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Review of *Go West Young Man! Horace Greeley's Vision for America* By Coy Cross II

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Go West Young Man! Horace Greeley's Vision for America. By Coy Cross II. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. ix + 165 pp. \$27.50.

Born in 1811 to a struggling New Hampshire farm family, Horace Greeley charted a course that led him to the founding editorship of the *New York Tribune*. Along the way he became a major player in American "conservatism" as a Whig and, later, Republican stalwart and the unsuccessful 1872 presidential nominee of the Liberal Republican and Democrat parties. Woven into Greeley's life story is his fascination with and hope for the American West (on both sides of the Mississippi)—a fascination and hope evidenced in the title of this solid volume by Coy F. Cross II.

Cross's aim is to explore Greeley's early popularization of a theory today identified with historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Turner's "safety valve thesis," although penned twenty years after Greeley's death, was the popular (and incorrect) notion that western lands held the key to eliminating America's urban blight by providing an escape route for impoverished and aspiring eastern wage laborers. Greeley sought to actualize the safety valve theory throughout his career in varied endeavors that included agricultural education and land grant universities, the free soil and homestead movements, transcontinental railroads, and his backing of utopian agricultural settlements in the West.

Introductory and concluding chapters book-end Cross's topical analysis of Greeley's advocacy of westward migration as a solution for the problems of New York's urban poor. Chapters address Greeley's compassion for the urban poor and his support of agricultural education (via newspaper articles and college courses), the movement against territorial slavery, the Homestead Act, federally subsidized railroads, and the Union Colony experiment (today's Greeley, Colorado) to assist aspiring farmers in moving West. Cross has carefully worked the primary and secondary literature

here, examining Greeley's letters and papers, his newspaper editorials and books, published contemporary firsthand accounts, and all relevant secondary literature. Much of the narrative is documented with primary source material quoted directly from the Greeley papers. Cross's volume thus stands as the most important study of Greeley since Glyndon Van Deusen's 1953 biography. Moreover, Cross's study of Greeley's social welfare ideas and agrarian radicalism greatly enhances our understanding of antebellum American "conservatism." It further corroborates what Seymour Martin Lipset recently described as the absence of a true "conservative" party in America after the Revolution; instead, early American politics is best characterized as boasting two diverse liberal parties, the Democrats and Republicans.

Coy Cross's book is a well-written, focused, solidly documented study of an absorbing and important topic. Unlike some of the "new" western historians, Cross analyzes manifest destiny and expansionism in historical context; he avoids the pitfalls of ideological polemics through evenhanded, analytical narrative prose. Moreover, he provides an important assessment and qualification of Greeley's (and Turner's) safety valve theory, concluding that while New York City's poor may not have heeded Greeley's call to "Go West!" millions of others in fact did. "And the Homestead Act, the absence of slavery, the information on the latest developments in agriculture, and the transcontinental railroads helped make their migration and settlement much easier. [Greeley's] were not wasted efforts, although he misjudged who the beneficiaries would be."

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