

*The Explorers: Nineteenth Century Expeditions in Africa and the American West.* By Richard A. Van Orman. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984. Pp. xiii, 243. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$19.95.)

During the past decade interest in comparative history has grown steadily, and *The Explorers* is another contribution to the field. In it the author compares nineteenth-century explorations in the United States with those of the British in Africa. His general theme is that three types of ideas and concerns motivated the explorers. These were a genuine interest in science and learning, a growing nationalism, and the moral obligation to bring "civilization" to the so-called backward peoples of the two continents. The author finds that, while acting on these interests, the American and British explorers actually advanced the process of imperialism and colonialism.

Considering the issues topically, Van Orman discusses the myths surrounding the American West and much of Africa. Then he considers the native peoples, the environment, the explorers, and the results of their actions. He shows that, for outsiders, Africa represented danger and death, while the American West appeared as something positive, even idyllic. Another difference was that American explorers observed mostly vacant parts of their own territory, while British expeditions trekked across foreign lands on a heavily populated continent. Third, British activities in Africa tended to be much more violent than those of American parties in the West.

Although he moves between American and English explorers easily, Van Orman gives little evidence of any comparative structure or method. At the same time, his study lacks focus. When considering myths or objectives, he ranges well beyond the chosen time period, thereby weakening the impact of his ideas. A related difficulty is that the reader never gets a clear idea of who all of the major explorers were, where they went, or what they accomplished. Yet there are sensitive portraits of some individuals and events in the narrative.

At the same time the book brings together a broad range of ideas and information. Regarding American explorations, the people, events, and ideas have appeared in the work of Robert Berkhofer, William Goetzmann, Donald Jackson, and others. For British activity in Africa, Van Orman offers an interesting portrait of major figures much less familiar to American readers. Throughout, the narrative is clear and interesting, and well-designed maps help the reader follow the action. The tasks Van Orman set for himself are compelling, and to have succeeded he needed at least

twice the space of the present volume. Nevertheless, this book is a good effort at bridging the scholarly gap that so frequently separates the continents.

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*Stagecoach East: Stagecoach Days in the East from the Colonial Period to the Civil War.* By Oliver W. Holmes and Peter T. Rohrbach. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983. Pp. vii, 220. Illustrations, table, notes, select bibliography of primary sources, index. \$17.50.)

For most Americans the word *stagecoach* evokes images of Wells Fargo and John Wayne riding shotgun in the Far West. *Stagecoach East* reminds readers that there was an earlier and equally important period, in which the American stagecoach lines played a vital role in linking the East together economically, socially, and culturally. Relying mainly on newspapers, travel journals, diaries, and government records, the authors trace the development of "staging" from the early eighteenth century through its golden decades, 1820-1840, to its decline in the East in the two decades before the Civil War. The work is a scholarly attempt to fill a major gap in the history of American transportation.

*Stagecoach East* endeavors to cover every important aspect of staging in the East from the stagecoach builders and drivers to the types of taverns along the routes. Among the most interesting chapters are those dealing with the ties between the federal postal system, newspapers, and the stagecoach lines. Until the advent of the railroads, the stagecoach was the principal carrier of United States mail and newspapers. The postmaster general, through his power to grant federal contracts, played a major role in scheduling routes and thus exercised a degree of regulatory power. Moreover, by requiring the lines to carry the newspapers at the lowest rates, the government could promote the Jeffersonian ideal of a literate informed public. On the other hand, travelers and commercial interests helped to subsidize the newspapers by paying higher rates. Indeed, the fourth estate enjoyed certain advantages.

Despite its originality and thorough research, *Stagecoach East* is not without some defects. Since staging required a fairly well-developed network of roads, the authors rightly concentrate on the Northeast and Southeast. However, seven pages cannot do justice to the importance of staging in the Old Northwest. Also, a work that describes in detail the various trunk and branch lines throughout the East should assist the reader by including more