

Book Reviews

Compiled by Andrew J. Wahll. *Braddock Road Chronicles, 1755.*

(Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, Inc., 1999. Pp. 498, Notes, Bibliography.)

Edited by Robert S. Grumet. *Journey on the Forbidden Path: Chronicles of a Diplomatic Mission to the Allegheny Country, March-September, 1760.*

(Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1999. Pp. x, 156, Bibliography, Index.)

The unyielding wilderness of the Appalachian Mountains that marked the frontier of European civilization in the mid-Atlantic colonies in the mid-eighteenth century inspired both intimidation and awe among both Native Americans and whites who dared enter it. Only a limited network of footpaths and pack trails passed through this sparsely populated, though highly contested, region. One reason so few people lived in the region, contained mostly within Pennsylvania, was because of conflicting and overlapping claims upon the territory made by various Indian nations, the British, the French, and several of the British colonies. This region remained in a state of contention until after the American Revolution. Two recent compilations of primary documents that detail separate expeditions into the "Allegheny Country," compiler Andrew J. Wahll's *Braddock Road Chronicles, 1755* and editor Robert S. Grumet's *Journey on the Forbidden Path: Chronicles of a Diplomatic Mission to the Allegheny Country, March-September, 1760*, do much to illustrate the dangers and challenges of traversing the Appalachian Mountains in the mid-eighteenth century.

Braddock Road Chronicles collects mostly previously published letters and documents that describe the construction of the Braddock Road during the unsuccessful British campaign to seize Fort Duquesne and eliminate the French presence in the Ohio Valley during the French and Indian War. In the spring and summer of 1755, Major General Edward Braddock commanded a force consisting of approximately 2,000 soldiers, 29 artillery pieces, 407 wagons, and 900 horses over an arduous 200-mile route between Fort Cumberland, Maryland, and the Monongahela River just south of Fort Duquesne, near present day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Braddock's troops constructed a wagon road, the first to cross the Appalachians, which roughly followed the Nemaquin Trail, an Indian footpath, between these two points. The National Road would later be an early-nineteenth century improvement of this route. Wahll's main intent is not

to show the construction of the Braddock Road as a campaign of the French and Indian War, but as the struggle of man “against the overwhelming forces of nature.” (p. 4) Utilizing the accounts of fifty-five participants and observers, Wahll follows Braddock’s army from debarkation at Alexandria, Virginia, across the Piedmont to their assembly-point at Fort Cumberland, through the construction of the wagon road and the army’s defeat by the French, and finally the retreat to Fort Cumberland. Sources include journals, diaries, letters, order books, and contemporary newspaper accounts. The introduction to the book contains background narration, brief biographical sketches of the chroniclers, and a very helpful chronology listing present place names.

Journey on the Forbidden Path: Chronicles of a Diplomatic Mission to the Allegheny Country, March-September, 1760 documents “a diplomatic effort to establish peace along the war-torn Appalachian frontier during the spring, summer, and fall of 1760.” (p. 1) With the impending defeat of French, the British around 1760 began scrambling to renew alliances with war-weary Indian nations along the frontier, especially in New York and Pennsylvania. Edited by Robert S. Grumet, *Journey on the Forbidden Path* retells a little-known episode of this process within the overall context of British-Native American diplomatic relations. Grumet documents this particular diplomatic mission through the use of council minutes, treaty speeches, correspondence, warrants, inventories, passports, journals, diaries, and other related documents, many published here for the first time.

The main body of the work consists of the journals and diaries of two men, Christian Frederick Post and John Hays. Post was an experienced frontier diplomat and Moravian missionary who was chosen by Pennsylvania Governor James Hamilton to accompany Teedyuscung, a Delaware chief who was the province’s official envoy, to a council of representatives of major Indian nations scheduled to be held in what is now Ohio in the summer of 1760. Hays, a Pennsylvania militia officer, was designated as Post’s bodyguard. Teedyuscung, Post, Hays, and eleven others chose as part of their route to reach this council what was called the “Forbidden Path.” This narrow trail was a strategic Native American link from the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley to the Susquehanna River. Members of the Iroquois Confederation strictly controlled this passage.

