

Book Reviews

HISTORY OF THE WILD WEST

The Great Columbia Plain

A Historical Geography, 1805–1910. By D. W. Meinig. Pp. xxi + 576. (University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, April 1969.) \$15; 143s.

PROFESSOR MEINIG's book is one of three very recent additions to a small but important group of historical geographies of North American regions¹⁻⁵. Written by academic geographers and published by university presses they represent a further stage in the development of a field of scholarship which came of age in 1948 with the publication of Ralph H. Brown's *Historical Geography of the United States*. Together they indicate that at least one branch of regional geography has withstood the shock waves of the quantitative revolution which has affected so much American geography during the present decade. Indeed, the field would seem to have survived intact, there being little evidence of new procedures or techniques. On reflexion this is not perhaps surprising because whilst innovators may occasionally find sources of historical data with which to demonstrate sophisticated techniques, historical geographers concerned with specific areas over a particular past period will only rarely have data in a form amenable to such types of analysis.

The Great Columbia Plain is a scholarly but eminently readable book about a little known part of the American West. During the years covered by the study the area, in the central and eastern regions of Washington and Oregon, experienced a rapid succession of linked demographic, cultural and economic changes. In tracing these changes the author emphasizes the ecological relationships between man and his physical environment and, more particularly, the spatial strategies by which men organized the area. To the extent that it is concerned with change through time it is historical. In that the focus is consistently on the ways in which a particular area of the Earth's surface has been dealt with by man, however, it is basically geographical.

The author is a native of the area, having been born there some fifteen years after the end of the period covered. He claims to have visited every district and almost every hamlet and locality mentioned in the text. This intimate knowledge of and feeling for the region is evident throughout the book especially in the vitality of the descriptions. This is, however, not a parochial study or a latter day work of topography. Perhaps its most distinctive and valuable characteristic is its ever changing perspective. The author changes the scale of study with the frequency and ease that a biologist changes the magnification of his microscope. One moment the reader is re-experiencing the conditions of life in a small new railroad settlement in the 1880s and at the next he is removed, as if by earth satellite, to view the same place as but part of a far more significant regional, national, continental or global system. These systems are effectively summarized in highly generalized maps of such diverse phenomena as the competing spheres of influence of service centres for mining areas and the diffusion of dryland agriculture. These maps reflect Meinig's mastery of the art of teaching. They are generalizations, however, based on a real knowledge not only of the land and its people but also of the literature of and on the area. The bibliography occupies 33 pages and footnotes occur with a frequency of more than one per page. The range of sources is

exceedingly wide and they are marshalled in a masterly fashion.

The book is expensive, but reasonably well produced. The specially drawn thematic maps are pleasing and effective, but as a reference map the more detailed folded pictorial relief map (after Erwin Raisz) is less satisfactory. Furthermore, it is inserted in such a way that it is inconvenient for reference. There are a few trivial errors of a kind which almost inevitably occur in the first edition of a book of this significance and the bibliography fails to include one of the most basic works of reference for anyone working on any aspect of the historical geography of the American West before 1861: Carl I. Wheat's *Mapping of the Transmississippi West*, (San Francisco, 1957–1963). These are minor weaknesses, however, and the author is to be congratulated on producing a work of scholarship on an important and little known region. (It is regrettable that Professor Meinig has no intention of writing a sequel to cover the period since 1910.) Presented in a lucid and jargon-free style it deserves a wide audience and should do much both to further understanding of the region and to enhance the reputation of historical regional geography.

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¹ Clark, A. H., *Three Centuries and the Island: a Historical Geography of Settlement and Agriculture in Prince Edward Island, Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1959).

² Merrens, H. R., *Colonial North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century: a Study in Historical Geography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1964).

³ De Vorse, L., jun., *The Indian Boundary in the Southern Colonies, 1763–1775* (University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

⁴ Wacker, P. O., *The Musconcong Valley of New Jersey: a Historical Geography* (Rutgers University Press, 1968).

⁵ Clark, A. H., *Acadia: the Geography of Nova Scotia to 1760* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

SUICIDE AND DEPRESSION

The Epidemiology of Depression

By Charlotte Silverman. Pp. xviii + 184. (Johns Hopkins Press: Baltimore; Oxford University Press: London, March 1969.) 71s 6d.

THE author, who is now chief of the Populations Studies Program, National Center for Radiological Health, and was formerly at the Epidemiologic Studies Branch, National Institute of Mental Health, has written a masterly review of the available literature on the incidence and prevalence of depression and its mortality (that is, suicide). She has, however, done much more than this, because she considers critically classification, diagnostic criteria and reliability, various personal and environmental characteristics of depressed people and recent work on the heredity, biochemistry and psychodynamics of depression. Finally, there are some pertinent reflexions on perspectives for future research. This intrepid undertaking, daunting to anyone with a narrower viewpoint, has resulted in a remarkably balanced, lucid and highly readable account of much current knowledge on the subject.

What emerges most clearly is the very great range of morbidity rates, depending on whether hospital statistics, medical practitioners' patients or general population surveys are the source of information. The number of people with depressive symptoms in the community at any one time (some 10–20 per cent) is about 1,000 times more than the number admitted annually, indicating that hospitals merely scratch the surface. Medical practitioners may see in a year about seven men and seventeen women with depression per 1,000 population. It is also a remarkable fact that first admissions to hospital with manic depressive disorder are much higher in the United Kingdom than in the United States—0.18 per 1,000 in Maryland and 2.4 per 1,000 in Bristol, for example—a discrepancy which (though the author does not consider this possibility) might be connected with the high cost of hospital care in the United States where nearly half the admissions with depressions are to private hospitals.