

areas as diverse as urban growth, business organizations, labour markets and the contested terrain of medical provision, *Victorian Ironopolis* is sure to have broad appeal to urban historians researching a range of topics.

**Tosh Warwick**

University of Huddersfield

**Eric J. Morser**, *Hinterland Dreams: The Political Economy of a Midwestern City*. Philadelphia,: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. xi + 266pp. Bibliography. £36.00.  
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*Hinterland Dreams* is an enjoyable and innovative look into the forging of American individualism and exceptionalism. Through the history of La Crosse, Wisconsin and its self-reliant entrepreneurs, historian Eric J. Morser explores the previously underestimated role of small Midwestern frontier towns in shaping twentieth-century American economic and political culture. An expert in state-building and early American history, Morser's book focuses on the regional urbanization of the Midwest in the late nineteenth century. This is not about one town, but about how Midwestern cities were integrated as a regional resource, transportation and economic centre, creating a conurbation that fuelled American industrialism and connected the western frontier to the larger world. Like many Midwestern cities, La Crosse offers an intriguing look into how state and local governments empowered residents of smaller cities to influence the region's economic history. In this way, the author is able to explore the history and historiography of the Midwestern frontier that made American exceptionalism possible.

The resource-rich surroundings of the Midwest, along with its vibrant community leaders, have long been cited by historians for their role in the American Industrial Age. The resource-abundant municipalities of the Midwest, conveniently located at the intersection of the Mississippi River and the rising railroad lines, served as transportation and financial centres that linked the frontier lands to the larger world. Although well known for providing the key resources used to fuel the large urban centres of the time, this understates the grander economic infrastructure required to support a wide-scale industrial transformation. In addition, these towns were forged by immigrants who developed entire industries and linked merchants from surrounding areas to facilitate the bustling industrial centres and diverse economies that allowed them to flourish. Despite this, historians typically overlook the role of hinterland communities, portraying them as backwards and unimportant. As a consequence, the important role of these towns and their citizens has largely been underestimated in the process of industrialization.

What makes this work unique is Morser's convincing illustration of how political choices made in these small cities had important consequences for the entire region. Largely missing from past conceptions, he argues, is the additional and yet fundamental role that government played in funding and promoting the underlying legal and political economy necessary to support the transformation of these cities. Federal, state and municipal officials built military outposts to provide protection, while funding regional railroads and local telephone and electric systems. At the same time, they passed laws, issued rulings and created a lasting

legal foundation that transformed the city and its economy. As a consequence, the overlapping levels of the American state helped to shape the economic world within which La Crosse and other small Midwestern cities took root. Morser is able to demonstrate convincingly how the cities' builders helped define the region's commercial history before 1900 and the lasting legacy that can still be noted today.

*Hinterland Dreams* is split into three main parts. Each chapter begins with the story of an influential La Crosse pioneer who was supported by the overlapping roles of federal, state and municipal government, allowing each of these individuals to flourish and enabling the economic transformation of these sleepy Midwestern towns. Part one looks at the drivers that led to the conurbation of the Midwest. Part two illustrates how municipal power was boosted through the rise of railroads and political reforms that helped to define the region's commercial history before 1900. Part three speaks to the rise of local entrepreneurs and their role in the regional economic transformation. The book concludes with a chapter entitled 'A city of bustling trade'. Using well-researched and vibrant historical description, Morser weaves an intricate tale of federal, state and local officials forging the Midwestern cities together into a 'whirring engine of commercial energy before 1900' (p. xii). Morser's characters are vivid and well developed and his writing style embraces the adventurous spirit of the era without being showy.

By exploring the historical biographies of La Crosse's founding mothers and fathers, *Hinterland Dreams* suggests a new way to understand the rise of American industrialism. Small towns like La Crosse illustrate how the American state provided its early citizens with powerful tools to build cities and help define their region's history in profound and previously underemphasized ways. Not only was the Midwest region drawn together as a conurbation that connected the frontier to the world, but these hinterland towns and their innovative citizens were essential in providing large cities like Chicago with the resources that made industrialization possible. In this way, the underlying political economy of these small Midwestern towns can be understood as important engines of American industrialization.

**T.M. Benney**

University of California, Santa Barbara

**Jeremiah B.C. Axelrod**, *Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. xii + 401pp. 55 illustrations. Bibliography. £44.95/\$65.00 hbk; £16.95/\$24.95 pbk.

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How can we explain Los Angeles? Other US cities that expanded rapidly in the twentieth century did so vertically, at least at their core. Yet for most of that century, Los Angeles lacked a skyscraper centre, and for some it has seemed to lack a centre of any kind. Its expansion was horizontal, an apparently unplanned sprawl. Yet for Jeremiah Axelrod, 'contrary to conventional wisdom, Greater Los Angeles's urban form was planned; in fact, it was overdetermined by plans' (p. 312). In rejecting the model of New York and Chicago, in the 1920s some Angelenos planners looked instead to Ebenezer Howard's ideal of the 'Garden City', while Los Angeles planning director Gordon Whitnall set out another dream, located between