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Richard V. Francaviglia. *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011. 310 pp. \$36.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87421-809-1; ISBN 978-0-87421-810-7; ISBN 978-0-87421-811-4.

Reviewed by Boyd Cothran

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Commissioned by Linda Levitt

In January 1844, John Charles Fremont's wearied expedition stumbled out of the snow-packed Sierra Nevada and into the more "mild and pleasant" landscape of the Truckee River basin in what is today western Nevada. Working their way south and east across the desert, the party came upon a large inland lake with a "remarkable rock" rising out of the water, presenting to the bewildered Fremont "a pretty exact outline of the Great Pyramid of Cheops." Rising an estimated "600 feet above the water," Fremont declared that future travelers would find this western rock to possess a "more striking resemblance" to the original pyramids of the pharaohs than the cracking and defaced remnants then to be found in Giza. In honor of his discovery's uncanny resemblance to the pristine beauty of the Egyptian wonder, Fremont named the lake "Pyramid Lake" (pp. 66-67).

Fremont's "Pyramid Lake" was not singular among nineteenth-century western places to receive Old World names. European and American explorers and travelers often bestowed familiar Eastern or biblical names onto the unfamiliar and exotic landscape of the American West. From Cairo, Illinois, to Memphis, Tennessee, and Utah's Jordan River, one need not look too far or too deep to find evidence of this enduring tradition.

The inhabitants of the American West—both natives and settlers and their descendants—were likewise commonly described in terms of their similarity to Easterners. Richard F. Burton, traveling across the United States in 1860, described the covered wagons he observed traversing the plains as "those ships of the great American Sahara" while the aboriginals he encountered he compared to "the Bedouin Arabs" he observed in El Hejaz or the Ishmaelites he recalled from the book of Genesis (p. 47).

Skeptics might dismiss these rhetorical and literary descriptions. But as historical geographer Richard V. Francaviglia chronicles in his exhaustive new book *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient*, the imagery and networks of meaning embedded in these transferences of Eastern or "Oriental" names and descriptions onto western places and peoples run much deeper and reveal a much more complex and enduring relationship between the West and the East than previously thought.

The Orientalization of the American West, Francaviglia concedes, has been recognized as a significant aspect of American cultural history. And "Orientalism"—famously articulated in 1978 by Edward Said as an essentially ethnocentric characterization of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern peoples as sexualized, exotic, and primitive "others" subject to European conquest—has enjoyed a prolific career among postcolonial thinkers and activists. But Francaviglia claims this one-dimensionally negative view of Orientalism is too limiting. "[T]he Orient was regarded with considerable ambivalence" in the American West and "it might be more profitable to recognize that it may be negative, positive, or both," he claims (p. 9). After all, Orientalists, Francaviglia insists, are "simply people who envision and engage the Orient (and its peoples) for a wide variety of reasons. Rather than brand their interests and motives as good or bad, I simply acknowledge that their Orientalism has yielded considerable information about that part" of the world (p. 10). Of course American Orientalism had its unsavory associations with the United States' history of empire and colonialism but Francaviglia's investigation is more concerned with how images of the Orient helped shape "the way newcomers encountered, and made sense of,

the people and places they found in the North American West” (p. 13). Unfortunately, Francaviglia’s reluctance to locate his study more thoroughly in the history of American empire and settler colonialism and his failure to provide a systematic explanatory historical framework ultimately limit the book’s contributions.

That is not to say Francaviglia is without a framework altogether. In considering these ubiquitous portrayals of the West as the East, he uncovers a dialogical process. Travelers, observers, or newcomers encountered exotic landscapes and peoples. To make sense of it, they filtered these experiences through their cultural repertoire, constructing place in the process. “When we name a community in North American ‘Mecca’ or ‘Lebanon,’ we subliminally imprint it with associations and memories” (p. 13). Subsequent Westerners, in turn, encountered these surrogate landscapes and reproduced their associations. Within a few generations, the West as Orient had become an enduring cultural script that lasts to this day.

*Go East, Young Man* is deeply researched with numerous enlightening examples. And the process Francaviglia outlines occurred in various forms and in a variety of places. Early in the book, he explains how nineteenth-century explorers, developers, and Orient-inspired religious communities—chief among them the Mormons—recast the West as a latter-day “Promised Land.” Branding the deserts of the Intermountain West as an ersatz Holy Land, they found haunting and thrilling similarities wherever they looked. An 1886 Utah & Nevada Railway pamphlet described the Great Salt Lake as “the Dead Sea of America” and reinforced the comparison by employing a color lithograph complete with an Oriental-themed font and floating junks in the background (p. 116). The Rio Grand Western Railway’s promotional brochure *Pointer to Prosperity* (1896) was even more straightforward. In a map titled “A Striking Comparison,” the railroad company illustrated the topographic similarities between the Holy Land and Utah (pp. 117-118).

