comers settled directly in the biggest cities—Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Louisville.

The author also incorrectly attributes the post-1900 declension in Evansville’s black population to the race riot of 1903. Violence influenced settlement patterns in the Ohio Valley generally, but more telling was the growth of Jim Crow policies—for example, the creation of restrictive covenants in real estate transactions. Most settlements along both sides of the Ohio, moreover, experienced population decline or stagnation—white as well as black—after 1890, reflecting limited local job opportunities and the appeal of industrial employment to the north. Evansville, Cincinnati, and Louisville were notable exceptions. Blocker incorrectly attributes blacks’ departure from the former city to its lack of prosperity, when in fact Evansville tripled in size between 1880 and 1920, and its economy thrived. He also overlooks the relatively small size of Evansville’s black community, as compared with upriver Cincinnati and Louisville, where a critical mass supported black businesses and professions, despite a history of violence against blacks.

A Little More Freedom, in short, offers much information about African American settlement in the lower Midwest prior to 1910. Whether the book offers a new interpretation of this period remains to be seen.

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Meredith Nicholson
A Writing Life
By Ralph D. Gray

In the early 1900s, Meredith Nicholson was a household name, not just in Indiana, but in most homes of literate Americans. Acclaimed for his best-selling romantic adventure novels, he was one of four central figures in Indiana’s golden age of literature, alongside James Whitcomb Riley, Booth Tarkington, and George Ade. Now, a century later, Nicholson’s name is barely recognized—a fact that Ralph D. Gray has sought to remedy with his biography, Meredith Nicholson: A Writing Life.

Gray, professor emeritus of history at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, is best known for his scholarship on the history of transportation and the history of Indiana, which has included
brief examinations of Nicholson. He also recently collected his favorite examples of Nicholson's essays and articles in *A Meredith Nicholson Reader* (2007). Here, however, in what is, surprisingly, the first full biography of the author's life, Gray provides a meticulously researched, richly detailed history of Nicholson's life as both author and diplomat.

Seven chapters chronicle the development of Nicholson from ninth-grade dropout into newspaper and magazine journalist, poet, state historian, novelist, essayist, and (in one unsuccessful attempt) playwright. While romantic adventure novels dominated Nicholson's tremendous output of 29 books, Gray asserts in the introduction that "his finest writing, and his most substantial and enduring contributions to American letters, can be found in his essays and articles" (p. 5). Nevertheless, Gray gives his highest praise to *The Hoosiers* (1900), "a remarkably full and detailed study of Indiana's literary, social, and political culture" (p. 63); *The House of a Thousand Candles* (1905), a mystery/adventure novel and his most popular book; and *A Hoosier Chronicle* (1913), which Gray considers to be Nicholson's "most significant" and probably best novel, as well as his first venture into realism.

Three other chapters chronicle Nicholson's political career, beginning in the 1920s with a chaotic and transformative decade of his life that other biographers have failed to address. Gray effectively captures Nicholson's fading glory as novelist—unable to successfully navigate the shift in readers' and critics' tastes from romantic to realistic fiction—and his rising reputation as a statesman and as a political and social writer. These new roles brought their own difficulties: Along with an unsuccessful bid for the state senate, Nicholson was one of Indiana's few publicly outspoken critics of the Ku Klux Klan. This unsettling period of his life ended with the death of his wife Eugenie, but he soon remarried and entered eight years of diplomatic service in Paraguay, Venezuela, and Nicaragua.

The book concludes with a synopsis of the years following Nicholson's return to the United States in 1941. The chapter has an unavoidably melancholy tone, as Nicholson tries to reestablish a home and a writing career in his beloved Indiana, despite loneliness and a collapsing marriage. Yet Gray asserts the import of Nicholson's stature and reputation in Indianapolis until his death in 1947, at the age of 81.

While the book's subject matter may seem to be of interest only to students of Indiana literature and history, its significance as the first—and undoubtedly only—biography of this once major American author and public figure is not to be overlooked. Nor is Gray's expert handling of his subject matter. He avoids the common tendency to divide Nicholson's life into two distinct halves, as writer and statesman. Rather, as Gray's sub-
title makes clear, he unifies the whole of Nicholson’s career into “a writing life.” The result is a coherent, compelling study with only minor shortcomings: a few instances of unwieldy prose that is otherwise clear and elegant, and, in discussion of events spanning 1938 to 1943, a few confusing shifts in chronology. Such lapses are negligible, however, in light of the book’s sizable contributions to Indiana’s literary and historical scholarship.

As Gray recalls in his final chapter, the New York Times called Nicholson “the last leaf on a famous literary tree that grew in Indiana” (p. 243). Thanks to Ralph Gray’s insistence that the life and work of Meredith Nicholson are still worth considering, despite the shifting literary winds of the last century, Nicholson’s place on that tree will remain secure.

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Steel Shavings, Volume 39
Brothers in Arms
Edited by James B. Lane
(Gary: Indiana University Northwest, 2008. 240 pages. Illustrations, index. Paperbound, $12.50.)

In this latest volume of the Steel Shavings series—a social history journal focusing on the Calumet region of northwest Indiana—historian James B. Lane has again woven together a thought-provoking, often entertaining, and at times tragic collection of oral histories and recollections from Vietnam veterans. The series first featured the stirring voices of local Vietnam veterans in 1988, when history students at Indiana University Northwest compiled oral interviews in conjunction with Professor Lane’s course on the war. At a time when Reagan-era revisionists were attempting to recast the Vietnam conflict as a noble and winnable endeavor, Lane and his students intended to reinforce the real “lessons of Vietnam”—from the hazards of misunderstanding vital national interest to the absence of a clearly defined exit strategy—by using the reminiscences of the working-class men and women who paid for those mistakes in southeast Asia. Now, twenty years later, with the United States again groping for answers in another unconventional war, Lane’s students have gathered together another album of visceral testimony in the hopes of revisiting many of those apparently still unheeded lessons of Vietnam.

As one soldier explains, every veteran has his own story; no two are the same. Indeed the real value of this Steel Shavings volume rests in the