The party departed Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in early May 1760. They reached the Indian town of Canisteo in southern New York, when Mingo representatives warned them that the whites could not proceed any farther. Hays stated in his diary on May 27 that “if we came any farther they

Would Rost [roast] Us in the Fire.” (p. 65) Not desiring such a fate, Post and Hays headed back to Bethlehem, which they reached June 30, continuing to record observations in their journals along the way. Teedyuscung and the rest of the party attended the conference, held near present-day Niles, Ohio. He returned to Philadelphia on September 13 and announced to Governor Hamilton that the ten nations represented at the council had agreed to make peace with the British. In effect, though, Teedyuscung’s agreement did not have much meaning because a formal treaty had been signed at Fort Pitt on August 20 between other Indian representatives and the British. In spite of these agreements, frontier violence continued to rage. Within five years after Post and Hays returned from their journey, all of the Indian villages that they had described in their journals had been destroyed.

Both of these compilations are highly entertaining and readable, in addition to being useful for researchers. *Journey on the Forbidden Path* is a valuable companion to James H. Merrell’s recent study of British-Native American diplomacy, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), in which this expedition and its main participants are briefly discussed.

Douglas Kern Bosley, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

By Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution.*

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2000. Pp. 262, xxiv. Notes, Maps, Illustrations, Index. \$49.95 Cloth, \$18.95 Paper).

For about the last decade a growing literature on an Anglo-Atlantic world has led historians to a heightened appreciation of the links that bound together Britons on the mainland of North America and in the metropole into a common national identity. Eliga Gould’s treatment of public discussion about the relationship between the colonies and the imperial center is a sophisticated addition to this literature. His work uncovers a transatlantic conversation about British identity that, beginning with the assumption that the empire was an extension of the nation, ended with a growing consensus that all parts of the empire were emphatically not created equal. European Britons reached this conclusion, Gould argues, because all classes largely supported both the revenue-raising initiative that followed the French and Indian War and the military effort against

American independence. The war encouraged Britons to appreciate the differences between Americans and themselves. And the loss of the colonies prompted a reevaluation of the relationship between periphery and center that marked an end to the old understanding that colonies were an extension of the nation.

Gould argues that the British concept of the empire shifted at the time of the Seven Years' War, before which national European security had been based on maintaining the balance of power on the continent. For a variety of reasons — particularly resentment toward Hanover and a new appreciation for the strategic and commercial potential of America — British opinion came to embrace a “blue water vision” of national interest that necessitated a more hands-on policy toward the colonies. Gould maintains that, in part because of “passive” nature of British patriotism and also because of public spectacles, such as those brought forth by the English Militia Act of 1757, the public remained steadfast in their support for the wider war. Moreover, Britons supported efforts to raise revenues in the colonies, believing that the colonists were, like the vast majority of men and women, virtually represented in Parliament, and also because they owned the same obligations as did residents of the metropole. Both notions rested on the assumption that the colonists were, despite their provinciality, Britons — a notion the colonists themselves shared, although it had a different meaning in North America.

The Revolution hastened a reevaluation of these views, together with a reinterpretation of the relationship between Britain and its imperial possessions. At home, government-sponsored demonstrations of national unity either muted dissent or turned the “Friends of America” into “Friends of Government.” Gould plays down voices of opposition in England, such as the County Associations of 1780, arguing that they were more moderate than have hitherto been judged. More important, even these critics could barely conceive of the severing of ties between America and England; both the government and its detractors remained committed to a “blue-water” conception of the British Empire. But as the war dragged on several factors eroded the concept of a transatlantic British identity, the most important being the failure of the crown to enforce its authority in the colonies. Moreover, the government increasingly treated with the Americans less as rebels than as a legitimate foreign power. And as Britons reflected on the fact of American independence, they reassessed both the scope of Parliament's authority in the colonies and the Britishness of imperial possessions. Parliament's diminished capacity to legislate for the colonies came to be accepted while its supremacy at home went uncon-

tested. And as the British reflected on their remaining imperial possessions — Bengal in particular — they came to appreciate the empire's racial and cultural diversity. While still a "British" empire, it was never to be British in quite the same way it was before 1783.

