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978-0-521-00360-5 - Aristocratic Encounters: European Travelers and North American Indians

Harry Liebersohn

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Aristocratic Encounters

Aristocratic Encounters: European Travelers and North American Indians relates how an aristocratic discourse on American Indians took shape in French and German writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Titled and educated French and German visitors to North America, with the background of the French Revolution in mind, developed a new belief in their affinity with the warrior elites of Indian societies, whom they viewed as fellow aristocrats. The book alternates between chapters on major figures such as Chateaubriand and Tocqueville and chapters on numerous lesser, but often instructive, travelers. For European historians, the book offers fresh evidence for the creation of a post-Revolutionary “aristocratic” culture through overseas travel. To the interdisciplinary audience of readers interested in colonial encounters, it opens up a Romantic vision of aristocrats from two worlds struggling to defend their code of valor and honor in an age of democratic politics. This book differs from other books about the European vision of the United States in its concentration on American Indians as the dramatic focus of European–American encounters. *Aristocratic Encounters* is a contribution to a burgeoning transatlantic, and even transnational, form of historical writing; it moves across national boundaries to ask how Europeans understood cultures vastly different from their own.

Harry Liebersohn is the author of *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870–1923*. His article “Discovering Indigenous Nobility: Tocqueville, Chamisso and Romantic Travel Writing” in *The American Historical Review* won the William Koren Jr. Prize of the Society for French Historical Studies. He is currently an Associate Professor of History at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

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For Ben and Jack

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Acknowledgments

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