

**Clements, William B. *Imagining Geronimo: An Apache Icon in Popular Culture*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013. 305 pp.**

<http://unmpress.com/books.php?ID=2000000005364&Page=book>

From the time that he first emerged as a figure of interest in news reports emanating from the southwest in the 1870s, the Apache shaman and war leader Geronimo has endured as a recurrent, and ambivalent image of “Indianness” in American popular culture. This, essentially, is the thesis of William Clements’ copiously researched new volume. Over the course of seven chapters, Clements surveys Geronimo’s presence in newspapers, folklore, film, literature, photography, and public appearances. Largely refraining from in-depth analysis of his examples, Clements instead aims to provide readers with a useful and provocative archive of material from which to draw for further study. Readers in Native American Studies will be particularly interested in his discussion of how Geronimo attempted (with mixed results) to exert some control over his image during his own lifetime. And readers with a particular interest in Gerald Vizenor’s work will find a variety of provocative examples of Geronimo’s “postindian” presence, examples sure to reward further consideration.

Clements begins his book with a discussion of the contemporaneous newspaper coverage of Geronimo’s exploits, his eventual capture by the U.S. military, and his relocation to Florida and Oklahoma, where he would live out his days in exile from his Arizona homeland. Not surprisingly, this survey reveals that the majority of the early accounts of Geronimo tended to depict him as an archetypal savage, or “red devil,” with only a handful of instances where his later image as a freedom fighter and patriot began to emerge. Suggestive of the complex role that the colonial construct of Indian “savagism” plays in American history, though, Clements also draws attention to the emergence of a genre of “Geronimo stories” in the oral culture and folkways of the American Southwest. Anglo settlers, in particular, employed both the spectral figure of Geronimo and a range of tall-tales regarding their encounters, or near-encounters, with him, as a means of legitimizing their presence in this newly tamed “frontier.” This corpus of Geronimo stories identified by Clements thus comes across as one rich with potential for further analysis. This type of material clearly cries out to be situated within the framework of recent revisionist paradigms in western history.

The best-developed section of the book is Clements’ discussion of Geronimo’s agency vis-a-vis his own image. He takes up this topic in a long chapter dealing with Geronimo’s presence at three World’s Fairs between 1895 and 1904 and his participation in Theodore Roosevelt’s inauguration in 1905. Clements here makes good use of key concepts in post-colonial theory (such as Spivak’s notion of the subaltern) as well as James Clifford’s important interventions into our understanding of ethnography and museum studies to provide a historically grounded and persuasive account of semiotic struggle. The battle over Geronimo’s image (waged between Geronimo himself and a wide-range of American actors with their own economic and ideological motives) emerges here as an emblematic story whose implications extend well beyond its turn-of-the-century context. Clements is not always as successful in making these broader connections; his linkage of Geronimo’s reported conversion to Christianity to the literature surrounding Black Elk in a subsequent chapter is thin, by comparison. But the gestures that he makes along these lines are always welcome ones, as they offer still further evidence of the symbolic potency surrounding Geronimo as an “icon.”

Clements' discussion of photographic representations of Geronimo's is both particularly stimulating and representative of the way that his book draws attention to an archive in need of further analysis. He grounds his discussion of the photographs with a brief nod to the philosophical distinction between idea (here understood as an image that becomes emblematic or representative) and event (here understood as an image where the subject retains its individuality). The resulting insight that Geronimo's image functions as *both* image and event is a provocative one. For many American viewers, in his time in particular, Geronimo has provided the "face to savagism" (155). His intense stare, never-smiling face, and willingness to pose well-armed are well-known features in his photographic portfolio. Interestingly enough, this side of Geronimo has also been repurposed in recent years; one of the most famous photographs depicting him along with three other armed Apache men now symbolizes pan-Indian patriotism in a poster bearing the label "Homeland Security: Fighting Terrorism Since 1492." At the same time, as Clements notes, Geronimo's face remains one of the most distinctive and inimitable images in American culture. It is suggestive, in this regard, that in presenting Geronimo as one of the emblematic "vanishing Indians," Edward Curtis was forced to render him in profile, thus blunting much of the effect of his visual distinctiveness. Clements concludes his discussion of Geronimo in the photographic record by loosely invoking Vizenor's notion of trickster discourse. While he does not pursue this insight with any specificity, it seems clear that much could be achieved in applying Vizenorian critical concepts to these powerful images. Minimally, the photographed Geronimo (viewed as idea/event) represents an intriguing example of visual irony.

It should be noted that, because of the nature of Clements' project, there is a certain amount of unavoidable unevenness in *Imagining Geronimo*. For example, the long chapter on literature reveals, first, that Geronimo is often only invoked in the title of works in which he makes no actual appearance and, second, that when he does play a larger role he is usually "flat and undeveloped" (192). With little interpretive interest inherent in the material, then, Clements' discussion of the "literary Geronimo" seldom rises above the level of listing and describing sources. The concluding chapter's discussion of Geronimo's presence in film, on the other hand, provides evidence to support Clements' central claim about the fluidity of his image. Nevertheless, this chapter is surprisingly short (about one third of the length of the literature chapter) and undeveloped. Contrasting the earlier chapter on the World's Fairs with the chapter on film is suggestive, in this respect, for in the former Clements' efforts to thicken the historical and critical context yields a much more complex survey of the archive itself. One imagines he could have done some of the same in his treatment of film.

There are moments in *Imagining Geronimo* where the reader is confronted with an impressive collection of material that cries out for a theory with which to approach it. To be sure, Clements' book does achieve what it set out to do; it provides readers with a comprehensive overview of Geronimo's appearances in popular culture that avoids the suggestion of a "simplistic developmental contour" that Clements finds in the work of earlier scholars (4). Where this book really shines, though, is in those moments when it moves beyond being a largely bibliographical study toward becoming a full-fledged analysis. It does so often enough to suggest some of the ways that future scholars will be able to build on the foundations Clements has established.

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