The evidentiary base of *The Persistence of Empire* rests upon Gould's close reading of over nine hundred political pamphlets published in Great Britain and the colonies from the 1740s through the Revolution. Though he mines other sources, including manuscripts, petitions, and political cartoons (the last of which are very usefully displayed throughout the book), his understanding of British opinion toward the colonies emerges from his reading of the pamphlets. Grounded in the approach of J. G. A. Pocock, Gould insists that we appreciate the contexts in which this literature was read on both sides of the Atlantic so that we might attain an understanding of what these texts could have meant to their readers. Gould pulls this off in jargon-free and even lucid style, and he takes some pains to reinforce his assertions about popular attitudes with non-elite sources and insights from social history. Nevertheless, Gould is often a bit breezy in his insistence that Britons across the social spectrum actively or passively endorsed the government's policies toward the colonies. His sources largely reflect elite and middle-class metropolitan opinion; with ordinary folk (whom, he asserts, also supported Westminster) he is on shakier ground. Nevertheless, *The Persistence of Empire* is a fresh, well-written, and valuable addition to the growing literature on the Anglo-Atlantic world.

Daniel Kilbride, *John Carroll University*

By Joseph R. Fischer, *A Well-Executed Failure: The Sullivan Campaign against the Iroquois, July-September 1779.*

(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997. Notes, Bibliography, Illustrations, Index, x, 265pp. Cloth \$29.95)

In 1779, George Washington ordered General John Sullivan to lead a force of 4,000 Continental soldiers against the British-allied Iroquois Indians of western New York. Sullivan's invasion of Iroquois country that summer involved the Continental Army's largest commitment of men and resources to the northern theater of the war since the Battle of Saratoga. The Iroquois proved to be an elusive enemy. Most abandoned their homes before Sullivan's troops arrived, and Continental soldiers engaged Iroquois warriors in only one small battle near the Delaware village of Newtown. Nevertheless, the Sullivan campaign destroyed over forty Seneca and Cayuga towns and forever altered the fate of the Iroquois in the United States,

branding them enemies of the republic and giving the federal government pretense to treat them as a conquered people at war's end.

In *A Well-Executed Failure*, military historian Joseph R. Fischer takes a new approach to this familiar story, treating the Sullivan campaign as an opportunity to evaluate the performance of the Continental Army at midwar. The book is organized topically in chapters that analyze the campaign's strategy, tactics, logistics, leadership, and civilian relations. In all of these categories, Fischer finds that by 1779 the Continental Army was exhibiting the organization, discipline, and adaptability that would eventually enable it to defeat the British. Fischer emphasizes the unique challenges that a campaign into Indian country presented for the Continental Army. Far removed from eastern population centers and transportation routes, Sullivan's army had to extend its supply lines beyond the limits considered acceptable at the time. Sullivan also had to deal with spoiled provisions, uncooperative local civilians, and a lack of militia support from Pennsylvania. Continental regulars had to adjust to the demands of woodland warfare, which relied on mobility and speed rather than the siege tactics typically employed by European armies. In the end, this was a campaign undertaken by professional soldiers pursuing very unprofessional objectives; in Fischer's words, "Washington did not envision Sullivan's expedition as anything more than a large-scale raid." (58)

While Fischer remains aware of the Iroquois throughout his narrative, this book is most decidedly an institutional study of the Continental Army rather than an ethnohistory of European-Indian conflict during the Revolutionary War. Fischer's focus on the professionalism exhibited by Sullivan's troops adds depth to the conclusions of Charles Royster, Don Higginbotham, and other military historians who have studied the Continental Army's evolution over the course of the war. However, Fischer deals only tangentially with what may have been the Sullivan campaign's most significant legacy in American military affairs: the precedent it set for waging war against Native Americans. As Fischer notes at several points, the Sullivan campaign was the Continental Army's first Indian expedition. Washington willingly abandoned European notions of "limited warfare" (141) when he ordered Sullivan to burn Iroquois villages and crops and to take as many Iroquois prisoners as possible. Such scorched-earth tactics created a large Iroquois refugee population that suffered tremendously during the harsh winter of 1779-80. One hundred years later, Civil War hero General William T. Sherman, no stranger himself to Indian fighting, endorsed Sullivan's methods as necessary measures against an enemy who would "oppose this great advancing tide of civilization." (192)

This book notes that link between Sullivan and Sherman but does not elaborate enough upon it to explain fully the legacy that the Sullivan expedition left for Native Americans.

