

One Vast Winter Count: the Native American West Before Lewis and Clark

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Book Reviews and Notices

One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark, by Colin G. Calloway. History of the American West Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003. xx, 631 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Susan Sleeper-Smith is associate professor of history at Michigan State University. She is the author of *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (2002).

In *One Vast Winter Count*, Colin Calloway offers an expansive view of cultural change in the West. He devotes considerable attention to the lands and people west of the Mississippi, but that is not his definition of the West. His West functions as an analytical lens that defines and redefines the regional landscape through the personal perspective of one's location on the continent. Thus, the lands between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River constitute the West prior to Lewis and Clark. Calloway's West changes across time and space.

One Vast Winter Count represents a remarkable survey of the recent literature. Calloway synthesizes a vast body of established and recent scholarship, from anthropological and ethnohistorical articles to histories of specific historical events, people, and landscapes. Equally impressive are his inclusion of Native voices and perspectives and his skillful reading of ancient sites, natural landscape features, and oral narratives. *One Vast Winter Count* has a richness of context that distinguishes it from its scholarly predecessors and competitors.

Calloway's formidable research provides the context for the long continuum of migrations that shaped the peopling of North America. He focuses on the multiple movements that occurred before Europeans' arrival. For Calloway, the West was "part of an ongoing American saga rather than just the culmination of Europe's westward adventure" (18). The West was a land with migratory patterns that preceded even those of medieval Europe. In many of Calloway's examples, he demonstrates how events in North America preceded those "landmark" events that denote change in western Europe. For example, "in the fall of 1064, just a couple of years before the Norman conquest of England, a volcano erupted near present-day Flagstaff, Arizona. . . . The volcanic eruptions literally shook the Sinagua world, but they did not produce an empty wasteland. . . . volcanic cinders enriched the soil and made it

attractive to farmers. . . . peoples from distant areas moved into the region" (19). Thus, Calloway often uses natural events to denote expansion rather than demise. He skillfully demonstrates how multiple re-settlements took place. *One Vast Winter Count* provides a comparative lens through which we can see how civilizations in North America "have risen and fallen as they have elsewhere in the world" (20).

The first part of the book focuses on the pre-contact period and examines the environmental and demographic stresses that led to population movement. Calloway draws attention to the similarities that characterized this pre-contact agrarian Indian world. Agricultural practice varied, though Europeans failed to appreciate the underlying agrarian dynamic that characterized Indian communities, whether in the Northeast or Southwest. Calloway reveals a tempestuous natural landscape where human endeavor resulted in unforeseen outcomes, and shows how recent decision making in the West often parallels or is shaped by the behaviors of the land's original inhabitants.

The second part of the book focuses on the period 1500 to 1730, when invaders explored and often settled in the trans-Mississippi West. These chapters challenge the perception that the United States asserted sovereignty over a vast, unexplored landscape. For the Southwest and Great Lakes region, Calloway offers an equally new interpretive framework. He shows that resistance in the Southwest was more widespread and lasted longer than previously envisioned. Simultaneously, he suggests that while the history of the Great Lakes region is a story of both accommodation and resistance, it was also a site of greater violence than historians often envision.

The third section—the last three chapters—of the book explores the shortest time period, the nineteenth century, when the West evolved as an identifiable region for U.S. territorial expansion. Calloway describes the revolutionary changes that preceded U.S. expansion: the ravages of disease and the repeated intrusive contests by foreigners. Despite the encirclement of Indian peoples and confiscation of their lands, the reader is ever mindful that Indians were themselves agents of change. More importantly, Calloway depicts this one century as a short expanse in a land of vast winter counts where "a linear or cyclical story of human experiences . . . stretches back thousands of years" (21).

In every chapter of this book there is evidence that the author has successfully integrated Indian and western history. Calloway's synthesis is trend setting because he uses the scholarly developments of these two evolving fields while sensitively positioning his writing within the long-term memory of indigenous people who "etched their histories continuously from times beyond memory" (21).

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