

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

1991

## Review of The Plains of North America and Their Inhabitants

James H. Gunnerson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Gunnerson, James H., "Review of The Plains of North America and Their Inhabitants" (1991). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 602.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/602>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*The Plains of North America and Their Inhabitants.* By Richard Irving Dodge. Edited by Wayne R. Kime. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989. Introduction, textual apparatus, index. 477 pp. \$60.00.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Irving Dodge wrote with the easy style of an experienced raconteur, drawing on twenty years of first-hand experience on the Plains. Most of his numerous anecdotes, however, date from the late 1860s and early 1870s. During this period he met an English promoter who encouraged Dodge to write the book. First published in 1876 it quickly went through two editions in England and two in the United States, all substantially edited. The present version, with only errors of spelling and punctuation corrected, is based on an unedited manuscript by Dodge and presents the work as he had envisioned it. Wayne R. Kime meticulously documents variations in the different editions and provides explanatory notes, an informative introduction, and useful commentary.

The volume is divided into three sections: "The Plains," "Game," and "Indians." The first contains a general description of the topography drainages, climate, and storms of the Plains from Texas north into the Dakotas, an area Dodge had repeatedly traversed in various military capacities. Much of this section presents practical advice regarding travel and camping useful for hunting parties.

Dodge then devotes a chapter to each of the large game animals and less space to small game animals, game birds, and fish. He was especially

concerned with the bison and was witness to their virtual extermination. Dodge was an avid hunter and organized hunting parties to entertain visiting dignitaries as well as to procure meat for the troops. He describes the animals well, both in appearance and behavior, again providing advice to those who would hunt them.

Dodge's longest section, that on Indians, tells us more about his opinions and what he thought would interest general readers than about the cultures of the plains Indians. For the most part he talks about *the* Indians as though all of the diverse tribes had a common culture. On page 229 he does state that "These sketches nearly all relate to the Cheyennes" except where otherwise noted. Context, however, frequently does not bear this out. For the most part Dodge disparages Indian morals, sexual habits, honesty, and cruelty; he does praise their horsemanship and tracking ability. Dodge was highly critical of the government's Indian policy and recommended that treaties be enforced—justly, but with force if necessary.

Kime should be commended for again making available Dodge's commentaries of the Plains and their inhabitants as viewed by an educated, experienced officer and gentleman in the early 1870s.

JAMES H. GUNNERSON  
University of Nebraska State Museum  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln