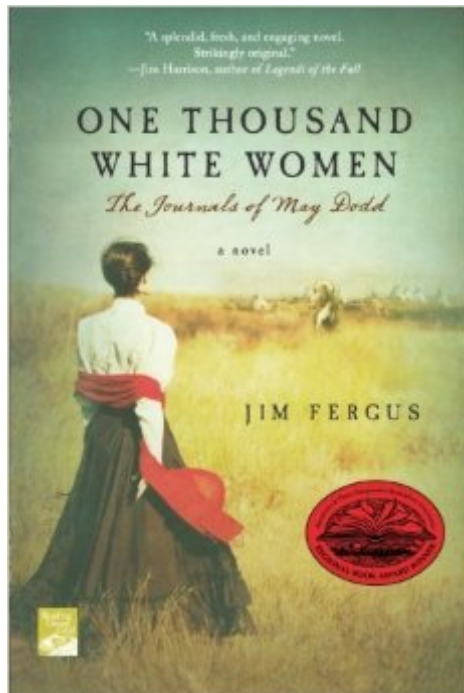


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One Thousand White Women: The Journals Of May Dodd



Synopsis

One Thousand White Women is the story of May Dodd and a colorful assembly of pioneer women who, under the auspices of the U.S. government, travel to the western prairies in 1875 to intermarry among the Cheyenne Indians. The covert and controversial "Brides for Indians" program, launched by the administration of Ulysses S. Grant, is intended to help assimilate the Indians into the white man's world. Toward that end May and her friends embark upon the adventure of their lifetime. Jim Fergus has so vividly depicted the American West that it is as if these diaries are a capsule in time.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is so well written you will believe it is true. I have never read anything quite like it. The premise is based on an honest request made at a peace conference by a Cheyenne Indian Chief in the year 1854 to trade white women for horses. The women would become brides and the children of these unions would make assimilation into the white mans society easier for the Indians who astutely saw the future at hand, and were looking for a peaceful solution. The author assures us that in real life this never took place, but in this book it does, and the story that follows is nothing but magnificent. May Dodd has been locked away in an insane asylum for her so called indecent behavior, a bright and cultured woman who has taken up with a common factory worker her parents will not accept, followed by two children born out of wed lock. It is May, who through an act of desperation, manipulates her way into the "Brides for Horses" campaign. The journals that she keeps throughout her adventure are the making of this story. Articulate and interesting in her views of life on the plains among the so-called savages, she starts to realize just how warm and accepting

a people they are. There is so much more to this book but I will let the author tell the story. I am re-reading it for a second time and I know it won't be the last. This is an incredible work of fiction, to be enjoyed for many years to come. Kelsana 4/18/01

I came close to tossing this book fairly early on. By page 64, May Dodd, the main character, had begun to annoy me. She is just the perfect humanbeing: intelligent, practical, fearless, a born leader, irresistible to men, ingenious, passionate, blah, blah, blah. In contrast, her companions are for the most part a flawed, inferior group: a racist, drunken southern belle, a nervous, sheltered old maid, the thieving, amoral, joined-at-the hip Irish twins, a pinch faced, mean-spirited religious fanatic, and the pathetically ugly with the heart of gold. The only two that can even vaguely approach our heroine in nobility are the regal, courageous Black woman and the mannish, free-spirited English artist. Why it's no wonder that the handsome, sensitive Captain and the brave Cheyenne leader both succumb to her charms, and lo and behold they both become her love interests! Her inferior companions of course merit inferior or inconsequential partners. So much for character development. There are a variety of personalities that could have provided much in the way of emotional interaction and growth, but this is not examined. Characters go through intense experiences, but there is little hint given as to their mental state, perhaps because the story is written in the form of one woman's journal. There is, however, no self reflection on May's part either. She mostly reports what she sees and what is around her. Another main peeve is the far-fetched attitude of the Cheyenne braves to their outspoken, free-thinking, culture-bending "wives". I find it hard to believe that a rambunctious pair of white women could push their way irreverently into a native sweat lodge and proceed to intimidate the men and make themselves at home without any consequences. Would they also be the ones to suddenly take over the bargaining and bartering negotiations on a trading expedition as the Cheyenne men passively sit and watch? Would the irrepressible Irish twins become the sudden masters of a gambling empire? Would our hulking Swiss be permitted to humiliate her Indian husband to the extent of actually kicking him across the Cheyenne settlement in public? Maybe in the 21st century, but I think not even then. Okay, you might ask, so why'd I give it three stars? Although it did annoy the hell out of me at times, the story itself (when I could get past the contrived love affair between May and Capt. Bourke) did engage me. I found that I generally enjoyed the writing style. Granted the repetition of "Perhaps I am truly insane" etc. did wear a little thin, along with the conveniently produced towels, May never running out of pencils and notebooks (how many can you always carry on your back??), and the character of Daisy having actually brought with her a 19th century wedding gown although the women are told at the beginning of their

