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**The View from Officers' Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians**

Sherry L. Smith

Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1990. xix + 263 pp. \$24.95 (cloth)

Reviewer: Graham Reynolds

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The history of the American West abounds with myths about the Indians as well as the soldiers who fought them. During the 19th century, Native Americans were seen as savages—either as stereotypical uncivilized brutes or as the romanticized “noble savage” of the sort that appeared in the popular writings of James Fenimore Cooper. Similarly, the soldiers of the United States Frontier Army have been commonly depicted as Indian-haters who were engaged in ruthless wars of extermination. All these images, Smith argues, bear little resemblance to the real people of the frontier, and they have prevented us from gaining an accurate understanding of the history of the American West.

*The View From Officers' Row* is based on a thorough analysis of diaries and correspondence of officers and their wives. It is an important study that focusses on the region west of the Mississippi during the period 1849-90, i.e., from the acquisition of the *Mexican Cession* to the *Battle of Wounded Knee*, the symbolic end to large-scale Indian resistance to the American military conquest of the west. Smith notes that Army officers were the most educated and articulate White group on the frontier, and that during this period they began to develop a sense of professionalism—with a common outlook, self-image and set of values. As a professional community, Army officers and their wives developed relatively moderate views about Western Indians. Initially, some officers and their wives possessed naïvely idealistic or romantic views about Indians, but these rapidly gave way to more realistic perceptions based upon their experiences on the frontier. Officers were vehicles for the American Federal Government's Indian policy which frequently brought them into open conflict with the numerous Native tribes in the West. But if warfare was the norm for cultural contact between officers and Indians, it did not inevitably result in negative views of the Indians, at least not of their military abilities. In perhaps the most interesting portion of her book, Smith describes how warfare between the Frontier Army and Indians generated respect and even admiration for Natives. As professionals, Army officers carefully observed the battles they fought and were often impressed with the courage and military skills of their “savage” opponents, which included such formidable fighters as the Apache and Nez Percé tribes. Officers observed that Indians were highly skilled horseback riders and expert marksmen with either the rifle or bow and arrow. Indeed, in the art of warfare, some Indian tribes were far superior to the U.S. frontier soldiers who were frequently inexperienced and poorly trained. Their skills were put to use by the Army who increasingly relied upon them to track and fight other Indians.

However, officers' accounts generally contained very little understanding of Native cultures. Officers and their wives, Smith argues, kept their distance from Indians, and their views about them often revealed more about themselves than about the Indians they described. In an informative chapter on Native women, Smith claims that officers and their wives agreed that Indians enslaved their women and

subjected them to a harsh and desperate life. This view was based in part upon the prevailing social norms of their class that placed women on a pedestal to be adorned and pampered. On the subject of childbirth, as with most subjects, officers expressed a variety of views. Some applauded Indian childbirth practices as more natural and healthy than those of civilized society, while others, including most officers' wives, strongly disagreed. These views tell us very little about the actual conditions and practices of Indian women; rather, they were a means through which officers and their wives reflected and debated the role of women in society.

Smith's study successfully dispels many myths about frontier soldiers and their attitudes toward Indians. She demonstrates clearly that officers were neither ruthless conquerors nor idealistic philanthropists; rather, their views and conduct were based upon their personal experiences. Although officers shared much in common as professionals, Smith wisely avoids making too many generalizations; instead, she concentrates on documenting the diversity of views and insights among those officers and officers' wives who took the trouble to write about their encounters with Native peoples.

The book will be of special interest, not only to students of American history, but also to social scientists interested in the history of ethnic and race relations and in women's studies.

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### **Native Health Research in Canada. Native Studies Review, Vol. 5, No. 1**

Frank Tough and James B. Waldram, eds.

Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Department of Native Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 1989. 293 pp. N.p. (paper)

*Reviewer:* Juaane N. Clarke

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Relative to others of its genre, this collection is excellent. It is based on conference papers presented at a workshop held during the joint annual meetings of the Canadian Association of Medical Anthropology, the Canadian Ethnology Society and the Society for Applied Anthropology in Canada, held in Saskatoon in May, 1988. Four thematic areas focussed the workshop: urban health issues, contemporary health issues, northern health issues and issues in traditional health, medicine and health care. Within this very broad field, the papers address a wide variety of topics, employ many different theoretical perspectives and levels of analysis, and use a multitude of research strategies.

There are papers with a primarily applied focus, such as one by Farkas and Johnson on a residential facility for Native men in Toronto and its program to teach the residents various practical things about food, including basic principles of nutrition. There are also papers of a more theoretical nature, such as that by Dufour on the etiology of *otitis media* (middle ear disease), which argues that current medical diagnosis is a reductionist explanation of complex symbolic interpretations of Inuit notions of environment, climate, and social and cultural life.

The articles range from broad and critical analyses of federal policy, such as Speck's work on the implications of the new "Indian Health Transfer Policy," to ideographic portrayals of the explanatory models of pregnancy used by a small group of