

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Carroll P. Kakel III. *The American West and the Nazi East: A Comparative and Interpretive Perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 310 pp. \$32.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-137-35273-6.

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Carroll P. Kakel's work *The American West and the Nazi East* applies the comparative model to the early American efforts to expel Native Americans from the West with the Third Reich's war of extermination in the East. Both projects made use of nationalist rhetoric to gain territory at the expense of racial out-groups, out-groups who experienced severe brutality and genocidal projects of extermination. Kakel engages the topics of "transnational colonialism and comparative genocide" to address a significant gap in the scholarship that has failed thus far to fully consider these dark moments together (p. 6).

Kakel primarily argues that both the American push west and the German push east represented "national projects of territorial expansion, racial cleansing, and settler colonization" (p. 7). He divides his argument into three sections highlighting each of those concepts, a decision that does make his points repetitive, but ultimately allows for a clean analysis of both time periods and the topic at hand. Part 1 focuses on the American West and Nazi East as two examples of "continental imperialism" which Kakel, borrowing from Hannah Arendt, defines as "territorial expansion in close geographic continuity to the metropole" (p. 12). Both the American West and Nazi East relied on racial othering that merged imperialist expansion of nearby territory with "exclusionary nationalism" that proved fatal for the indigenous inhabitants (p. 13). Part 2 discusses settler colonialism, the idea that beyond conventional imperialist objectives, like military and trade, the Nazi East and American West "involved a settler population intent on land seizure" (p. 77). Settler colonialism, then, involved replacing the indigenous in-

habitants with a settler population, a project which carried "an inherent genocidal imperative" (p. 78). Part 3 explores "frontier genocide," the idea that the frontier, representing "the edge of empire" promoted expansionary war as a nationalist endeavor. Such wars then "provided both the cover and the pretext for genocidal assaults against allegedly inferior and unwanted out groups" (p. 177). Concluding, Kakel argues that the Holocaust was "a blend of several forms of mass political violence whose patterns, logics, and pathologies can be located in the Early-American settler-colonial project" (p. 217). Kakel acknowledges differences in scale and intensity between Western expansion and the Holocaust, the latter being a unique machination of terror and industry, but ultimately both projects demonstrate continuities in modern history that revolve around racial othering and imperialism.

*The American West and the Nazi East* is largely a consolidation of secondary material, so anyone reading this book looking for original research shall go wanting. Additionally, much of the German material provided was either written in or translated into English. That said, the sheer amount of material assembled to write this comparative history provides any scholar looking to mine the bibliography with a veritable treasure trove of relevant and up-to-date resources. Kakel's stated objective was to target a wide audience, hoping to offer value to undergraduate students, postgraduate history specialists, researchers of genocide, and general readers. He delivers on all these accounts as this book provides a valuable and uncharted insight into two dark moments of history. Kakel deserves considerable credit for tackling such an

important and scarcely addressed topic. This work would be particularly helpful as a model to students of what the comparative, transnational model can offer historical study. Kakel's work provides a fascinating and detailed assessment of two atrocity-laden nationalist projects and does so by unearthing profound insight without obscuring the individual histories. Any scholar of transnational history would do well to read this work and incorporate its lessons and approach into their own work and teaching models.

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