journey (a three hour tour????)that they cannot bring very much with them. These little nagging details I was willing to overlook, though. I also enjoyed the recounting of the travel and the details of native life. The story moved along at a satisfactory pace and was readable and entertaining. It didn't require much effort to just let the story carry me along. There were enough characters to provide a variety of mini, if scanty storylines. Again, there was potential for further development here that unfortunately wasn't explored. I'll admit that part of the reason that I continued to read was out of sheer curiosity. Would the author predictably reunite May and the Captain, the long-suffering, star-crossed lovers? Would May remain with her Indian husband, Little Wolf? When May becomes pregnant, it didn't take much imagination to figure out that the baby would belong to Bourke (Oh, spare me...) Bourke one, Little Wolf zero. By now I felt sure that May and the Captain would live happily ever after, but I doggedly read on. One of the stars I therefore award because the author had the courage not to tie all the stories into a neat package at the end. Life is not a neat package, and that may have been the most realistic part of the book. In conclusion, *One Thousand White Women* was predictable at times, and tends to put a 21st century spin on 19th century people, but on the whole it was an entertaining, and readable yarn, and even though I thought I'd toss it a couple of times, it did keep me reading. Take it to the beach, turn off your critical brain, and enjoy.

If I could rate this below one star I would. This book covered every stereotype possible: the boozy, trashy, red-headed Irish twins; the big, homely, muscular, Swede; the racist, phony, southern belle; the filthy, rotted-tooth little Frenchman, etc. Of course, the heroine is "chosen" by the most well-respected and good looking brave. The author made sure there was a mate for every one of his characters, there even "happened" to be one Black brave to be paired with the regal, non-conformist, former slave woman. The premise to this novel is original but everything else was so cliché it was embarrassing. The only part of the book the author seemed to put any effort into were the elaborate, porn-like, sex encounters. I'm no prude but these scenes were thrown in helter-skelter and added nothing to the story line what-so-ever. Don't waste your money or your time on this book.

Wow, this book was so bad I actually feel angry at the friend who recommended it. As other reviewers here have said, the book is poorly written (full of clichés, uses a format that is unconvincing), the characters are one-dimensional (embarrassing stereotypes, unconvincing motivations), and the dialogue and plot read like a third-rate romance novel. I am stunned by 1) the

terribly shallow presumptions about women's interior lives, thoughts, and motivations; 2) the corny treatment of love and sex; 3) the voluminous, vicarious depictions of rape and; 4) the insanely retrograde ethnic stereotypes, not only of the "brides" but of the Indians (noble savages to drunken savages). Finally, the motivations of the main character just do not ring true, and she is the only character who is flushed out enough to have any interior life. I can't help but think that the author just lacks imagination (including the ability to imagine another person's motivations, but also an ability to create a world outside of stale, rehashed tropes). I'm actually mad at myself for wasting the time to finish the book.

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