Timothy J. Shannon, *Gettysburg College*

By James A. Lewis, *Neptune's Militia: The Frigate South Carolina during the American Revolution*.

(Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1999. Pp. ix, 235. Appendix, Bibliography, Notes, Index. Cloth \$39.00)

This book is, above all else, a biography of a ship. The subject is the *South Carolina*, "the largest man-of-war under American command during the American Revolution, carrying 550 men when fully manned" (1). The story of the ship began in the diplomatic efforts of the Continental Congress in France, where Benjamin Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee searched for sea power with which to defend the new republic. The American commissioners signed a contract with a French naval officer and engineer, Jacques Boux, who built the ship, first called *L'Indien*, in Amsterdam. When it became clear that the Americans could not afford the vessel, the French government took charge and eventually granted control to Anne-Paul Emmanuel Sigismond de Montmorency, the Chevalier de Luxembourg, who in turn made a three-year agreement with Alexander Gillon, a multi-lingual Charleston merchant of Scottish parentage and Dutch birth, who had been sent by the state of South Carolina to Europe to procure a naval vessel. Summarizing the ship's accomplishments under Commodore Gillon, Lewis writes that she "captured nearly a dozen prizes, took New Providence (in partnership with the Spanish) from the British, refitted in Philadelphia, fought off numerous efforts by envious bureaucrats to give her to someone else, and ended her career in battle with three British cruisers off Long Island. While she had a short life by modern standards, the ship's career was eventful and significant." (2). In writing the biography of the ship, Lewis demonstrated two of the greatest strengths of the old-fashioned maritime history: impressively wide-ranging research and clear, vigorous, and engaging writing.

No small portion of the tale's drama came from the international intrigue that surrounded the vessel from its beginning until well past its end. The building of the ship mobilized British spies in Amsterdam who worried that the powerful new warship under construction was meant to be used against them. Once Gillon got the *South Carolina* to sea, he fought bitterly with a group of gentlemen passengers, patriots like himself, about

the routes, purposes, and leadership of the ship. After the vessel was captured by the British in December 1782, sailors and their families wrangled with the government of South Carolina for wages, pensions, and their rightful share of prize money. Soon followed a tidal wave of other claims, as merchants, lawyers, agents, and governmental officials from France, Spain, Russia, Portugal, and Holland descended on Charleston, all demanding to be paid for credit here. The final claims on the ship were not settled until 1856. Lewis has reconstructed the ship's complex international financial affairs with patience and skill.

However, *Neptune's Militia* demonstrates one of the main weaknesses of the old maritime history. Although the book's title and jacket promise discussion of the "citizen-sailor" in the age of Revolution, and although Lewis announces in his introduction a concern with the "polyglot crew recruited in some of the most cosmopolitan ports of the Atlantic" (3) — the English, French, German, Dutch, Irish, American, and African-American sailors and marines who manned the *South Carolina* — the promise proves false and the concern proves limited: Lewis does not draw upon the rich social and cultural history of seafarers that have been written in recent years, nor does he attempt any serious analysis of the workers aboard the *South Carolina*. This is especially unfortunate because their resistance, expressed through desertion, conspiracy, and mutiny, constitutes one of the most important themes of the book.

In the end the *South Carolina* proves too frail a vessel for the author's ambitions. Lewis understates the case when he says that the *South Carolina* exhibited a certain "lack of ferocity" in its naval campaigns (105). It captured fewer than a dozen prizes, a pitifully small number for a ship of such size and firepower. Moreover, it is difficult to understand by the evidence presented how Lewis can claim in his ultimate sentence that the *South Carolina* "performed astounding feats during the war" (134). The only thing truly astounding about the ship was the differential between the mammoth expense in building and operating it and its paltry military results. It is also hard to accept the author's positive reassessment of Gillon's naval career. Although Lewis has researched and told his story well, he cannot quite overcome previous interpretations of Gillon as a flawed minor figure and the *South Carolina* a huge waste of time, energy, and money.

