The Story of Cole Younger by Himself, Being an Autobiography of the Missouri Guerilla Captain and Outlaw, His Capture and Prison Life, and the Only Authentic Account of the Northfield Raid Ever Published

by Cole Younger; introduction by Marley Brant


As Marley Brant notes in her excellent introduction, Cole Younger has attained legendary status. This status means that determining what is true and what is fabrication is a very difficult task. Younger's autobiography, while occasioned by his frustration with the many baseless stories being circulated about his life, does little in a direct way to clarify what is true about Cole Younger. This fact does not mean, however, that this 1903 autobiography is without considerable historical value, especially given Brant's comments.

Younger begins the chapter on his youth by referring to bitter politically inspired hatreds that were commonplace in Jackson County, Missouri. Born January 15, 1844, Younger came from a family that prospered due to his father's store and mail delivery contract. Early on during the Civil War the destruction of the family's property by Kansas Jayhawkers and the murder of his father by the "Missouri Militia" set in motion the personal motivation of Cole Younger to take arms against the Union Army.

The second chapter, entitled "The Dark and Bloody Ground," also begins by stating, "Many causes united in embittering the people on both sides of the border between Missouri and Kansas." Younger acknowledges the earnestness and enthusiasm of many of the Kansas emigrants but goes on to characterize most of them as "undesirable neighbors." This chapter reveals the role of historical inaccuracies in the mentality of Younger and one suspects many others. He refers to those coming from the North as being "abolitionists" when in fact most of them were free-state in their orientation, the difference being that the freestaters were opposed to slavery because of its consequences to white economic opportunity and, unlike the abolitionists, did not identify with or sympathize with the plight of the blacks held in bondage. Younger also repeats the Quantrill story of a brother being killed by Jayhawkers, which has been proven to be inaccurate.

Younger describes his own enlistment in the Confederate Army and details close cooperation of Quantrill with the Southern troops. Regarding the attack on Lawrence on August 21, 1863, Younger is very limited in his comments other than to cite Edwards' book Noted Guerrillas in which Younger is credited with saving a dozen lives and taking no lives except "in open and manly battle." Given the largely unarmed character of the Lawrence residents, this statement is certainly one that could be disputed.

Beyond the Civil War, Younger makes a solemn oath that he "never, in all life, had anything whatever to do with robbing any bank in the state of Missouri." As for robberies of other kinds in Missouri or robberies of banks in other states, Younger's oath does not cover these possible incidents. The last fifty pages of this autobiography are focused on events leading up to and including the Northfield, Minnesota, raid in 1876. He does not implicate Frank or Jesse James in this robbery, identifying instead a Pitts and a Woods.

Younger finished his story with an account of "What My Life Has Taught Me," which is a reflection upon the lessons he learned during his life as a soldier, an outlaw, and a prisoner. Repeat with poetry, references to religion, and philosophy, Younger's tone is conciliatory and with an interesting patriotic tone.

The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History
edited by Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray
vii + 251 pages, map, notes, index.

Although no American would ever deny the economic or cultural importance of the region known as the Midwest, the question of how and why this basic geographical unit came into being is not well understood. Neither is what a midwestern identity means to the millions of people who claim it. Such issues form the core of this collection of original essays by a group of ten historians (native midwesterners all) who were invited to a conference at Miami University in 1998. All the contributors are talented writers. This fact, together with encouragement they received to mix personal experience into their narratives, makes for pleasant reading.

As in all collections, some important topics are omitted and some entries are stronger than others. The editors point out the key omissions: material on Chicago and other major cities, material on the African American experience, and attention to questions of gender. They also correctly observe that most of the essays treat perceived gaps in traditional understandings of the midwestern experience rather than formulating or reformulating a master narrative for the place. To provide a context for what follows, then, the editors present such an overview in their introduction. This essay—elegant and concise—is one of the book’s most valuable sections.

I see the ten main essays as falling into four categories. Half of them, the ones by Nicole Etcheson, Jon Gjerde, R. Douglas Hurt, John L. Larson, and Mary Neth, deal largely with generalities. Etcheson and Neth argue that class and race are important but understated themes in the region’s history. Gjerde asserts that a pair of contradictions—revolt and nostalgia, condescension and defensiveness—lie close to the core of self-identification, while Larson says the answer can be found in more stress on history and less on environment and folkways. Finally, Hurt opts for a more encyclopedic explanation including statistical analysis wherever possible. Two other essays are marked by their marginality to the book’s theme. Kenneth Winkle provides a rather repetitive account of how the speeches of Abraham Lincoln emphasized nationalism over sectionalism for political purposes. Eric Hinderaker, in an examination of how Kentuckians have used rhetorical practices to hide the moral issue of the Indian conquest there, makes a weak attempt to tie this experience to midwestern concerns.

