

# Book Reviews

## HUBERT H. HUMPHREY: THE POLITICS OF JOY.

By Charles L. Garrettson III.

(New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1993. 372 p. Cloth, \$34.95.)

Charles L. Garrettson's purpose in this study of Hubert H. Humphrey's political philosophy and career is to assess the possibilities of applying principles of religious morality to the practice of politics. While presenting a systematic assessment of some of the principles underlying Humphrey's long political career, however, the author fails to persuade the reader that Humphrey was as religiously motivated as is claimed here or, more specifically, that he was a conscious practitioner of the Social Gospel.

The book focuses on particular episodes in Humphrey's life in an effort to illuminate his religious beliefs in action: his boyhood in Doland, South Dakota; his love affair with the New Deal; the 1948 speech at the Democratic national convention that launched him into the national spotlight; the story of his role in the passage of the momentous 1964 Civil Rights Act; and, finally, the ordeal of the vice-presidency and the culminating crisis of the 1968 election. Little attention is given to the final decade of his life. Throughout, Garrettson relies heavily on Humphrey's autobiography, *The Education of a Public Man*, and other published sources, but there are also references to the Humphrey papers at the Minnesota Historical Society, as well as frequent quotations from interviews the author conducted with friends and associates of the late senator.

The two most troubling aspects of the book are the frequency with which simplistic assertions are offered to explain Humphrey's actions and, annoying even to a reader who is a strong admirer, the pervasive pro-Humphrey bias. One especially simplistic explanation, often repeated, is that the sense of "community" ingrained in Humphrey as a boy led directly to his career-long commitment to making the federal government pay attention to civil rights and social-welfare issues. Moreover, when Garrettson makes the point that "Humphrey often spoke fondly of the Judeo-Christian tradition," he could be describing virtually any practicing politician in the United States. At too many points, the author strains to portray his subject as a theological thinker, even though he concedes that the man did not "necessarily under[stand] his political career in the formal terms of a religious calling."

Undeniably, Humphrey (like all post-New Deal liberal Democrats) was idealistic in his vision of the possibilities of

American democracy, but Garrettson does not succeed here in making his case that the senator was directly descended from Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel movement. More persuasive, however, is the author's analysis of the similarities between Humphrey's thinking and political approach, particularly on foreign-policy issues, and that of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr; the title of the chapter containing that discussion, "The Near Christian Realist," is probably the most precise theological label that can be placed on Humphrey from the evidence presented in this book.

Garrettson's unqualifiedly sympathetic treatment of Humphrey leads to several distortions. In defending the vice-president's views on the Vietnam War, for example, the author presents a tortured argument that it was Humphrey—not the antiwar Democrats—who adhered to the "authentic" liberal position and who, in supporting the war, was truly "keeping up with" public opinion. At other points, Garrettson overemphasizes Humphrey's principled loyalty to explain his conduct while vice-president, underplaying the importance of Lyndon Johnson's intimidation and control, as well as Humphrey's own overweening ambition to become president. Similarly, Garrettson largely omits dealing with Humphrey's role in launching the Americans for Democratic Action and in the anticommunist (and anti-civil-libertarian) legislation of 1950 and 1954—two episodes that give little support to the Social Gospel theme.

With several pages of admiring statements by former Humphrey colleagues, Garrettson concludes that Humphrey reflected the "fullest 'integrity' that can be fairly expected in reference to religion and polities" in the American context. This verdict may go beyond what many readers will accept, but the study effectively reinforces the image of Humphrey as an admirable public servant, motivated by idealistic faith in the political process and by commitment to the principle of equality of all human beings. If Garrettson does not succeed in presenting Humphrey as the quintessential practitioner of the Social Gospel in American politics, the author nevertheless demonstrates the possibilities—too infrequently realized—of putting idealistic moral principles into effect through pragmatic political action.