Marcus Rediker, *University of Pittsburgh*

By Edward L. Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*.

(New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. viii, 290, Notes, Index. Cloth \$29.95)

Edward L. Widmer has written an enjoyable book about Young America and its main spokesman, John L. O'Sullivan, that has little to do with the growth of either democracy or the Democracy (the Democratic Party) in New York City. It is a relatively old-style book that is reminiscent of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s, *The Age of Jackson*, in that it over-emphasizes the influence of the intellectual in politics. Its partisan prejudices are also stated without apology. But then Widmer was trained in American Literature at Harvard and is employed as a speech writer by Bill Clinton. The central chapters of the book tell the interesting story of a circle of artists and writers in New York, centered around the *Democratic Review* and its editor O'Sullivan, and their attempt to democratize American culture. But the over-arching focus of the book is O'Sullivan himself and the Young America movement.

Widmer is not an academic historian, but a student of literature and the arts. The focus of his revisionism is more Perry Miller than Merle Curti. Actually, his targets are usually unidentified textbook writers and what is significantly conventional wisdom. Unfortunately he tends to exaggerate what are reasonable arguments and create straw men that remind one of Schlesinger — reactionary Whigs. That the opposition called themselves the "Democratic Whigs," and that there were "Young Whigs," and many of the writers he talks about (and some very good ones he doesn't) were politically, Whigs, seems to roll off his back like water on a duck. The central chapters, in which he discusses the literary-politico thrust of Young America are both well-written and instructive. I had known little about William Sidney Mount and the American Art Union or the Library of American Books. Evert Duyckinck I remembered, only because I could never figure out how to pronounce his name. Widmer treats these men lovingly and convincingly argues that they did wish to bring art to the masses. Young America was a group of literary democrats. But even here in his favorite chapters he exaggerates. He is too interested in fighting current culture wars about the "canon."

Widmer likes his dead white men and tries too hard to make them all Young Americans. Hawthorne was a party hack who wrote a campaign biography of his college chum, Franklin Pierce. Melville was a long-time clerk in the New York customs office. But Widmer tries too hard to turn these political Democrats into ideological democrats. He is constantly

acknowledging yet trying to forgive the racist and proslavery views of his main characters. Widmer need not worry so much. He writes as if he is speaking for the mind of a generation, but it is a pretty small circle of intellectuals. They are fascinating. But he should have gone beyond Poe's "Literati" to people like Mary Gove Nichols, who dabbled in things such as free love, and whose lover and second husband, Thomas Low Nichols, was very much like O'Sullivan in his political views. Both became Confederate sympathizers.

The shell of the book is about O'Sullivan. It begins with the man who coined the term Manifest Destiny and wanted to write a partisan journal that gave a democratic view of literature as well as the Democratic party line. The main argument Widmer makes is that what most of us think of as Young America was two different groups connected by phases in John O'Sullivan's life. So he postulates two Young Americas: I and II. Widmer likes the first, but not the second; and he has written this book in the hope that he can keep future scholars from confusing the two. Young America I represented the vigor of the new democracy and embraced American culture in the early 1840s. Young America II included that weird, wild-eyed grab any island you can, but especially Cuba, imperialism of the 1850s.

This is a very leaky boat. First of all Widmer is writing about O'Sullivan, who belonged to both Young Americas and more. Secondly, what Widmer is trying to argue involves the small number of people he writes about who are never well defined, although they seem to be those connected to the *Democratic Review* when O'Sullivan was editor. But matters become difficult when Widmer tries to include in Young America every creative writer O'Sullivan had some connection with. Like scholars of socialist movements in America, Widmer is attuned to the factions within a very small group of people. The reason that most historians miss a division he considers crucial is that it is not crucial at all to those of us who want to write about Young America in general.