Three of the ten essays in The American Midwest sparkle. Those by Kathleen N. Conzen and Susan Gray do so by eschewing bland generalities in favor of solid case studies. Conzen’s look at the career of Michigan journalist Jane Grey Swisshelm shows how a story co-opted as part of standard regional history actually has a more complicated reality that sheds important light on personal motivations and ethnic repression. Gray’s study of three memoirs written by Etta Smith Wilson, whose father was an Odawa Indian, provides rare insight into how a particular native woman was able to negotiate the encounter with white civilization both successfully and on her own terms. Andrew Cayton’s essay, “The Anti-region,” is the most ambitious in the collection. He obviously took seriously the charge to probe at the heart of regional identity and presents a strongly argued theory. Regionality, he posits, arises only where people see themselves marginalized from the larger society. The Midwest, in contrast, was a “self-conscious creation” (p. 157) via a charter document (the Northwest Ordinance of 1787) that said the area would exemplify the emerging national culture. Because of this, Cayton says that midwestern people have no outsiders to blame when things get tough and that they therefore tend to direct issues inward. This practice, in turn, leads to such widely observed behaviors as efforts to render themselves inconspicuous and an obsession with niceness.

Reviewed by James R. Shortridge, professor of geography, University of Kansas.
Indian Treaty-Making Policy in the United States and Canada, 1867–1877

by Jill St. Germain

xxi + 243 pages, illustrations, maps, appendixes, tables, notes, bibliography, index.
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001, cloth $45.00.

Indian Treaty-Making Policy in the United States and Canada, 1867–1877 is part of a growing wave of comparative scholarship on American Indians in the United States and Canada. These studies help explain the similarities and differences in Indian–white relations on each side of the forty-ninth parallel. Jill St. Germain's specific purpose is to examine treaty-making on the Plains and the Prairie West to explain why the United States became mired in an incessant cycle of violence with American Indians while Canada presided over years of peace. The author contends that in 1867, when Canada achieved independence and the United States created the Great Peace Commission, both governments developed treaties that did not take into account the needs of the Indians who negotiated with them. In her view, the demands placed on Indians in treaties conducted between 1867 and 1877 offer the best window into Canadian and American objectives for Indians. These treaties also provide the best explanation of the relative peace between Indians and whites in Canada versus the bloodshed that occurred between those groups in the United States.

Canadian and United States Indian policy has a much longer, unbroken history than this study of a ten-year period suggests. St. Germain concedes that the twin goals of expediency and economy in treaty-making were first articulated by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, but the reader is led to believe that policymakers in both countries dramatically reoriented their countries' approaches to Indian peoples in this short period. Since 1763 British and later Canadian officials focused on the limited objectives of obtaining Indian land. Canada's seven numbered treaties, signed between 1871 and 1877, did not require that Indians support missions or schools and were allotted on the basis of current population. Consequently, Canada's Indians could determine the pace of cultural change within their communities after they had signed away their lands. Yet economic independence remained illusory as Indian population growth soon outstripped the available land and resources of the Canadian tribes.

In contrast, St. Germain points out that American treaty-making policy changed with each administration and the moral impulses of the era in which the treaties took place. With the establishment of the Great Peace Commission in 1867, American reformers came together to craft what they hoped would be an enduring "civilization strategy" for the Plains tribes that included land cessions, agricultural reform, and Christian missions. But intensive emigration and concomitant Indian resistance undermined the Peace Commission's dream of cultivating peace with tribes such as the Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, and Sioux. Indian–white violence in the American West, illustrated by the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876, resulted from the ambitious goals of American policymakers. The casual pace of expansion on the Canadian prairie meant that policymakers did not have to demand the sudden assimilation of its Indian population and thus limited the objectives of Canadian treaties.

St. Germain claims that preordained policies determined the outcome of Indian–white relations in Canada and the United States. Indian Treaty-Making Policy in the United States and Canada is modeled after earlier scholarship that granted government policymakers greater importance than the Indian and white negotiators who made the treaties and lived with the consequences. Secondly, while it is true that United States Indian policy changed dramatically with each passing administration, it is also clear that there were enduring characteristics of Indian–white relations in the United States. A longer analysis of Indian–white relations in the United States and Canada would have shown that policymakers between 1867 and 1877 perpetuated older ideas as much as they invented new approaches to the "Indian problem." While there is much to recommend this brief study, stronger organization, clearer writing, and a more comprehensive view of Indian–white relations in both countries would have improved its contribution to the field.

