

thirty years. Potts created *Smoke Signal* primarily to publicize information about the complex “Indians of California” land claims case in the Indian Claims Commission. Castaneda underscores that the FIC was an organization primarily run by California Indian women including Bertha Stewart (Tolowa), creator of the Del Norte Indian Welfare Association. Potts’s five daughters, including Kitty Potts Flores and Pansy Potts, all worked around the organization. Additionally, Castaneda’s treatment of Potts’s political cartoon “Injun Louie,” showcases another side of Indigenous claims making. The unique photographs illustrate Potts’s joy and creativity, particularly the prowess of the Federated Indians of California publicity events.

Part Three is organized thematically to explore Potts’s leadership, educational, and cultural work in her later years. Potts worked with the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the American Indian Chicago Conference, and the American Indian Press Association, and her activism reverberated across the country. Up until her last days, Potts practiced cultural revitalization, teaching basketry at Sacramento State College and educating schoolchildren across Sacramento. An element not covered in this otherwise excellent study is Potts’s membership in a federally unrecognized Mountain Maidu Tribal Nation. Her membership in a community without federal recognition highlights the complexities of inter-tribal struggles among the people known as “Indians of California.” Castaneda is an expert storyteller and her work is an important addition to the growing scholarship on twentieth-century California Indian history.

KATHLEEN C. WHITELEY  
University of California, Davis, Davis, CA,  
USA

***Ambitious Honor: George Armstrong Custer’s Life of Service and Lust for Fame.*** By James. E. Mueller. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020. xvi + 382 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index, \$32.95.)

In the 145 years since his death, George Armstrong Custer has been one of the most-studied figures in the history of the American West. James E. Mueller’s *Ambitious Honor: George Armstrong Custer’s Life of Service and Lust for Fame* is the latest volume to delve into the career and psychology of one of the most compelling, and divisive, figures of the nineteenth century. Mueller argues that Custer was, at heart, an artist and a storyteller. Though Custer spent his career as a soldier, Mueller believes that the Civil War’s “Boy General” consciously courted celebrity—and that he was so successful in doing so that the country made him a hero after his death, rather than condemning him for his faults. Custer’s luck, in Mueller’s formulation, was a carefully crafted public image and friends in all the right places.

Anyone conversant with the basic outline of Custer’s life will find much of Mueller’s narrative familiar. Custer attended West Point, graduated in time to fight in the Civil War, became a famous cavalry commander and favorite of Phillip H. Sheridan, spent some of Reconstruction in Texas, and some in Kentucky, but was best known for his service on the Great Plains—in Oklahoma and Kansas from 1867 to 1871 and in the Dakotas and Montana from 1873 until his death in 1876. The basic outline of Custer’s biography is well told and Mueller makes good use of manuscript materials.

The real contribution of *Ambitious Honor*, however, is in Mueller’s examination of Custer as a writer. For much of the post-Civil

War period, Custer wrote for popular periodicals about his experiences in West. Mueller examines Custer's process and passion for writing articles about his life. Mueller views Custer's work as an act of self-preservation and way to secure fame for himself. Custer's popular image certainly helped him to weather his share of political controversies.

A few elements of Mueller's interpretation could use some refreshing. The most glaring is Mueller's treatment of Custer's wife, Elizabeth Bacon ("Libbie") Custer, who is cast merely as a promoter of her husband's image after his death. There has long been a tendency in Custer studies to dismiss Libbie's work as hagiography, and Mueller's argument

about artistry and fame could have been applied to Libbie as easily as to her husband. It is fair to ask, in conclusion, whether another biography of Custer was needed. In the case of *Ambitious Honor*, the answer is that readers looking for updated insights into Custer's writing and public image will find a great deal to consider; and, on the whole, will enjoy a well-written and researched biography of one the nineteenth century's most famous figures.

CECILY N. ZANDER

Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX,  
USA