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**Bound to Have Blood: Frontier Newspapers and the Plains Indian Wars.** By Hugh J. Reilly. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. 192 pages. \$15.95 paper.

Frontier newspapers in the latter decades of the nineteenth century were the only “authoritative” source of information for the new settlers of the American West. Informal sources, including letters and word of mouth, carried personal accounts of happenings, but because the newspaper was the only information medium that appeared regularly, it accrued much importance and value in frontier communities.

The major tenet in nineteenth-century journalism was that the sensational was the lifeblood of newspapers. Sensation attracted readers and subscribers, who in turn drew advertisers, and accuracy and objectivity were sacrificed on the bloody altar of the bizarre and atrocious. This “yellow journalism” became the *modus operandi* for most successful editors/publishers, educated men, for the most part, often with strong political views and agendas. These captains of journalistic industry hired reporters, more accurately deemed correspondents, who were very often adventurers more interested in telling stories than in objective reporting. In fact, many of these correspondents (such as Samuel Clemens, Joaquin Miller, and Cherokee John Rollin Ridge), went on to pen fiction. The result, of course, was published news that took a distorted view of life and circumstances on the American frontier, a perspective that was transmitted not only to the local citizenry, but to eastern policymakers as well. Many of these accounts took on a life of their own, resulting in a body of myth and legend of the American frontier that persists today, and is reflected in our entertainment media.

At that time the major issues in the West were the acquisition of land for white settlement and the concomitant displacement of the Native inhabitants. Nearly all the frontier editors set their journalistic machinery to the task of “clearing” the Indians from their lands in Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas, Colorado, Kansas, and other western territories. Editors saw clearly that they would attract settler-readers by telling them what they wanted to hear, so in pursuing this political agenda they would reap financial rewards and bring in advertisers eager to reach these readers. By arousing the population, editors hoped to exert pressure on those elected officials responsible for government policy toward the Natives, culminating in a national effort to herd Indians onto reservations and make their lands accessible to white settlers. More settlers meant larger communities with potentially larger newspaper audiences, more advertisers, and more profits. In waging this campaign, editors became major catalysts in igniting and stoking the conflagrations known as the Indian Wars.

Originally titled *The Frontier Newspapers and the Coverage of the Plains Indian Wars*, and published by Praeger Publishers in 2010, in this book Hugh J. Reilly uses modern content analysis methodology to examine racial attitudes, language, and accuracy of historical accounts. He pays special attention to several major physical conflicts involving whites and Indians, including the 1862 Sioux “uprising” and subsequent executions at Mankato, Minnesota, the Sand Creek Massacre, the Battle of Greasy Creek (Little Big Horn), the Cheyenne “Outbreak,” and Wounded Knee, among other important clashes. Reilly is fair; in those unusual instances when newspapers treated the facts with something close to objectivity, he takes note. But he is quick to point out that the negative racial attitudes expressed by these writers are nearly universal.

One of the reasons for the often-extreme bias in news stories concerning clashes between Indians and settlers or Indians and the military was the limited vision of the newspaper correspondents. Many did not know the history behind the story, how the conflicts had often begun due to broken treaties, broken promises, and maltreatment by agents and traders. Once a conflict had begun, the correspondent could not interview the Indians, even if linguistic barriers could be surmounted. Generally, then, the newspaper account reflected the viewpoint and reported the opinions of the military or other whites involved. Most times, these views were decidedly anti-Indian.

Before giving an account of the circumstances of the Sioux “uprising” of 1862, Reilly is careful to set the backdrop by reviewing US policy toward the Dakotas in general. He writes of how rations were held back due to pending negotiations on how to deliver rations or money from future treaty agreements, which was an issue because the US government was husbanding its funds for the war effort. When the Dakota leaders pointed out that the people were starving while food was impounded in warehouses, agent Andrew Myrick retorted famously, “Let them eat grass.” Driven to action, some young Dakotas began to steal food from the settlers and killed some whites during a raid on their farm. Fearing retribution, the larger group decided to attack the whites while they still had strength to do so. The “massacre” began with an attack on Myrick’s agency, where his dead body was found with his mouth stuffed with grass.

The Mankato newspaper account of the attack had several inaccuracies, including that that no whites had survived, when in fact forty-seven people had escaped to Fort Ridgely. The fort commander set out with a small force to apprehend the Indians, but was caught in an engagement in which he and twenty-four others were killed. Once the Indians attacked the settlement of New Ulm, twenty miles from Mankato, the Mankato *Semi-Weekly Record* intensified its inaccurate reporting, helping to stir up the population and to spread panic. Using inflammatory language—“savages” with “an insatiable thirst for murder and barbarity,” “red devils”—it claimed it was basing its facts

on “eyewitness” accounts. In an editorial, the *Record* claimed that the southwestern portion of Minnesota was being “depopulated” by the Dakota attacks and that the one remedy was for the US government to end their status as “wards” of the government and to regard them as outlaws “for all time.” Jane Grey Swisshelm, editor of the *St. Cloud Democrat*, agreed, writing that the legislature should offer a bounty of \$10 for every Sioux scalp and predicting that this would be an economical way to exterminate them. Once the “war” was over the newspapers kept up their anti-Indian crescendo, demanding that the 400 Dakota arrested for the civilian crimes of murder, rape, and robbery be hanged. They supported “Sioux Exterminator” lodges, groups of civilians dedicated to lynching the prisoners if the government didn’t execute them. When President Lincoln ordered the execution of twenty-nine and pardoned the rest, the newspapers cried foul, and bloodthirsty editors tried to outdo each other in calls for revenge.

Reilly uses the same methodology in other chapters on the Sand Creek Massacre, the Little Big Horn battle, and the Northern Cheyenne “outbreak.” Once he establishes the background to the conflicts, he then gives an account of circumstances that relies on historical sources while analyzing the roles of the frontier newspapers. In the Sand Creek chapter, for example, he shows how the Denver newspapers whipped up public sentiment so that Colonel John M. Chivington had no trouble raising a troop of untrained ruffians to attack the Indians. Later, when these “soldiers” were exposed as attackers of a village flying a white flag and killers of women and children, the two Denver newspapers engaged in a war of their own, one defending the attackers, the other condemning them. After Custer’s defeat, newspapers played an important role in sanctifying the military forces and were instrumental in rousing public sentiments for revenge. When the small band of Northern Cheyennes who had been removed to the unfamiliar environs of Indian Territory sought to return to their Montana homeland, the Omaha newspapers stirred up rumors of murderous renegades, which resulted in the incarceration and maltreatment of Indian men, women, and children in below-zero temperatures. Even when their subsequent escape attempt to keep from freezing and starving failed, the Indians were characterized as devils and savages.

Well-documented, this book features full citations and an extensive bibliography. However, the index includes only personal and place names, with no subject references for scholars interested in trends, relationships, or causality. Nonetheless, this is a welcome addition to Indian studies that documents an important feature of the history of the American West.

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