Reviewed by Stephen Warren, assistant professor of history, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond.
Contrary Neighbors: Southern Plains and Removed Indians in Indian Territory

by David La Vere

xvi + 154 pages, photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index.

The rapid territorial expansion of the United States, fueled by the ravenous land hunger of its citizens, led directly to the creation of an “Indian problem.” As settlers poured into new-found Edens they came into increased, often acrimonious, contact with those whose roots already ran deep in those places: tribal peoples who were perceived, at best, as obstacles to Manifest Destiny. In 1825 the government adopted what many Euro-Americans thought of as a generous and humane solution to this potentially explosive situation by hiring on a way to separate the people of the American nation from those of the tribal nations. This was accomplished by creating Indian Territory in the vast domain west of the Mississippi River, smack in the middle of the “Great American Desert,” a place the best minds of the time believed would never provide a magnet for white settlement.

In its original form, Indian Territory embraced an enormous swath of land that started at the western borders of Arkansas and Missouri and ran westward a bit past the site of present Dodge City, Kansas. Its north–south axis began at the Missouri River’s great bend in Nebraska and sliced as far as the Red River, beyond which lay Mexican territory. (It would later shrink and be associated with today’s Kansas and Oklahoma; later still, contract yet more and become linked forever in public memory with the latter state.)

Indian emigration from lands east of the Mississippi was initially intended to be voluntary. But in 1830, after tribes balked at trudging off into the unknown, Congress abandoned the fiction that Indian opinion counted for anything by passing the Indian Removal Act. The resulting forced movement of tribal peoples from their ancestral lands onto the Southern Plains amounted to nothing less than a monumental diaspora. Uprooted from familiar places by governments anxious to find a quick-fix solution to the “Indian problem,” these people found themselves embarking on a journey into a strange, dangerous country. “It was a tremendous migration in which thousands upon thousands of people straggled along in dribs and drabs on their own personal trail of tears” (p. 3), author David La Vere, an associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina (Wilmington), points out in Contrary Neighbors.

This migration is customarily viewed from the perspective of how it affected Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, Shawnees, and other emigrants. But there is more to the tale: those who emigrated from the East became immigrants when they arrived on the Plains, an area already populated by and laid claim to by such tribes as the Osage, Kanza, Kiowa, and Comanche. How the new arrivals and the longtime residents interacted is the fascinating topic David La Vere explores in this book.

La Vere has packed a tremendous amount of information into the aptly titled Contrary Neighbors, which is both well researched and well written. His is a narrative history in which details abound but do not drag the tale down into the minutiae that so often burdens scholarly publications. (Anyone who wants to traverse that terrain is, of course, free to explore the trails clearly laid out in the author’s extensive endnotes.) The topic of interaction between the easterners and Plains tribes in Indian Territory has been touched on before, but La Vere gives this important, seldom recognized perspective on Indian life the kind and degree of attention it deserves.

Ultimately, La Vere makes it clear that he believes the tribal peoples of the Plains and Southeast found themselves divided in fundamental and significant ways during their involuntary association in Indian Territory. Southeastern agricultural folk accustomed to living in settlements faced hunter–gatherer nomads. The southeasterners typically viewed Plains Indians as “savages,” while thinking of themselves as “civilized.” The Plains Indians, staring at the new arrival from the other side of the mirror, reciprocated by beholding people who had wandered so far down the white man’s road that they were not really Indians anymore.

As La Vere, in effect, peels away the layers of the cultural onion he reveals an essential and troubling effect of Indian removal (or, from the Plains peoples’ perception, Indian arrival). It was these differences, often exacerbated by the United States government, that kept these two Indian peoples apart, often breeding suspicion, hatred, and contempt. Although the twentieth century has seen amazing pan-Indian and intertribal alliances, national identities have prevailed. Over the years Indian peoples have often joined together to win significant victories, but beneath the label “Indian,” or “Native American, glorious histories, old suspicions, and remembered outrages bubble and ferment” (p. 229).

The philosopher George Santayana may have been on the right track when he noted, “Those who cannot remember the past will be condemned to repeat it.” If so, those who read David La Vere’s Contrary Neighbors, an altogether excellent book, may find themselves better equipped to leave behind the endlessly pointless maze of cultural antagonism and help blaze new trails of understanding.

