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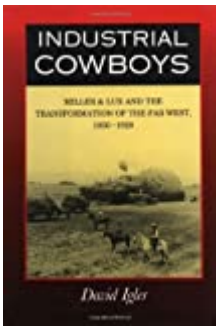

David Igler. *Industrial Cowboys: Miller & Lux and the Transformation of the Far West, 1850-1920.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001. xiv + 267 pp. $37.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-22658-6.

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In this book, David Igler presents a careful study of the development of the San Francisco meatpackers Miller and Lux, tracing that firm from its origins in the Gold Rush to its dissolution in the 1920s. This is an important book, examining not only the company's organizational structure, but also a range of other aspects, including environmental change in California's San Joaquin valley, the political economy of California and the West, and labor relations. Igler is a member of the history faculty at the University of Utah. The book began as his dissertation at the University of California, Berkeley; it is solidly based on extensive research in a wide range of primary sources, including the unpublished reminiscences of Henry Miller and Charles Lux, company records, public records, and newspapers. The book also incorporates a skillful analysis of photographs and presents a number of useful maps. Igler also draws upon an impressive range of historiography, ranging from the studies of business organization by Alfred Chandler to the environmental histories by William Cronon.

Miller and Lux, with company headquarters in San Francisco, was the only agricultural corporation in 1900 to be ranked among the nation's 200 largest industrial enterprises. At its peak, the firm counted some 100,000 cattle spread over 1.25 million acres in three states and dominated Pacific Coast and intermountain meat markets. In 1913, the company posted annual sales of more than $5 million. To accomplish that, Miller and Lux secured control over both land and water rights, and used that control to transform the environment in the interest of making profits. As Igler puts it, "industrial enterprise in the Far West thrived by engineering natural landscapes and mobilizing large labor forces" (p. 7).

In many ways, Miller and Lux resembled other large industries that emerged in the late nineteenth century–it was vertically integrated, relied on capital to accomplish both vertical integration and market domination, and employed an ethnically segmented work force. Unlike most other large industries of the period, however, Miller and Lux faced their most significant challenges not from competitors, but from the environment–from floods, drought, landscapes inappropriate for raising cattle and food for cattle, and even normal seasonal variations in rainfall. Given these risks, Miller and Lux eventually determined to transform the land- and waterscape: "to simplify nature's complexity, redesign ecosystems, and restrict environmental change" (p. 10). Ultimately, Igler argues, "market relations commodified and transformed all natural resources" (p. 11).

The firm's principals, Henry Miller and Charles Lux, were German immigrants who established themselves in New York City in the 1840s, then followed the lure of gold

to California where both set out to make their fortunes not as miners but as butchers. They formed a partnership in 1858 and soon integrated their operations backward from their packing plant, first by buying cattle herds, next by acquiring land–much of it initially from impoverished Californios–for fattening their cattle, then by raising their own cattle, and finally by acquiring more land and water rights as well as undertaking vast engineering projects to transform the environment to fit their purposes. Igler describes their meatpacking operations in San Francisco, in Butchertown, as the largest meatpacking district west of Chicago (p. 142), but consideration of the size of meatpacking operations in Omaha and Kansas City would have helped to establish that claim. By 1900, Igler argues, Miller and Lux was the nation's largest *integrated* cattle-raising and meatpacking enterprise; though there was a larger cattle ranch in Texas and more meatpacking in Chicago, Miller and Lux were unique in the scale and scope of their integrated operations. Igler describes the men's thirty-year partnership as "cordial yet distant" (p. 17). Lux lived in San Francisco; married into the city's emerging elite; eventually lived on Nob Hill, hobnobbing with the city's corporate and financial leaders; and ran the company's central office and packinghouses. Miller spent much of his time on his ranch near Gilroy and managed the company's far-flung land, water, and cattle empire. By the mid-1870s, the partners had acquired 421,000 acres in the San Joaquin valley and more than 100,000 acres elsewhere but were still not unusual in the San Joaquin valley, where 1 percent of landowners held 25 percent of the land.

Miller and Lux, however, came to operate the region's largest irrigation system, engineering both elaborate waterways and the draining of sloughs, shallow lakes, and marshes. Soon the largest number of their employees were engaged in irrigation and drainage operations related to the creation of pastures and land for raising cattle food, rather than working directly with cattle. One of the most dramatic legal battles of the late nineteenth century took form as *Lux v. Haggin* (1881), a struggle over control of water in the San Joaquin valley; the defendant was James Ben Ali Haggin, another San Francisco entrepreneur whose land and water holdings were on a scale comparable to those of Miller and Lux. By the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Miller and Lux's workforce had become distinctively segmented along ethnic lines. The ranch cooks were Chinese. Other workers were all described in the company's records as "white," but they included Mexicans, Italians, other European immigrants, and old-stock Americans. The *vaqueros*, from the outset, were largely Californios or Mexicans, but the alteration of the landscape eventually resulted in the deskilling of cattle handling and reduced the firm's reliance on experienced cowboys. Employees with Spanish surnames became much less prominent on the company's payrolls by 1900 or so; those who remained were mostly in the lowest-paying jobs. The men who worked on the irrigation and drainage systems included many European immigrants, especially Italians, who made up the largest single ethnic group on the payroll by 1900. Packing plant workers, in San Francisco, included much the same groups, with Mexicans in the lowest-paying jobs by 1900 and other positions held by European immigrants and old-stock Americans. Any efforts at unionization were dealt with severely, and Miller and Lux refused to sell meat to retail butchers who displayed a union shop card. Managers were nearly all old-stock Americans or immigrants from northern Europe.

After Lux's death in 1887, some ranch lands were sold to the American Cattle Trust (Swift, Armour, Cudahy, Wilson, Morris), which soon posed serious competition for Miller and Lux. The reforms of the progressive era, according to Igler, "altered almost every aspect of the firm's operations: its access to the public domain, use of water resources, livestock shipping practices, and meatpacking procedures" (p. 172). The net impact of reforms was an adverse one for the company, both in the city and on the range. After Miller's death in 1916, the firm declined steadily as a result of exhausted soils and aging water systems as well as regulation and competition. Still, even today, some of Miller's heirs farm land that were once part of the Miller and Lux empire, and one descendent still holds some of the water rights secured in *Lux v. Haggin*.

In the end, Igler suggests, the history of Miller and Lux demonstrates an important truth about the western political economy: "Wealth and power remained with those who could engineer the landscape and temporarily elude the environmental and social consequences" (p. 183). All in all, Igler's book presents important understandings for business history, environmental history, labor history, ethnic history, and the history of California and the West more generally.

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