

# Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: the European Image of the America Frontier in the Nineteenth Century

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census takers listed such women as "not gainfully employed" (p. 56). She examines Iowa women's responses to the double challenge of the frontier and the Civil War in another chapter. Also, she devotes a chapter to Iowa's first woman suffrage movement.

Riley is to be commended for her readiness to acknowledge that problems may occur with sources. For example, memoirs were usually written years after events took place, and may have been colored by changing perceptions. Riley allows for such possibilities in drawing conclusions. She also points out that as important as suffrage leaders were, they were not representative of a majority of Iowa women. Most important, she places the experience of the Iowa frontierswoman firmly within the context of nineteenth-century life. By our standards, she concludes, life was hard for them but life was hard for everyone. We do not need to portray these pioneers as stoic survivors, for they certainly did not see themselves that way.

Two minor criticisms may be made of the book. The final chapter contains a discussion of white women's attitudes toward Native Americans that would have fit better into the chapter dealing with racial and ethnic diversity. Also, the detailed bibliographical essay would have been enhanced with additional discussion of the works enumerated.

Neither of these points should detract from the book's value as an important contribution to American history. It will interest not only the historian but general readers as well. Glenda Riley's case study approach will stimulate similar efforts by scholars interested in women's experiences in other parts of the West. *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* is an excellent companion volume to Julie Roy Jeffrey's *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* for a study of women in the American West.

NEW MEXICO HISTORICAL REVIEW

CHERYL FOOTE

*Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the America Frontier in the Nineteenth Century*, by Ray Allen Billington. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1981. pp. xv, 364. Photographs, bibliographical notes, index. \$18.95.

Ray Allen Billington's recent death has brought to a close a distinguished career. His legacy to us is this volume, the last of a dozen book-length works concerned with the frontier experience and the American West. Entitled *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise*,

this valedictory volume continues his mission to spread the gospel of the frontier—now across the Atlantic Ocean. It is a characteristic work and a fitting tribute to its author.

What Billington proposes to do is to describe the impact of the American frontier on Europeans over a hundred years and then to draw some conclusions about the political, economic, and social consequences of this impact. In pursuit of these ends, he has examined the image-makers, novelists and adventure writers, guide books, promotional literature of land and railroad companies, and letters to the homeland from American immigrants. Here, he has displayed his extraordinary organizational talents, for with the help of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, he assembled a staff of research assistants in several European countries, and at home a group of translators who could present these findings in English. The result is an outpouring of information about the treatment of the frontier in European writings and the realization on our part of the staggering amount of printed matter available to Europeans about this subject in their native languages. This material is now presented to American historians for the first time in such complete form and in translation. Billington conceived of this work as a pilot project to "encourage other investigators, particularly in Europe, to dig more deeply into the sources and substantiate their findings by the broader use of local evidence" (p. xv). His is truly a pioneering enterprise.

Billington begins with an extended account of the "image makers." Foremost among these are the astonishingly large number of popular writers, in virtually every European country, who appeared and wrote in response to the original "Coopermania." These are characterized by their fantasy frontiers and their wide popularity. Germany's Karl May (seventy books after 1875, half of these on an American West that he never saw), France's Gustave Aimard (born in Paris in 1818, resident in the American Southwest for a decade, who wrote his first western in 1858), and England's Mayne Reid (seventy novels, the first in 1850, and countless stories in boys' magazines) were the most prominent, but scarcely the only popular writers who set their tales of adventure in the American West. To these authors of fiction should be added writers of promotional literature, distributed by land companies, railroads, and state immigration offices. These printed outpourings emphasized the positive side of immigration, as did the numberless "American letters" from earlier immigrants back to their homelands. Finally, a horde of European travellers—especially after 1840, when trans-

portation across the Atlantic and in America was easier and safer—rushed into print with their observations. Their views, as one might imagine, were mixed. Of importance to all authors were technological changes in the printing process for cheaper mass production of books and magazines, and changes in schooling that helped create a mass reading public.

According to Billington, the sum total of this vast outpouring of words was a two-fold message: the American frontier as a land of savagery; the American frontier as a land of promise. On the one hand, the American West was home to savages (Indian and pioneer alike), bloody encounters, vigilantes who represented the law, not to mention the violence of nature in storm, flood, fire, famine, pestilence, and ferocious animals and reptiles. On the other side of the printed page, however, lay the land of promise: the Garden of Eden, whose boundless opportunities contrasted sharply with Europe's enclosed societies. Here the writers talked of political and religious freedoms, economic opportunity—(especially for land ownership), and social equality. Billington's coverage of and commentary about the American Indian is especially insightful, as he nicely captures the European ambivalence: the distaste for the savagery of the Indians, and the equal distaste for the treatment of the Indians by the American government. Throughout, the author graces his exposition with the fluent style, sense of humor, and the eye for the telling quote that two generations of historians have come to know well.

The analysis of this mass of material poses difficulties, even for so sophisticated a practitioner. First, consider the question of influence. It is difficult to speak with certainty about the volume or nature of Europe's reading public and the degree to which this reading public read books about the American frontier such as those discussed here. Statements such as "every schoolboy on the Continent knew of the last red man of earth who wept as he chanted the death song that would waft him to his happy-hunting ground . . ." (p. 139) are easily made but difficult to support. Then, there is the issue of cause and effect. That millions of words appeared in print in Europe about the American frontier over the 19th century is amply proven; that some twenty million Europeans immigrated to America in this same century is also a matter of record. The cause-and-effect of this sequence is not. It is not self-evident that Europeans who immigrated to America in the nineteenth century had read about the frontier, and if they did, they had probably read (or had read to them) the letters of immigrants

rather than the fictional accounts that form the largest part of this book. Finally, the "language illiteracy" to which Billington refers (p. xii) is also cultural illiteracy. American historians who read translations of European writings see words, but they do not see feelings or account for differences of words in local contexts any more than European observers who write about America without language competency or having made extended visits to the several regions of the United States. In short, images through American eyes from English translations are not necessarily what they appear in a native language in European eyes. Perhaps this is what Billington meant when he called upon European scholars to take up this subject. It is to be hoped that many will accept the challenge.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

MALCOLM J. ROHRBOUGH

*Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830*, by Herman J. Viola. Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1974. pp. ii, 365. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index, maps. \$8.95 paperback, \$15.00 cloth.

The author of this book, Herman J. Viola, is an Indiana Ph.D. (1970) who is the director of the National Anthropological Archives in the Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. He has written a number of articles, and has developed or edited three books: this biography, an edition of Thomas McKenney's memoirs, and a biography of Charles Bird King, a painter of Indian scenes who did many portraits for McKenney and the War Department.

Thomas McKenney was a figure of moderate importance in the Monroe and Adams administrations. As an experienced merchant, he became superintendent of the government's Indian trading posts in 1816. This role got him deeply involved in negotiations, in reform efforts, and in economic clashes with private traders. The latter, led by John Jacob Astor, saw McKenney interfering with their profits, and by 1822 they were able to get his posts and his office abolished. McKenney resurfaced as a Calhoun supporter. Since Secretary of War Calhoun hoped to create an overall "Bureau of Indian Affairs," he hired McKenney as a minor clerk and then gave him charge of all Indian matters. McKenney remained a moderately independent director of this non-existent bureau for some years, handling all Indian subjects and generally creating the groundwork for the future department. As a Calhounite, he was

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