

A short review of 'Geronimo: The Man, His Time, His Place'

Christiane Fischer

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Geronimo: The Man, His Time, His Place. By Angie Debo. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976. xx + 480 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$14.95.)

In true western fashion, Angie Debo has set out to rehabilitate the much discussed figure of Geronimo. Her view of his personality is sympathetic throughout, and she has taken great pains to explain why so many misunderstandings occurred between him and the various American officials he had to deal with. She shows that the course of action he decided upon at some crucial times in his career was not erratic; rather, it was quite logical, if seen from the Indian perspective. In place of the distorted image of Geronimo as a bloodthirsty savage, she offers her vision of a man full of energy and drive, fiercely independent, possessed of great business acumen, and interested in everything.

Debo's book is, basically, a factual account of Geronimo's checkered life made lively by the inclusion of anecdotes and descriptions of Apache rites and customs. She shows a preference for primary over secondary sources, and her narrative features interviews with people who had known the Apache chief; there are many quotes from Barrett's story of Geronimo's life, which is based upon the Apache leader's reminiscences. The pattern of capture-surrender-breakout which recurs in Geronimo's career is given detailed treatment, as are the tribulations of the Indian warriors and their families after the final surrender, and their difficult life in captivity. Toward the end of the book, a chapter is devoted to a portrait of Geronimo in his closing years, in which the dual aspect in his personality is brought out: he appeared as a gentle, kind, and courteous man in whom a latent fierceness occasionally erupted; he was a man who had perpetrated murders and depredations, but who had also suffered huge personal losses.

Debo's book is a most detailed, thorough, pleasantly written, and stimulating account of Geronimo's life and circumstances.

UNIVERSITE DE NANCY, FRANCE
CHRISTIANE FISCHER

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