

sponsible. But for those looking to immerse themselves in the complex and romantic history of the American frontier, told through the experiences of one of its most colorful characters, this may be an ideal read.

*Sight Unseen: How Frémont's First Expedition Changed the American Landscape*, by Andrew Menard. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. xxix, 249 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

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John C. Frémont's report of his first expedition to the Rocky Mountains in 1842 once attracted substantial scholarly attention, partly because of its obvious literary attributes. Now Andrew Menard's impressive analysis should help Frémont's report reclaim its place in the literature of American westward expansion. Indeed, Menard seeks to position Frémont's "best-selling" government report within the gallery of great works of artistic impressions of the western American landscape. The author's erudition is truly remarkable; beyond the usual notice of the works of Thomas Jefferson (and his agents Lewis and Clark), the Hudson River School, James Fenimore Cooper, and Washington Irving, allusions (or significant digressions) are made to the ideas of Pascal, Emerson, Montesquieu, Condorcet, Bacon, Malthus, and others too numerous to mention here. Suffice it to say that Frémont's work is subjected to a thorough literary and intellectual examination.

Clearly, Frémont's exploits provided something intriguing, if not inspirational, for westward-looking Americans. Suggesting that the report made America's "longitude" as enticing as its "latitude," Menard attempts to pinpoint Frémont's influence by contrasting it with the traditional "bleak" or "dreary" images crafted by the reports of Zebulon Pike and Stephen Long. Scholars have long known that Frémont "painted" a more pleasing portrait of the western prairies and ranges, helping make the western "landscape" itself an object of desire. (Other factors naturally contributed, including the work of western expansionists in Washington, led by Frémont's father-in-law, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri—not to mention an expanding population and dynamic market economy.) Menard extends this analysis by skillfully placing Frémont's observations within the context of numerous historical, scientific, and literary trends and genres.

Fittingly enough, the heart of Menard's approach focuses on Frémont's seemingly quixotic quest to climb what he (mistakenly) took to be the "loftiest peak" of the Rocky Mountains in Wyoming's

Wind River Range. The author appropriately highlights that climb in scientific and symbolic terms, reconstructing Frémont's skill at reading the peak's elevation with a barometer and planting a makeshift American flag near the summit. Recalled by few Americans today, Frémont's scaling of the "high peak" enthralled his compatriots his entire life and beyond. Throughout his study, Menard develops how Frémont's stress on the West's "topographic geology" refocused attention to the lure of the western landscape, developing a thirst for similar such quests to the "western frontier," desires quenched at first by the region's acquisition and culminating in such modern developments as the National Parks.

This relatively slim volume nonetheless contains much to digest. Its major contribution is to once again place Frémont's explorations at the center of nineteenth-century developments. (Not accidentally was the most noteworthy Frémont biographer the renowned historian Allan Nevins.) Menard alludes to, but does not really resolve, the curious fact that Frémont and his reports have seemingly gone out of fashion as recent scholarly trends have emerged. In this respect Menard's analysis is somewhat more traditional in tone and style, especially on one key point. Left unstated until a thoughtful "Afterword" is the critical issue of the authorship of the "Frémont report." Recent scholarship has tended to stress the literary skill and contribution of John's fascinating wife, Jessie Benton. (That view has accompanied a more critical attitude toward the mercurial career of John Frémont, whose "heroic" stature has suffered as a result.) Menard's careful reconstruction of the writing process largely dismisses the importance of Jessie's role in the content and style of the report. Admirers of Jessie may beg to differ.

If Jessie may be discounted throughout the work, Frémont himself at times fades into the background as the author explores a wide variety of issues, authors, and artists. At the same time, much is claimed for Frémont and the dominance of his work. No doubt it is easier to trace the influence of Frémont upon others than it is to speculate on how Frémont's work intersected with those preceding him. Still, Menard mounts a worthy effort in reconstructing the intellectual context for Frémont's report. He succeeds, too, in showing Frémont's importance in redirecting thinking about American expansion, from the recognition for a transcontinental railroad to link Frémont's West with the developed East, to pointing the way to American dominance beyond the continent's true boundaries. If Frémont's first report "conquered" the Rocky Mountain barrier and boundary, then Menard's work helps to define and corroborate that conquest.