When Widmer generalizes he is overly expansive. He writes as though everyone who was young in 1840 believed what he vaguely calls "Jacksonian Democracy." Yet, throughout the 1840s and early 1850s, there were almost as many Whig as Democratic voters. O'Sullivan did not elect Polk. The schemes of Young America — other than the Mexican War which Widmer would disown — never came to fruition because they never could muster a majority in Congress. He underrates the complicity of literary and artistic intellectuals in Young America I and overstates their departure from Young America II. Great artists like Hawthorne and Melville cannot be pigeonholed with those who at one time or another had parti-

san sympathies like their own. And the wild-eyed crazies on Cuba were there from the beginning. (Jefferson had been one several decades earlier). The question Widmer does not even attempt to analyze was the relation of Young America, in any form, to larger currents of nationalism as is usually conceived.

William G. Shade, *Lehigh University*

By Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century.*

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999. Pp. xxvii, 321, Appendix, Notes, Index. Cloth \$30.00)

For years, cultural history has been obsessed with the changing character of American taste. This has been the story of trickling up and down, and barriers between taste levels, rising and falling. It has also been the tale of the battle between tastemakers — especially the competition between intellectuals and commercial interests. As expected, Michael Kammen provides a fair, balanced, and solidly researched interpretation of this vast and controversial subject.

Although this book is a series of essays rather than a tightly argued historical narrative, Kammen gives us far more than his “take” on the accumulated literature. He makes a persuasive case that we need to reassess our use of terms — “popular” and “mass” culture in particular. We need to recognize that a popular culture (particular and often participatory) can exist in a commercial setting while mass culture (widely disseminated across ethnic and class lines and relatively passive) became dominant only after 1960, much later than often supposed. In contrast to numerous specialized studies of mass and consumer culture, Kammen finds a complex transition from the 1880s and the 1960s. Traveling salesmen and general stores coexisted with mass advertising and department stores until the 1950s just as clubs and diversity in radio programming survived alongside the privacy and passivity engendered by Hollywood and the networks. Kammen agrees with the Left that mass consumer culture is as much a product of commercial manipulation as the rise of wages and desires. But he finds that a proto-mass culture emerged out of innovations as diverse as syndicated comic strips in the early 1900s, licensed movie character merchandizing in the 1930s, the standardization of processed foods, and the shortening but intensification of fads. TV, of course, was a major transition toward full-blown mass culture but so were shopping malls. Even the age of mass culture has been a time of rising tourism and segmented consumption.

While Kammen agrees with other scholars that taste lines hardened after the 1870s and that taste levels have mixed and blurred since 1960, he rejects any simple causation. A central theme is shifting attitudes of intellectuals towards high and low culture, the threat and possibilities of mixed taste levels for democracy. While Kammen acknowledges the elitism of many cultural critics in the first half of this century, he also recognizes that "some of our cultural heritage seems to be headed for extinction." (p. 46) The repeated insistence that American taste could be stratified (by Russell Lynes and others) in the 40s and 50s only disguised a subtle trend toward homogenization, symbolized best perhaps in the marriage of Marilyn Monroe to Arthur Miller in 1956. Still, Kammen is correct to note the long history of mixed and blended "brow" from the days of P. T. Barnum through Walt Disney and Frank Capra to Benny Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall concert.

Kammen offers a number of explanations for this blurring of the boundaries of taste. He notes the declining influence of "cultural authority," those academic and cultivated tastemakers who have been displaced by the obscurantist and relativistic advocates of postmodernism. This trend has reinforced popular distrust of "snobs" and reduced contacts between intellectuals and educated middle-class culture consumers. Probably most important is the rise of entertainment, mass consumption, public relations, and advertising industries that have tipped the balance toward "cultural power." These industries, devoted to ephemeral and immediately accessible products, combined with a newly dominant ethos of public opinion to undermine traditional cultural authority. Despite the laments of cultural critics like Clement Greenberg and Irving Kristol, nothing could stop the blending of high and low in an apparent downward push. Profits and the pressure of advertising agencies for maximum audiences drove the process. As a result, today cultural authority has shifted to relatively untrained media celebrities like Laura Schlessinger or Oprah Winfrey.

