

BOOK REVIEWS

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Hell of a Vision: Regionalism and the Modern American West

Robert L. Dorman. Modern American West Series. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012. 272pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$50.00.

Robert L. Dorman takes the title of his book from a dialog in Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, and this choice of source and title sets both the tone and aim of the volume. Dorman's goal is to tell the story of the shifting visions of the West held by writers and other western regionalists from the close of the nineteenth century to the present. While he makes good use of government reports and other non-literary sources, the heart of *Hell of a Vision* is about the cultural visions that writers, thinkers, and a handful of historians have devised to capture and explain the meaning of the nation's largest region.

And a big region it is; seventeen states—everything from the one-hundredth meridian to the Pacific Coast. As Dorman admits, it is difficult to pin down any one identity for this expansive region; in response, he often talks about sub-identities and partial visions. Whether whole or part, Dorman divides western visions into a set of primary visions, each defining a different aspect of a changing West.

The years from the 1880s to the 1930s, from the "closing" of the frontier to the Great Depression, define the first vision, an agrarian landscape peopled by pioneers and cowboys, but also by American Indians and Spanish-speaking, mostly Mexican, people.

As in the rest of the country, the Depression threw this early vision into disarray, to be replaced by works of social criticism and government programs that transformed the landscape and people of the Big West. World War II replaced economic distress with wartime expansion and shifted the center of the nation's population westward, especially in production centers on the West Coast. At war's end, all forms of regionalism, whether in the South, New England, or the West, were absorbed by a national ideology of "Americanness" that characterized the Cold War, but also by the growing nationalization of consumer culture fed by expanding suburbs, interstate highways, and national television networks. One thinks immediately of Ray Kroc, who built an empire from his base in the West by creating fast-food restaurants that were virtually identical in every region.

Western regionalism did not die in the wake of McDonald's, however, and Dorman sees the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, along with the concomitant rise of identity politics, as the savior of western regionalism as well as the impetus for a new western culture, much of it heavily political. Sierra Clubs, the Environmental Defense Fund, and a series of Sagebrush Rebellions stamped this era, one in which we continue to live. Dorman closes his account of the changing cultures of the regional West with a look at "New West" writers and a brief gesture toward the place of the West in an increasingly global world.

Hell of a Vision is a thoughtful and well-written book full of intriguing insights.

While it requires much of the reader, including a good foundation in the literature of the American West, those who persevere will find a clear and comprehensive view of what the West has meant for generations of western regionalists.

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***Karl Bodmer's America Revisited:
Landscape Views Across Time***

Photography by Robert M. Lindholm.

Introduction and annotations by W. Raymond Wood and Robert M. Lindholm. Foreword by David C. Hunt. Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West, Vol. 9. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 192pp. Illus. Map. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$45.00.

Among nineteenth-century Europeans fascinated with America's unique landscape and native people, Prince Maximilian zu Wied and Swiss artist Johann Karl Bodmer have long been praised for the scientific accuracy of their work. The scientific/artistic pair traveled through the United States from July 1832 to August 1834, Maximilian keeping detailed journals and Bodmer illustrating the land, wildlife, and the people of the American interior with acknowledged accuracy.

W. Raymond Wood and Robert M. Lindholm's coauthored book, *Karl Bodmer's America Revisited: Landscape Views Across Time* revisits their travels by pairing Bodmer's original landscape sketches and watercolors with Lindholm's contemporary photographs of the same sites.

In addition to a brief coauthored introduction noting both the historical context and the authors' purposes and methodology, the text features sixty-four Bodmer illustrations paired with photographs by Lindholm. The authors include brief annotations underneath each pair, noting the site and other historically important information. Because the images are placed chronologically, the reader follows

Maximilian and Bodmer's two-year journey from Cape Cod through the American interior and, finally, back to New York City, where they departed for Europe.

The annotations offer at times valuable scientific information that allows a new way to appreciate Bodmer's images. For example, Bodmer and Maximilian, like Lewis and Clark before them, were delighted by the strange geological formation of the Missouri Valley in eastern Montana. Bodmer created his most striking views in this region, which are matched wonderfully by Lindholm's photographs. More interestingly, the geological causes of these formations are explained in the annotations, which surely would have pleased Maximilian's curious mind.

However, as David C. Hunt notes in his foreword to the text, the annotations stop far short of interpretation or critique. The point of the volume, Hunt states, is simply to document the scenes and create "a comparison of corresponding views" (p. x). While it is interesting that we can still catch a glimpse of the West that so fascinated nineteenth-century adventurers and, conversely, witness the great change in the landscape that has taken place over the last 180 years, neither should be a revelation for readers. The lack of critical context and interpretation emphasizes the documentary aspect of Bodmer's work, which is exhaustively documented elsewhere, leaving readers wondering what this text adds to our understanding of the Maximilian/Bodmer partnership.

One point not explicitly addressed is a comparison of media used in the book. Indeed, the decision to use photography—here understood uncomplicatedly as a truth-telling tool—to prove the accuracy of Bodmer's sketches is fascinating. Yet, Bodmer's work is consistently the more engaging of each pair. There is a depth and a "realness" to his sketches that is lost in the photographs, which are arguably more "accurate." We know more through Bodmer's work beyond mere transcription of the landscape. Perhaps this fact can serve as a reminder to Western American art scholars, as it seems time to set aside de-

bates of accuracy for ones of meaning. That, however, is the task of another book.

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Custer and the 1873 Yellowstone Survey: A Documentary History

Edited by M. John Lubetkin. Frontier Military History Series. Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 2013. 320pp. Illus. Maps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$39.95.

