

ing; FDR responded by promising “the mothers and fathers” he would not send their boys “into any foreign wars.” Willkie lost, of course, but he was the most formidable foe that FDR faced in his four campaigns for the presidency. A majority of respondents told pollsters that had it not been for the looming crisis in Europe, they would have voted for the Indianan.

The Roosevelt-Willkie contest had a postscript hard to imagine in today’s polarized environment. To underscore American unity, FDR sent Willkie on several diplomatic missions abroad. The two even talked about jettisoning the mossbacks in both of their parties and organizing a progressive third party of their own. In 1944, before their plans had moved beyond the talking stage, Willkie died of a heart attack. FDR followed him six months later.

Dunn excels at characterization. She brings her protagonists to life

but sometimes takes dramatic license. Her isolationists are mostly starry-eyed idealists or menacing, pro-German appeasers. But as the leading scholar of the isolationists, Wayne S. Cole, has persuasively argued in *Roosevelt and the Isolationists* (1983) and elsewhere, the isolationists were a diverse and largely respectable lot. None advocated cutting the United States off from the world; most opposed Germany and Japan and favored some sort of aid short of war to Britain; all wanted an impregnable national defense. A presidential election set against the backdrop of war is dramatic enough. It doesn’t need embellishment.

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The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History

By Jon K. Lauck

(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013. Pp. 166. Notes, index. Paperbound, \$35.00.)

In 2010, the University of Iowa Press launched its Iowa and the Midwest Experience series, which already includes thirteen publications. Jon K. Lauck’s *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* stands out among the group. A historiography rather than a monograph, the book calls for new historical research that will foster a revival of “the his-

tory of the Midwest as a region” (p. 90). Lauck makes his case in less than one hundred pages but impressively includes another almost sixty pages of extensive footnotes with bibliographic lists that will serve as a bountiful starting point for any scholar.

Lauck begins his study by offering anecdotal evidence regarding the lack of interest in the Midwest. His

examples are compelling and disheartening but paint a sympathetic picture of a region that he claims is historically significant because it “played a central role in American development by helping spark the American Revolution, stabilizing the young American republic, making it economically strong, giving it an agricultural heartland, and helping the North win the Civil War” (p. 7). The rest of the book expounds on these themes through four chapters: Why the Midwest Matters; The Prairie Historians and the Foundations of Midwestern History; The Case for Midwestern History; and Toward a Revival of Midwestern History.

The first chapter focuses on the Midwest’s contributions to “the development of American nationalism” from the Revolution through World War II (p. 23). Lauck emphasizes the region’s diversity, its economic contributions, and its influential role in American politics and argues that the Midwest is full of rich, untapped primary sources waiting to be mined. The second chapter offers an essay about historians who wrote extensively on midwestern history in the early twentieth century. These men, the “Prairie Historians,” also created organizations such as the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, launched journals, and founded historical societies throughout the region. They consciously promoted the region’s history and “gave birth to an intellectual movement” that successfully promoted the Midwest for an era (p. 50). Lauck urges historians to return to this kind of regional dedication.

The third and fourth chapters become repetitive, going into too much detail about the Prairie Historians. Lauck’s descriptions of the hobbies, religious affiliations, and political tendencies of these early twentieth-century historians distract from his argument. Despite offering other reasons for midwestern significance, he returns regularly to the theme of how “[Frederick Jackson] Turner brought the Midwest into the conversation about American history through his resistance to eastern dominance” (p. 71). Is this the approach he advocates whereby contemporary historians can restore the midwestern history genre? Is the “resistance to eastern dominance” the only way to study the Midwest? Surely, midwestern history deserves independent scholarly recognition. Historians of the Midwest will need to identify intellectual arguments that can serve as the undergirding for regional analyses beyond what this book offers. Lauck also gives too short shrift to historical literature since the era of his focus, but his point remains clear: Historians need to revitalize midwestern history and do so in a way that keeps the Midwest at the center of the story.

Lauck offers historians ideas to mull over, debate, and engage with as we consider how best to address his challenge. Hopefully *The Lost Region* will someday find its place among the annals of a reinvigorated midwestern history genre.

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