H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Christine Bold. *The Frontier Club: Popular Westerns and Cultural Power, 1880-1924.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. 320 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-973179-4.

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Published on H-SHGAPE (June, 2013)
Commissioned by Julia Irwin

Cultural Power and the Making of the Popular Western

Albert Bierstadt had been avoiding Theodore Roosevelt throughout the winter and spring of 1893. Six years earlier, Roosevelt had tapped the famous German-born painter for membership in the newly formed Boone and Crockett Club, an elite club of gentlemen hunters who combined social status with a passion for hunting and an enthusiasm for the masculine and romantic West. Membership was strictly limited to private nominations, with unanimous support from the whole. And all members had to have shot with a rifle at least one–later raised to three–of a designated list of big-game animals (p. 18). Bierstadt's qualifications were stellar: a renowned and prolific interpreter of western landscapes, he had also famously killed a huge moose, which had the eighth-largest known antlers in the world. But those antlers were now coming back to haunt him.

In January 1893, Roosevelt had hatched a plan to publish a volume of essays, *American Big-Game Hunting*, to be distributed at the World's Columbian Exhibition. The essays were supposed to generate a distinctively American genre of hunting literature that would both sway pubic opinion in support of the club's conservation goals while also recreating the American West as a distinctive space reserved exclusively for superior species, both animal and human. Roosevelt and his co-editor George Bird Grinnell hounded members for contributions, writing letters of solicitation. They wanted Bierstadt, in particular, to write an account of his most famous hunt. "I want that moose article!" Roosevelt scribbled on his calling card one afternoon after visiting the artist in his study (p. 39).

Cornered, Bierstadt eventually produced a manuscript but Roosevelt did not approve. Indeed, he became dismayed "when he arrived at the climactic moment of the story only to discover that Bierstadt had not shot the moose; his Native guide John had" (p. 39). This revelation not only potentially invalidated Bierstadt's membership but it also disrupted the racial hierarchy of the gentlemen hunt the Boone and Crockett Club sought to promote. The hunt was supposed to feature Anglo-Americans honorably killing big-game animals after a "fair chase" across an idyllic landscape emptied of all indigenous peoples. Roosevelt demanded a series of revisions, Bierstadt refused, and the essay never appeared in any Boone and Crockett publication.

This story, one of many Christine Bold recounts in her fascinating and engaging new book *The Frontier Club: Popular Westerns and Cultural Power, 1880-1924*, highlights the degree to which a closed patrician group of elite white men carefully crafted and then promulgated a particular vision of the American West that yoked the "western as we commonly know it" to their own self-interest in "hunting and conservation, open-range ranching, mass publishing, Jim Crow segregation, immigration restriction, and American Indian assimilation" (p. xvii). And by embracing particular narrative formulas, Bold argues, the frontier club ultimately sustained the systems of privilege and exclusion that legitimized their cultural power.

This cadre of influential eastern cultural power brokers included mostly East Coast educated elites with inherited wealth, political connections, and literary talent. Their membership included many purveyors of the western but Bold chose to focus on Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, Owen Wister, Winthrop Chanler, Madison Grant, Henry Cabot Lodge, Caspar Whitney, Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, and Frederic Remington. These were men with incredible resources at their disposal. But they also felt tremendous anxiety over issues of race, class, and industrialization, threatened, as they were, by these perceived forces of change. And one of Bold's central contentions is that they seized upon the western to both shore up their masculine identity and social superiority and also to influence public opinion, federal policy,

race politics, and mass culture.

Building upon the work of G. Edward White, Richard Slotkin, and others, Bold creatively mines the personal papers, archives, and writings of these men to reveal the hidden social, political, and above all financial relationships that gave rise to the modern western. Indeed, this is as much a history of capitalism as it is a work of literary analysis. Institutions such as the Cheyenne Club–an exclusive club for Wyoming cattle barons–served its member's social and economic interests by connecting the western cattle industry with the publishing world of New York. Grinnell and Roosevelt invested in both, using the profits from publishing to finance their ranches. And Owen Wister bound the two together in his most enduring novel, *The Virginian* (1902), inspired by material gathered while visiting Cheyenne Club members' ranches. But this collusion also had ramification for how Americans remembered and understood the nature of capitalism in the West, especially as it pertained to the range war. Indeed, as Bold argues convincingly, "Powerful interests on the plains and on publishers' row worked to structure and publicize marketplace competition as a class- and race-based hierarchy setting Anglo gentlemen (cattle barons and quality publishers) who transcended commercial interests above the dregs of society ('squatters' and 'pirates') who were consumed by them" (p. 94).

