

Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene. By John R. Stilgoe. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Pp. xiii, 397. Illustrations, figure, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

It is often said that railroads and the railroad industry were the chief agents of technical and social change in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Yet, few of the many books devoted to railroads venture far beyond the local right-of-way or the corporate boardroom; railroad literature is too often a myopic enterprise that deprives its subject of its broader significance.

Metropolitan Corridor is the antithesis of such literature. It provides a broad overview of the impact of railroads on American society from 1880 to 1930. John Stilgoe's focus is on all sides of the track as he attempts to show how the railroad shaped American concepts of travel and luxury, and how the technology born of the industry was the preeminent force in engineering and planning for more than half a century. Though the impact of the industry was broad, Stilgoe shows that it was gathered in force in the corridors that formed along the rail lines linking major American cities. These were avenues of civilization and progress, dominated by the machines that traversed them, governed by the electricity that provided power and manipulated communications, and peopled by a variety of actors ranging from the hobo to the construction engineer. Settlements apart from the corridor languished, while those situated along it, or linked to it by branch lines or interurbans received their food, news, and ideas almost solely from it.

Stilgoe ranges widely in his discussion of the corridor, considering such areas as electrical generation, factory design, trackside beautification, interurban railroads, popular literature, cinema, and trackside subcultures. His style is lucid and makes for enjoyable reading. His use of quotations from popular fiction adds much to the literary quality of the work, while also advancing his thesis, which is well argued in most areas of the book. It is only when Stilgoe leaves the corridor for the final two chapters that the work begins to weaken. These deal with the slow decline of New England hill towns not linked to the corridor and the decline of the railroad industry itself in the 1930s. While the chapter on the hill towns is well-written and informative, both still appear as a hasty and awkward coda to the book—perhaps because both subjects deserve studies unto themselves.

This is, however, a minor problem in a volume that deserves the attention of academic and amateur alike (it should be required reading for the rail buff with single track vision). Indianans who

remember the busy times along the New York Central and Pennsylvania Railroad lines that cut across the state will nod in agreement with much of this volume and in it will find an explanation for events and institutions that were a familiar part of everyday life only decades ago.

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Lee and Grant: A Dual Biography. By Gene Smith. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1984. Pp. xiv, 412. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$17.95.)

A dual biography of Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant is an exceptionally good idea. Very different in background, style, and personality, they became the principal military antagonists of the Civil War. As the author of this book suggests, in many ways each was typical of his cause: the aristocratic and anachronistic Old South, a strange mixture of gentility and brutality, versus the industrializing, rough-and-ready, egalitarian North. Admirably organized around the counterpoint suggested by its protagonists, the book traces their origins and careers. The author plays no favorites; an effort is made to characterize both men fully. A prolific and successful trade writer, Gene Smith writes very well. Granting all of these positive points, the book is significantly flawed.

In the first place, Smith relies entirely on secondary sources. Regardless of the general acceptability of this method, it appears that Smith has consulted them indiscriminately. (His imprecise method of footnoting adds to readers' doubts.) Thus, he has overlooked well-known authoritative historians (Bruce Catton and K. P. Williams, for example) and turned instead to such doubtful sources as W. E. Woodward and Sylvanus Cadwallader. The truth is that Smith is far from home in dealing with the military history of the Civil War. He has grabbed whatever was handy to advance his manuscript and apparently had neither the knowledge nor the time to evaluate his sources.

The author's research base shows up in a number of ways. For example, he accepts Cadwallader's account of Grant's binge during the Vicksburg campaign. Smith is presumably unaware of K. P. Williams's persuasive destruction of this story. He characterizes other Civil War personalities with dubious stereotypes. His treatment of General Henry Halleck, for example, shows that he has made no inquiry into the very complicated role of that very complex man.