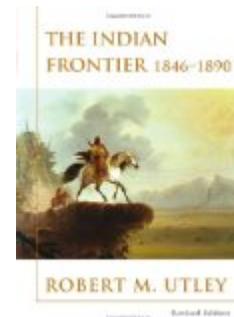


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Robert M. Utley. *The Indian Frontier, 1846-1890*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003. xix + 325 pp. \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8263-2998-1.

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Settlers Invade the West

Almost twenty years after the first issuance of *The Indian Frontier* the former National Park Service and western historian Robert Utley has re-issued his classic narrative of America's postbellum frontier. Utley, a prolific writer, makes several changes to the new work mostly in the first and last chapters, the bibliography, and adding some new photographs. The rest of the changes he makes are stylistic. Thus, this review reiterates the substance of the work from the first edition. However, it also takes issue with several points, one being that frontier history does involve more than Native-white interactions, and another being the author's analysis of Civil War generals' handling of the "Indian problem."

For a person wanting to gain an initial familiarity with the postbellum West, a time when settlers crossed and settled the Plains in record numbers, then there is probably not a better book to read. Utley admits this is a book for a general audience and is not, like many of his others, geared towards professional historians. Utley writes in an engaging style that many undergraduates would find interesting. He does skip around geographically quite a bit, which seems like an attempt to keep the chronology straight. One example involves David Merriwether whose name arises periodically throughout chapter two. In the chapter little changes for Merriwether other than the passage of time. Utley does employ breaks throughout the chapters as he switches topics and locations. The work is an excellent narrative of the era and the maps (over a dozen) and pictures (over eighty) will engage any reader.

The Indian Frontier proceeds in a fairly chronological order from the Dakota uprising during the Civil War to the Peace Commission to the Nez Perce War to Geronimo's capture. The last chapter, new to this edition, takes the "frontier" beyond the December 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre. Utley breaks the book down into nine chapters. Chapter one "The West at Mid-century" gives a background of what is happening west of the Mississippi River before the Civil War. Chapter two "Foundations of a New Indian Policy 1846-1860" portrays government policy up to the Civil War and its lack of continuity. Chapter 3, "When the White People Fought Each Other," relates many of the Native/white conflicts during the Civil War. These include the most well-known incidents such as the Dakota uprising and the Chivington Massacre. Chapter 4, "War and Peace: Indian Relations in Transition, 1865-1869," relates the development of postwar Indian policy that tried to deal with the massive white migration. Chapter 5, "Grant's Peace Policy 1869-1876," and chapter 6, "Wars of the Peace Policy," discuss the details of President Ulysses S. Grant's policies and the failed attempts made by the government to avoid conflict and to solve the "Indian problem." Chapter 7, "The Vision of the Reformers, 1865-1890," examines white reformers who attempted to guide the government's policy goals and directly help Native Peoples in the West. Chapter 8, "The Reservation 1880-1890," involves the reservations' effectiveness once major combat ended. While the final chapter, "The Passing of the Frontier, 1890," provides much new information, the author does not draw many connections between the chapter's many sections. Utley's "history and bibliography" is six-

teen pages covering eight subjects that are useful to those wanting to know more.

The *Indian Frontier* is not only dedicated to the chief historian of American Indian policy, Francis Paul Prucha, but also follows Prucha's model that conflicts between American Indians and settlers proved inevitable even though the government tried various methods to avoid clashes. Utley predictably focuses on white settlement, Native reaction, and government policy in this order. His introduction rejects the "New Western History" he credits to Patricia Nelson Limerick. He also rebuffs victimization often credited to Dee Brown. Nor does the author acknowledge the decolonization movement's existence.