*Reviewed by Gary W. Reichard, chair of the history department at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, and the author of several works, including Politics as Usual: The Age of Truman and Eisenhower (1988). He is currently working on a biography of Hubert Humphrey.*

## **THE NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD AND THE SELLING OF THE WEST: A NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUBLIC RELATIONS VENTURE.**

*By Sig Mickelson.*

(Sioux Falls: Center for Western Studies, Augustana College, 1993. 232 p. Paper, \$17.95.)

This book is something of an academic oddity. First written in 1940 as a master's thesis in journalism at the University of Minnesota, it remained unpublished and inaccessible to scholars. Now available as the first work in the Prairie Plains Series of moderately priced but historically valuable books, Mickelson's study of the Northern Pacific Railroad's efforts to sell off its land grant and colonize the Great Northwest remains an important contribution to scholarship, despite the more than fifty years that elapsed between its writing and publication.

The Northern Pacific was both blessed and burdened with an enormous land grant, close to 50 million acres, the size of Ohio and Indiana combined. The road had to sell this land to settlers in order to finance its construction and create traffic for the line. This undertaking, stretching from 1870 to 1902, was both a business venture and an exercise in salesmanship, promotion, and propaganda.

Mickelson has not written a standard business history. The reader learns little about acquisitions and mergers, corporate organization, or strategy and structure. Nor is it a traditional railroad history, replete with the story of heroic construction feats and famous trains. Rather, it is a case study of commercial propaganda, a historical analysis of corporate advertising and promotion. The thesis was a pioneering effort, a first attempt to look at corporate sales techniques and an attempt to measure their effectiveness over a 30-year span of history.

The first six chapters offer a chronological treatment of the Northern Pacific's Land Department and Bureau of Immigration, structured around the railroad's checkered financial history. About every ten years the company collapsed in a spectacular fashion—in 1873 with the demise of the Jay Cooke empire, in 1883 with the end of the Henry Villard regime, and in the Panic of 1893. Each debacle brought an abrupt halt to the land-sales campaign. Alternating with these busts were boom periods, when advertising efforts were going full blast, offices were opened in Europe to push immigration, and land sales poured money into the railroad's treasury. Mickelson provides a solid, well-researched narrative of this on-again, off-again cycle of activity.

The final two chapters are quite different. Here Mickelson attempts to analyze the effectiveness of the land-sales efforts. Just how much did sales, promotion, and advertising really affect the tide of settlement that poured into Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Montana? The Northern Pacific utilized all the promotional techniques known to modern public-relations experts. It used paid agents for person-to-person contacts, placed extensive newspaper advertising, and gave free transportation to editors who printed favorable notices. It sent out a stream of direct-mail advertising; published magazines, pamphlets, and brochures; exhibited at fairs and trade shows; subsidized authors and postmasters; and sponsored excursions and lectures.

The railroad worked especially hard to counteract the widely held belief that the severe winters of the northern plains rendered them unsuitable for settlers. Skillful propaganda claimed that the weather was invigorating, with enough snowfall but not too much, and that the region had "one of the most healthful climates in the world." One executive candidly wrote in 1873, "Blink at it as we may, the question of climate... can only be overcome by convincing people that, in spite of the long and cold winters, they can live comfortably and make money on the... Northern Pacific road." It is Mickelson's conclusion that the "selling of the West" was indeed effective, and while it is most probable that the Northwest would have been settled even without the line's efforts, "the railroad hastened the flow of migration and directed that flow to conform to its own desires."

No book written in 1940 would be current with research trends of the 1990s, and Mickelson's work is no exception. Some of its research is dated, and many citations have been superseded by more recent scholarship. However, in one crucial area I must find fault, and the criticism is directed at Augustana's Center for Western Studies. In 1940 the Northern Pacific's archives were housed in a warehouse storage building, and Mickelson's citations refer to the filing system then in use. Today's scholars find that, thanks to the massive Burlington Northern archival project at the Minnesota Historical Society, the Northern Pacific records are now cataloged and easily accessible through modern finding aids. Likewise, the papers of the F. J. Haynes, the railroad's photographer whose images were central to the advertising campaign, are now cataloged and open for research at Montana State University in Bozeman. Augustana's editors have failed scholars by not bringing the bibliographical information up to date.

