

*The Code of the West*. By Bruce A. Rosenberg. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. Pp. 213. Notes. \$15.00.)

Folklorist Bruce A. Rosenberg declares that the chief purpose of his book is "to give structure, order, hierarchy, and purpose to several events, individuals, and institutions of the American West" (p. 1). He candidly admits that his book will offer no major new understanding of the frontier experience, but by interpreting several famous western symbols he hopes to explain their continuing popularity.

Rosenberg's eleven chapters explore the exploits of mountain men, the dreams of prospectors, the narratives of overlanders, the endurance of Mormons, the courage of George Armstrong Custer, the speed of the Pony Express, the race of two Mississippi steamboats, the accomplishments of the railroaders, the infamy of the gunfighters, the dream of the sensual native maiden, and the myth of the white stallion of the prairies. There is often little to connect these chapters so that the book is really a collection of disparate essays. Any of them could stand alone, and in fact three have been previously published in journals, while the Custer chapter presents nothing not said better in Rosenberg's excellent *Custer and the Epic of Defeat* (1975). The chapter on the race between the steamboats *Natchez* and *Robert E. Lee* has little, if anything, to do with the West at all, belonging more to southern folklore. This disjointed narrative makes it impossible for the author to achieve his goal of giving order and structure to the past.

The notes are quite brief, reflecting the use of a limited number of materials. The sources that are used are often a strange mixture of folklore, popular culture, and academic and pop history. The consistent misspelling of the names of well-known historians Sandra Myres and Robert Athearn in the text and notes makes the reader wonder about how familiar the author is with these materials. The depth of his research is further clouded because either he or his publisher decided against including a bibliography. That is too bad, as was the decision not to include an index.

Although an attractively produced book on a worthy topic by a noted scholar, *Code of the West* ultimately promises more than it can deliver in under two hundred pages of text. Rosenberg never seems to have enough space to develop his arguments. While several of his chapters are interesting, even engaging, the book ultimately fails to live up to its potential.

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