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Review of *The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning in the American West before 1890* By John W. Reps

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The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning in the American West before 1890. By John W. Reps. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981. Maps, illustrations, bibliographical note, index. viii + 169 pp. \$25.00 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

The title of this book is misleading. If the work carries one persistent message, it is that the cities of the American West were not planned at all. Conceived as speculations in land, yes; almost always designed in the form of a repetitive gridiron, yes; but planned in any twentieth-century sense of the word, definitely not. Only the southwestern Spanish towns and the Mormon towns of Deseret come close to being examples of "urban planning." City planning, after all, only came along early in the twentieth century, and Reps clearly illustrates that few towns were established after 1890. The term *planning*, as Reps uses it, can perhaps best be defined as "the determination of the initial physical layout of a town." Urban design would have been a better word choice.

Though Reps notes that this volume is "an elaboration of an unpublished 1977 conference paper," its parentage is clearly his major 1969 work, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton University Press, 795 pp. + index). It is from this work that Reps draws both reproductions and text, a fact he does not attempt to hide, as he often cites the 1969 work. The value of this newer volume therefore lies in its streamlined format. Compared to the encyclopedic, comprehensive parent volume, it is a highly readable book, with much of its space devoted to map reproductions of good quality.

Reps points out, as other scholars do, that cities and towns were the stepping-stones of civilization on the frontier, and that "new towns preceded or occurred simultaneously with the opening of lands for farming and ranching" (p. 1). The book examines a series of "detached frontiers"—the Southwest, Texas, the Pacific Northwest, the mining frontier, the plains, railroad towns, towns of Zion, and the Oklahoma frontier.

In any book, there are interpretations with which others will take issue. Here, for instance, Reps writes that "the desire for some kind of urban order, however primitive, was deeply instilled in the minds of those who flocked" to mining sites (p. 59). Yet the text makes it abundantly clear elsewhere that it was in fact the operation of the rent gradient and speculation in land, rather than some primordial psychological urge for order, that created the pattern of the towns. There are few such unsupported statements, for the text is more encyclopedic than interpretative in nature. This quality is, indeed, the principal failure of the volume, for one is better drawn to the 1969 book for details; a bit more interpretation would have been useful. But the slighter volume makes a good supplemental reader in an urban history course. For this it can be highly recommended, and Reps merits praise for his efforts in making us aware of the initial physical layout of the American city.

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