*Reviewed by Patrick B. Nolan, director of the Sam Houston Memorial Museum, Huntsville, Texas. With his wife Bobbe, he is writing a book on national-park concessions and railroad promotion of western tourism.*

## **HARD-PRESSED IN THE HEARTLAND: THE HORMEL STRIKE AND THE FUTURE OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT.**

*By Peter Rachleff.*

(Boston: South End Press, 1993. 135 p. Cloth, \$30.00; paper, \$12.00.)

The strike at the Hormel meat-packing plant in Austin, Minnesota, which lasted from August 1985 until April 1986, generated more active support around the United States and more controversy within the labor movement than any other labor struggle since the United Farm Workers' grape boycott of the 1960s. Although life in Austin had revolved around the company for generations, Hormel had not employed more than 1,750 workers since it opened its new plant in 1982. The company enjoyed the media image of a paternalistic firm paying relatively high wages in the bucolic setting of a small and virtually all-white town of homeowners. This was hardly the setting where one would have anticipated

the Reagan era's counterpart of the great Flint sit-down strike of 1937.

Nevertheless, when Peter Rachleff, an eminent labor historian at Macalester College in St. Paul, was elected chair of the Twin Cities P-9 Support Committee, he found in Austin the makings of a rebirth of the American labor movement. The style of struggle developed by the members of Local P-9 of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) and their families suggested to him that American working people would not prove to be helpless victims in an age of global economic restructuring and "lean-and-mean" management. The actions of Austin's men and women and many thousands who came to their aid; the largely forgotten historic precedents from their own town; the power mobilized by the company, regional business leaders, the state and federal governments, and their own international union to force the Hormel workers to accept the drastic deterioration of their working conditions demanded by the firm; and the lessons provided by the strike for participants in the many comparable battles that lie ahead are the topics of this informative and important book.

Like the strikes of the Pittston coal miners, the air-traffic controllers, the Greyhound bus drivers, the Phelps-Dodge copper miners, and the NYNEX telephone workers, the P-9 strike was produced by what Rachleff calls the "great u-turn" in corporate strategy that occurred between 1965 and 1975. A quarter century in which steady economic growth and pattern bargaining had generated an unprecedented improvement in living standards and stable, if not always harmonious, patterns of industrial relations gave way to decades of plant relocation, concession bargaining, and pursuit of the flexibility promised by a "union-free environment." The meat-packing industry was a pacesetter in this development, leading the officers of the UFCW to beat a "controlled retreat" in hopes of maintaining some union membership and control over an increasingly chaotic industry. Union officials concluded that resistance to Hormel's demands for drastic contract concessions at Austin was to choose "the wrong target at the wrong time."

Workers in the new plant had other ideas. Although most of them came from established Austin families, an ever-growing proportion had been hired after 1965, even in the last few years before the strike when the loss of incentive pay, the increasing intensity of work, and the epidemic of injuries in the high-tech installation had produced a new leadership in Local P-9. President Jim Guyette personified this new leadership, dedicated to everyday involvement by the rank-and-file in direct confrontations with management. In response to the company's demands for concessions, wives and husbands of workers had formed a United Support Group, which filled the Austin Labor Center with an endless round of community activities. These local activists invited labor organizer Ray Rogers to mobilize a corporate campaign against Hormel and the First Bank Systems; produced a vote of 93 percent to strike rather than accept the company's terms (and repeated such rejection at four subsequent votes); mobilized the support of thousands of local unions around the land through the Adopt-a-Family campaign and motorized caravans bringing food and other supplies; and demonstrated en masse against the company's efforts to reopen the plant.

