

Tom Chaffin. *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the Course of American Empire*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2002. Pp. xxx, 559. Paper, \$18.00; ISBN 0-8090-7556-3.

In American history, some individuals become celebrated for the wrong reasons. There are a number of people who are defined by an event that might not be representative of the totality of their historical contribution. This dynamic probably applies to John C. Fremont. Fremont is known primarily for two events. First, he was the Republican Party candidate for president in 1856. Second, as a Union major general in Missouri during the Civil War, he issued an ill-advised emancipation order that clashed with the policies of the Lincoln administration. Lincoln relieved Fremont of his command and his reputation has suffered since.

In *Pathfinder: John Charles Fremont and the Course of American Empire*, Tom Chaffin examines Fremont's entire career. And in this excellent biography, the reader will see that Fremont's primary historical legacy was as an explorer, surveyor, and writer in the American West. From 1837 to 1854 Fremont was renowned in the United States as a Western traveler and leader of scientific missions. He led five different expeditions west and helped prepare the area for settlement. His accounts of these travels enthralled the nation and helped set the stage for expansion.

Fremont was educated in South Carolina where he became friends with influential South Carolina politician Joel Poinsett. When Poinsett became secretary of war in 1838, he assigned the young Fremont to assist Joseph Nicollet, the French scientist and explorer, as they set off to survey the area between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers. His career as the "pathfinder" was set.

Along with Poinsett and Nicollet, Fremont also gained influential connections when he married the daughter of Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton. Senator Benton helped Fremont secure several expeditions to the Oregon territory. In addition, Fremont's wife, Jesse Benton Fremont, helped him with his writing, and was also a powerful advocate for her husband's career.

During the early 1840s, Fremont (with his wife's help) wrote several books about his western expeditions. After a four-month expedition in 1842 through the South Pass on the Continental Divide, Fremont published a spirited government report that caught the imagination of the curious public. And in 1843, Fremont and his party traveled an estimated 6475 miles in the Oregon region. His account of that journey also captivated the public and stirred many to move west.

This is an exceptional biography. Chaffin is adept at examining Fremont's eccentric personality. Fremont was a loner who disliked authority and rules. His elusive personality caused him many problems. In California during the Mexican War, Fremont became unnecessarily entangled in a quarrel between two superiors and was court-martialed. And during his 1848 expedition to the Rockies, his group became lost and several men died. Some blamed Fremont for the problems. Chaffin explains that

Fremont was best as the daring and resourceful leader of these expeditions—when he ventured into politics and business matters, he suffered.

Chaffin also gives the reader a superb look at the antebellum westward movement and its consequences. One of the questions that appears regarding Fremont is whether he helped accentuate Indian Removal—whether he should be blamed for some of the worse aspects of empire or imperialism. As Chaffin writes, “While traditionalists venerate Fremont as a hero carrying liberty’s light into the west, revisionists dismiss him as an advance scout for imperialistic and anti-Indian genocide policies.”

This book fills a gap that is often missing in antebellum history. We do have monographs on the westward movement. But we have too few works that connect these westward scientific missions with Manifest Destiny. Chaffin’s book helps to fill in that gap.

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Robert H. Zieger. *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000. Pp. xxii, 272. Cloth, 427.95; ISBN 0-8476-644-8. Paper, \$21.95; ISBN 0-8746-9645-6.

It is difficult to capture the complex nature of a large-scale conflict, such as World War I, in the classroom. Sophisticated instruction requires an examination of the conflict’s battles, leaders, and weapons, but issues of nationalism, commerce, manufacturing, and labor are important as well. Students in the best classes investigate some of the more troubling elements of the conflict, including its true purpose, race relations, and political manipulation. In addition, war involves opponents and allies who have stories of their own to discuss that students need to consider. The Great War of 1914–1918 is an excellent example of this complexity, and few individual books have captured its total experience in a format usable in the classroom. However, it is possible to successfully describe this conflict from a specific national, regional, or topical perspective, which is the approach of Robert H. Zieger in *America’s Great War*.

Focusing on the American perspective, Zieger builds his manuscript around four major themes: this nation’s connection to Europe, the relationship between the war and the Progressive era, the rise of the national security state, and the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. In chapters organized chronologically, Zieger takes the reader from the European war, through America’s entry, to the disastrous peace negotiations of 1918–1920. Inserted in this narrative are chapters on mobilization and the issues surrounding class, race, and gender. He concludes his manuscript with a discussion of the postwar United States and poses some questions he believes are central to placing this conflict within the broader scope of American history.

America’s Great War is a work of synthesis, and Zieger consults a wide-array of secondary works on this conflict to support his manuscript. As a Distinguished