

tention, then ethical law can have no credibility or authority for the really “liberated” individual, whether he styles himself a “left” radical or a “right” libertarian. This view proposes or entails a “deification of the individual,” rooted in the “extravagant claims for the powers of the individual that we find in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman.” Left or right, the modern American often has an “Emersonian detachment from awareness of our conditioned state,” as well as a concomitant contempt for ethics. He lives in and promotes what C.S. Lewis called “a world of incessant autobiography.” Yet in the academy, now largely influenced by the Paris Deconstructionists, such radical voluntarism often shares the same cranial cavities with determinist ideas that deny *any* human agency or free will, seeing us all as puppets of gender, race, class, and an authoritarian “logocentrism,” a contradictory conjunction that Anderson opposes.

Though essentially a work of literary and cultural history, *Making Americans* is a tribute to the moral imagination. It is also a book written out of love and loyalty to our turbulent and tattered Republic.

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Lonesome No More

by Gregory McNamee

Streets of Laredo

by Larry McMurtry

New York: Simon & Schuster;
864 pp., \$25.00



All literary genres have their loyalists, but few have more devoted—and querulous—readers than the Western. So when in the mid-1980’s rumors began to circulate that Larry McMurtry, hitherto known for his angst-ridden tales of modern Texas, was at work on an epic oater, shoot-em-up fans began looking for a noose, sure that the bespectacled belletrist would revise their Old West out of existence. He did; but McMurtry’s *Lonesome Dove* went on to become one of the best-selling Westerns of

recent times. Of course, diehard oater-eaters had their day with it; they even convened a special panel at the 1985 Western Historical Association convention to squabble over why the mock-heroic cowboys who populate the novel needed to drive their cattle all the way to Montana when they would have hit a stockyard-bound railroad line in southern Kansas. In *Lonesome Dove* McMurtry took pains to strip away the legendary West, to discover a region plagued by genocide, random violence, failure, and frustrated dreams, a West where many lose while few gain, where people travel far to go nowhere.

Sequels never quite match up to their progenitors, and McMurtry’s *Streets of Laredo* is no exception. Partly, this is the inescapable result of its setting. Texas has quieted down since the hell-raising days of Augustus McCrae and Woodrow Call. In *Lonesome Dove*, the protagonists were retired from the Texas Rangers and happily settled into a life of hard drinking and cattle rustling, ending with McCrae’s death far from home. The second book finds the fast-aging Call at loose ends, adrift in the place he helped settle. His friend, the historical figure Charles Goodnight, describes the situation, remarking of his ranchhands:

The cowboys wore guns from wistfulness. . . . They wanted to feel that they were living in a West that was still wild. It was harmless nostalgia, for the most part; as long as they didn’t injure themselves or the livestock, he put no strictures on their use of firearms.

But the Panhandle was no longer the wild West—not by a long shot. The cowboys could play or posture all they wanted to, adjusting their holsters and practicing fast draws. The fact was, they were herdsmen, not gun-fighters, and it would be colossal bad luck if their herding ever brought them into contact with a real killer, of the sort that had once been common in the West.

Such psychopathic killers may have dwindled in number, but the deeds of one of them helps to propel *Streets of Laredo*. Across the border in Mexico, a teenager named Joey Garza has discovered that he enjoys wasting most of the people who cross his path. Had he stayed put in Ojinaga, the good gringos

across the way would not have minded this antisocial behavior, but Joey has taken to crossing the line, killing whole train crews, and felling innocent men with a long-range rifle just for the pleasure of practicing his aim. In one particularly gruesome scene, the *bandido* slaughters a hapless cowboy and deposits choice bits of the buckaroo’s body atop the sheriff’s desk in the nearby Presidio jail, inches from the snoring lawman. When Garza unites with the racist bandit John Wesley Hardin, it is only out of expediency; their common front will earn him enough money to return to Mexico, live in high style, and mutilate his neighbors whenever the fancy strikes.

Psycho or not, Garza is the most interesting character in the novel. Woodrow Call, who should hold center stage, has always been a one-dimensional character, without much to say and without many thoughts in his head. Call, loyal as a bloodhound, is good for killing, but even being whittled down bit by bit over the years fails to inspire him to much reflection. Garza, on the other hand, actually feels passion for his line of work, sinister though it may be, and is the only character who might be said to possess an idea. The taciturn Call (“I ain’t a lawman. I work for myself.”) naturally has to go up against Garza, inspired not by noble thoughts but rather by a bounty offered by a railroad tycoon. Call suffers all kinds of setbacks, and only the help of his trustworthy sidekick Pea Eye saves him from winding up any worse than he does.

Devotees of the Western genre will find little to displease in *Streets of Laredo*. McMurtry peppers his story with enough historical characters to keep diehards guessing and uses his considerable literary skills to elevate his story far above the average oater, bringing in some of the dark vision that makes his earlier modern novels like *The Last Picture Show* so compelling. As he remarks of the people of the borderland, “Survival was all they had time for, and numbers of them failed even at that.” His sequel is not, and probably could not have been, the great achievement of *Lonesome Dove*, but far weaker attempts have been made at getting to the heart of the West than *Streets of Laredo*.

