

contested Civil War borderland, it is a sophisticated, compelling, and imaginative work of scholarship.

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Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature, and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West. By Karen R. Jones (Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2015) 363 pp. \$55.00

Strains of nostalgia laced the *fin de siècle* culture of late nineteenth-century America. In the 1890s, economic depression and political unrest cast a shadow over the future of the republic, but fond memories of a triumphal past offered solace and reassurance. And well they might. In less than a century earlier, the United States expanded across a large continent and maintained its nationhood despite the challenges of distance and a destructive Civil War. With expansion came the acquisition of the American West, the backdrop for *Epiphany in the Wilderness*—the storied saga of the hunt, the hunter, and the hunted. In parsing the performance and the drama, Jones argues that the recounting of hunting events assumes a time-honored cultural ritual in the narrative of American history, the making of “the West as site of personal and social memory.” She declares, “The nineteenth century was irrevocably shaped by westward expansion, and in that story the hunter stood center stage,” citing confirmation from Turner’s nostalgic and bravado-laden 1893 frontier thesis that artifacts of American identity included “the hunting shirt and the pioneer cabin” (5).¹

Epiphany in the Wilderness is a challenging and complicated work that employs theoretical underpinnings to highlight the importance of the hunting narrative to American cultural history. The seemingly straightforward story of the hunter type represented by the figure of Daniel Boone earlier in the trans-Appalachian West became much more complicated and laden with meaning in the trans-Mississippi West. Clearly the choice of the word “epiphany” in the title—something that transcends—signals theorized constructions to follow, with references to Derrida’s deconstruction theory and the “actor network theory” of Callon and Latour all in play.²

Hunters and hunting in the nineteenth century assume three modes—subsistence, market, and sport—all of which treated the landscape of the American West as one of “appropriation and conquest.” In the case of the marketers, the destruction of buffalo was on an industrial scale that

1 Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1921), 1–38.

2 See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, 1976; orig. pub. in French, 1967); Michael Callon, “Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St. Brieuc Bay,” in John Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge* (Boston, 1986), 196–233; Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987).

saw “the trans-Mississippi West as cornucopian landscape” and buffalo slaughter a milestone in the “winning of the West” (8). The hunting performance is also shaped by the “gaze.” Gaze occurs in a time lapse that imprints memory and ultimately influences, or even dictates, the recounted memory of the hunt; stalking, chase, kill, and celebration comprise the performance. The emerging stories shaped by the gaze and the telling of the performance from and in memory helps to assert a teleological narrative, or even an “allegorical sign” (336), in the grander stage of American history, particularly in an environment like the trans-Mississippi West, in all of its disconnected/connected variety.

Although the hunting drama and performance appear to constitute the province of white males, Jones backs away from that generalization, introducing “heterodoxy” to the story. Additional participants include women, Indians, and various representatives of the “subaltern” in the form of hunting guides. The camera also brings diversity in the hunt in its substitution of a captured image for a kill. According to this work and others, hunting culture and its validation as a profoundly important cultural experience through narrative lent momentum to the emerging conservation movement—for instance, the elitist members of the Boone and Crockett Club who worked to protect and restore once abundant wildlife in streams, forests, and plains. Curiously on the opposite end of the power spectrum, Jones makes an oblique reference to the Ghost Dance of the Plains Indians that envisioned the restoration of a bygone era when a hunting culture flourished on the abundance of animal capital.

Center stage in the conclusion is the entanglement of human society and ecology as expressed in the culture of the hunt, “rendering the West as a complicated landscape of subsistence, sport, profit, sacredness, belonging, and vitality.” Most importantly, the pace of environmental change in this hunter’s paradise “conspired to make conservation irrevocably western in design” (336). Note the term *design* rather than *origin* in this carefully worded sentence. Adventure stories of the hunt reinforced emerging romantic notions about wild nature’s role in restoring the human spirit and vitality amid an urbanizing America. The many-faceted inquiries of Jones’ work will provide grist for discussion for many years to come.

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Long Past Slavery: Representing Race in the Federal Writers’ Project. By Catherine A. Stewart (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2016) 372 pp. \$29.95

For decades, the most cutting-edge monographs about enslavement have relied on a rich but controversial archive to tell the story of slavery from the bottom up. Comprised of interviews that were gathered in the late 1930s as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, the archive, known as the “WPA (Works Progress Administration) Ex-Slave