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The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West

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amalgamation did it in. In Portage County in northeastern Ohio, where Scott Russell Sanders grew up, the destroyer was a dam. Built ostensibly for recreation and flood control, it destroyed the land and the people on it.

Many of these essays rightfully mix nostalgia and anger. Others, however, have a lot of humor, like Mary Swander's tribute to the bootleg whiskey industry in Templeton, Iowa, where production in 1931 was one hundred gallons a day and in droughts the mayor made sure the distilleries got enough water. Deborah Galyan celebrates growing up on the wrong side of the tracks in Bloomington, Indiana. James B. Hall and Ellen Hunnicutt honor their Ohio and Indiana accents. David Foster Wallace evokes the heroics of playing junior tennis in Philo, Illinois, where he learned to beat the kids from suburban country clubs by taking advantage of prairie winds.

Nearly every essay thus dispels the notion that this land of check-board townships is monotonous and uniform. Variations of wealth, religion, and previous nationality are enormous. Space and isolation have preserved differences, and a national ethic of tolerance generally allowed people to go their own ways. At least, those are the messages of the memoirs—even those that protest against the obliteration of former township boundaries. The technically superb but somehow predictable photographs project a different image, however: the Midwest of old *Life* magazines. The conflict here between photos and texts, between a photographer's current universals and the writers' vanished particulars, is the dilemma of the contemporary Middle West.

The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West, by Carl Abbott. The Modern American West Series. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993. xxiii, 244 pp. Illustrations, maps tables, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JON C. TEAFORD, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

In *The Metropolitan Frontier* Carl Abbott discusses big cities and rapid growth, two topics not generally associated with twentieth-century Iowa. This volume is, then, an account of what Iowa is not, and it deserves the attention of Iowans interested in placing their state in a broader national context. Focusing on the period from 1940 to 1990, Abbott describes the development of American cities from the Missouri River west to Honolulu. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, and Dallas receive the most coverage, but Abbott demonstrates his knowledge of a broad range of cities, including a number of references

to such lesser metropolises as Butte and Billings. With a sweeping command of his subject, Abbott offers a first-rate synthesis of the middle to late twentieth-century urban West, examining its problems and its achievements.

Abbott begins by discussing the urban growth that resulted from burgeoning defense industries and military bases during World War II. The urban West garnered a disproportionate share of defense dollars, and this federal spending ignited explosive population and economic growth that continued in many areas throughout the Cold War era. Accompanying this growth during the 1940s and 1950s was the rise to power of "neoprogressive reformers." In a number of cities these young, dynamic civic leaders ousted do-nothing mayors and council members and formed ruling cliques dedicated to efficient, effective government and the aggressive pursuit of economic development.

Their efforts, together with continued defense spending, paid off during the second half of the twentieth century as one western city after another shed its provincial status and became a business center of national significance. Abbott traces this transformation from "regional city" to "national city" and further discusses how the metropolises of the West were increasingly "gateways to the world," important players in the international business of the Pacific Rim and Southwest borderlands. He also examines the ethnic diversification of these cities as Latin America and Asia contributed not only trade but millions of immigrants to the western metropolises.

In the final section of his book, Abbott perceptively discusses suburbanization and the development of "multi-centered cities" in the modern West. He also considers the relationship of the booming cities to the rural hinterland and to the nation as a whole. By the late twentieth century, western cities, according to Abbott, were no longer remote cultural colonies of the East but instead national pacesetters in style and taste. Though now determining the flow of the national mainstream, they remained distinctively western in their character. For example, Abbott finds the traditional western trait of individualism evident not only in the free-wheeling entrepreneurship of Texas capitalists but also in the counterculture of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury.

In less than two hundred pages, Abbott thus offers a superb summary of the modern urban West. Those who have read his previous works will find some of the material familiar, but the book is rich in new and valuable insights. Some may question his definition of the West as beginning at the Missouri River, a definition that lumps matronly Omaha incongruously with flashy Las Vegas, countercultural San Francisco, and exotic Honolulu. A demarcation line somewhere

west of Lincoln may have been more appropriate. But few will be able to fault his account of the trans-Rockies West, and anyone interested in urban development in that area should read Abbott's work.

Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement, by Peter Rachleff. Boston: South End Press, 1993. 135 pp. Appendix, bibliography, index. \$30.00 cloth, \$12.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY JEFF ZACHARAKIS-JUTZ, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

What is the role of the historian when he or she is a part of the unfolding events that are the subject of the research? Should or can the historian be objective as both activist and scholar? Where is the fine line between historical research and personal account when the historian is an active player? Peter Rachleff's hard-hitting social history of the P-9 Hormel strike in Austin, Minnesota, in the mid-1980s raises these and other difficult questions.

Rachleff, who chaired the Twin Cities P-9 Support Group while teaching U.S. history at Macalester College, meticulously collected documents and kept notes throughout the strike. His not-too-hidden agenda, though, was to document and report a history favorable to the P-9 strikers. In challenging the perspective of the highly acclaimed, Academy Award-winning documentary on the strike, *American Dream*, Rachleff sides neither with organized labor nor with the meatpacking corporations. Rather, he sides firmly with the strikers, their local leaders, and the thousands of citizens across the country who believed the P-9ers were "victimized" by both Hormel and their international union, the United Food and Commercial Workers.

This book is divided into three sections. The first section contains a brief but well-conceived analysis of labor history, including an overview of the rise and decline of unionism within meatpacking plants. Rachleff argues that organized labor's influence has declined because of its inability to attract and organize workers, the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy, growing resistance to unions among employers, and the anti-union policies of state and federal governments. Throughout this section, Rachleff successfully connects P-9 to the militant roots of the labor movement.

The second part of the book focuses on the Hormel strike between 1985 and 1986, and in particular on the high level of rank-and-file activism coupled with the web of solidarity strikers experienced with people across the country. This core theme of democratic participation cuts through Rachleff's analysis of all other social and economic issues.

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