



Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature, and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West

Karen R. Jones

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Whether fulfilling subsistence needs or featured in stories of grand adventure, hunting loomed large in the material and the imagined landscape of the nineteenth-century West. *Epiphany in the Wilderness* explores the social, political, economic, and environmental dynamics of hunting on the frontier in three “acts,” using performance as a trail guide and focusing on the production of a “cultural ecology of the chase” in literature, art, photography, and taxidermy.

Using the metaphor of the theater, Jones argues that the West was a crucial stage that framed the performance of the American character as an independent, resourceful, resilient, and rugged individual. The leading actor was the all-conquering masculine hunter hero, the sharpshooting man of the wilderness who tamed and claimed the West with each provident step. Women were also a significant part of the story, treading the game trails as plucky adventurers and resilient homesteaders and acting out their exploits in autobiographical accounts and stage shows.

Epiphany in the Wilderness informs various academic debates surrounding the frontier period, including the construction of nature as a site of personal challenge, gun culture, gender adaptations and the crafting of the masculine wilderness hero figure, wildlife management and consumption, memorializing and trophy-taking, and the juxtaposition of a closing frontier with an emerging conservation movement.

The University Press of Colorado gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University toward the publication of this book.

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