

nounced attachment to married women; so as to preclude any attachment that could cause a rumor or other ties. It would be useless and impossible to argue the matter, or to give reasons for preferring solitude soul to solitude à deux; but the reasons are sufficiently strong, and if I ever should act in a contrary sense, it would be because I should have begun to lose my will, and was in the first stages of imbecility. Just now my only wish is to escape from the dangers that remain in life with the least possible noise and suffering.

In fact, he called the period after 1885 his "posthumous" existence and never remarried.

It was doubtless a blow to Adams that the nation never drafted him for President by acclamation. Yet the letters to his friend John Hay, Secretary of State under Presidents McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, show his vicarious sense of political power and are rich in ruminations touching the imperial ambitions of Russia, Germany, France, and England. But with Hay's death in 1905, he remarked that "I've no longer any concern in politics." Gradually this historian sunk himself in the Middle Ages, so he prepared *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1904). Still, as he told Anne Palmer Fell in 1901, "though I am glad to be through with it, and to have no more responsibility for the universe, I find it still very amusing to look at, from a front box. The spectacle does not lose its interest. Far from it! What a fascinating melodrama it is, when one has time to think; and what do the Kaiser and the Czar and Edward VII and Pierpont Morgan think of it? I presume that Marian can tell you, since she was born to it. As I was born in the year 1138, I

don't catch on."

The Education was meant to focus what he thought of the meaningless spectacle of life in his time; and, to Henry James, he called the autobiography "a mere shield of protection in the grave. I advise you to take your own life in the same way, in order to prevent biographers from taking it in theirs." However "suicidal" the writing of autobiography may be, the letters of Henry Adams give us the living man; and, for all the irritations of his continuous irony, he is well worth knowing in this correspondence.

James W. Tuttleton is a professor of English at New York University.

The Conservative Roots of Conservation

by Nelson Van Valen

Frederick Billings: A Life

by Robin W. Winks

New York: Oxford University Press; 424 pp., \$27.95

New York Times junkies would have noticed an August 28, 1991, story headed "Woodstock Journal." Reading on they discovered that the story was datelined Woodstock, Vermont, and that it reported a proposal by Laurance S. and Mary Rockefeller to donate their 531-acre Woodstock estate as a National Historical Park. Although the Rockefeller family has a generations-long tradition of adding to the national park system, the story was not one of dog bites man. The estate includes the two-centuries-old mansion that was the birthplace of George

Perkins Marsh, author in 1864 of *Man and Nature: Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, which in Lewis Mumford's frequently quoted words was "the fountainhead of the conservation movement in America." In 1869, Marsh sold the estate—the only time it has ever been sold—to a lifelong admirer, Frederick Billings. Mary Rockefeller is Billings' granddaughter.

Although a principal American railroad builder and pioneer conservationist, Frederick Billings has lacked a scholarly biography. Robin W. Winks, having gained permission from the Rockefeller family to consult the records in the Billings Archives, has admirably filled that gap. Before launching his railroad career, Billings sought his fortune in gold-rush California. He arrived in San Francisco in the spring of 1849 and took not to the gold fields but to law and real estate. He was the first attorney in San Francisco to hang out his shingle and was a founding partner in what became California's principal law firm. Specializing in litigation of disputed land claims—a lucrative field in gold-rush California—Billings used his fees and his knowledge of dubious land titles to buy real estate. He also, with his partners, constructed the Montgomery Block, the city's most attractive office complex. As soon as his increasing wealth could support the role, Billings the attorney-businessman was joined by Billings the philanthropist. Public education (especially school libraries), religion, and parks and scenic landscapes became lifelong areas of special interest. He was a major figure in both the founding of the University of California and the preservation of Yosemite Valley as, in effect, a state-run national park.

Yet Billings continued to sign himself "Frederick Billings of Woodstock," and his California years did indeed prove only to be an extended sojourn. In the mid-1860's he returned to the East Coast and bought into "the single greatest American corporate undertaking of the 19th century," the Northern Pacific Railroad, becoming its largest single stockholder and president. He made two, closely related, lifesaving contributions to the railroad. In the aftermath of the Panic of 1873—largely precipitated by Jay Cooke's mis-handling of Northern Pacific finances—Billings carried through a reorganization that made survival possible. Equally crucial, he revitalized the railroad's land office, and income from the increased land sales made the reorganization feasible.

LIBERAL ARTS



DANCES WITH DAYS

Columbus Day was struck from the calendar in Berkeley, California, and renamed Indigenous Peoples Day, reported the *Chicago Tribune* last March. Floyd Red Crow Westerman of the movie *Dances With Wolves* hailed the decision, saying "we feel lucky to have survived these 500 years since Columbus."

Billings' move, therefore, from the West Coast and law to the East Coast and railroads was not a radical new departure. As Winks observes, "What Billings knew best was land law," and "railroad companies were, in fact, land companies." Addressing the standard question about the business giants of the Gilded Age—were they "Robber Barons" or "Industrial Statesmen"?—Winks' answer for the railroad builders is a little bit of both. Billings, however, despite a few small warts (real estate promotion is inherently risky to the promoter's moral health), unquestionably belongs in the second category; he is a "hero of capitalism."

