

the best general survey of the Indian Wars that one is likely to find. He concludes:

Thus the frontier army was not, as many of its leaders saw it, the heroic vanguard of civilization, crushing the savages and opening the West to settlers. Still less was it the barbaric band of butchers, eternally waging unjust war against unoffending Indians, that is depicted in the humanitarian literature of the nineteenth century and the atonement literature of the twentieth. Rather, the frontier army was a conventional military force trying to control, by conventional military methods, a people that did not behave like a conventional enemy at all In the process they wrote a dramatic and stirring chapter of American history, one that need not be diminished by today's recognition of the monstrous wrong it inflicted on the Indian (p. 411).

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Wisconsin: A History. By Robert C. Nesbit. ([Madison]: The University of Wisconsin Press and The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973. Pp. xiv, 573. Maps, selected bibliographies, appendixes, general bibliography, index, illustrations. \$12.50.)

There is a widespread belief in Wisconsin that the state has had a unique history, that it has been a progressive state because of "cheese, peas, and Germans." Many citizens speak with pride of the "Wisconsin Idea" as something that separates the state from others. Some say that it was the La Follettes that stamped the state and gave it a claim to uniqueness. Readers of *Wisconsin: A History* will not deny these beliefs, but they may modify them.

The writing and publishing of state history has been regarded as a parochial pursuit by many historians and as a precarious venture by many publishers. The teaching of Wisconsin history is hardly flourishing though it is found in many elementary schools and occasionally in high schools. Most of the colleges and universities in Wisconsin teach Asian and African history, but only a handful offer Wisconsin history. Consequently, it is not surprising that an earlier manuscript on Wisconsin lay on one author's desk for over a decade, finally being published in a state history series in 1940. During Wisconsin's centennial year (1948) the *Milwaukee Journal* published a popular history of the state which has been reissued several times. Nesbit's present volume is the most recent, the most complete, and the most mature in

its scholarship of the three or four volumes now extant, and it is likely to stand for a long time.

Professor Nesbit, who teaches history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, takes a long view of Wisconsin's past, places it in the Great Lakes geographic province, and writes it into the nation's history. If more historians could see state history as national history in microcosm, as he does, the role of state and local history might prosper instead of being regarded as irrelevant by many. In *Wisconsin: A History* Nesbit covers the three and one half centuries of Wisconsin history to 1970 in thirty-one chapters. He states that he is least satisfied with the historical evaluations of the recent years. This reviewer found the final chapters least rewarding of all.

While this study of national history in a state laboratory may not interest readers in other states, nevertheless they may find the following views of interest and want to compare their history with that of Wisconsin: the French and English empires left little behind them; the Yankee emigrants from New England, New York, and Ohio built Wisconsin's institutions and shaped its early history; the largest immigrant groups—Germans, Norwegians, Irish, Poles—have influenced politics more than anything else, and their customs have largely been assimilated into the Wisconsin culture; the legend of the La Follettes as innovators has been overdone. The author even raises his eyebrows about the claim that Wisconsin has been a unique state, or if it has, he feels that it more and more reflects national norms rather than ethnic influences.

The book is well written, and the language and style is informal and easy to read. It does not attempt to deal with such topics as art, literature, or drama. Not even the Paul Bunyan legends or the lore about the origin of "Badger" are discussed. The book pays little attention to education, especially to higher education beyond the Madison campus. Folklife, folkways, or folk beliefs that affected history receive scant mention. There is a heavy orientation toward political affairs. Despite this, it is an imposing volume, with hundreds of insights into the process of building the Badger State, and it has been written without looking over the shoulder at any ethnic group, family, or friend who might think differently. It is scholarly state history at its best.

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