

## BOOK REVIEWS

*David Stradling. *The Nature of New York: An Environmental History of the Empire State.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010. Pp. xi, 277. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographic essay, index. Cloth, \$29.95.)*

Scholars knowledgeable in the literature of environmental history will find much of *The Nature of New York* conventional. David Stradling surveys the entire scope of New York State's history and illuminates the role the natural environment played in the state's political, social, and cultural history, from the time of the first Dutch settlement up to the present. In a work that is arranged topically but told in a roughly chronological fashion, Stradling effectively demonstrates the ways in which New York epitomized different approaches to the environment, from the importance of the market and the profit motive in "taming" the land, to the role that New Yorkers played in fostering cultural appreciation for nature and the sublime through the novels of James Fenimore

Cooper and the paintings of the Hudson River School, to the influence of New York in conservation and environmental politics during the twentieth century. Although Stradling draws upon primary sources most scholars will recognize, his command and synthesis of the growing secondary literature is impressive and adds much to his study. Moreover, he writes in an engaging and lively style that makes this work accessible to the popular as well as the academic reader.

Stradling is at his best when he illustrates the ways in which industrialization and deindustrialization shaped the urban environments of New York. The creation of the Erie Canal fostered explosive rates of urban growth and industrial development that transformed the cities of New York State. Densely packed industrial and manufacturing districts gradually created more residentially segregated cities, with the poorest urbanites living in the worst environmental conditions. As Progressive reformers like George Waring and Jacob Riis sought to involve the government in improving public health and transforming the urban environment, many upper- and middle-class city residents fled the cities altogether. The rapid growth of suburban settlement caused its own environmental problems (most infamously the settlement of the Love Canal region of Niagara Falls), while the urban exodus also exacerbated the poor conditions of the cities, leaving behind deindustrialized brownfields and a deteriorating infrastructure. These developments diversified the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s as the urban crisis and environmental crisis became tied together in the minds of many working-class and poor city residents.

Although cities may be the most famous part of the Empire State's landscape, true to the purpose of the work Stradling also examines other areas of the state. He discusses in depth the fate of agriculture in New York: the rise of market farming and scientific methods of agriculture "had helped make farmers wealthier, but they had also become more vulnerable" (64). Despite the reliance on expertise and "scientific agriculture" advocated by Andrew Jackson Downing and others, farmers found themselves in a precarious financial position by the end of the nineteenth century. The decline of agriculture continued in the twentieth century, despite the best efforts of conservation-minded governors like Franklin Roosevelt, and Stradling notes the trend of reforestation of much of what used to be farmland. Today, only seven million acres in the state are devoted to agriculture, with many upstate counties suffering from dramatic declines in the number of working farms.

Similarly, the recreational landscapes of New York State receive a great deal of attention. Stradling describes the ways in which nature and culture interacted. In the romantic celebration of sublime landscapes and the rise of natural tourism in places like the Hudson River Valley, the Catskills, and the Adirondacks, Stradling detects the first stirrings of a preservationist mentality among New Yorkers. This popularly held attitude would never fully disappear and could be glimpsed even in the rhetoric of the environmental and historic preservation activists of the 1960s and 1970s who led the successful protest over the installation of a Con Ed pumped-water storage facility on Storm King Mountain in the Hudson River Valley.

For environmental historians, Stradling's greatest contribution with this book is the notion that place matters. He acknowledges he partially wrote this book to demonstrate the utility of using "a state as a unit of study" when so much of environmental history eschews political boundaries in favor of regions or ecosystems (6). Stradling's monograph places New York State firmly at the center of many of the themes that concern environmental historians, and he shows how so much of the political, social, and cultural history of New York was dependent upon environmental conditions, both locally as well as statewide. "Every place has a story," Stradling writes, and he tells New York State's story exceptionally well (241).

JOSHUA BRITTON

*Lehigh University*

George M. Fredrickson. *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. xi, 156. Notes, index. Cloth, \$19.95.)

Abraham Lincoln's positions on race and slavery remain a persistent tension for any student of Lincoln. Was Lincoln the Great Emancipator or was he an opportunistic white supremacist? The best answer is that Lincoln was wholly neither and yet, to an extent, he was both. Into this contentious arena comes distinguished historian George M. Fredrickson, in this publication of his 2006 W.E.B. DuBois Lectures at Harvard University. Regrettably for the