

basic—as the length, width, and breadth that enclose space; an historical dimension by analogy ought to be equally basic. To see hotels as basic in this sense to western history is to force the point. Embellishment, yes; dimension, hardly.

This book would have been strengthened by giving more attention to the economics of the business in the West, for instance, to the pursuit of the interesting suggestion that hotel building as well as railroad promoting helped bankrupt many western communities.

In sum, this is a pleasant, diverting book about a little-known side of western history. Its greatest appeal will be to buffs and any others having a general interest in the western scene.

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This Almost Chosen People: Essays in the History of American Ideas.

By Russel B. Nye. ([East Lansing]: Michigan State University Press, 1966. Pp. x, 374. Index. \$7.50.)

This Almost Chosen People consists of seven unrelated essays on ideas that "have given an ideological backbone to American thought and activity" (p. ix). The author has attempted "to sketch out some of the changes these basic cultural presuppositions have undergone from their beginnings to the present" (p. ix). In a truly impressive display of erudition accompanied by extremely helpful bibliographies the ideas pass in review before the reader. Out of many themes or concepts the author chose to examine the idea of progress, the American view of nationalism, the tradition of free enterprise, the sense of mission, the place of the individual, the view of nature, and the idea of equality. For the sake of brevity this reviewer has been inconsistent in condensing the titles of the essays, but he has only followed the example of the author who felt obliged to entitle Chapter V "America and the Individual" instead of "The American View of Individualism."

Unless one is a Curti or a Persons, he will find it difficult to comment meaningfully on the broad panorama of ideas and on the sources upon which the discussions are based. In a general way the author seems to be on surer ground in discussing the earlier expressions of the ideas. This seems to be an entirely reasonable result of his scholarly studies of the cultural history of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Again he seems to be more at home with the literary exponents of the ideas than with the business men and politicians who sometimes adopted them. Clearly the essayist was confronted with a monumental task of compression, synthesis, and generalization. Inevitably he exposes himself to the criticism of the specialist who has a particular interest in one of the ideas. This reviewer is inclined to the belief that the influence of the frontier has been over-emphasized particularly with respect to the idea of individualism. He would suggest that since attention is paid to Charles A. Beard's *The Myth of Rugged Individualism* some mention should have been made of Mody C. Boatright's *The Myth of Frontier Individualism*. On a related topic the reviewer recalls that there was a fairly strong con-

servation movement in the 1850's when the use of charcoal threatened the timber resources of certain eastern states.

But a more basic question needs to be raised. This concerns the validity of literary, forensic, and journalistic expressions of ideas as indicators of "American" sentiments. Even granting the superb accomplishment of the author in fulfilling his purpose, for whom were the relatively small group of persons speaking? Judging from the index entries Franklin, Emerson, Jefferson, Lincoln, Whitman, Wilson, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, and Kennedy were among the most articulate transmitters of American ideas. Even if this list were expanded tenfold, would it be representative and extensive enough to form the foundation for valid generalizations? For one thing there is an assumption of broad circulation of the ideas and general literacy on the part of the public.

The inclusion of an errata list is of dubious value. It suggests that eight errors are all that appear in the book. This is not quite the case. The metamorphosis of John O'Sullivan into John L. Sullivan is not listed, and it is not quite accurate to say that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments placed "these rights" (the referent of these is not entirely clear) immediately "under national jurisdiction." But even ten instances of misspelling or slight errors of fact do not lessen the value of the book as an excellent source of information for the general reader, a stimulating piece of collateral reading in a general course, or perchance the principal basis for a more specialized venture into the history of American ideas.

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Labor and Liberty: The La Follette Committee and the New Deal.

By Jerold S. Auerbach. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966. Pp. xi, 246. Notes, bibliography, index. \$6.50.)

Auerbach's monograph is a study of the so-called La Follette Civil Liberties Committee (1936-1940). Despite its name, the focus of the committee's investigations was upon employer interference with the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. Several inter-related factors were responsible for this emphasis. The inspiration for the establishment of the committee came from National Labor Relations Board officials, who found their hands tied by court challenges to the constitutionality of the Wagner Act and hoped that the exposure of employer anti-union activities would rally public opinion behind the NLRB. The pro-union bias of the committee's staff—many of whom were Communist party members or sympathizers—was reflected in the committee's acceptance, and propagandizing, of the class warfare theme. And the coincidence in time of the most active phase of the committee's work with the CIO's bid to organize the mass production industries resulted in the committee's becoming an adjunct of the CIO's organizing drive.

Auerbach reviews in detail the evidence uncovered by the committee of employer union-busting activities: the use of labor spies, strike-breakers, company police, and munitions. He concludes that despite