While Utah was often represented within biblical terms, other parts of the American Southwest were too. New Mexico and particularly Santa Fe with its Spanish-read Moorish-architecture were often described in Orientalist terminology. As Ralph E. Twitchell of the Santa Fe Railway explained: “Something of that intangible air of mystery that the moors brought from the Far East to Granada was transplanted to American soil by the conquistadores” (p. 138). The Indigenous inhabitants of the American Southwest were also given Oriental identities. In the 1850s one traveler described the Pima-Maricopa

people as “Good Samaritans of the desert” (p. 132) while Spanish officials often referred to the Jicarilla Apache as *faraónes*, or pharaohs (p. 139).

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Orientalization of the American West, Francaviglia argues, went in new directions as Chinese and to a lesser extent Japanese immigrants came to call the Far West home. Depictions of Chinese labor in both the mining industry as well as the construction of railroads marked the West as a landscape shaped by Oriental hands, while colorful postcards of Chinatowns across the region offered glimpses of the exotic flavors of these ethnic boroughs. But even as popular culture imprinted Oriental labor onto these malleable western landscapes, Chinese individuals were thoroughly excluded from mainstream society. Indeed, as Francaviglia points out in his astute analysis of a postcard titled “A Happy Family in Chinatown” (ca. 1906): “[S]uch seemingly mundane scenes revealed the Chinese family as the ‘other,’ a counterpart to the ideal American family that was likely white, Christian, and upwardly mobile” (p. 169).

Corporations and businesses were often the most effective promulgators of Orientalist discourse, as Francaviglia demonstrates through his reading of numerous advertisements. A turn-of-the-century citrus label from Bradford Bros. Miracle Brand Oranges featured a genie bearing a tray of oranges. Images such as this one, he argues, Orientalized California’s landscape and its bountiful products. Other advertising campaigns sought to promote the Far West’s physical and cultural association with the Far East. In an interesting confluence of analysis, Francaviglia compares the Great Northern Railway’s operation of the Minneapolis-Seattle “Oriental Limited” between 1905 and 1929 and subsequent efforts by Northwest Airlines to promote their coast-to-coast service after World War II as a modern-day Northwest Passage, linking the United States to the riches of the East (pp. 218, 294-296). By deploying Orientalist discourses, these companies built upon generations of imagining the American West as the Orient in order to present the Far West as the gateway to the Far East.

Francaviglia is at his best in the latter third of the book when he analyzes American popular cultural representations of the West as East in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As the United State rose to global dominance following World War II, its enormous entertainment and cultural industrial complex proliferated and expanded existing symbolic associations between the American West and the Orient. In these chapters,

Francaviglia takes the reader on a postmodern pastiche of high-low cultural juxtapositions, from Frank Baum's *Wizard of Oz* (1900)—which he presents as a New World adaptation of the *Arabian Nights*—to the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, and Oriental-inspired western films such as *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), and the 1970s television series *Kung Fu* starring David Carradine as the Shaolin priest Kwai Chang Caine wandering the West in search of his half-brother Danny Caine.

In *Go East, Young Man*, Richard Francaviglia ultimately provides a convincing and at times entertaining examination of the many-faceted ways in which the American West was represented as the East through Orientalist cultural constructions. This in itself is a contribution. However, this reviewer was frustrated by Francaviglia's decision not to foreground these cultural representations within the subtext of American empire and settler colonialism. Without providing the theoretical apparatus necessary to understand how these discourses functioned to advance larger historical forces, Francaviglia's

study limits its applicability to scholars.

That said, the Orientalization of the American West will continue to have profound importance for Americans as they continue to negotiate the United States' imperial ambitions. Francaviglia is correct when he observes that there is an enduring conflation between the West and East in American culture. And in the twenty-first century, as the United States seeks to extract itself from two wars of conquest in the Middle East, it would benefit all Americans to recall the at times dialogical relationship of associations between the East and West, a relationship made clear on May 1, 2011, when the world learned that U.S. Special Forces had killed Osama Bin Laden, the mastermind between the attacks on the World Trade Center, in a midnight raid on his safe house compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Considering the long history of imaginings of the American West as the Orient, it should come as no surprise that the al-Qaeda leader had been code-named Geronimo after the Bedonkohe Apache leader who confounded American military capture for decades in the mountains of southwest New Mexico.

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