Utley thoroughly explains how the U.S. Army carried out policy, which represents his work's greatest strength and contribution to the field of Western history. He spends little time on American Indian perspectives or historiography. Thus the work is dissimilar to his book on Sitting Bull in which Natives take center stage or his two works on the army in the West where soldiers are the focus. Otherwise Utley is balanced, chastising Euro Americans' ideas about progress and their constant drive to accomplish such. The problem of encroachment is fully stated, as is the government's goal of protecting white settlers. He also addresses the religious, namely Christian, reasons for expansion and the racism that whites practiced by denying the import of Native Peoples.

A significant hitch involves a theme common in Utley's many writings. He seems to believe that generals sought to solve the "Indian problem" in much the same manner they ended the Civil War, through total war. He argues that while Grant and William T. Sherman sought to end Native-white conflict, they put the gun before the olive branch. He ignores the fact that when they used the gun, though most often after diplomacy, it had the purpose of shortening conflict thus saving both white and American Indian lives in the long run.

Though a prominent historian, Utley promotes the perspective that Grant carried out a "war at any cost" mentality that is so pervasive in Civil War "Lost Cause" history. *The Indian Frontier* contains a plethora of examples. He writes, "Throughout the nation, voters went to the polls and voted overwhelmingly to make as their next president the general who would obliterate every tribe if necessary to protect U. S. Citizens" (p. 124). This statement inspires two considerations. First, in the 1868 election, Grant did easily win the electoral vote, but the popular vote proved much closer. The black vote carried him to a narrow 310,000 popular vote majority; Grant

obtained fewer white votes than Democrat Horatio Seymour.[1] Second, freedmen were not a constituency that concerned themselves with westward expansion or Native assimilation. Thus voters did not "overwhelmingly" elect Grant president "to obliterate every tribe."

Utley does not believe Grant's pre-presidential experiences with Natives influenced his policies when he took office, but the president had long comprehended the "Indian problem" (p. 128). Grant did not, "suddenly and inexplicably," switch his views on Indian policy (p. 127). In 1853, as a young lieutenant, Grant wrote his wife from the Oregon Territory, "I believe the whole race [American Indians] would be harmless and peaceable if they were not put upon by the whites." [2] Utley discusses Grant's relationship with the well-noted Seneca Ely Parker who "had the president elect's ear nearly continually" as if the Parker/Grant relationship began on election night (p. 130). Parker served under Grant from Vicksburg until the second year of Grant's presidency and the men knew each other before the Civil War. In 1866, before Grant's election, Grant told Sherman that the army must "deal fairly with Indians and protect them from encroachments by whites." He continued, "I have always thought that a good part of our difficulties arise from treating all American Indians as hostile when any portion of them commit acts that mistakenly makes a campaign against them necessary." [3]

Nevertheless, much to learn lies in *The Indian Frontier's* story. Utley correctly writes, "And civilization remained a cornerstone of federal Indian policy until 1844 with the reservation as the hothouse for germination" (p. 154). Of course civilization should be in quotes. He rightly states that military force did not cause the Natives to succumb, but railroads, settlements, and technology born out of an "aggressive and highly organized society brought defeat to the Indian." Utley relates one notion that is lost on many more "progressive" scholars of American Indian history who abhor the reformers' treatment of the Natives. The notion is that reformers "honestly saw nothing worth saving in Indian culture" (p. 259). Utley puts events in context and this context will help readers understand the conflicts that stretched from the Civil War to the settling of the West. *The Indian Frontier* will give any reader a good overview of the happenings in the West between 1846 and 1890.

Notes

[1]. Out of the 5,716,000 votes cast, Grant received 3,012,000. From this sum Grant received 450,000 black votes thus; he attained 2,562,000 white votes to Sey-

mour's 2,653,000. After the war, 703,000 blacks, and 627,000 whites were registered to vote in the South. See Martin Mantell, *Johnson, Grant and the Politics of Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 102.

[2]. Ulysses S. Grant (USG) to Julia Dent Grant, 19

March 1853, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (PUSG), John Y. Simon, ed., 24 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-), 1: p. 296.

[3]. USG to William T. Sherman, 14 March 1866, PUSG, 16: p. 160.

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