Rachleff's detailed account of their actions is flanked by a history of the Independent Union of All Workers, which had organized Austin "wall-to-wall" and spread its style of union-

ism to 13 other towns between 1933 and 1937, and by a brief analysis of other forms of local solidarities and social unionism that have appeared since the defeat of P-9. In sharp contrast to Barbara Koppel's award-winning film, *American Dream*, which envelopes the Hormel strike in a message of futility, *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland* evokes P-9's reawakening of America's rich legacy of peoples' efforts to take their destiny into their own hands.

*Reviewed by David Montgomery, Farnam Professor of History at Yale University, who worked as a machinist in St. Paul during the 1950s and earned his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in 1962. Among his books on the history of American labor is Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market during the Nineteenth Century (1993).*

## TO BUILD IN A NEW LAND: ETHNIC LANDSCAPES IN NORTH AMERICA.

*Edited by Allen G. Noble.*

(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. 455 p.  
Cloth, \$65.00; paper, \$29.95.)

This timely book, focused on vernacular forms of small-town architecture and rural landscapes, addresses the current, rising interest in North America's multicultural history. In the complex immigration statistics that scholars so often cite the authors find unique groups of individuals, each with a different story to tell and contribution to make to North America's physical environment. Providing a much-appreciated focus on rural, rather than urban, settlement patterns, this collection is appropriate for the general public as well as the serious researcher.

The authors of the 22 essays successfully explain how the diverse ethnic cultures of North America created a diverse physical environment. Groups discussed range from the large population of Germans who settled in Ohio to the small, often overlooked communities of Acadians who settled in Maritime Canada. The Atlantic states and eastern region are well represented, but there is limited coverage of the western states and virtually none of the Pacific states. Of particular interest to midwestern readers and researchers are chapters addressing Belgians and Norwegians in Wisconsin, Danes in Iowa and Minnesota, Finns in the Lake Superior region, Czechs in South Dakota, German-Russian Mennonites in Manitoba, and Irish, English, and Scots in Ontario. In addition, the book looks at changes in the Native Americans' physical environment as a result of immigration.

The book's analysis of the degree to which these physical environments survive today brings history into the present. Such studies are useful to those involved in preserving ethnic landscapes. Diligent, carefully documented research supports these perspectives, resulting in a nice combination of facts and descriptive analysis. Not to be overlooked are the many wonderful maps, graphics, and photographs.

The book's introduction performs the essential role of setting the context for the period of immigration that the chapters study. It discusses the differences and similarities among

the ethnic groups and regions, something not possible in smaller works addressing just one group or region. My only addition would have been a clear definition of "vernacular" with regard to architecture and landscapes, because the term is often misunderstood and used in many contexts.

*To Build in a New Land* is a large undertaking, and one book cannot address all of the geographic areas and ethnic groups of North America. For those covered, the reasons for migration and factors affecting settlement patterns are well defined, resulting in a clearer understanding of the physical environment in which we live. This book should be considered an excellent introduction to a vast subject, leaving the reader with an awareness of the phenomenal feats of immigrants to North America and an enthusiasm to learn more.

*Reviewed by Christine Taylor Thompson, currently at the Cottonwood County Historical Museum, who recently taught a course in historic preservation at Mankato State University. Before moving to southwestern Minnesota, she was the historic preservation planner for Eugene, Oregon.*

## AGRARIAN WOMEN: WIVES AND MOTHERS IN RURAL NEBRASKA, 1880-1940.

*By Deborah Fink.*

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. 242 p. Cloth, \$34.95; paper, \$12.95.)

