

disdained biographies as a means of understanding a writer. Perhaps Noiville means to signal, by this admission, that her attempt to bring Singer to life will lead to many dead ends. A scant 120,000 of Poland's three million Jews survived the Holocaust. Sixty years later, Noiville searches for the house where Singer was born, in Leoncin, 20 miles northwest of Warsaw; all that remains on the spot is an orchard. The section of Warsaw to which the Singer family relocated, memorialized in his books as the place where the thieves, the pimps, and the prostitutes were never too far from the virtuous, is gone too.

No one, Noiville discovers, wants to live on the street named after Singer in the town of his birth. Anti-Semitism runs deep. But a lot of people hated Singer the man as well. He left a five-year-old son in Poland and didn't see him again for 20 years. He lovingly described his mother in prose—but didn't write to her for a decade. He thrived on juggling the attentions of numerous women, and apparently demanded total devotion from his associates. Saul Bellow launched Singer's career in English with a beautiful translation of the short story "Gimpel the Fool," published in *Partisan Review* in 1953, but Singer failed to acknowledge this debt. Other Yiddish writers despised him, possibly because he alone managed to have an illustrious career in the English-speaking world. There is plenty of grumbling, too, that Singer's work in English has been sanitized from the Yiddish original.

I grew up hearing my father read Singer's magnificent short stories aloud. Whatever his personal shortcomings, Singer clearly loved every one of his characters. Noiville's book, translated from the French by Catherine Temerson, is eloquent, funny, and moving: a tribute to the art and importance of translation and to the life of Singer, who reached so many through devoted translators. And as Singer might say, a translation of a life may be as close as one human being can get to understanding another.

—Aviya Kushner

## Long, Strange Trip

HOW DID A 2,448-MILE-LONG highway across some of the country's most unforgiving and sparsely populated territory become the road Americans think of when they dream of *really* going somewhere?

That's the question geographer Arthur Krim takes up in a book that is neither traditional road guide nor comprehensive history, but an account of the real-world origins of Route 66 and its development into a national symbol of democratic freedom, boundless promise, and westward-rolling self-exploration.

Following the pattern of Alan Trachtenberg's *Brooklyn Bridge: Fact and Symbol* (1965), Krim begins by examining the "idea" of Route 66 in its many prefigurations, from Native American footpaths to emigrant wagon trails to 19th-century railroads. Then he describes the "fact" of the road, its physical presence as a series of two-lane regional auto trails across Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, the Texas panhandle, New Mexico, Arizona, and California that became a single highway when the federal system of numbered routes was established in 1925. Finally, Krim turns to the symbolic importance of the road, as reflected in such disparate cultural artifacts as John Steinbeck's Dust Bowl novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and a 2000 billboard advertisement for Kmart's Route 66 clothing line.

In that third, and longest, section of the book, we learn just how large Route 66 has loomed in the American imagination. Bobby Troup, discharged from the Marines after World War II, made a seven-day trip with his wife to Los Angeles in February 1946, following U.S. 66 all the way from St. Louis to California. By April, Nat Cole's trio had recorded three different versions of Troup's "(Get Your Kicks On) Route Sixty-Six!," the postwar anthem that effectively changed the name of 66 from "highway" to "route" (always pronounced with an eastern inflection: "root"). In the 1969 biker film *Easy Rider*, an acid-dropping

### ROUTE 66:

Iconography of the American Highway.

By Arthur Krim.  
Center for American Places. 220 pp. \$35



On a stretch of U.S. Highway 66, an expanse of Arizona sky above a lone Texaco gas station beckons cross-country travelers in 1947.

Captain America played by Peter Fonda crossed the Colorado River into California on the U.S. 66/I-40 bridge, as his own father, Henry Fonda, had done playing Oklahoma migrant Tom Joad in the 1940 film adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath*. The road has meant a good deal to real-life capitalists too: In 1975, Bill Gates and Paul Allen founded Micro-Soft (later de-hyphenated) in an Albuquerque office building on U.S. Highway 66.

And just how did Route 66 come by its magically incantatory double sixes? In 1925, a planning committee of state highway engineers designated the route U.S. Highway 60, one of nine transcontinental roadways whose route number ended in zero. But Kentucky governor William J. Fields, stung by the absence of a national “zero” route through his own state, successfully lobbied Washington for a U.S. 60 across Kentucky. To maintain a cross-country tourist route from Chicago to L.A. identified by a single number, highway officials from Illinois, Missouri, and Oklahoma agreed in 1926 to give up their coveted zero, and adopted—for reasons shrouded in mystery—the number 66.

With enactment of the Interstate and Defense Highway Program 30 years later, states set to

work on a national network of high-speed, limited-access freeways that, in just a few decades, bypassed U.S. Highway 66 or supplanted it entirely. Long stretches of its original roadbed were obliterated, and much of what remained was in disrepair. In 1985, it was decommissioned as a federal route.

For younger readers, Krim’s history might assume too much familiarity with a road that was, for much of the last century, *the* route to the promised land of California. But for those who remember Bobby Troup’s near-perfect rhyme of “Winona” and “Arizona,” *Route 66* is a fascinating account of the real people and real events that built a fabled road in our minds.

—Eric Jones

## HISTORY

### American Iconoclast

AFTER HALF A CENTURY IN journalism, I. F. (Izzy) Stone—one-man band, self-described Jeffersonian Marxist, investigative reader, patriotic subverter of the official line, merciless monitor of the mainstream

media, early Holocaust exposé—had graduated from pariah to prophet: When he sold his 19-year-old political newsletter, *I. F. Stone’s Weekly*, to *The New York Review of Books* in 1971, its circulation was 70,000, astonishing for a publication of its kind.

Blind without his Coke-bottle glasses and deaf without his hearing aid until an operation late in life, I. F. (born Isador Feinstein) Stone (1907–89) knew how to read and listen between the lines. He was ahead of the herd on pointing out the contradictions posed by McCarthyism to a democratic society. Even as J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI spent thousands of man-hours tracking and reading him, he counter-investigated, exposing the follies, illegalities, and excesses of the FBI director and his Bureau. Vociferously opposed to totalitarians (although he was a little late in dis-

#### ALL GOVERNMENTS LIE!

The Life and Times of Rebel Journalist I. F. Stone.

By Myra MacPherson. Scribner. 564 pp. \$35