

hunters years later, likely to rescue their reputations in a conservation age.

Buffalo Nation does not advance the history of the North American bison by so vigorously promulgating this common but questionable and unconfirmed interpretation. Otherwise, I congratulate the authors and their publisher on a handsome addition to the field.

Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation, by Malcolm J. Rohrbough. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. xv, 353 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DAVID A. WALKER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

James Marshall's discovery of gold in the California Sierras opened the door to one of the most spectacular episodes in this country's history. Perhaps eighty thousand Americans left for California in 1849, leading to changes the author equates with those brought about by plague or war. Malcolm Rohrbough, professor of history at the University of Iowa, has written a marvelous history of the gold rush that emphasizes the human dimension—both the Forty-niners and the families left behind.

The gold rush was a national event, part of the American dream. It exemplified basic mid-century values: hard work led to success; and wealth, available to all, would alter lives forever. "No other series of events produced so much movement among peoples; called into question so many basic values . . . ; led to so many varied consequences; and left such vivid memories among its participants" (2).

Although it touches on economic and political themes, *Days of Gold* is primarily a social history. The author focuses on specific individuals representing every social class and region of the country. As news of Marshall's discovery spread, tens of thousands of inexperienced argonauts caught gold fever and made plans to head west by sea, across Panama, or overland. The largest number of Forty-Niners left home only after considering the opinion of wives and parents; some simply announced that they were leaving and either expected others to accept that decision or defied family opposition. Many, recognizing their family responsibilities, expressed reluctance to leave home. As travelers raised funds for the trip, they also made provision for those left behind. Unity, cooperation, and competition intermixed with a sense of adventure and independence. The idea of failure and unfulfilled dreams was never out of the picture. By 1851—

52, nearly every community had at least one resident who had returned from the gold fields.

Upon their arrival in California, miners found themselves in a rootless, chaotic, impersonal, and often immoral world, initially in San Francisco, then in the Sierras. A sense of adventure and independence led many to enjoy, if only briefly, freedom from family or community criticism for indulging in gambling, alcohol, and other forms of entertainment. Yet the most shocking realization was the scarcity of women in the gold fields. For the first time in their lives, men were now totally responsible for their domestic well being. Letters and diaries clearly indicate an almost mystical attachment to the idea of women as civilizers. Women who did join their husbands, hoping to contribute to family income and to experience a sense of adventure, quickly found profitable opportunities running boarding houses or performing domestic chores.

One of the most important aspects of the California gold rush was the fact that in the earliest years gold was easily accessible. The majority of inexperienced American miners merely needed a pick, shovel, and pan to achieve success. Without visible governmental structure or formal authority, miners operated on the principle that resources belonged to those actually working a claim. By the mid-1850s a second phase emerged, with a greater emphasis on complex mining techniques and a heightened sense of competition. Large companies demanded labor and capital as they turned to river and hydraulic mining. Communities paid a price for these changes. Robberies, assaults, and claim jumping increased; foreigners, especially Mexicans and Chinese, became the targets of vicious attack.

Just as the Forty-niners adjusted to significant change, so too did families left behind. Many women assumed new duties and responsibilities as they managed the farm, shop, or store. Others turned to wage labor. Social relationships were altered by the chasm between optimistic expectations and reality. Miners returning home without the anticipated wealth often experienced feelings of shame and failure.

Days of Gold is a wonderful example of social, very personal history presented in a flowing, highly readable narrative. Unlike other gold rush histories, this volume presents both sides of the mass migration westward. The miners' experiences are contrasted with adjustments made by families left behind. The author immersed himself in a wide variety of primary materials: letters, diaries, books, pamphlets, and guides, even sermons. The gold rush generated a volume of diaries unequalled in American history up to that time. Newspapers were especially important, offering not only encouragement but also

practical advice as editors adapted stories to reflect local interest. Newspapers also included private letters. The book's publisher enhanced the text with three excellent maps and more than a dozen contemporary illustrations. This exceptional contribution to western and American history will expand the knowledge of specialists and fascinate general readers.

American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest, by Gregory H. Nobles. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997. ix, 286 pp. Maps, bibliographical essay, index. \$25.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PAULA M. NELSON, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-PLATTEVILLE

Gregory Nobles is a brave and ambitious man. When his work on the "near frontier" of western Massachusetts acquainted him with the explosion of research generated by the rise of the "new western history" in the 1980s, he decided a fresh synthesis of the field was in order. His book, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest*, is the result. In it he retells the story of westward expansion, beginning with early conflicts between native peoples and English colonists in the seventeenth century. He concludes his tale of cultural interactions and conquest in 1890 with the death of Sitting Bull and the tragedy at Wounded Knee. The theme throughout the book is the complexity of human relations throughout his four-centuries-long tale. "The point," according to Nobles, "is not to reduce the history of the frontier to a morality play about cultural monoliths, the 'civilized' Europeans and the 'savage' Indians (or, as some might just as easily argue, vice versa). Neither side was that simple" (12).

American Frontiers serves as an excellent introduction to a variety of issues related to the Euro-American conquest of North America. Nobles begins with the historiography of his subject, describing the impact of Frederick Jackson Turner in some detail. Specialists will find this material familiar, but students and general readers will welcome his straightforward explanation of the ongoing arguments in the field. Turner is a presence throughout the book; Nobles measures new research findings against Turner's work, generally to Turner's detriment, and occasionally applies particularly felicitous phrases from Turner's famous essay to appropriate events in the text. The use of Turner as a framework of sorts will aggravate scholars who wish the man would stay in his grave, but Nobles rightly resurrects Turner's work for a sweeping book of this sort. Nobles ultimately rejects

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