This book is a compilation of previously unpublished accounts and recollections of the 1873 Yellowstone survey expedition of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Collectively, it serves to document further George A. Custer's first adventure on the Northern Plains. Editor M. John Lubetkin is a western railroad historian, specializing in the Northern Pacific, and the author of a book on the railroad and several articles on the 1873 survey.

Lubetkin sets the stage describing the railroad's struggle to build the line westward to Bismarck. The failures and successes of the earlier 1871 and 1872 surveys west of the Missouri River and along the Yellowstone are noted, and the key players of the 1873 expedition are introduced. The bulk of the book is a collection of participant accounts, beginning with correspondent Samuel J. Barrow's interesting and entertaining reports to the *New York Tribune*. Pertinent diary entries and letters from lead surveyor Thomas Rosser (Custer's friend and Civil War adversary), Edward M. Konopicky, the Austrian artist of the expedition's scientific corps, Lieutenant Colonel Luther P. Bradley, third-ranking officer of the military escort, and others follow. Most of the accounts are previously unpublished.

Editor Lubetkin arranges his materials into three sections: preparations for the expedition, the march to the Yellowstone, and the August fights with opposing Lakotas and the return to Fort Lincoln. The accounts are presented chronologically and present new insights into the expedition and incidents of

the march, which include surviving a horrible hailstorm, slogging through rain and mud followed by days of exhausting heat, and personnel problems. The latter most notably includes the difficulties between Custer, in charge of the cavalry escort, and Colonel David S. Stanley, expedition commander. Of particular interest to this reviewer is the report by Captain Augustus Corliss of the infantry escort on the logistical, camp, and marching aspects of the expedition. Good stuff.

The editor is at his best when addressing his area of expertise, the railroad survey. However, some statements in the introduction regarding his understanding of the difference between Indian agencies and reservations might raise some eyebrows. Other comments in section introductions and footnotes relating to military aspects might be questioned. For example, when Colonel Stanley conferred with Spotted Eagle, it was at Cheyenne River Agency, across the Missouri River from Fort Sully II, twenty-five miles north of Pierre, not "Fort Sully, present-day Pierre, South Dakota" (p. 24).

The book is illustrated with photographs of the principal players and modern views of the terrain the surveyors and troops passed through. It is further enhanced with a selection of views by expedition photographer William Pywell, fortunately reproduced in better quality than has previously been done. However, as a son of the plains, I am obligated to point out that the deer pictured on page 265 and identified as being shot by Colonel Custer is actually an elk.

As it stands, however, *Custer and the 1873 Yellowstone Survey* makes an important contribution to the literature of the western frontier. Editor Lubetkin is to be congratulated for producing a fine source book that will make a welcome addition to collections of Northern Plains, Montana, and western railroading histories, and, of course, Custer in the West.

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Making Marriage: Husbands, Wives, and the American State in Dakota and Ojibwe Country

Catherine J. Denial. Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2013. 208pp. Illus. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Paper, \$19.95.

In a smart and creative examination of the history of marriage in the Upper Midwest, Catherine J. Denial reveals the central role of marriage to the task of nation building as the United States extended into American Indian lands in the mid-nineteenth century. Exploring four case studies, which highlight the marriages of traders, missionaries, and slaves, in addition to one story of divorce, Denial weaves together a social and political narrative of the Upper Midwest that features the invisible labor of women as wives. Denial argues that even as European Americans extended into Dakota and Ojibwe lands with goals of assimilation, native inhabitants actively resisted cultural expectations that conflicted with their own understandings of marriage, family, and gender. Native resistance, cultural negotiation, and the primary role of women's domestic labor link together these distinct and fascinating case studies to create a compelling narrative about the political importance of marriage history that transcends its regional dimensions.

The first two case studies provide the framework for Denial's claims of native resistance. In her examination of the "trade marriage" of Jean-Baptiste and Pelagie Faribault, Denial argues that Pelagie—the daughter of a French trader and a Dakota woman—existed outside of the legal expectations of coverture that governed European American women's lives (p. 34). The very fact that she, a married woman, would be considered the rightful property owner of Pike's Island indicates "the strength of the cultural systems already in place in the region and the ability of Native and mixed-heritage individuals to frustrate the transformation of Indian country into an American state" (p. 28).

Moving next to a study of missionary

marriage, Denial notes that the marriage of Stephen and Mary Riggs was both a practical and spiritual endeavor, one that facilitated their mission work among the Dakotas. Here Denial further illustrates the conflict between European American and Dakota perspectives on marriage and gender, noting that unlike the Riggs's marriage (and those of other European Americans), "inclusion, not separation, stood at the heart of Dakota marriage" (p. 69).

In the third case study, Denial explores household culture and labor at Fort Snelling, arguing that the "below stairs" labor of slaves and servants made possible the "civilized" life of the fort upstairs (p. 85). Noting that the desire for the "civilized life . . . pulled slavery into the Upper Midwest regardless of that territory's status as free," Denial nonetheless suggests that the fort's isolation rendered slavery malleable (p. 102). Such flexibility is evidenced by the legal marriage of famous slaves Harriet Robinson and Dred Scott.

In her final case study, Denial examines the divorce petition of Margaret McCoy, an Ojibwe woman, and Joseph R. Brown, her trader husband. The granting of the Brown divorce signified the inability of European American law to govern what Denial calls the "between-space," the geographical and cultural reality of Indian-white interaction, such that "the legal system that was supposed to establish order in the Upper Midwest was, in 1840, patently unable to do so" (pp. 127–28).

Drawing upon numerous, diverse primary materials, including several archival collections from the Minnesota History Center, Denial expertly combines a careful analysis of these sources with a deep knowledge of gender and American Indian history to create a compelling and readable narrative that should be of interest to legal scholars, gender historians, as well as scholars of American Indian history.

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