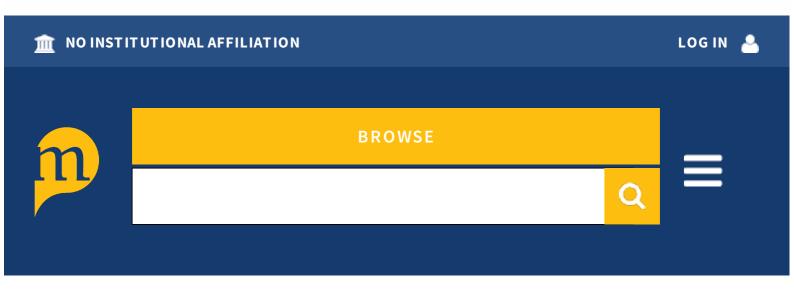
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The Battle of the Washita: The Sheridan-

Custer Indian Campaign of 1867-69, and: The

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The Battle of the Washita: The Sheridan-Custer Indian Campaign of 1867-69, and: The Buffalo War: The History of the Red River Indian Uprising of 1874, and: Death Song: The Last of the Indian Wars (review)

Edmund J. Danziger Jr.

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REVIEW

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

90 CIVIL WAR HISTORY ners, customs, modes of travel, religion, moments of happiness and of sadness,

politics—the sum of life as he experienced it. The result, if not startling, is a valuable account of life in the
South, especially in North Alabama. The extremely thorough work of Editor Axford is highly useful and
informative. William Warren Rogers Florida State University The Battle of the Washita: The Sheridan-Custer
Indian Campaign of 1867-69. By Stan Hoig. (Garden City, New York: Double day fit Company, 1976. Pp. xvii, 268.
\$8.95.) The Buffalo War: The History of the Red River Indian Uprising of 1874. By James L. Haley. (Garden City,
New York: Double day fit Company, 1976. Pp. xxi, 290. \$7.95.) Death Song: The Last of the Indian Wars. By John
Edward Weems. (Garden City, New York: Double day fit Company, 1976. Pp. xx, 311. \$10.95.) These volumes
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the nine teenth century. Triggered by the headlong expansion of aggressive white trespassers—buffalo
hunters, miners, ranchers, farmers, to wnbuilders — into the trans-Mississippi West, military engagements
be tween blue-coated cavalrymen and painted warriors defending their home lands were a mixture of
savagery, heroics, treachery and confusion on both sides. Hollywood notwithstanding, "To be caught up in
an attack by Indians was not romantic," writes James L. Haley; "it was a cold, mean, bloody, cruel and
terrifying experience. But above all it was a revolting, ugly thing." Yet the allure of these events and such
colorful personalities as George Armstrong Custer persists even for historians. The three volumes under
review broadenour understanding of this frontier clash of arms, yet one laments the relative lack of
scholarly interest in the fate of the Plains tribes once they ceased to be a military problem and were
shunted off to isolated reservations. No doubt a major cause of contemporary public apathy toward the
American Indian is the historian's failure to explore the long-range consequences of the Plains Indian wars—
the linkages of the Little Big Horn, for example, to Wounded Knee I and Wounded Knee II. One of the post-
Civil War era's most decisive campaigns was the Sheridan-Custer invasion of the Indian country south of
Kansas during the winter of 1868-69, culminating in the battle of the Washita—the subject of an in-depth
study by historian Stan Hoig. Introductory chapters trace the events which led to this contro-BOOK
REVIEWS91 versial engagement: the abortive 1867 campaign of General Winfield S. Hancock, the failure of
the Medicine Lodge Creek Treaties to confine Plains nomads to their assigned reservations, and the bloody
but indecisive skirmishes north of the Arkansas. Angry and frustrated, Major General Philip H. Sheridan
bargained that a three-pronged winter drive south of the river would catch the elusive Cheyenne and
Arapaho hostiles in their home camp. For his field commander, Sheridan selected Lieutenant Colonel
Custer, who trained his men intensively for their bold offensive. Custer's orders were to proceed south from
Camp Supply (on Wolf Creek of the North Canadian) "in the direction of the Antelope Hills, thence towards
the Washita River, the supposed winterseat of the hostile tribes; to destroy their village and ponies; to kill
or hang all warriors, and bring back all women and children." He did just that. After a four-day march through
he avysnowhiscommandattackedatdawnonNovember27,1868, theCheyennevillageofpeacechiefBlackackgack
Kettle, nestled in the Washita River Valley. The surprise was complete, just like the one sprung four years
earlier — almost to the day—on Black Kettle's Sand Creek encampment. The toll at the Washita was likewise
grim: 103 Indians killed, including principal chiefBlack Kettle; 53 women and children taken prisoner; the
contents of the Indians' teepees, including all winter provisions, burned; and over 800 ponies shot. In the
author's judgment, the Sheridan-Custer campaign "destroyed, both in concept and in reality, the Indian
Territoryastheredman'slastrefugefromtheons laughtofwhitecivilization.Thecampaignwasthevanguard
invasion by the white man of lands that would

ners, customs, modes of travel, religion, moments of happiness and of sadness, politics the sum of life as he experienced it. The result, if not startling, is a valuable account of life in the South, especially in North Alabama. The extremely thorough work of Editor Axford is highly useful and informative.

WILLIAM WARRYN BODERS

Florida State University

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