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**Review of *Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle* By
Richard Allen Fox, Jr.**

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Archaeology, History, and Custer's Last Battle. By Richard Allan Fox, Jr. Foreword by W. Raymond Wood. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993. Foreword, preface, introduction, maps, illustrations, photographs, conclusions, notes, references, index. xviii + 411 pp. \$29.95.

In John Ford's classic film "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," Senator Ransom Stoddard tells an incredulous group of admirers his own version of the incident that launched a distinguished career in politics. Faced with that less-than-glorious revelation, the seasoned newspaper editor destroys his notes and declares he will not run the story. "This is the West, sir," he indignantly proclaims. "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend!"

In the American West there is perhaps no greater legend than that surrounding the person of George Armstrong Custer and the calamitous events of 25-26 June 1876. In his book *History, Archaeology, and Custer's Last Battle*, Richard Fox challenges a part of that legend by printing the facts as he sees them. The facts he employs, moreover, derive from a source quite different from those that have been used in traditional studies of the battle. Archaeological data in the form of artifact distributions across the battleground are here offered as rebuttal to interpretations previously drawn from standard historiographic sources. That unconventional class of information provides a distinct perspective on the Little Bighorn battle and raises new questions about its progress.

Although not the first account summarizing recent archeological investigations at the historic battlefield (in addition to the reports of other researchers, Fox himself has authored or co-authored several previous works on the subject), this publication is likely to have much wider appeal than some others currently available. Although providing a scholarly treatment, Fox does not write solely for an archaeological readership, as is evident from his rather eccentric prose style. Indeed, his

book is as much about the arcane method of knowing through archeology as it is about Custer's last fight.

It is important to note, however, that archaeological knowledge is largely a product of interpretation, neither as certain nor as monolithic as Fox might have his readers believe. Indeed, some of his conclusions are sure to be disputed by fellow archeologists with differing views, as well as by those historians he confronts directly in the book. Still, Fox develops a compelling argument that will serve as a point of departure for future debates on this enduring and ever-controversial subject. Accordingly, there is little doubt that his book will garner a vast audience among historians and archaeologists, students of military tactics, those broadly interested in the American West, and of course the many thousands who share a peculiar fascination with Custer's fatal hubris.

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