as the main suppliers and important customers of fur trade companies. When he does pay heed to Indians, he tends to homogenize them into a single group, regardless of time and place. In this, he fails to draw on a rich body of scholarship illustrating that the fashions, needs, and especially intertribal politics of particular Indian nations were as critical to the fur trade as were the concerns of colonial states. He also slights the effects of the fur trade on Indian material culture, focusing too exclusively on alcohol and its ravages and not enough on the cloth, kettles, knives, axes, and guns that constituted an Indian consumer revolution. In short, Dolin has written only half of the story of the North American fur trade. Likewise, he has a tendency to adopt an outdated tone in his repeated celebrations of the “first white man” to appear in various parts of North America, the implication being that American empire was bound to follow. Despite some occasional environmentally minded qualifications, his tone reflects the patriotic spirit of Manifest Destiny. The contingent processes of American expansion, which also deeply involved Indians, are swept away by such rhetoric.

What Dolin has provided, then, is a readable synthesis of our knowledge of the fur trade as it existed in the early twentieth century. For readers who want to hear the basics of the Euro-American side of the ledger told in an engaging style, that will be enough. Others who seek a more rounded story, including the part played by indigenous people for whom the fur trade was sometimes a matter of life and death rather than just of profit, will have to turn elsewhere.

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Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710-1840

By William H. Truettner


As senior curator of painting and sculpture at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, William Truettner has made many significant contributions to the field of art history over the course of a lengthy and admirable career. The present volume focuses on the role played by white artists in painting Indians of North America during two specific time periods. First, the author examines images (primarily British) of Mohawk and other Iroquois leaders in the eighteenth century. These paintings, as Truettner shows, largely depict their subjects as “Noble Savages.” The Indi-
ans, who had been in contact with Europeans for a number of generations, are depicted formally, wearing a mixture of traditional garb and dress with accessories adapted from the newcomers. The second group of profiled artists traveled up the Missouri River in the 1830s and painted members of Plains tribes who were less affected by trade and who had experienced less direct contact with white newcomers. Truettner names this group “Republican Indians.”

The book, which began as a lecture, has grown into an all-too-brief presentation of the general ideas of British and American nation building as interpreted through art. Most usefully, Truettner points out that these paintings demonstrate how “white attitudes toward Indians shifted noticeably . . . from one that encouraged the upward mobility of native tribes to one that tied them to a level of human development far below that of white Americans.” The author admits that the transition from formal studio portraiture of one century to the next century’s documentary images done in the field is more complex than the book demonstrates. The most noticeable shortcoming is its failure to explore this subject more fully; although it suggests interesting ideas, they are not completely developed.

The book also lacks adequate descriptions of Native American dress and material culture, leading to questionable interpretations of the meaning of the paintings. Quilled bags and other items are mistakenly described as “beaded.” Earlier images are described as ethnographically “imprecise” because the subjects are shown wearing a mixture of native and non-native materials in a type of “cultural cross-dressing.” The implication is that the artists “dressed” the subjects, when in fact it was normal after generations of contact for Indians to wear trade cloth and European style shirts.

Exploring the ethnographic nature of Indian images made in the 1830s and 1840s by George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and Alfred Jacob Miller, Truettner notes that their “more accurate record of Indian life, however, did not necessarily bring about a greater understanding of Indians.” Comparing portraits of the same Mandan subject by Bodmer and Catlin, he unconvincingly notes that “for all that painstaking accuracy, or perhaps because of it, Bodmer’s Four Bears is more foreign and exotic than Catlin’s.” He implies that Bodmer is more accurate when in fact Catlin is as effective an observer and recorder of what he saw, but less effective artistically in expressing himself.

Painting Indians and Building Empires in North America, 1710-1840, while not fully satisfying, may still serve as a beginning point for some readers who will wish to continue their investigations with such books as Robert Berkhofer’s The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (1978) and Brian W. Dippie’s Catlin and His Contemporaries: The Politics of Patron-

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Stephanie Pratt’s *American Indians in British Art, 1700-1840* (2005) is an especially important work that goes much further in exploring the subject. John C. Ewers’s pioneering study of the ethnographic accuracy of the work of many of these artists and Christian Feest’s study of material culture of Woodland tribes are among the many additional reliable sources available to those seeking to broaden their understanding of the material content of the paintings highlighted in Truetter’s book.

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**Wicked River**

*The Mississippi When It Last Ran Wild*

By Lee Sandlin


I first saw the Mississippi River on June 3, 1984, when my wife and I crossed it at St. Louis, heading west to Denver on our honeymoon. It was the second day of our marriage, my thoughts were turned to love, so I scarcely noticed the river or the Gateway Arch rising beside it. In the next twenty-seven years, I would walk beside it, fly the length of it, drive over and beside it, and cross it on a ferry. Though I live hundreds of miles from it, it feels near. Were I to launch a canoe in the creek that bisects my southern Indiana farm, I would end up on the Mississippi and eventually in New Orleans. Others had done it before, most notably Abraham Lincoln, in the year 1831, when the river ran wild.

Native North Americans lived along the Mississippi for thousands of years before European observers first recorded their presence. The Sioux, whose villages dotted the river’s northern banks, were among the first people encountered by French travelers in the seventeenth century. The Chippewa moved in from the east, skirmishes commenced, while the real threat—a grasping European presence—went unchecked. Although the violence and disease that followed in the new settlers’ wake drastically decreased tribal populations along the river, Native people continue to call the Mississippi home. The most obvious reminder of those early days is the river’s name *Mizu-ziipi*, the Ojibwe phrase meaning “very big river.”

Today, the Mississippi is an industrial corridor, corralled, controlled, and contained, except when spring rains and snowmelt spill onto the farms, towns, and cities that line its path. That is the Mississippi we know, the muddy giant rising behind