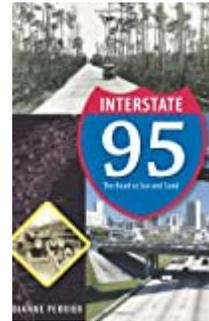


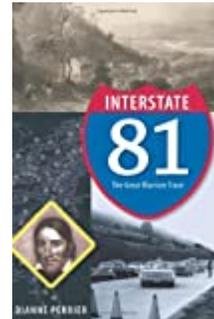
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Dianne Perrier.** *Interstate 95: The Road to Sun and Sand.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010. 256 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-3480-5.



**Dianne Perrier.** *Interstate 81: The Great Warriors Trace.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010. 272 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8130-3481-2.



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## I-95 and I-81

Dianne Perrier has written two books that may puzzle yet ultimately entertain and enlighten readers. The confusion stems from the fact that neither *I-81: The Great Warriors Trace* nor *I-95: The Road to Sun and Sand* are strict adherents to the conventions of academic history, despite their publication by a university press. The books show little evidence of archival research, contain few citations, do not engage other literature, and feature more exclamation points than scholars are gener-

ally comfortable with. They are also misleadingly titled, as the eponymous modern superhighways make mere cameos; instead, the books are histories of the corridors these roads traverse. Readers expecting in-depth analysis of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 or the construction of the New Jersey Turnpike will be disappointed, as Perrier is much more interested in how Native Americans and American colonists used the predecessors of today's highways than in their current manifestations.

All of these characteristics will discourage some readers. However, those who stick with the books will be happy they did. In the end, Perrier convincingly argues the underlying thesis behind both books: the history of today's roads must be thought of in terms of centuries rather than decades.

*I-81* resembles a travel guide more than a standard historical text. Beginning in New York, Perrier leads the reader southward down the "Great Warriors Trace," ultimately ending—as does the highway—in Tennessee. Rather than relay the history of the I-81 corridor explicitly, Perrier uses stories from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries to convey the importance of the route in history. Some of these stories are clearly tied to the road (for example, how armies used it to move supplies during the Civil War) while some appear a little more tangential (how lice pestered Civil War soldiers). Throughout, readers will learn a great deal about the towns and regions I-81 traverses.

Rather than following the state-by-state approach of *I-81*, Perrier organizes *I-95* around themes. Individual chapters consider how presidents, those seeking healthier climates, and those simply wanting respite from everyday life have traveled the I-95 corridor. Of particular interest here is Perrier's assertion that I-95 has been "the road to sun and sand" for longer than most would believe. While the book focuses on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Perrier shows a nascent tourism industry developing on the I-95 corridor in the early seventeenth century. As in *I-81*, *I-95* also features many asides that illuminate the history of the towns along the corridor.

Both books demonstrate Perrier's remarkable ability to tie disparate accounts of road travel into coherent narratives and to extract significant amounts of information from limited sources. Perrier ultimately develops unique accounts of road history because she looks to sources not

normally used. While Tom Lewis employed the holdings of the National Archive, the Federal Highway Administration, and presidential libraries in *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Lives* (1997), Perrier builds histories of transportation routes using the writings of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Julia Dent Grant, and Charles Dickens. Both *I-95* and *I-81* rely on Perrier's strength as a storyteller more than as an archive researcher. Methodologically and stylistically, then, Perrier's works resemble William Kaszynski's *Route 66: Images of America's Main Street* (2003) more than Anne Mitchell Whisnant's *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (2006).

Two factors ultimately hold back *I-95* and *I-81*. The first is a matter of sources. While the bibliographies are extensive, few of the sources are mentioned in the text. Consequently, it is unclear from where Perrier gets some of her information. Additionally, the primary sources are limited to a handful of published books and sources available on the Internet. Her analysis of these sources is sophisticated, and one can only wonder what the product might have been were more primary sources consulted with such an adept eye. The second problem relates to the aforementioned side stories. While very interesting, they are so numerous that they detract from the central argument of each book. *I-81*, in particular, does not focus nearly enough on marshal uses of the road to warrant the subtitle "The Great Warriors Trace."

Both *I-95* and *I-81* are worthwhile reads for anyone interested in transportation history or travel in general. Undergraduates will find the books accessible, and instructors may find them useful in demonstrating how transportation has changed over the course of three hundred years and the effects of this change on American society. But—as Perrier reminds readers—for as much as the means of transportation have changed, some travel routes have changed remarkably little.

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