In *Sweet Tyranny*, Kathleen Mapes charts the history of Michigan's sugar beet industry during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Mapes aims to present “a complicated and compelling history about the creation of migrant labor, the emergence of industrial agriculture, and the development of American imperialism” in relation to the Great Lakes state. She describes a rural countryside neither classless nor ethnically homogenous, and certainly not isolated from national economic policy and world markets.

The first sugar beet refinery came to Michigan in 1898, the year of the outbreak of the Spanish-American War; the history of the industry from its inception was accordingly intertwined with the politics of tariffs and the economics of imported cane sugar. Billed as a “civilized” product that would, in contrast to “barbarian” sugar from abroad, bring jobs to white American workers, labor-intensive sugar beets ironically came to rely on low-paid immigrant laborers—German Russians, Hungarians, Bohemians, Poles, and eventually Mexicans.

Mapes also examines farm labor. Between one-third and one-half of the sugar beet farmers had relied upon family labor, but growers also made extensive use of child labor, and then of entire immigrant families, in a system of migrant labor organized and administered in large part by the refining companies. Mapes's stock story of labor exploitation and the prevalence of racialist ethnic stereotypes offers no surprises, except that the proximity of industrial cities did afford these working-class families options absent in the country’s more remote rural districts. Tired of deal-
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ing with the wage demands of “ever more militant eastern European families,” the Michigan sugar industry began to recruit more vulnerable temporary workers from Mexico under a wartime program created by the Department of Labor, and continued to lobby for the importation of Mexican field labor through the restrictionist 1920s, a decade in which the industry faced threats both from child labor reformers and from declining sugar prices (p. 127).

Although the Great Depression rocked the industry, it nonetheless allowed industrialists to gain on the local growers, while looking to tariff protection, Philippine independence, and later Agricultural Adjustment Administration price supports as a fix for their economic problems. Michigan state and local governments meanwhile sought a solution in the repatriation of excess Mexican labor, while national reformers redoubled their efforts to improve conditions in the beet fields and field workers themselves organized. When all of these efforts proved short on results, what remained was the redefinition of Mexicans as part of the “migrant problem” (p. 234).

Sweet Tyranny is a bit repetitive and excessively detailed, and Michigan events often get lost in the national narrative. It is also a bit surprising that the book devotes no attention to what goes on inside the Michigan sugar refineries. Nonetheless, Professor Mapes has written a fine study, a sturdy example of transnational history writing which unearths the roots of the industrialization of agriculture.

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To the Wide Missouri
Traveling in America During the First Decades of Westward Expansion
By Louis A. Garavaglia
(Yardley, Pa.: Westholme, 2010. Pp. ix, [323]. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. $28.00.)

Faced with traffic, road construction, or crowded commuter trains, it is easy for the modern-day traveler to gripe about the inconveniences of transportation. We expect a seamless journey: smooth highways, open roads, and the pleasures of viewing the passing landscape behind expansive sheets of glass.

Louis A. Garavaglia's To the Wide Missouri subtly reminds us that our present-day travel conditions are trouble-free—at least relative to the enormous difficulties that faced westward-bound emigrants in antebellum America. Drawing from a host of published first-hand accounts, maps, and mass-produced guides available to