier by the National Endowment for the Humanities. The 16 authors and two editors reflect the expected academic backgrounds: mostly literature and history with lesser representation from American studies, architecture, art history, music, philosophy, and independent writers. Their papers are relatively brief — between 12 and 22 pages — and because this meeting was held in Lincoln, Nebraska, the themes are weighted toward midwestern subjects.

Editors Mahoney and Katz provide an excellent interpretive framework in their introductory essay. They explore how interest in the regionalist concept waxed in the 1920s and 1930s as a reaction to