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Review of The View from Officers' Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians

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army is extraordinarily difficult. For example, a major theme in *Soldier West: Biographies from the Military Frontier* (1987), edited by Paul Andrew Hutton, was the rich variety in experiences, interests, and personalities among army officers. Now, Smith, an assistant professor of history at the University of Texas at El Paso, demonstrates how ambivalent and contradictory the officers were in their *perceptions* of virtually every aspect of Indian affairs. And, importantly, she recognizes that officers' wives also lived on "officers' row," and wherever possible she probes their attitudes.

Although the author systematically and thoroughly explored the army's views about the essential nature of the Indians' character and tribal life, about Indian women and children, and about Indian policy and warfare, few tidy formulas or patterns emerged. All officers apparently agreed that civilization was superior to savagery, that they had a special expertise (far superior to that of civilians working as Indian agents) in Indian affairs, and that the army's conduct and performance on the frontier had been exemplary. But on every other important issue the single constant element in the army's collective opinion was diversity. "The only apparent keys to differing perceptions of Indians," she concludes, "were the nebulous, even unmanageable, ones of individual personality, temperament, and circumstance" (183).

Collectively, army officers should have been excellent observers, for they were reasonably well educated and articulate. Moreover, having helped conquer the Indians, concentrate them on reservations, and commence efforts at acculturation, they had more experience with Indians than any other group. Yet, officers rarely transcended the limitations imposed by white culture, and consequently never *understood* Indian culture. As the author emphasizes, the "military peoples' comments on Indians reveal much more about Anglo-American ideas on culture, civilization, savagery, and race than they do about the realities of Indian lives and cultures" (xix).

The View from Officers' Row: Army Perceptions of Western Indians. By Sherry L. Smith. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990. Introduction, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xxi + 263 pp. \$24.95.

Careful students of the American West have long realized that making valid generalizations about the officers who served in the frontier

Smith's study is impressively broad, for it not only encompasses the entire trans-Mississippi West from the Mexican Cession of 1848 to the unhappy affair at Wounded Knee in 1890, but also incorporates all levels of the officer corps from commanding generals William T. Sherman and Philip Sheridan to the most junior officers. In pursuit of the officers' thoughts, she has mined manuscript sources in repositories from California to New York and culled information from an enormous number of published primary sources. Scholars interested in both military history and the West will find much of value in this book.

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