In this study of women in Boone County, Nebraska, Deborah Fink explores the relationship between the reality of farm women's lives and the Jeffersonian legacy of agrarianism. According to Fink, between 1880 and 1940 agrarian ideology shaped public policy and rural people's values, and, from its beginnings, posited an unequal and subordinate role for women. Its primary effect has been to silence women and obscure their reality, even to themselves. Using historical sources and ethnographic approaches, Fink concludes that women's stories directly challenge the romanticized agrarian myth that still thrives in Boone County and other locales.

After an overview of the history of agrarianism and the settlement of Boone County, Fink examines women's lives as rural wives and mothers from settlement through the hard times of the Great Depression. Suppressed realities surface, exposing pasts that "contained more pain than they wanted to process." The underside of the agrarian ideology, the suppressed reality, is the world of women and the extreme hardship that the frontier and rural Nebraska represented for them.

Fink marshals a good deal of evidence that the Nebraska frontier and rural culture represented a uniquely inhospitable environment. Women were aghast at the stark environs. The settler generation faced all manner of misery: bleak, treeless plains, sod huts with snakes and collapsing roofs, wild winds and fires, unpredictable precipitation, poverty, and failure. This harsh environment combined with the market economy to create a social structure of considerable inequality. Poverty, social exclusion, and isolation marked the lives of some women. Those identified as "poor trash" felt the bruises of the not-so-hidden injuries of class. Powerless in relationship to public policy and similarly powerless in the arena of family and household, women's voices and choices shaped neither

public dialogue nor private life. Because of sparse settlement, women endured isolation that left them particularly vulnerable to emotional and physical abuse. Picking up the logic of John Mack Farragher in *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*, Fink argues men's civic and public life depended upon the release from labor made possible by exploiting the labor of women and children. Most painful to women was their inability to protect their children from the burdensome and destructive demands of farm production. Encouraging their children to flee farming became a key form of resistance.

The author's portrayal of life in rural Nebraska dramatically contrasts with what others have documented in the East and Midwest. Nancy Grey Osterud, for example, found that by promoting values of respect and mutuality, rural women in nineteenth-century New York modified both family and class relationships. Kinship systems in open-country communities and women's role in agricultural production provided the structural base for women's promotion of an ideology stressing equality and mutuality—a rural radicalism and a rural feminism that mitigated hierarchical social ideals, transformed agrarian republicanism into rural radicalism, and held back typical market social relations. Fink takes to task agrarians of all stripes—"modern agrarians," "feminist agrarians," and traditional agrarians—for allowing myth to obscure women's realities and for embracing what she sees as a variation of the romanticized agrarian ideology. Feminist-agrarian "reading of history owes more, I believe, to the spirit of present, than to a true reconstruction of women's lives." Fink argues that "women's full participation in production" is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for full participation in social life. This, she finds, is primarily because "the organization of labor within the nuclear family undermined its liberating potential." While women used their productive roles to promote an ethic of mutuality and equality elsewhere, the author suggests that women's economic responsibilities had the opposite effect in Nebraska.

It is unclear if Fink's critique of agrarian feminists is limited to Nebraska's history or includes rural women's history in general. Some of her remarks suggest rather sweeping implications from the Nebraska situation, although she also points out the structural conditions that set the plains experience apart: "When European-American women gained power through their farm production, they did so because particular geographic, economic, or social conditions allowed them to draw on resources from beyond the nuclear family." Aridity, poor soil, and sparse settlement are identified as the sources of the distinctly harsh circumstances that prevailed in Nebraska. No rural feminism undercut the existing hierarchy or stood as a bulwark against market social relations, both of which deeply penetrated rural family life in Nebraska. Women worried about their children's welfare and futures, but dominant men, more interested in farm production, silenced women and controlled family life. Both the market and patriarchy held a firm grip on rural Nebraska.

Fink's study reminds us of how difficult rural women's lives could be and that comforting ideologies that serve the interest of men may have profoundly different implications for women. She also draws attention to the potentially powerful impact that the physical environment may have on the quality of women's lives and their power in the public and private arena. Nonetheless, one wonders if the author did not dwell



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