Spring 2011

Review of *The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars* by Hugh J. Reilly

Kyle Carsten Wyatt

*University of Toronto*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)

Part of the [American Studies Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly), [Cultural History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly), and the [United States History Commons](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly)


[http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2661](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2661)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
As a community of scholars, we need to ask more from books like this. Despite a topic ripe with fruitful and compelling potential, Reilly’s approach to newspaper coverage of the Plains Indian Wars lacks rigor, nuance, and engagement with contemporary critical conversations.

Reilly, a communications professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, discusses eight “watershed events,” from the Great Sioux Uprising in 1862 to the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1891. Newspapers throughout the United States, indeed the world, reported on these conflicts. The coverage that appeared
in national publications, such as the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune, is digitally archived and readily available on microfilm. Recognizing this, Reilly instead pays much needed attention to lesser known and, for many scholars, less accessible newspaper evidence from the region itself. The book includes numerous long block quotations, which are invaluable primary sources and worth our attention.

Unfortunately, Reilly does not fully contextualize, integrate, or interrogate the significance of his meaningful research, nor does he firmly ground his terminology. While the chapter on the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 and the book's conclusion gesture toward useful interpretation, the analytical depth as a whole is uneven and, at times, shallow. In such a short monograph, Reilly lacks the necessary space to develop each chapter. His discussion of the Standing Bear trial, in particular, is cursory and out of place.

Methodologically, the book relies too heavily on dated and unproblematic critical approaches. This is essentially a nineteenth-century Great Plains print culture project. As such, attention to primary content must be paired with more recent historical discussions of readership, editorial policies, inter- and intratextuality, modes of production, circulation, distribution, and so forth. Moreover, it is remarkable that Native voices—both past and present—are not integrated. Reilly does briefly acknowledge the reporting of Susette La Flesche (Omaha), and he off-handedly mentions Duncan McDonald, "a half-blood Nez Perce who covered the Nez Perce campaign as a correspondent for a small Montana newspaper." However, he does not adequately consider the implications, possible resistance, and self-determination of their writing. One also has to question the decision not even to mention Native-controlled Plains newspapers. For example, what did the Cherokee Advocate say—or, as importantly, did not say—of these events?

Reilly's archival work does make a worthwhile contribution to an important topic. The book's analytical heft and critical methodology, however, do not find equal purchase.

Kyle Carsten Wyatt
Department of English and Program in Book History and Print Culture
University of Toronto