

tin delineated dilemmas facing biographers. Among them: how to make subjects come alive; what made them tick; and how much personal material to reveal. Boomhower succeeded on the first two counts and exercised discretion regarding the third.

JAMES B. LANE is emeritus professor of History at Indiana University Northwest, co-director of Calumet Regional Archives, and editor of *Steel Shavings* magazine.



### *Mellencamp: American Troubadour*

By David Masciotra

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015. Pp. 290. Bibliography, index. \$35.00.)

Rock singer John Mellencamp “has never had a permanent address outside Indiana,” notes David Masciotra (p. 247) in wrapping up his 260-page examination of the man and his work. Masciotra attributes Mellencamp’s “no bullshit” (p. 2) approach to life and music to his heartland roots; the author applies the same ethos in this book, beginning with the dedication to his “own ‘no bullshit’ grandfather.”

*Mellencamp: American Troubadour* is part biography (tying the singer’s songs and thought to his youth in Seymour, Indiana, and identifying Indiana places referenced in Mellencamp’s “heartland rock” lyrics), part musical history, and part social analysis. The author calls it “a case study of humanity” (p. 4) because rock music (as others also note) is “the perfect soundtrack for American culture” (p. 120), and the great rockers—Dylan, Springsteen, Lennon, Mellencamp—are social critics as well as poets and performers. Masciotra

himself is nearly as valuable a social critic as he is a biographer.

The book’s cultural analysis does produce occasional tangents as Masciotra provides a theoretical context or socio-historical model for a Mellencamp song, and this bimodality creates occasional repetitions between the book’s two halves. The first six chapters examine songs, albums, and musical styles, mostly in chronological order and with generous quotation of lyrics. The remaining chapters address big-picture themes: adult life, love, race, politics (especially farm politics), free speech, and American freedom (or what’s left of it). Readers who remember their own youth will appreciate Masciotra/Mellencamp’s celebration of sexuality and Mellencamp’s analysis of time (“All I got here / Is a rear view mirror”). Rural Americans will appreciate Masciotra’s assertion that the destruction of the family farm is just one early example of that urban, littoral “consumer-driven business civilization” (p. 55)

which erases the heartland American Dream of independence and self-sufficiency. Midwesterners can appreciate what Masciotra sees as the small-town paradox of “communitarian individualism” (p. 246).

All readers will enjoy Masciotra’s rich writing style, and learn from the impressive array of supporting material he brings to bear on the song lyrics. He references a wide variety of well-known artists and thinkers, including Freud, Vonnegut, Tocqueville, Kierkegaard, Cather, Anaïs Nin, Larry McMurtry, Jim Harrison, Greil Marcus, Christopher Lasch, and Neil Postman, as well as the less familiar Karl Ove Knausgaard, Lee Burke, Robert Putnam, and Benjamin Barber. All provide a useful context for understanding the songs

of John Mellencamp, American troubadour.

Readers of Masciotra’s previous book *Working on a Dream: The Progressive Political Vision of Bruce Springsteen* (2010) will note a matured vision here, as the author concedes that the Left is quite as inept at resolving national problems as the Right, given its “big government, self-interest, self-advancement, historical incompetency and inefficiency” (p. 251). That may be Masciotra’s biggest big-picture, “no bullshit” assertion: P.C. is O.P.D. R.I.P.

DAVID PICHASKE is the author of twenty books, including *A Generation in Motion* (1979) and *Song of the North Country: A Midwest Framework to the Songs of Bob Dylan* (2010).



## *The Second Amendment: A Biography*

By Michael Waldman

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. Pp. 255. Note on sources, notes, index. Clothbound, \$25.00; paperbound, \$16.00.)

What to make of Michael Waldman’s *The Second Amendment: A Biography*? His claims about the meaning and history of the Second Amendment reiterate a slew of discredited theories, an instance, as Yogi Berra opined, of “*déjà vu* all over again.” Waldman is president of the Brennan Center for Justice, a supposedly nonpartisan policy institute, but he could hardly be more partisan, dismissing contrary evidence and ignoring William Kelleher Storey’s tenet that “real historical

writers probe factual uncertainties but they do not invent convenient facts and they do not ignore inconvenient facts. People are entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts” (*Writing History*, 1999).

After asking “What does the Second Amendment mean?” (p. 58), Waldman replies that it simply preserved state militia, rather than affirming a right of individuals to keep and bear arms. Chief Justice John Marshall explained that the