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Go East, Young Man

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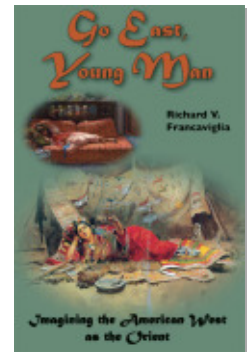
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Preface

THE AMERICAN WEST MAY SEEM LIKE FAMILIAR TERRITORY, but it is really a land of paradoxes, one of which is the subject of this book. Beyond the stereotypes of cowboys and Indians, modern cities and ghost towns, lies another set of images of a West that is not Western at all but has its origins in Asia and the Middle East. The paradoxical idea that the West can be East—that is, have a connection to what was once widely called “the Orient”—is evident in the region’s historical literature and modern-day popular culture. In other words, Eastern or Oriental motifs also brand this otherwise characteristically western American locale.

This Orientalization of the West was apparent to me as a kid growing up in California in the 1950s, where a place named Mecca and its date palms simmered under the intense sun near the Salton Sea. It became even more apparent to me when I moved to Oregon in my early twenties and noticed artists and writers equating the Pacific Northwest’s landscape with that of China and Japan. In graduate school at the University of Oregon, I studied the Mormons’ role in shaping the landscapes of the Intermountain West. In that desert region, too, the West was Orientalized, as members of this most American of religions had been cast as peoples of the Middle East, most frequently Muslims. Over the years, I collected information on this important but neglected theme of West as East (and westerners as easterners) in American history.

About ten years ago, the theme of the Orient in the American West reemerged as I taught American and transatlantic history at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Asked to teach a graduate seminar, I selected the theme “Orientalism in Transatlantic Perspective.” When I presented a lecture on “Orientalism and the Mormon West” in class early in the semester, one of my students asked when I’d be writing a book on that subject. I told her I was actually writing an extensive article that was nearly ready for publication. When she seemed surprised and suggested “Why not write it as a book?” I realized she was correct. The article was becoming too long already, and I had found myself holding back on writing the longer story anyway. However, because the Mormons were only one part of the story, it soon became apparent that the larger story itself—how the entire American West was Orientalized—needed

to be told. So, pulling together the many references I'd been collecting about the East in the West, and some that those students had discovered, that paper ultimately became the book you are now about to read.

As part of my research into this subject, I traveled to the real Orient to compare landscapes there with their American counterparts. The Holy Land was one of my first stops. In Israel, Rehav (Buni) and Milka Rubin were my hosts as I compared landscapes of the Middle East with those of the interior American West. I traveled elsewhere in search of prototypes used in *Orientalizing the American West*, but their hospitality was unmatched. Closer to home, in Utah, friend and associate Phil Notarianni, director of the Utah State Historical Society in Salt Lake City, introduced me to the very helpful archivists there, including Doug Misner and Tony Castro. The staff at the University of Washington Special Collections was also of great assistance. I also received assistance from Southern Methodist University's DeGolyer Library. The US Library of Congress also provided a number of relevant sources, as did the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, where Michael Landon and Ron Barney were especially helpful. I also gleaned a number of sources from books and articles I'd read over the years; many of these were also found in university libraries and other archives. In Arizona, Joe and Billie Foster provided photos of Hi Jolly's monument, and Roy Purcell of Green Valley opened his studio to me. In California, Peter Blodgett and Dixie Dillon at the Huntington Library proved to be of great assistance, sharing their knowledge of sources with me when I visited San Marino. The staff at the Coachella Valley Historical Society in Indio—especially Connie Cowan—graciously provided examples of advertisements promoting California dates. In Weaverville, Jack Frost at the Joss House State Historical Park provided a behind-the-scenes tour. In Locke, Clarence Chu provided photographs of the town and its celebrations.

Fellow academicians at other universities also helped. When two cultural geographers at the University of Nevada at Reno—Gary Hausladen and Paul Starrs—learned that I was working on this book, they became quite enthusiastic. In a matter of minutes, they began to rattle off numerous exciting references, from Joan Didion's California-based memoir to Los Angeles-based film noir that had Oriental overtones and undercurrents. Similarly, historian David Weber of Southern Methodist University in Dallas introduced me to the intriguing novel *West of Babylon* when he learned of my interest in the subject of the American West as the Orient. At Arizona State University, geographer Dan Arreola and his wife, Susan, graciously provided postcard images from their extensive personal collection. Very close to home, the staff

at Willamette University's Hatfield Library here in Salem, Oregon, went out of their way to assist me as I searched for resource materials.

Although many of the sources used in this book were located in archives scattered across the country, others were in my personal collection. Over the years, I've collected many postcards of the American West that revealed aspects of Orientalism—chromolithographs of geographic features in the West with Egyptian or Middle Eastern names; early (as well as fairly recent) color cards with a person, building, or scene in San Francisco or Los Angeles masquerading as the Orient. Some of these I share with readers in this book not because they are factual depictions of places and people but rather because they are just the opposite. They are, in effect, testimonies to a popular tendency to reconfigure the American West (and the American westerner) into venerable Oriental counterparts.

Among the other archives I consulted were those at the Special Collections of the University of Texas at Arlington, where I taught for seventeen years before retiring in 2008. At UTA, Special Collections staff members Kit Goodwin, Cathy Spitzenberger, and Ben Huseman were especially helpful. In addition to my colleagues in the History Department, I also acknowledge the strong support of Ken Roemer (professor of English), Chris Conway (professor of Spanish/modern languages), and Karl Petruso (professor of anthropology and dean of the Honors College). I owe special thanks to my former secretary, Ann Jennings. Ann is the type of lifelong learner who made both my job and hers enjoyable—the kind of secretary who not only typed up the material I provided but also enjoyed looking up unfamiliar terms and people in order to learn more about them. I should also note that several of the students in that graduate seminar are mentioned in the endnotes, as their insights were quite helpful; so too was former student Jeff Stone, who brought several interesting maps to my attention as he completed his doctoral dissertation at UTA. This is yet another example of a professor learning from his or her current and former students, but I also learned a great deal from critics who reviewed the manuscript, including historian David Wrobel of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, who kindly shared sources pertaining to nineteenth-century travel literature in the American West. David also suggested the two-part design of this book, with an American West Orientalized in the past covered in part one, and the modern West being covered in part two. Above all, though, I owe a debt of gratitude to editor John Alley of Utah State University Press. John suggested many ways in which my original manuscript could be improved while never losing faith in either the subject of American Orientalism or this manuscript.