

## REVIEWS

### *At Home in the Hoosier Hills*

*Agriculture, Politics, and Religion in Southern Indiana, 1810-1870*

By Richard F. Nation

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. Pp. xi, 274. Maps, notes, index. \$35.00.)

Richard F. Nation argues that an intense sense of localism distinguishes early residents of the hill country of southern Indiana from their neighbors elsewhere in the state. For Nation, this localism forms an overriding and unifying theme of the region's religious, economic, and political life. It explains the reluctance of southern Indiana residents to embrace some of the changes that other Hoosiers considered marks of progress, a reluctance that in turn led some to label hill country Hoosiers as backward and lazy.

In religious life, residents of southern Indiana formed neighborhood congregations to which they gave the power to regulate the moral life of their communities. Nation discusses German Catholics and Primitive Baptists in particular; both, as he

shows, remained suspicious of beliefs in human perfectionism, preferring to think of humankind as innately sinful. Followers of each sect distrusted reform movements, such as temperance or abolitionism, that aimed to perfect society and presumed the right of outsiders to pronounce judgment on the morals of distant others.

Residents of the Hoosier hills created what Nation terms a "surplus produce" economy. Producing primarily for subsistence, they traded any surplus on the market but hesitated to commit themselves fully to the risks of market production. Hogs and corn constituted the staples of the agricultural economy. Neither required disciplined effort by the farmer—hogs could run wild in the woods and corn could stay in the field

awaiting harvest. It was largely in their failure to engage in the driven pursuit of profit, he contends, that these Hoosiers earned the label of “lazy” amid the striving market culture of the early nineteenth century.

Religion and economics, of course, intersected with politics. Like other scholars, Nation finds that residents of southern Indiana supported the Democratic party rather than the market-friendly, moral-perfectionist Whigs. That party loyalty endured through the Civil War, although Nation asserts that they remained loyal Unionists.

Nation's study is an interesting and well-written one. Little of its discussion of religion, agriculture, and politics will be new to students of the antebellum and Civil War periods. The value of Nation's work lies instead in its concentration on the distinctiveness of the Indiana hill country. Although he occasionally notes the existence of other subre-

gions that shared the hill country's hostility to the market, abolitionists, African Americans, and Whig/Republicans, more of these comparisons would be welcome. Nation does a good job of conveying the area's distinctiveness in relation to other sections of Indiana but one wonders what the hill country shares in common with other regions where similar values prevailed. The subtitle's dateline is somewhat misleading. Although he includes a chapter on the Civil War, Nation's discussion of Southern Indiana's localistic moral, economic, and political culture focuses on the pre-war period. Other omissions can be traced not to the author's discretion but to the press: pages 85 and 86 were missing from my copy.

NICOLE ETCHESON is Alexander M. Bracken professor of history at Ball State University and author of *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (2004).



### *Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics*

By Stewart Winger

(DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003. Pp. viii, 271. Notes, bibliography, index. \$38.00.)

One of the dominant components of Lincoln studies in recent years has been the debate over the sixteenth president's religion and its expression in his public life. Now Stewart Winger enters the fray with this somewhat ponderous but deeply penetrating examination of Lincoln as public intellectual and theologian. Hardly a

beginner's book, Winger's work requires of the reader considerable grounding in American intellectual history and Lincolniana. Reading it can be hard work, but the labor is well invested, for Winger's contributions to the scholarly discussion of Lincoln's religious thought are profound and provocative.