Reviewed by Ron McCoy, professor of history, Emporia State University.
A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century

by Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard

ix + 219 pages, notes, bibliography, index.

One of the most neglected aspects of modern agricultural history is the environmental. While agricultural historians have for the most part dealt in social history, environmental historians have not sufficiently mined this rich subject matter. Randal S. Beeman, professor of history at Bakerfield College, and James A. Pritchard of Iowa State University have entered this void with A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century. This book tackles a subject matter that has largely been neglected by historians’ ecological concerns in farming.

Beeman and Pritchard trace the threads of environmental issues in farming during the twentieth century. In the midst of economic crisis or pressing environmental concerns, these concepts become serious alternatives to the mainstream concepts and practices of American agriculture. The book is roughly divided into two sections. The first half details how ecological concerns regarding American agriculture entered and were influential in New Deal thought. In the midst of the Dust Bowl and economic chaos of the depression, many thinkers envisioned an alternative system of agriculture that was more concerned with soil fertility and erosion, one that was more holistic in its approach and took into account long-term concerns and issues regarding the land and stewardship. This “permanent agriculture” movement believed that by ensuring the fertility of the nation’s fields, America would remain strong. The second part of the book covers the period from 1965 to 1980 when concerns over population growth, technological advancements, environmental abuses, and industrial farming came to dominate many people’s thoughts. This “sustainable agriculture” grassroots movement took up environmental concerns and notions of organic farming. It drew from a wider spectrum of people with diverse concerns and backgrounds. Both movements would struggle with and be defeated by the USDA, land grant institutions, and agribusiness.

A Green and Permanent Land is effective in its weaving together the economic, intellectual, and social currents that gave rise to the “green” movements in the New Deal and modern America. Beeman and Pritchard are able to show how thinkers such as Hugh H. Bennett, Rexford G. Tugwell, Louis Bromfield, Rachel Carson, Dick Thompson, and Jim Hightower came into being, their influences, and why they had a national forum in these matters. The authors also detail the resistance in the USDA, land grant colleges, and experiment stations to these people and their thoughts. In the hands of lesser writers, these streams of arguments could have become a garbled mess.

The only criticism, and albeit minor criticism, that can be leveled against this book is not having enough space devoted to the reaction of common farmers to these “green” agricultural philosophies. Given the publicity of each movement, why did the Iowa corn farmer or the Kansas wheat farmer not embrace more aspects of these movements? How did they view what was being argued in the magazines and newspapers? Their voices become almost lost in the debate, with the exception of The Practical Farmers of Iowa, among experts and authorities. Some oral interviews by farmers who did not embrace these ecological movements would have enriched the flavor of the book. Beeman and Pritchard do not analyze whether these “green” ideas where practical and achievable.

Still, it should become a mandatory text for graduate students and those concerned with environmental or agricultural issues. A Green and Permanent Land joins Don Worster’s Dust Bowl and Mark Fiege’s Irrigated Eden as bedrock works in this growing field and should encourage others to add their contributions. In the years to come, it will be interesting to see how many of the ideas found in the book germinate and take root in American agricultural practices.

Reviewed by T. Jason Sodenstrum, graduate student in rural and agricultural history, Iowa State University, Ames.
Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life

by Fran Grace

xiv + 374 pages, maps, photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

This new biography of Carry Nation (1846–1911), published in a series called Religion in North America, offers a sweeping re-examination of a life fixed in our imaginations as an axe-wielding, anti-liquor fanatic. Fran Grace brings new sources to her subject and new attention to the communities that shaped Nation’s identity.

The most remarkable part of the book lies in its account of Nation’s life before she knew her mission. Grace draws a detailed portrait of the young wife, widow, and wife again, struggling at the edges of economic security and respectability and crafting her own religious convictions in the small towns of Missouri, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. It is in this part of the book that the author’s grounding in religious history has the greatest impact. For biographical purposes these chapters provide the underpinnings for Nation’s religious identity as a chosen one. But the chapters also offer a rare glimpse of a nineteenth-century woman’s experience that would be valuable to history even if the subject did not grow up to be Carry Nation.

