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Review of *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest* By Gregory H. Nobles

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American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest. By Gregory H. Nobles. New York: Hill & Wang, 1997. Bibliographical essay, index. xvi + 286 pp. \$25.00 cloth, \$13.00 paper.

Gregory H. Nobles has produced a thoughtful, clearly written, thoroughly researched survey offering "an interpretive synthesis of recent [frontier] scholarship." Using the studies of such scholars as James Axtell, Alfred W. Crosby, John Mack Faragher, Julie Roy Jeffrey, Robert M. Utley, and Patricia Limerick, Nobles proposes "to summarize and synthesize this remarkable new research, to connect the frontier histories of the East and West . . . and, above all, to put it all into a coherent, accessible narrative." The author admirably accomplishes his aim.

His introduction provides an excellent discussion of Frederick Jackson Turner and the frontier thesis. While the University of Wisconsin professor was "an insightful, innovative historian," Nobles asserts that Turner's "notion of the frontier was seriously flawed," and goes on to redefine the frontier as "a region in which no culture, group, or government can claim effective control or hegemony over others. In that regard, contact often involves conflict, a sometimes multisided struggle with an undetermined outcome." Frontier history, Nobles states, "is not a clear-cut account of westward migration by white people . . . It is a story of continuing encounter that can be told from many perspectives, from the standpoint of native inhabitants as well as Euro-American invaders, immigrants as well as emigrants, women as well as men, even land and animals as well as people."

Nobles contends that America's frontier did not close, as Turner maintained, in 1890. "Many of the issues that formed the history of the frontier up to 1890—new towns and territories, land sales and settlement, gold rushes and oil booms, and, above all, the ongoing struggles between Indians and whites, speculators and settlers, ranchers and farmers, bureaucrats and taxpayers—have by no means

been resolved or put to rest. Over a century after the official closing of the frontier, people are still struggling over many of those issues."

Nobles also emphasizes the significant role of the federal government in the conquest of the continent. Here again he differs with Turner, holding that "westward expansion cannot be seen primarily as a process carried out, as Turner suggested, by restless citizens seeking to gain greater opportunities or perhaps to escape the restraints of government. Rather, it was a process that depended on the participation, even the active promotion, of the national government."

In sum, this is a welcome contribution to the study of the American frontier.

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