Review of *After Custer: Loss and Transformation in Sioux Country* by Paul L. Hedren

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Paul Hedren is well known for excellent studies focusing on the Sioux wars and the Northern Plains. In After Custer: Loss and Transformation in Sioux Country, Hedren returns to his favorite topics, but this time telling a story no longer focused on Northern Plains conflicts between Indians and whites, but on the changes that took place in the years following the Plains Indian Wars. His approach is admirable, since for most people—scholars and general readers alike—interest often ends with the conclusion of open combat. The years between Little Big Horn and Wounded Knee are seldom treated so thoroughly as in Hedren’s well-written and newest book.

Hedren tells an interesting story portraying the rapid transformations that took place in the Northern Plains after Indians were forced onto reservations. While the facts are generally well known, the rapid changes in the environment, economy, and demographics of the area were astonishing. Within a year of the Little Big Horn battle, army generals touring the country could not see a single Indian—this in a country that only a few months before was too dangerous even for smaller military escorts. Now the railroad, aided by the U.S. Army, was rapidly preparing the way for the booming cattle industry. Hedren portrays these changes at a pace almost as breathtaking as the events themselves. His writing is scholarly, yet lively and captivating.

After Custer considers the impact of the Sioux wars on local white settlers, the army, and Native people. While telling a story of growth and success, indeed of “Manifest Destiny,” Hedren explains the costs of that growth to the environment and to Plains Indian cultures. He reminds us of the slaughter of the bison and other game, and he revisits the miserable conditions of the reservation Indians and the resulting tragedies of the Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee. Simultaneously he puts these developments in a wider context that includes the economic and political growth of the United States as a nation. In the Northern Plains, “wilderness” certainly gave way to “civilization” in a most Turnerian fashion, and Hedren carefully explains this transformation without taking sides.

Paul Hedren has spent most of his life writing about the Northern Plains and working in the area. His appreciation of the country and its people can be seen throughout this book, one everybody will find well worth reading.

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