Spring 2012

Review of *Violent Encounters: Interviews on Western Massacres* edited by Deborah and Jon Lawrence

Paul H. Carlson
*Texas Tech University*

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/2771](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2771)

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.

"Massacre" is a fiery, often provocative word, and sometimes it is hard to define. In the American West, for example, in a violent encounter, how does one distinguish between massacre and battle? Such violence as Cutthroat Gap (1833), Oatman (1851), Mountain Meadows (1857), Bear River (1863), Sand Creek (1864), and McComas (1883) should be defined as massacres. But, how should one define the Sioux Uprising (1862), the Saline and Solomon rivers and the Washita (1868), Little Big Horn (1876), and Wounded Knee (1890)?

The experts disagree—of course. Indeed, as this unexpectedly engaging book shows, scholars hold divergent views on a number of issues related to violent encounters in the West—discerning the difference between battle and massacre is only one of them. As a second one, was *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* among the worst books published on Indian-soldier fighting in the West or a thorough study that illuminates a disturbing record of massacres of Indians? What was the extent of pre-Columbian ethnic group fighting, and how did it relate, or not relate, to patterns of violence after Europeans arrived?

In their well-crafted book, Deborah and Jon Lawrence, retired professors of English and physics respectively, present edited transcripts from interviews with nine writers who have studied violent encounters and military history in the West. The individual interviews, while not particularly long, are wide-ranging, and, when considered together, make an engrossing book, one that touches on views and philosophies of history, on changing interpretations of killing and bloodshed in the West, and on discussions of the interviewees' own books and articles as well as works by others.

The editors pack a lot in the book, which is mainly about nineteenth-century events. Often, they connect the bloodshed to western trails, and they cover Anglo-Indian, Indian-Indian, and Hispanic-Indian violence from Minnesota and Arkansas westward to Oregon and California. The distinguished interviewees include Marc Simmons, Margot Mifflin, Will Bagley, Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Michael Tate, Albert Hurtado, Robert Utley, Jerome A. Greene, and Ned Blackhawk. In a concluding chapter the editors sum up the discussions and review major themes that emerge through the interviews. It is a fine work.

Paul H. Carlson
Department of History, Emeritus
Texas Tech University