In the end, Kammen takes a rather pessimistic view. While he acknowledges the ways by which consumers filter, interpret, and generally adapt mass-production to meet their needs, he is skeptical that "cultural resistance" really can counteract the trend toward passivity and homogenization. Instead, he sees, "an increase in cultural populism accompanied by a decline in elitism, but also a loss of guidance. . . . Amid a free enterprise ethos, power trumps authority." This is sad perhaps but, he concludes, "the situation is considerably less attractive in unfree societies." (p. 259)

The essay format allows for a free flow of ideas and themes across time and a vast bibliography, but it sometimes leaves the reader with a wish for more detail and analysis. Still, all who read this book will come away with a richer understanding of American Culture and delight in meeting such an erudite mind.

Gary Cross, *Pennsylvania State University*

By Jerry Bruce Thomas, *An Appalachian New Deal: West Virginia in the Great Depression.*

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998. Pp. x, 316, Photographs, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Cloth \$36.95)

In spite of its shortcomings, the *New Deal*, argues Jerry Bruce Thomas in this balanced account of the Great Depression in the Mountain State, "met desperate needs" (234) through beneficial federal intervention. By making the situation bearable for many West Virginians, Franklin Roosevelt's activist government represented a much needed response to an unprecedented crisis and created institutions to deal with economic and social upheavals. It also allowed for existing structures, notably the United Mine Workers of America, a weak, ineffective union in the 1920s, to develop into the powers that they became a decade later. These new or revitalized entities "modernized" West Virginia and precipitated the creation of a more bureaucratic, corporate state.

Thomas' favorable portrait of the New Deal in Appalachia takes issue with Paul Salstrom's *Appalachia's Path to Dependency* (1994). By claiming that high governmental relief payments undermined subsistence agriculture by making farmers dependent on cash incomes, Salstrom sees Roosevelt's program as detrimental to Appalachia. Moreover, he claims that the National Recovery Administration's (NRA) policies hurt the southern coal producers' ability to compete with their northern counterparts and added to the long-term decline of the industry in the state. Thomas answers by arguing that over fifty years of ecological damage, the result of mining and timber harvesting, coupled with the lack of scientific farming on an already stressed land base, rendered West Virginia's land exhausted by the 1920s. In fact, Thomas asserts that many farmers, long before the depression, had relied on nonfarm work to gain the cash needed to survive. "Only from the perspective of cashlessness," Thomas adds, could relief payments be considered "high" (128). In defense of the NRA, Thomas states that it resuscitated a "moribund coal industry" and "achieved reform goals that had seemed impossible at the beginning of the decade." (110).

None of these accomplishments detracts from the New Deal's faults. While the NRA failed to effect a real economic recovery, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) concentrated on the problems faced by commercial and middle-class farmers and largely ignored the state's sharecroppers, tenants, and subsistence farmers. In keeping with his corporate theme, Thomas attributes this focus on the fact that these wealthier landowners had close contact with interest groups including the national Farm Bureau Federation and the Extension Service. Through these institutions, West Virginia's landed elite exercised their voice and promoted their needs to the government.

One of the New Deal's most significant problems in West Virginia, however, did not originate in the nation's capital, but in the state's. Along with Roosevelt's electoral success in 1932, West Virginia experienced a political realignment. The state's voters banished the pro-business Republicans that dominated the 1920s, only to replace them with fiscally and socially conservative Democrats — "reluctant" New Dealers or "statehouse" Democrats as Thomas calls them. It is in his analysis of the complicated interplay between those emerging interest groups, the statehouse Democrats, and the "federal," pro-New Deal Democrats, led by U.S. Senator Matthew Neely, that the book particularly shines. With his interest in state politics and its importance in the administration of federal programs, Thomas' study complements recent trends in depression-era scholarship.