The heart of the book lies in the obvious place, in Nation’s smashing or “hatchetation” of saloons in Kiowa, Wichita, and Topeka in 1900 and 1901. Angered by the failure of local governments to enforce the constitutional ban on liquor adopted in 1880, Nation broke away from longstanding tactics of moral suasion, petitions, and prayer to destroy the property of barkeepers, liquor distributors, and pharmacists peddling medicinal alcohol. Strikingly, she led many people over that line to violent and direct action. Even the said Woman’s Christian Temperance Union recognized uneasily that it needed to associate itself with this new phase of their movement. Men, who enjoyed the alternative of voting their opinions about alcohol, also accepted the logic of Nation’s rage.

To explain this stage of Nation’s life, Fran Grace adopts a model of Kansas as a singular place with a particular culture that enabled Nation to transform her faith into a public mission. Nation found a local culture characterized by feelings of moral superiority in a promised land and hostility to eastern money and corporations; by respect for frontier women and veneration for the state’s vigilantes. A convergence between her faith and this secular culture explains why Nation found a compatible community in Kansas, one willing to share her view of a world defined by good and evil. It falls short, however, as a model for understanding the situation in which Nation and her opponents made their decisions. It fails to address why the contest over alcohol became so heated and violent in Kansas, why prohibition failed, or why Protestants came to view its success as the measure of their faith.

Carry Nation’s career continued after 1901. Taking advantage of the notoriety she gained from the Topeka smashings, she went on national tours until 1909 as a performer still proselytizing for prohibition. These are disturbing chapters wherein college students humiliate her, audiences laugh and throw things, and Nation herself walks through cities yanking cigars out of the mouths of men in the streets. The author treats this phase of Nation’s life as a continuation of the same story. It reads like a dramatic change. Performance (the word is the author’s) is a lonely art. The precise tactics and the mobilization of sympathetic men and women that distinguished the smashings disappear, while Nation seems to cultivate the very caricature that was her chief legacy. As a sign says in one of the many wonderful illustrations in this book: “Carry’s Act Is Great; All Seats 10c.” This is the language of the sideshow, not of faith or politics.

Carry A. Nation is a loving book about a complex character. It may occasionally be too loyal to its heroine, but the same passion makes it an informative book that opens up new doors to histories of women, religion, and Kansas.

Reviewed by Ann D. Gordon, research professor of history, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.
Tell Them We Are Going Home:  
The Odyssey of the Northern Cheyennes

by John H. Monnett

xxix + 252 pages, maps, tables, photographs, notes, bibliography, index.  

This is the story of the removal of 970 Northern Cheyennes from Nebraska's Red Cloud Oglala Sioux Agency in mid 1877 to the Darlington Agency in the Indian Territory and the dramatic return of some three hundred men, women, and children to Nebraska and Montana two years later. While many American Indian tribes suffered removal episodes in their histories, few have captured the country's attention as this one, thanks in large measure to Mari Sandoz's sympathetic Cheyenne Autumn, a literary treatment published in 1953, and John Ford's adaptations of her story for the silver screen in 1964.

The plight of the Cheyenne tribe is rooted in a continuum of bloody turmoil befalling these people during the course of western settlement, where kith and kin were variously massacred at Sand Creek in 1864, blindly attacked at the Washita in 1868, struck by troops on the Powder River in March 1876, and viciously attacked again on an upper branch of the Powder in November 1876. The latter two fights occurred within the context of the Great Sioux War of 1876–1877, a sweeping conflict aimed at imposing the government's will on the Teton Sioux and the opening of their hunting lands to settlement. The Cheyennes, a small tribe compared with the Sioux, were long allied with their more numerous neighbors, particularly the Oglalas and Brules, and they shared common bonds through marriage and a preference for the vast northern buffalo range.

John Monnett's story opens as the Northern Cheyennes, led principally by Dull Knife (or Morning Star), Little Wolf, Elk Horn Scraper, and Wild Hog wrestled at Camp Robinson, Nebraska, in the summer of 1877 with an edict to relocate to Fort Reno and the Darlington Agency in Indian Territory to live among their southern relatives. The northern people ultimately had no choice. In Oklahoma malarial diseases and other infections beset them almost immediately, and forty-one who relocated died of disease during the first winter.

Weakened and homesick, Dull Knife and Little Wolf and some 350 followers surreptitiously fled northward from the agency in September 1878. The Cheyenne flight in the coming months was emotionally and physically depriving. Sections of Kansas were settled by then and contact with whites invariably led to bloodshed. The army, meanwhile, quickly mobilized con-

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Reviewed by Paul L. Hedren, National Park Service superintendent, Nebraska National Scenic River and Missouri National Recreational River, O'Neill, Nebraska.