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Review of *Thomas Jefferson and the Changing West: From Conquest to Conservation*, James P. Ronda, ed.

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Thomas Jefferson and the Changing West: From Conquest to Conservation. Edited with an introduction by James P. Ronda. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, in association with the Missouri Historical Society Press of St. Louis, 1997. Maps, index. xx + 204 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

Thomas Jefferson would have liked the idea of this book (if not all the essays themselves) since the American West was a canvas on which he loved to paint. Obvious links to western history can be found in Jefferson's 1803 purchase of the Louisiana Territory and his central role in launching the subsequent expedition of Lewis and Clark. Of more subtle relevance was Jefferson's propensity to construct worlds in his imagination, usually filled with sturdy yeomen laboring virtuously on freehold farms carved out of a continental wilderness that he preferred to think of as empty and inviting. Hence the monument to Jefferson a thousand miles west of Monticello in the Gateway Arch at St. Louis. And hence the 1994 conference for which these essays were conceived to address the enduring significance of our third president to the West—and perhaps vice versa.

James P. Ronda labors artfully in the volume's introduction to lift and clarify the themes and connections that might justify its subtitle. The eight following chapters come together pleasantly enough, but not exactly as a seamless whole. John Logan Allen opens with thoughtful reflections on Jefferson's imaginary West, followed by a careful but hard-hitting assessment by Anthony F. C. Wallace of Jefferson's commitment to "Obtaining Lands" from their Native owners. From a Native American perspective, Robert A. Williams Jr. generously styles Jefferson's views and Indian policies as "utilitarian" and portrays this philosopher-magistrate as a figure Native persons ought to recognize: that is, a teller of stories that "make things happen."

A pair of essays by ecologists Robert Gottlieb, Helen Ingram, and Mary Wallace introduce (but cannot adequately develop)

more recent issues of resource management, governance, and community conflict. Peter S. Onuf deftly explicates the complex (troubled?) mind that simultaneously encouraged state equality and states' rights while fretting at the spread of slavery and positively dreading the prospect of disunion exposed in the Missouri Crisis. Elliott West holds up the influential Bents of Missouri as a lens through which to view both old and new patterns of land and resource exploitation on the Central Great Plains. Finally, Mary Clearman Blew turns a writer's eye on "The Exhausted West" to see if literary life remains in the much-used western landscape.

Patricia Nelson Limerick closes with a brief summary that nicely exposes the collection's hope and frustration. The "central structuring idea of this volume," she concludes, is "the notion that historians, and historical understanding of Jefferson, might be of some use in figuring out the dilemmas of the American West today." Unfortunately, what we seek today is clarity and what historians do best is complicate our stories and cloud our vision with contingencies. As a result, these essays may satisfy readers already accustomed to historians' diet of indeterminacy, but they will frustrate seekers of keys to our policy problems.

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