

more perdurable "compact" vehicles that are demanded by the austerity standards of the cold war epoch.

Far from producing a depression, the end of military buying by the U.S. government might touch off a boom of incredible duration, once the transition to a true peace basis has been made. Indeed, while the U.S. and Soviet Russia have been putting their money into armaments, western Europe has been booming precisely because it has not been diverting its income into bigger and better missiles. Heilbroner refuses to draw any relevant deduction from this extremely obvious fact.

In addition to his fears that capitalism must founder on the investment problem, Heilbroner also worries over the possibility that the have-not nations will gang up on the haves if the West refuses to underwrite bigger and better socialistic Five Year Plans from the Ganges to the Congo. My own reading of "the future as history" tells me that unless the citizens of Soviet Russia and Red China can escape from their present institutional masters, they are due to experience bigger and better famines. Moreover, if India and the Congolese bind themselves to "the future as socialism," they, too, will have bigger and better failures. Just how this will endow them

with the strength to gang up on the West defies all logic.

If Mr. Heilbroner proves right about the possibility that the West may be on its last legs, it will be because we ourselves have gone over to the "planning" philosophy. By making ourselves slaves to government, we of the West will become have-not powers, too. And in a contest between have-nots, the more fecund Indians and Congolese might indeed take over. ◆

▶ MAN IN MODERN FICTION

By Edmund Fuller (New York: Random House, 165 pp., \$3.50)

Reviewed by Robert Thornton

SOME THIRTY YEARS AGO Albert Jay Nock wrote an essay entitled *On Making Low People Interesting*. Referring to the characters of contemporary fiction he observed: "They were all so colorless, in fact, so unsubstantial for literary purposes, that the authors had to be continually helping them out, finding something for them to do, creating one striking situation after another, to keep them going." The "something for them to do," then as now, usually involved sex or mayhem. Mr. Nock's complaint was not that authors dealt with low people — "a great asset to an artist" — but that there was "no vestige of the art that creates a character interesting in itself, irrespective of plot and ro-

matic action, powerfully stimulating the reader's fancy and imagination. . . ."

I was put in mind of this fine essay while reading Edmund Fuller's piece of criticism. The characters in recent novels are not only uninteresting, charges Mr. Fuller, they barely qualify as human beings! In the "terrible spate of novels now current man is seen specifically and insistently as an ironic biological accident, inadequate, aimless, meaningless, isolated, inherently evil, thwarted, self-corrupting, morally answerable to no one, clasped in the vise of determinisms economic or biological. His uniqueness as a person is denied or suppressed. He inhabits a hostile universe which is the creation of irrational and possibly malignant forces. The themes of these novels, to borrow some words from Lewis Carroll, are *ambition, distraction, uglification, and derision*. Unlike the great tradition of man as individual, responsible, guilty, but redeemable, this despairing disillusionment sees man as collective, irresponsible, morally neuter, and beyond help." As one might surmise from this rather lengthy quotation, Mr. Fuller writes with style. He rather puts one in mind of H. L. Mencken who never leaves his meaning in doubt.

Mr. Fuller has crammed too

much into his pages to permit the use of quotations to sum up his points — it would be necessary to quote the entire book! — but let me mention two things:

First, Mr. Fuller's bold declaration of a belief in God which comes as profound pleasure in this day when so many authors practically apologize for any mention, however slight, of their religious convictions.

Second, the nature of his remedy. After reading Mr. Fuller's strong criticisms of the filth and brutality so common in modern fiction, one expects to encounter a demand for censorship by some public agency. Nearly everyone, these days, screams for the State with its bag of cures whatever the complaint! But not Mr. Fuller, who comes out strongly *against* government censorship. He understands that legal sanctions are no substitute for the sanctions of taste and manners, and the application of literary standards. He realizes that if government is allowed to regulate the actions of a particular group because some of the members of that group behave badly, the good members will suffer the most. Censorship is needed, says Mr. Fuller, but censorship that is self-imposed; censorship by writers, reviewers, critics, and publishers themselves, not by bureaucrats. ◆

► **WESTWARD EXPANSION: A History of the American Frontier**
By Ray Allen Billington (Mac-Millan Co., 758 pp., \$8.00)

Reviewed by Lawrence Sullivan

THIS BOOK is a far-ranging economic and social history of America, although it is far from the dull, dry reading of the standard history text. It is the story of what Billington calls "the repeated rebirth of civilization along the western edge of settlement."

It is illustrated with 91 special maps delineating the movement of settlement and development from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Florida to Oregon. These maps range from 1513 A.D. to circa 1895.

The frontier has played a key role in our history and in the development of American national character. "Not only did institutions, but the character of men and women, change through contact with the wilderness," says the author. "This did not mean that the frontier molded all under its influence into identical beings; inherited cultural traits were too strong to be sloughed off entirely. Yet the western environment did endow pioneers with unique characteristics which all shared. This was accomplished partly by the selective processes which operated in all migrations: timid conformists were left behind, for only

brash, ambitious, dissatisfied, materialistic nonconformists were willing to risk the tribulations of wilderness existence. The attitudes of the selected groups which arrived in the West were further modified by the frontier environment.

Free public lands and the inflexible legal principle of enclosed private ownership on all new lands were the peculiar institutions of the newly developing settlements west of New England and the Southern Piedmont.

Free land made free men. A new breed of men came into being—men to whom opportunity was a national heritage. And these free men wrote with large and firm script in the book of "mission accomplished."

Here, in one volume, is a scholarly documentation of the physical, social, political, and economic development of America through some three centuries. It is rich in detail, tracing the frontiers not only in geographical terms, but in terms of minerals, lumber, trapping, cattle, agriculture; in railroads, highways, river traffic. Its 800 pages are a thrilling chronology of the conquest of a continent measuring some three million square miles. The American epic has no parallel in all human history, and Professor Billington tells it well. ◆