Bold is in part telling a story of elite homosociality and male cultural power. But in doing so, she also recovers the stories of the women of the frontier club–the wives, mothers, and daughters whose reproductive labor strengthened the frontier clubmen's "network biologically and socially" while also increasing their "cultural cachet, extending their transatlantic reach, and fine-tuning their scripting of the West" (p. 98). Here Bold is concerned with re-evaluating the so-called Wister moment, the persistent notion that the modern western formula was *sui generis*, emerging out of Owen Wister's seminal novel. This narrative of a one-man-genre, however, ignores the contribution of women like Mary Channing "Molly" Wister who helped to forge his authorial persona. It also ignores, moreover, the countless women who bought and read these westerns. Indeed, women consumers of westerns were central to the genre's success. But they also served a more abstract purpose. Imagining an idealized bourgeois female readership, Bold insists, helped alleviated some of Wister's class anxieties about participating in a mass cultural product. "Being able to envisage at least part of his audience as people of his own class, reading in their traditional family units," Bold claims, "relieved his uneasiness about contributing to mass culture … [and] helped him to refine his representation of women" (p. 109).

As marginalized as Molly Wister and other frontier clubwomen were, they nonetheless avoided the demonization and marginalization experienced by African Americans, so-called "new" immigrants, and Indigenous peoples. In a series of chapters, Bold seeks to uncover the hidden histories of these marginalized groups who stood necessarily outside the frontier club. "As many as one in four cowboys and one in five soldiers in the West may have been African American," Bold explains. Yet, African Americans are almost completely absent from the formulaic narrative of Anglo-Saxon heroism endemic to the western. In a chapter titled "Jim Crow and the Western," Bold explores "the process by which black Westerners were displaced by, and even on occasion transformed into, white heroes" (p. 132). Most revealingly, she rehearses the story of the African American Ninth and Tenth Cavalry's involvement in the taking of Kettle Hill during the Battle of San Juan Hill and the subsequent "whiting" of the Rough Riders as Theodore Roosevelt and his Anglo-Saxon volunteers claimed credit for the victory in the popular press. This story may be familiar to many but Bold adds valuable perspective by delving into the African American popular press and their celebration of the so-called Coloured or Black Rough Riders. Looking at the frontier club through the lens of African American representations of the Black Rough Riders, Bold ultimately contends, reveals the defensive nature of the frontier club and their narratives of western manhood.

The regulation of American citizenship remained an enduring concern for the frontier club and two treads of their ideology converged in 1924 with the passage of the National Origins Act and the Indian Citizenship Act: eugenics and American Indian assimilation. Decades in the making, these two acts were influenced to no small degree by the writing of frontier clubmen. Most obviously, many were members of anti-immigration organizations like the Immigration Restriction League, for which both Wister and Grant served as vice presidents, or the American Defense Society, for which Roosevelt served as honorary president. But the connections ran deeper still. The language of eugenics and Social Darwinism, for instance, suffused their writings: "'The hunting field is the best training field,"' Grinnell wrote, "for 'the survival of the fittest intellectually and morally,' whether the wars are against racial others–'Sclav [*sic*] and Tartar and Latin races are not going to bow themselves politely out of the earth to make room for us'–or 'sectional wars or class wars at home"' (pp. 176-177).

Eugenic ideas and policies restricted immigration. But they also affected Indigenous peoples during the crucial decades of the earlier twentieth century. Indeed, frontier clubmen appropriated Aboriginal cultural identities even as they advocated for their dispossession. Many members of the Boone and Crockett Club, for instance, "played Indian," adopting Native American names while swapping stories that marginalized Indigenous culture. Dispossession occurred most obviously in the case of George Bird Grinnell and Glacier National Park.

But these efforts to banish others from the frontier club's vision of the West were not completely hegemonic. As Bold explains in her final chapter, several marginalized individuals strove despite the cultural power of the frontier club to shape an alternative narrative of the American West. Building on the work on Andrew Brodie Smith, Craig Womack, and others, she locates the fascinating story of Princess Chinquilla, Simon Pokagon, S. Alice Callahan, Nat Love, and Fus Fixico, to name a few, within the complex matrix of counternarratives through which marginalized Indigenous peoples, African Americans, and white women sought to popularize the West in terms strikingly different from those offered by the frontier club.

Deftly written with engaging and illuminating examples, Christine Bold's *The Frontier Club* is an important contribution to the history of capitalism, to the influence of social networks on historical memory, and to the history of literary representations of the American West. The social, cultural, and economic world she reveals will make historians of the American West reconsider the contributions, both good and bad, of these elite easterners to Americans' most cherished stories about the West.

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Citation: Boyd Cothran. Review of Bold, Christine, *The Frontier Club: Popular Westerns and Cultural Power, 1880-1924*. H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. June, 2013.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=38712

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