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Review of *The Making of Sacagawea: A Euro-American Legend* By Donna}. Kessler

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The Making of Sacagawea: A Euro-American Legend. By Donna J. Kessler. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1996. Tables, map, photographs, notes, works cited, index. xii + 258 pp. \$29.95.

The basis for this book is a good idea: to discover the factors that have made Sacagawea a legend and then examine the ways in which the legend has evolved. Indeed, the author has done an excellent job in tracing Sacagawea's changing image, but a series of missteps detract from her laudable intent. The book suffers from repetitiveness, questionable literary devices, and lengthy accounts of the obvious. Squeezing out the superfluous would have yielded a sturdier essay of appropriate proportions.

Sacagawea may be the best known member of the Corps of Discovery after Lewis and Clark. Although she served in a valuable capacity on the trip, she was no match for several expert hunters, boat handlers, and crafters in the party. That fact has not kept numerous writers and artists from using her as a device to develop their own agendas and elevate her beyond her actual importance. Kessler attempts to explain why the woman has come to assume such a high position relative to her deeds.

In her best work Kessler demonstrates that Sacagawea has been interpreted as both ignoble savage and Indian princess. Relegating

her to little more than the "interpreter's wife," expedition diarists placed her largely in the former role, according to Kessler. Nonetheless, their ambiguous assessments left room for later writers to view Sacagawea differently. That came when biographers such as Eva Emory Dye and Grace Raymond Hebard promoted her to expedition guide and Indian princess, the latter based on her brother's rank as a Shoshone chief. From that point, Kessler finds later works no more than theme and variation on the existing positions. In reviewing all these works the author fails to mention, however, that most of the writing is wretched history. The books may have established Sacagawea's legend but their overall inadequacies should have been acknowledged.

Kessler devotes excessive time and space to stating well-known facts about Native American stereotypes. Much of this unnecessary general history seems quite distant from Sacagawea. The author too frequently uses rhetorical questions instead of stating her own opinions which seem to be lurking behind them. She is much too repetitive: first comes a chapter preview, then the text itself, followed by a summary, and finally a review of the points at the beginning of the next chapter. The author has a habit of telling us chapter-by-chapter what she is going to prove and finally boasts of methodologies she has employed without explaining what they are, for example "psychological myth criticisms."

I liked her central point and thought she made it well. A firmer editorial hand with a bold blue pencil would have helped the book considerably.

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