

will be considered the authoritative biography of the Great Compromiser for many years. Indeed, Remini's fairness and attraction to Clay is remarkable.

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The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America. By Marilyn Irvin Holt. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992. Pp. 248. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$27.50.)

Holt has written a comprehensive work on the placing-out system—that nineteenth and early-twentieth century technique of moving destitute children from the cities to the “west” to save them from lives of poverty. The title of her work refers to the nickname applied to trains used to transport the children. Holt discusses the earliest uses of placement in the United States and then the role of Charles Loring Brace of the New York Children's Aid Society in popularizing it. Other public and private agencies, such as the Boston Children's Mission, New York's Juvenile Asylum, and the Sisters of Charity, are also covered. The author includes information on the placement process, describing, often in the words of the children, the trips out and subsequent experiences. Two children sent to Indiana later became state governors.

The growth of poverty in the Midwest and the creation of state boards and institutions were reasons for the initial attacks on the system in the 1870s by states including Indiana. Other factors contributing to placement's demise in the 1920s were state legislation limiting placements, acceptance of the idea that preserving the family was critical in saving children, compulsory school laws, and the shift from religious-based charities to the secular activities of social workers, based on the new “scientific” concepts of sociology. Holt concludes that without complete records it is impossible to determine the exact number of successful placements. Clearly placing-out met a need, and equally clearly times and values changed, leading to its elimination.

Holt slights the almost seven thousand adults placed out by the New York Children's Aid Society during Brace's lifetime although she discusses adults placed by other agencies. The fact that placing adults ran counter to Brace's views is a tantalizing inconsistency that should not be ignored. The material on Charlene J. Talbot's *An Orphan for Nebraska* (1979), which is included in the discussion of literary orphans, could be reduced. There are some minor stylistic problems including inconsistencies in the use of hyphens in the phrase “placed-out” (pp. 86-87). Citations that neither follow direct quotations nor appear at the ends of paragraphs as well as long awkward sentences which, while grammatically con-

ceivable, are difficult to read occasionally mar the text. On balance, however, this is a good book with well-researched descriptions of the placing-out system and thoughtful analyses of the origins, modifications, and demise of this intriguing part of the American welfare system.

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Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940. By David E. Nye. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 479. Illustrations, tables, map, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$32.50; paperbound, \$15.95.)

One of the transforming developments of the past century has been the widespread adoption of electricity as a source of power and a means of lighting. In *Electrifying America* David E. Nye deals with this change, focusing not on the technological or business history of the electrical industry but on the impact electricity had on society and the way of life of the average American. Dealing with the period 1880 to 1940, Nye demonstrates the powerful consequences of the new technology in the United States.

This book is of special interest to Hoosier readers because Nye's first chapter focuses on the impact of electricity on America's Middletown, Muncie. Throughout the book he relies on examples from the Muncie area, giving Indiana disproportionate attention in this national study. After surveying the electrification of Muncie, Nye devotes chapters to the development of electric streetcar systems, the application of the new source of power to manufacturing, the promotion of electrical appliances for the home, and the movement for rural electrification. With an admirable breadth of vision, Nye examines such diverse sources as paintings, popular literature, General Electric advertisements, and world's fair promotional material, presenting what they have to say about electricity and its impact on American life. His work is at times imaginative and always ambitious.

Nye's ambitions, however, exceed his achievement. His individual chapters on transportation, manufacturing, and the home are too brief to satisfy the specialist who would expect a volume on each of these topics. Yet as a general summary the work also seems incomplete. Limiting the book's effectiveness is a definite proelectricity bias. For example, Nye neglects the early fears of the new technology that delayed its adoption. Hoosier President Benjamin Harrison and his wife refused to turn on the new electric lights in the White House for fear of being shocked, and they were not alone in their misgivings. Electricity not only excited the American love of progress, it also represented a frightening force