

that must, if its practitioners are as open to diversely generated perspectives as Jim Cullen, encompass the politics of the present as well as those of the past.

*The Frontier in American Culture*, by Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, edited by James R. Grossman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. xiii, 116 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendix. \$30.00 cloth, \$15.00 paper.

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As editor, James R. Grossman deserves recognition for the lush production of *The Frontier in American Culture*, designed to complement a recent exhibition at the Newberry Library in Chicago. Drawing on the considerable talents of two of western history's brightest stars, Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, Grossman shapes an exhibit catalog into a fresh intellectual piece within a visually attractive format. The content consists of an essay apiece from White and Limerick, a generous pictorial selection of exhibit items, and a list of the materials displayed. The result is a short volume, but one that goes far beyond the usual publication in this genre.

Richard White, in "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," frames his essay around the Newberry exhibit. But rather than offering a summary of the exhibited works, White assesses the items on display by commenting on the joint national impact of Turner and Cody. In so doing, he elevates the two seemingly disparate frontier celebrities to common cultural importance. He explores the western vision of both, assesses their parallel contributions to the emergence of our national identity, and bonds his observations to the text's illustrations. White explains how other Americans, especially artists, absorbed and expressed the ideas of Turner and Cody.

Tracing familiar terrain with his discussion of Frederick Jackson Turner, White manages to infuse his essay with observations that show that the shop-worn frontier thesis can still elicit thoughtful writing in the hands of an imaginative scholar. At the same time, White layers his work with his own perceptions of the American identity.

It is this aspect that gives grace to Richard White's writing. With his razor-like mind and keen wit comes his undisguised love for the West and its history. While White calls for a more critical examination of the West, he does so with complete respect for his subject and inspires readers with a national vision that sees above all the unity of the American people. Everyone should read White's essay, worrying less about his criticisms of past interpretations and focusing more on

his themes that underscore the importance of regional history for all Americans.

Patricia Nelson Limerick, in her essay, "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century," takes up the thankless task of dissecting definitions of the word "frontier," especially within the context of the current historical debate. Limerick's great gift is her ability to jolt her reader to attention by choosing an example far afield of academia, wedding it to western history, and tying the whole package into a provocative essay. Thus, she starts by making a clever linguistic alliance between usage for the words *velcro* and *frontier* and moves briskly through present scholarly differences, presidential campaigning, and advertising slogans. With her fast-moving mind, Limerick delivers a lot of humorous insight before arriving at her final sobering assessment of the difference between popular imagery and regional reality.

Limerick's scholarship is compelling, for ideas crackle through her writing, pushing the reader to the next thought. Despite the quick pace of this essay, one should not give it a hasty read. To do so would be to miss an original turn of phrase, an engaging point of humor, a piercing observation. If Limerick has a flaw, it is that she casts her text in an "us versus them" motif, by which she forces readers to side with her interpretation or against it. For instance, an assertion that an "unthinking reliance" on Turner's frontier theory "almost ruined" western history (75) may generate personal offense rather than academic debate. Perhaps this strategy stems from Limerick's commitment to ideas and her desire to stimulate intellectual exchange.

This difficulty aside, *The Frontier in American Culture* stands as a fitting justification for the widespread public attention that western history continues to enjoy. In tandem, these essays outline the cultural forces by which the West broke its regional parameters and assumed a powerful place in America's imagination. *The Frontier in American Culture* elucidates fundamentals of our heritage, but also demonstrates how these came to take on a life of their own within the American mind.

Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick have helped to energize their discipline; James R. Grossman's edited publication shows why they have done so. This highly readable catalog, appropriate for both a scholarly and general audience, makes it clear that ideas about the West and its national meaning cross time, geographic boundaries, and individual perspectives. These are important essays that touch on the thinking of America, past and present.

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