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Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 1983

Review of *Clio's Cowboys: Studies in the Historiography of the Cattle Trade* By Don D. walker

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Skaggs, Jimmy M., "Review of *Clio's Cowboys: Studies in the Historiography of the Cattle Trade* By Don D. walker" (1983). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1705.

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Clio's Cowboys: Studies in the Historiography of the Cattle Trade. By Don D. Walker. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Notes, index. xxi + 210 pp. \$13.95.

Clio's Cowboys is an important book, the first truly analytical historiography of the glory days of the cattle trade. It will probably also be controversial, because it chastises three generations of western historians for mindlessly repeating sweeping generalizations about cowboys and cattlemen, for relying on questionable sources, and, worst of all, for disembodiment of the most colorful of the nation's epics with impersonalized economic and business histories.

Don D. Walker says that historians—for all their pretense of accuracy—do no better in capturing the essence of the American cowboy than do novelists, whom they superciliously dismiss as naive. Suggestive examples of Walker's heresy: Joseph G. McCoy's *Historic Sketches*, which most historians have accepted almost as holy writ, is the polemical memoir of an "embittered old man" (p. 6); other standard sources such as J. L. Hill's *The End of the Cattle Trail* and J. Marvin Hunter's *Trail Drivers of Texas* are little better; Fred Shannon, Ramon Adams, Joe Frantz, and Julian Choate are "shallow" (p. 2) in their respective evaluations of sources such as these; Theodore Roosevelt, upon whom historians often rely, "too often . . . could not see the particular for the general, the person for the type" (p. 40); Ernest Osgood, Edward Dale, Walter Prescott Webb, and Louis Pelzer penned

nostalgia disguised as history and passed off under inaccurate titles; Frederick Jackson Turner's assertions about frontier individualism have been unthinkingly repeated by historians without qualification, even though they are demonstrably false; Robert Dykstra erred by rejecting fiction as source material; Jimmy Skagg's "abstract economic drama [ultimately] may prove to be damaging to history" (p. 191); William Savage's call for better Western fiction "may even aggravate the weakness we are hoping to overcome" (p. 112); and Evetts Haley's biography of Charles Goodnight, while engaging, is inadequate, for the author was overwhelmed by his subject. *Clio's Cowboys* is an extraordinarily candid appraisal of cowboy history that spares few.

Walker chides historians for relying upon the likes of McCoy, Hill, and Hunter while ignoring sources such as Edward and Eleanor (Marx) Aveling's obscure *Working Class Movement in America* (1891), which includes a chapter on the proletarian cowboy and his bourgeois oppressor, the rancher. Meanwhile, academicians have foisted off sentimental claptrap as serious history. Dale did it. So too did Rudolf (spelled "Rudolph" by Walker) Clemen.

Superficial errors such as the misrendering of names unfortunately detract from an important work and will be seized upon by historians, when other flaws are more significant. Walker's presumption as to the validity of the Avelings' diatribe, considering his own critical standards, is curious; moreover, his chauvinism intrudes: he assumes that Edward Aveling, a physician, was the driving force in a duo that featured Karl Marx's daughter—during an era in which men regularly fronted in public for their intelligent wives. Facts that fail to fit Walker's biases often are buried in footnotes, as in "As far as I know, the only historian to call *Historic Sketches* an autobiography is Jimmy M. Skagg's Introduction to J. L. Hill's *The End of the Cattle Trail*" (p. 169, n. 16). Walker's prose is often unfathomable: "In the epistemology of history and literature, the delicate equation between organizing conception and raw phenomenal perception was overweighted with the former" (p. 40). As Walker himself exclaims in

a different context, "In all of [James Fenimore] Cooper is there a bit of prose as stiff, as awkwardly abstract as this?" (p. 40).

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