The bandwagon labeled "Pioneers of American Conservation" has in recent years become increasingly crowded. Among the old, familiar riders—naturalists and foresters, novelists and essayists, politicians and publicists—are unfamiliar newcomers such as sportsmen and military men, artists and scientists. To this lengthening manifest Winks would add yet another name, the businessman—or at least a businessman—Frederick Billings. He showed an interest in conservation throughout his life and devoted his last years to it "almost wholly." Yet Billings was, as Winks makes clear, a conservationist "by the light of his day." Not only was he untroubled by such present-day questions of deep ecology as "Do rocks have rights?" but he died in 1890, before the controversy over definition that produced the conservation schism had fully developed. Hence, without much sense of inner conflict, he could be both preservationist "nature-lover" and utilitarian "wise-user." He worked for the preservation of the natural wonders of Yosemite, served on the Vermont Forestry Commission, and demonstrated reforestation, scientific management, and sustained yield on his Woodstock estate. Yet like his mentor Marsh, Billings was in the end an intelligent manipulator of nature. In Winks' words, "Love of landscape . . . was not enough. . . . Nature would need help." St. Benedict, not St. Francis, was the patron saint of conservation.

Winks' biography of Frederick Billings brings a much-needed reminder to conservatives: pioneer conservationists were not exclusively early-day, left-wing "radical environmentalists" pursuing the "hidden agenda" of destroying private enterprise. Conservation was not, and is not, inherently "anti-business," and Billings' life provided repeated instances of what Winks calls "the alliance of commerce

and conservation." Rereading Marsh toward the end of his life, Billings was convinced that "conservation was the highest form of efficiency." It is time for conservatives to regain the leadership role in the conservation movement that Billings pioneered more than a century ago.

Nelson Van Valen is a retired professor of history living in Belen, New Mexico.

The Cultural Middleman

by Thomas Fleming

Daydreams and Nightmares:
Reflections of a Harlem Childhood

by Irving Louis Horowitz
Jackson: University Press of
Mississippi; 116 pp., \$18.95

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To start with, the process of Americanization began at birth. Within the space of one week at the Metropolitan Hospital, I started life as a Hebrew child, with the name Yitzhak-Isaac. This apparently was too cumbersome for record-keeping purposes, so I was entered on the birth certificate as Isadore. But my sister, or at least so she told me, thought that name was far too Europeanized for a Harlem baby, so I became Irving by the seventh day. Louis is an affectionation of my late teens—there had to be some way to distinguish myself from all the other Irvings who lived in the Bronx and Brooklyn."

So begins Irving Horowitz's remarkable memoir of growing up Jewish in Harlem. Readers be warned. This is no Neil Simon tale of adoring parents and precocious kids. The Horowitzes were not a happy family. The socialist father, who deserted the Czar's army but nourished dreams of a Soviet Yiddish state, displayed no affection toward his family. Without the skills to succeed in the garment trade, he set up a key and lock shop in Harlem on the sound theory that such a business would do well in a high-crime area. The author gives us the impression that when his parents were not quarreling with each other or beating the children, they were staying one step ahead of their black neighbors. During Christmas season the family worked the bulb scam: unsuspecting black cus-

tomers would bring in their bulbs for a test that usually revealed the lights to be defective. "When the same bulbs were retested after the customer left, they almost always were found to be perfect. . . . My father placed them into inventory and resold them as new."

But if the Horowitzes picked up a few dollars with such tricks, the whole of Harlem, black and white, was devoted to the hustle, and young Irving goes from sneaking money from his father's cash drawer to manipulating ticket sales at the Polo Grounds to running numbers and scalping tickets. What training for a political sociologist!

More than anything this is the story of a Jewish boy with a cleft palate making it the hard way on the streets of Harlem. After the great Harlem riot in which the family business is sacked, the Horowitzes move to pleasanter quarters in a Jewish section of Brooklyn. The young Horowitz—"a Jew with heavy traces of a black sharecropper's accent"—brought Harlem with him to Brooklyn. His new classmates regarded him, not without reason, as a bully, and he got into real trouble with his one attempt to imitate the sexual mores of Harlem by attacking a girl whom he had never met. When all hell broke loose, he "kept wondering why Harlem kids seemed to manage sexual intercourse without incurring the wrath of parents and other authorities." During his period of in-school suspension, he begins to see life from the principal's perspective, and it took the tough-minded teachers of PS 193 only one term to turn him into a kid who would grow up to be a major American social theorist and the proprietor of a major academic press.

Even more interesting than Irving Horowitz's personal story are his observations on the difficult relations between blacks and Jews. Like many Jewish kids, Horowitz was as fond of the blacks' music as he was terrified of their unrestrained behavior. If blacks envied Jews for their particles of economic success in the 1930's, some Jews had a sneaking admiration for black creativity. However, "the majority of Jews, for their part, saw this flirtation with black culture as nothing short of a desecration of Jewish life—an early warning signal that sexuality would displace marriage and undiluted individual expression would destroy family solidarity."

But for all the ambiguities of the relationship, suggests Horowitz, it was a black-Jewish partnership that to a great