Party unity did not follow the ascension of the Democrats. The statehouse faction recoiled from what it considered the New Deal's intrusion upon the state's prerogatives while it sought to control the money and political good will generated by the influx of federal dollars. (Ironically, Thomas points out that West Virginia's Republican leaders of the 1920s more readily embraced an activist government, albeit on the side of business and industry, than the state's Democrats.) Underlying the conservatism of the statehouse division was West Virginia's Tax Limitation Amendment passed in 1932. This constitutional provision provided individual citizens with property tax relief, but also denied the state substantial revenue because it also cut corporate taxes significantly. Consequently, the state failed to provide the matching funds required to participate fully in federal relief programs. Nor would West Virginia go into debt to secure the necessary money. Instead it adopted a series of regressive taxes on such items as food and prescription medications that further injured those least able to pay. In addition to restricting the funding of relief measures, the new tax arrangement led to the systemic underfunding of the state's educational system and infrastructure. This, along with the shift to alterna-

tive energy sources, mechanization, and overproduction in the coal industry, transformations that had nothing to do with the New Deal, Thomas concludes, contributed to the continued impoverishment of mountaineers after World War II.

In this age of welfare reform, some may challenge Thomas's positive view of governmental activism. Others will ask for a more comprehensive look at the close association between corporations and New Dealers that framed a conservative reform agenda in the 1930s. Still, Thomas' account of the Great Depression in West Virginia is a welcome edition to the historiography both of the New Deal and of Appalachia.

Thomas Kiffmeyer, *Morehead State University*

By Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong*.

(N. Y.; New York: Lipper/Viking, 1999. Pp. xix, 188, Notes, Cloth \$19.95)

Jonathan Spence is a distinguished Yale University specialist on China. In his latest book, he has tackled the life and times of one of the dominant figures of the twentieth century, Mao Zedong. Spence's strength is the ability to explore extensive data and to express his conclusions in a well-integrated narrative accessible to non-specialists. This is not to say that specialists in modern China would not benefit from reading this volume; rather Spence can speak both to those familiar and unfamiliar with the subject. He seamlessly incorporates newly available sources with more familiar material into a thematically organized book which is short, and readable, yet covers more than just the basic facts.

Mao Zedong was born in 1893 and died in 1976. His picture still dominates Tiananmen Square in Beijing, and his legacy is still debated within China and without. Spence begins with the statement: "Mao's beginnings were commonplace, his education episodic, his talents unexceptional; yet he possessed a relentless energy and a ruthless self confidence that led him to become one of the world's most powerful rulers." (xi) The explanation of this complex statement is the gist of the book. Spence details the contradictions in Mao's personality and policies, yet notes that only his physical weakness brought him down. Therefore, one theme in this work is to demonstrate how Mao gained his position of power and maintained it for so long. Mao in his lifetime achieved a cult of personality, and maintained a status approaching the mythic.

One of the contradictions which Mao initiated and sustained was that in order to change China, even after a long period of war and civil

turmoil, he encouraged, "order's opposite." (xii) In Mao's view only continuous political and social upheaval, directed from the center, could prevent a return to a traditional system other than the communist revolution. This concern explains the many campaigns against the "evils" associated with society prior to its control by the Chinese Communist Party. Mao emerged from a period of nearly constant upheaval and war; his policies in this context are almost understandable. Yet they form an interesting juxtaposition to the traditional Chinese assumption that the role of a government is to create order and stability.

In Mao's lifetime China changed from a technologically backward, foreign dominated country with a high degree of illiteracy to a modern, respected nation. The price of such a transformation was high. Mao, removed from much of the turmoil he created, willingly paid that price. The Chinese people are still reckoning the cost. Mao's role in this transformation is still debated; the general Chinese assessment is that his actions were seventy percent good, and thirty percent harmful. "Mao Zedong Thought," an adaptation to Chinese circumstances of Marxist-Leninist ideology, is still recognized in the constitution as integral to the functioning of the government and society of the Peoples Republic of China. Yet it is no longer actively used, except in intra-party debates, by the present government. Mao remains a complex and controversial figure; his legacy is equally controversial.

Spence tries to make accessible Mao's thoughts as evidenced in letters, essays, reports, journals, and the writings of others. He is succinct; he presents his picture without apparent bias to develop an understanding of a controversial and powerful figure. He is academically rigorous with detail or unfamiliar terminology. These characteristics are the hallmark of Spence's work.

Katherine K. Reist, *University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown*