

Schwantes, Carlos A. *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey*. University of Idaho Press, 1994.

Carlos A. Schwantes, a University of Missouri professor who specializes in transportation studies, has written about an interesting moment in history in his second book, *Coxey's Army: An American Odyssey*, which vividly approaches the 1894 movement of unemployed workers of the nation. The workers hailed from primarily the west and Midwest, and marched on Washington in protest of poor economic circumstances. This book gives in-depth background to the movements of Coxey's "army," a title given by the press but not heralded very warmly by the leadership of Coxey's march (Carl Browne, Jacob S. Coxey's assistant, felt that such military terms portrayed the men and women of Coxey's movement as an invading force, instead using terms like "cantons" and "communes" from the French Revolution). While Schwantes does provide a very definitive piece on the subject of Coxey's long march on Washington to encourage the hand of government to pass his public works and "Good Roads" bills through his "Petition of Boots," his writing style is occasionally unnecessarily verbose.

Throughout the work as well, Schwantes references statements of notable figures within the rag-tag ranks of Coxey's Army, such as Carl Browne, a rabble rouser, artist and a messianic preacher, an intriguing man known as "The Unknown", who is representative of the silent masses (he is always described as being a "man of the people", despite being well dressed and skilled, he sleeps outside with the rest of the men on their journey), Dr. "Cyclone" Kirkland, a medicine man and astrologer who proclaims he was an Indian chief in a past life, among many others such as Jasper Johnson, the standard bearer of Coxey's Army, and Bunker Hill, a his trusty dog. Other people of note are the historians, such as Professor Frederick Turner, congressmen, such as Ignatius Donnelly, author of *Caesar's Column*, and especially the newspapers and how they

began to turn on Coxeys Army. While this can be helpful, it occasionally is to the point of confusion on what point the author is trying to make. The majority of the figures within the work are given context but not all of them are. Which led to roughly the same issue that was discussed earlier with the author's terminology. Also, there was a lack of pictures that were directly relatable to the content that was written, though the book had some pictures, which provide a nice reprieve from the book turning from a true story into a narrative, but what would have really been much more visually narrative would have been a map at the end of the book detailing the journey of Coxeys Army to Washington D.C.

The author, as previously stated, is a University of Missouri professor who specializes in transportation studies, and has written twelve books that are primarily written on early railroad, which he touches on in Coxeys Army. He holds a doctorate in American history and has authored 12 books and edited three dealing with the American West. It is a small leap from American history to transportation studies, as his expertise certainly does show through in his detail of how Coxeys Army and other migrations transported across the country. He also references earlier labor rebellions, such as the Haymarket rebellion of 1886, in comparison to Coxeys Army.

Jacob S. Coxeys early life is portrayed appropriately, with his birth in a small town in Pennsylvania, and his youth spent following in his father's footsteps as a stationary engineer, where he then saved up enough money and branched out into his uncle's scrap metal business. Later on, on one fateful trip he went out to Massillon, Ohio to buy the town's abandoned blast furnace and enjoyed the scenic countryside and the hospitality of the people so much that he bought a small ranch on the edge of town with an unprofitable sandstone quarry connected to it. Luck was on his side though as his sandstone quarry soon become quite profitable processing the

stone into fine sand that was used in the manufacture of iron, glass, and much more. So why in 1894 did a wealthy rancher who had a certain curiosity about currency unite the unemployed workers of the nation to march on Washington to ensure the passing of a public works bill? This work will answer that.

The prologue is quite technical in its explanation and serves as a very useful introductory thesis. While Schwantes use of 1890s terminology occasionally impedes on the fluidity of the work, it does truly enrich the reader's experience to know about the "Silverites," "The Silver Congress," and "yellow journalism." Throughout the work, the author's use of subtle metaphor is frequent and often humorously appropriate, such as on when the mayor of Chicago, Carter Harrison, steps up to the podium to address the people of Coxey's Army in the park and his speech is described as speaking "to calm the troubled waters with the oil of his rhetoric." This can humorously be interpreted as how the mayor is being both insincere in his speech and how out-of-tough he is with his audience (the fact that oil and water do not mix at all). There is also a humorous comparison made early on in the book on the similarities between Jacob Coxey's army and Robert E. Lee's army. Another great and informative example of the author's use of metaphor is the interesting allegory he places between L. Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* and the 1890's economic state of America, specifically the west. Schwantes even goes as far as correlating the Tin Man with the disenfranchised unemployed laborer who constituted such ranks in organizations as Coxey's Army and Kelley's Army. Along with the "gold-backed" east being portrayed by the "Yellow Brick Road."

This relates to the next issue which is that while the story is easy enough to follow along, it does briefly discuss the workings behind Coxey's ideas, which are hard to follow without a background in finances or economics. Although the work presents a fair amount of technical

information, it is also frequently fantastical, through the frequent introduction of characters that just seem to fade into obscurity after a little while or the misadventures the army has through towns. Although the author only has a limited amount of space and information he can weave into a book, many avenues of exploration are opened by the author but quickly abandoned to focus on the larger picture of Coxey's march. This is frustrating as though the author is either ineffective at writing for a specified target audience, such as gilded age historians and labor historians and college students, or he is trying to appeal his work to a wider audience, such as highschoolers and non scholarly readers. Whatever his intentions were, they are effective in spurring people on to exploring the rich history of Coxey's Army.

While Coxey's Army does have its flaws, such as the issues with its wordiness and fluidity of reading as aforementioned, the work certainly does stand out as a cornerstone to any research on the 1894 labor movements across the country. While the protest of Coxey's Army is relevant to what has led to the history behind the current state of economic affairs in the United States, it probably would have faded into obscurity had books like Schwantes' *Coxey's Army* not been written to preserve its legacy, so that others may learn of the actions of Jacob S. Coxey, Carl Browne, and their army of motivated unemployed workers. Lastly, it is certainly a great book to read for both academics and those who casually strive to learn more about the 1894 labor movements.

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work.