

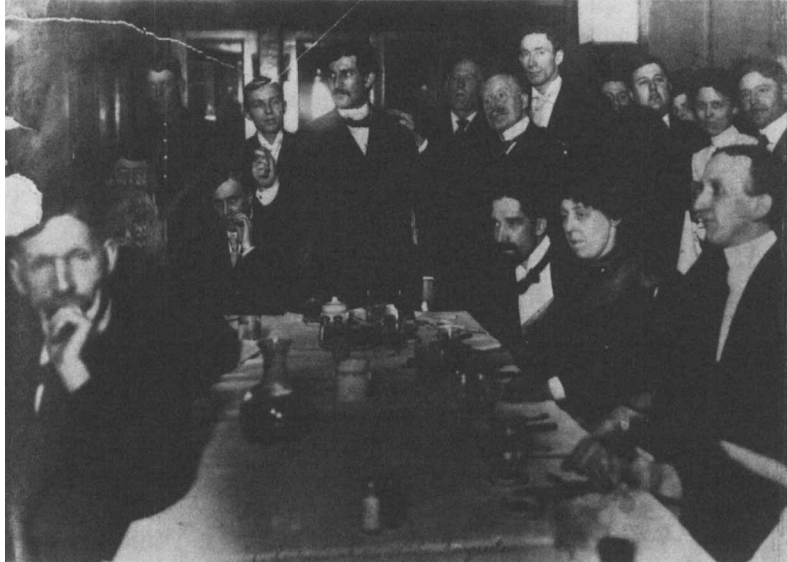
anyone take it away from me" (p. 67). With ample oral narratives of killings as macabre as any story written by Flannery O'Connor, Montell clearly demonstrates that the State Line country is a subregional culture that, within well-established limits, tolerated violence to maintain social order.

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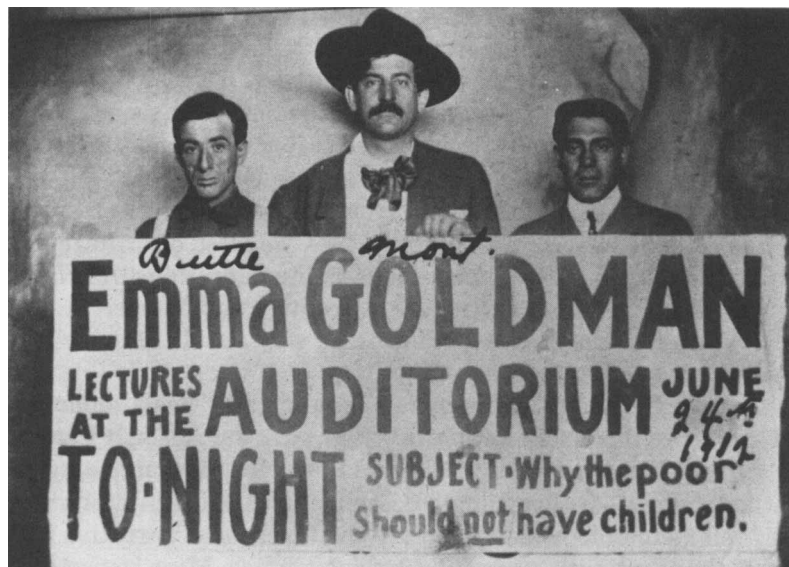
*The Damndest Radical: The Life and World of Ben Reitman, Chicago's Celebrated Social Reformer, Hobo King, and Whorehouse Physician.* By Roger A. Bruns. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. Pp. xi, 332. Illustrations, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$24.95.)

Benjamin Reitman lived in the dark shadow of the Progressive Era. Born in 1879, he ended his Chicago childhood abruptly when he jumped an eastbound freight and entered the hobo world. Despite frequent wandering, he managed to graduate from a Chicago medical college in 1904. Then in 1907, while on the road, he met James Eads How, whose St. Louis hobo college Reitman decided to imitate in Chicago with well-publicized results. A year later he met Emma Goldman, and for the next decade he was her road manager and lover. But he never became a part of the anarchist movement, which distrusted him as a crude-mouthed, publicity-seeking adventurer. Even Goldman's interest was limited to his crude attractiveness and helpfulness in handling her lecture tours. He neither influenced nor was influenced by the movement. He simply traveled with Goldman, his "blue-eyed Mommy." In 1912 he paid the price for his association with Goldman, however, when San Diego vigilantes—bankers and real estate salesmen—abducted him to the desert, stripped, injured, and humiliated him. After that he began to drift from the anarchists. In later life he advocated birth control (which led to two trials and imprisonment), continued the hobo college, medicated the Chicago crime syndicate's prostitutes, and in the 1930s supported a pioneering educational campaign against venereal disease. He died in 1942.

This is a "life and world" biography in which, one might say, the world obscures the life. Reitman was clearly interesting, but he did not lead, influence, nor report events. He was an arranger who knew how to publicize the hobo college and reserve Emma Goldman's hotel rooms. In his reform activities, humanitarianism, not ideology, drove him; expediency, not vision. To describe the world of some Progressive Era reformers through his life illuminates neither. Long chapters discuss events, but readers often learn only that Ben was somewhere nearby and little involved. We read



BEN L. REITMAN AT HEAD OF TABLE, HOSTING THE HOBO BANQUET, 1907



REITMAN, IN HAT, PUBLICIZING EMMA GOLDMAN LECTURE, 1912.

Courtesy of the University of Illinois at Chicago, The University Library, Department of Special Collections.

at length of the horrendous Ludlow Massacre in Colorado and learn that Ben later spoke to Denver's mayor. We read in detail of Chicago's literati gathering at the Dill Pickle Club and discover only that Ben was an argumentative patron. We read of a poison attempt at a banquet for Chicago's Cardinal Mundelein and learn Ben later claimed to police that he spoke with the alleged poisoner. Ben was interested in the condition of the down-and-out, but he was peripheral to reform circles. He was outrageous and combative but managed only limited contributions to Chicago's turbulent social history. A more concisely described world would not have overshadowed Reitman's life.

HOWARD F. MCMAINS, a resident of Bloomington, Indiana, and editor of the *Newsletter* of the Organization of American Historians, has written articles on modern American history.

*American Frontier and Western Issues: A Historiographical Review.* Edited by Roger L. Nichols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986. Pp. viii, 303. Notes, sources and repositories for frontier and western history, index. \$35.00.)

This book contains an introduction and thirteen essays on recent trends and developments in American frontier and western historiography. The essays cover a broad spectrum of topics, such as territorial government, frontier environment, mining, agriculture and livestock, transportation, economics, frontier military affairs, Native Americans, women, urbanization, and social history. In his interesting introduction, Roger L. Nichols briefly examines the several major problems that have plagued the field. These include a perceived lack of respect from colleagues in the historical profession as a whole, declining student interest on college campuses, and a persistent dilemma concerning definitions. As Nichols rightly asks, "If the practitioners of frontier and Western history cannot agree on the nature of their field, why should other scholars pay much attention to their efforts?" (p. 3).

Although some of the essays are analytically weak, amounting to little more than bibliographical lists, most successfully evaluate the current literature. Many of the contributors advocate using new methodologies—anthropological, sociological, economic, quantitative, and meteorological—to replace the traditional narrative histories of the West with more interpretive studies. More importantly, the authors' various suggestions on how to improve frontier and western history serve to stimulate thought and direct both students and professionals to new research problems. One should note, however, that merely advocating changes within the field does not necessarily produce them. Several of the authors, especially Lawrence H. Larsen (frontier urbanization), Mark Wyman (mining), and Paul A. Hutton (military affairs), believe that their areas of