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 ***Bound to Have Blood: Frontier Newspapers and the Plains Indian Wars* by Hugh J. Reilly (review)**

Phillip H. Round

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REVIEW

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

Reviewed by:

*Phillip H. Round (bio)*

Hugh J. Reilly. *Bound to Have Blood: Frontier Newspapers and the Plains Indian Wars*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8032-3627-

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Imperial campaigns of land grabbing and genocide such as were carried out in the nineteenth-century American West rarely succeed without some form of public support. And while historians of the Plains Wars have primarily focused on military actions and federal policy, even those studies that have tried to engage the public opinion dimensions of the period's "Indian Problem" have relied mostly on publications and pronouncements made in the East. In *Bound to Have Blood*, Hugh J. Reilly seeks to rectify this omission by focusing on "large and small newspapers in the Great Plains states" (xi), papers with names like *Omaha Arrow*, *Rocky Mountain News*, and *Daily Mining Journal*—papers that explicitly called Native peoples "fiends of hell" (25) and openly advocated their "total extermination" (8).

The newspapers Reilly discusses took such no-holds-barred approaches to Indian issues because they were "relatively close to the events described" (xvii) and feared that federal policy was made by bureaucrats who did not suffer damage from the Indian wars that their readers did and because it sold papers. What is most surprising about Reilly's study, however, is that his careful sifting of the evidence uncovers occasional and significant deviations from an otherwise unremitting racist onslaught of stereotypes and rumors. For this reason what might become a dreary read—endless stories of nonstop Indian atrocities and hyperbolic calls for vengeance—actually turns out to be a revealing glimpse into the politics and print practices of an emergent western American sectionalism that had significant impact on federal Indian policy.

*Bound to Have Blood* is organized around case studies of what Reilly views as the eight most important Indian war stories of the second half of the nineteenth century. From the Great Sioux Uprising in the Minnesota Territory in 1862 to the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, Reilly traces local newspapers' reactions to battles, relocations, massacres, and court cases to discover whether or not western American

public opinion evolved over time into more nuanced responses to Indian affairs.

Reilly begins by noting that the papers he is studying occupy a **[End Page 105]** unique place in the history of American print culture. Frontier newspapers were located far from print publication centers like New York, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati. They employed primarily amateur correspondents, often "literate soldiers" in the ranks of the men who fought the Native combatants. Because, as Reilly notes, the telegraph did not cross Nebraska until 1860, news often traveled slowly through these outpost networks, and rumor and innuendo were the order of the day. The Battle of Little Bighorn on June 25, 1876, for example, was not reported until the *Bozeman Times* wrote a piece about it on the third of July. Although he does not spend much time on this element of frontier print (a discussion of material practices that many historians would find helpful), Reilly's account of the local responses to Custer's defeat allows him one good opportunity to observe this outpost news system in action. The only correspondent assigned to Custer's troops, Mark Kellogg, was killed in the battle, and his replacement Clement Lounsberry turned Kellogg's unfinished notes into a 15,000-word breathless recitation of events he did not witness that took a telegraph operator twenty-two hours to send back east. His story also played well in the western frontier settlements. The *Bismarck Tribune* issued a single sheet extra the next day with one prominent headline: "Massacred."

Given these hit-or-miss qualities of frontier print, Reilly focuses on parsing out the writers' and editors' use of stereotypes (of the sort described by Robert Berkhofer in *The White Man's Indian*). His determination as to whether an individual story is "accurate" or stereotypical derives from a method advocated by journalism scholars L. John Martin and Harold L. Nelson. While his application of these criteria is fairly irregular throughout the book, Reilly does seem to uncover a broad pattern of reporting that moves from "uneven" (36) to an...

Hugh J. Reilly. *Bound to Have Blood: Frontier Newspapers and the Plains Indian Wars*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-8032-3627-1. 162 pp.

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