Gregory McNamee’s *Gila: The Life and Death of an American River is forthcoming from Crown Publishers.*

Letter From Indiana

by William L. Isley, Jr.

The Middle American Struggle



Earlier this year my 12-year-old son and I had a knock-down-drag-out fight over patriotism and the evils of media influence. What incident set off these family fireworks? Was it the current U.N. wars or the influx of foreign goods? Was it Dan Rather or MTV? No, it was something much more important. My son, who misses no opportunity to criticize Indiana's Hurling Hoosiers, was backing the University of Michigan's "Fab Five," happily defeated earlier in the year by one of the dumbest mistakes in NCAA basketball history.

I suppose to the uninitiated this might raise a few eyebrows. How can you get from jump shots to Japan or from dunk shots to Dan Rather? The answer is that we take our basketball very seriously in this state. In order to understand this state's passion for basketball, you must first understand that historically the heart of Indiana basketball has been not in the colleges, but in the high schools. Dr. Naismith may have invented the game in Massachusetts, but it took off like a three-point shot in Indiana. According to Herb Schwomeyer's *Hoosier Hysteria*, the first game played in America outside of Massachusetts was in Crawfordsville in 1893. Eighteen years later Crawfordsville High School won the first state high school championship.

It is significant that Crawfordsville won the first state title. It is also significant that Muncie Central High School has won eight championships, more than any other school. It tells us something about Indiana culture. We are, in contrast to our image as a rural farm state, a state of small cities and towns. The 1990 census states that 65 percent of Indiana's population lives in urban areas. True, one of the glories of Indiana high school basketball is that it has a classless or, as we anti-Marxists prefer to say, an equal-opportunity state tournament. All schools, regardless of their size or lack of it, compete against one another for the

same championship. This means that tiny Milan, which loosely served as the basis for the movie *Hoosiers* and had an enrollment of only 161, was able to defeat Muncie Central in 1954, lay legitimate claim to being the best team in the state, and attain Hoosier immortality. Still, Milan's great victory has become a myth obscuring the fact.

Most of our towns found their corporate identity through high school basketball teams and through employment in one or two factories. Entertainment and economies within the towns created and fostered intense local loyalties. My mother, a generous and kind Christian woman, born and reared in Madison, Indiana, still cannot prevent a look of contempt from spreading over her face whenever the name Jasper is mentioned. Jasper had the audacity to upset Madison in the 1949 championship game. I, to this day, cannot cheer for a Noblesville team, our arch rivals when I was in high school.

Unfortunately, our tradition is in serious danger. Our small-town culture is dying in the face of America's contemporary centralizing "mediaocracy," although school consolidation has done significant damage as well. The local basketball game is not the only show in town. Increasingly, people will sit in front of their televisions to watch Northeast Louisiana State play Oklahoma A&T rather than attend the game at their local gym. My son would rather have watched Chris Webber of Michigan, a mere media image in his life, than go to see a flesh-and-blood local hero fight for the glory of Carmel High.

Now, although the words catch in my Hoosier throat that has often gone hoarse at a ball game, I must admit that there is more than the game of basketball at stake here. The sin of the mediaocracy is that it makes us live in a world of illusory images. What appears on the screen is more real than our neighbor, to whom we only happen to say "Hi" in the driveway as we rush in to eat our frozen dinners in front of the boob tube. The result is moral voyeurism by which people become more agitated about defending the "rights" of Kuwaitis, Somalians, and Bosnians than about defending the integrity of their own community. After all, they don't see Richmond and Koko-

mo on ABC news or even its Indianapolis affiliate. In a mediaocracy, whose motto is "I televise, therefore it is," they quite simply do not exist.

Symbolic of this confusion of image with reality were the 1993 state championship games, which we attended since Carmel, my town's high school, was among the "Final Four." They were held in the Hoosier Dome, a professional football stadium converted for the use of basketball to accommodate 25,000-plus fans. The problem was that the floor was so far away for much of the crowd that they had to have a huge screen. Many, although in attendance at the game, still viewed it through a camera lens. Image was more real than flesh and blood.

The economic base of our community identities is fast eroding as well. Many of our small central and eastern Indiana towns, such as Muncie, which was the subject of the Lynd's famous "Middletown" studies, experienced their first boom with the discovery of natural gas in the late 19th century. Glass factories, like the Ball Company, came in to take advantage of the readily available resource. Hoosier towns early on became automotive centers, often producing their own automobiles. Indeed, many of their consumer products were made for local consumption. This pattern continued into the 20's, the very time basketball caught on in a big way. These two elements, economics and entertainment, helped to create a strong and independent community identity. Team names, such as the Bedford Stonecutters and the Ladoga Cannery, reflected this fused identity. By the time of the Great Depression, the local industries were usually struggling or had been purchased by regional or national companies. The locally owned small factories, such as meat-packing plants, have almost entirely disappeared now. In the automotive industry, towns eventually came to produce only parts as part of a larger corporation. These factories are still alive, but in grave trouble.

Even areas in which there is some good economic news no longer foster a strong community identity. Take Anderson, for example. The town, home to a large Delco Remy plant, has been having serious economic difficulties, and its population declined by over 13,000 in the 1980's. A recent article in the *Indi-*