Michael Berry, George Maude, Jerry Schuchalter. *Frontiers of American Political Experience*. Turku: Turun Yliopisto, 1990. Turun Yliopiston Julkaisuja Annales Universitatis Turkuensis Sarja - Ser. B OSA - Tom. 191. 139 pages.

For almost one hundred years "the frontier thesis" as formulated by Frederick Jackson Turner has maintained its towering presence in the American self-consciousness. In addition, the frontier thesis has been seen as the beginning of the discipline of American studies. Deepened as well as supplemented by Perry Miller's celebrated essay on the "Errand into the Wilderness" the frontier thesis constituted a field of a cultural science fit for American aspirations and beliefs originally to be pronounced on the Columbian exposition in Chicago in 1893 in celebration of the discovery of America. It may be that a significant part of the issue of whether American studies is to be predominantly practiced as a learned version of US officialdom or as a critical vision of American society is to be determined with reference to the frontier thesis.

The present work, which consists of three essays by historians that teach American history and social science in Finland, is intended as an exploration of the meaning of the frontier thesis as a paradigm of American political experience. Jerry Schuchalter has written on the intellectual origins of the Turner thesis. Michael Berry's essay is an attempt to understand the shifting image of Finland in the shape of the American perception of a frontier society. Finally, George Maude's essay relates the frontier thesis to the ideas of Turner' contemporary Alfred Thayer Mahan and, in a surprising move, shows how the ideas of a moving frontier across the seas came to surface in present day Soviet Russian naval doctrine. Thus, the essays appear to be conceived on different terms and certainly discuss the notion of the frontier from very different perspectives. On closer inspection, however, they turn out to be unified by their preoccupation with the form of power expressed by the notion of the frontier.

The most original feature of the volume relates to the discussion of the state in liberal society. Although the authors do not attempt to present a formal discussion of theories of the state, the central claim established by the essays read as a whole is that the ideology of the frontier is not to be understood as the myth of American democracy but as the legitimating myth of the American state. State and frontier are integrated by the emphasis on 'necessary,' i.e. legitimate violence, and the accepted quest for unlimited power.[1] Though importantly inspired by William Appleman Williams, the

1 See, "Politics as a Vocation," in From *Max Weber*, eds. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 78.

idea that the frontier stands for state reason has clearly moved the discussion moved beyond his notion of the frontier as a means of escape from the contraditions of the liberal capitalism.

Traditionally, the idea of borders served as important manifestations of state power. Borders signified protection provided by national armies and police, both of which were seen as the very essence of centralized power, and therefore, an important means of governance. In Europe, borders were conceived to have been shaped by the state and imposed upon society. They restrained natural means of commerce and communication. In America, however, the reverse seemed to happen. Transfigured as the frontier, American borders were seen as the expression of private enterprise and as the symbol of opportunity rather than pretection. Borders were disguised as the opposite of state policy. The immigrant-settler-booster seemed to replace the soldier. Thus, the frontier came to stand as the expression of a 'spontaneous' process of civilization that belonged to the realm of 'society.' Frontiers in America were private activity that was formed by a liberal-republican tradition and its peculiar needs. Liberal republicanism needed to promote deference to principles of inequality of power and wealth, and sought to teach citizens to obey orders, to sacrifice private interest and even engage in bloodshed when necessary. The frontier signified a dramatic moment in domestic no less than foreign politicy, when the social contract was abrogated and the citizen/soldier was symbolically confronted with the prospect of a return to the state of nature, where he was under the obligation not only to observe the law of nature but also obliged to enforce it, according to Lockean version of the origins of political order. In sum, the frontier was an interpretative model which taught Americans how to understand their political experiences. On the one hand, they cultivated deep suspicions against a government presumed to represent democratic principles of election and cherished a constitutional system of checks and balances that presumably was to guard against unlimited ambitions. At the same time, however, references to the frontier taught Americans how to think about progress—not in terms of cultural restraints—but in terms of the abandonment of established limits to state power.

Niels Thorsen University of Copenhagen