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Review of *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* Edited by Howard R. Lamar

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The New Encyclopedia of the American West. Edited by Howard R. Lamar. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. Illustrations, maps, photographs, illustration credits, index. xv +1324 pp. \$60.00.

The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West, edited by Yale historian Howard Lamar and published by Thomas Y. Crowell Company in 1977, was a pretty good book, bringing to the American public the first comprehensive single-volume treatment of the history of the West. But that reference work has now been superseded—and dwarfed—by this new rendition, also edited by Lamar. More than 1250 pages of three-column text, 1.5 million words in all, are given over to 2400 alphabetically-ordered entries written by more than three hundred scholars. Long thematic entries, on the fur trade or railroads, for example, are interspersed with shorter pieces, often on individuals. Six hundred photographs and a good number of maps augment a readable text. A bibliography at the end of most entries points the reader to additional sources; there is some cross-referencing of entries, though not enough; and there is an index, but only of the names of persons (there was no index at all in the 1977 edition). All in all, this is a handsome, informative, engaging book—well worth the asking price. It rightfully takes its place alongside the rival four-volume *Encyclopedia of the American West*, edited by Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod (1996), as the best reference works on the West.

The New Encyclopedia, like its predecessor, is ambitious in both conception and scope: in conception, because it includes the West as process, a frontier stage occurring across the entire United States, as well as the West as a place, the western half of the country; in scope, because among its entries are old favorites of western history, such as wars, politics, and gunfighters, but also more recent concerns, such as gender, ethnicity, and environment. So, for example, there is an entry on Plymouth Rock and another on the early settlement of Vermont, but only states of the West get the

full treatment, with coverage of their histories from early settlement through to the present. This is a logical way of dealing with the ambiguous meaning of the West, but the complexity of the arrangement, mixing temporal and spatial parameters, causes some confusion, as is evident in the entries on Physiography and Vegetation, two of the longest essays in the book. Whereas the former deals with the physiography of the entire country, the latter covers only the vegetation of the Western United States, suggesting what? That the shape of the land was more important to settlers than the availability of wood?

The selection of entries and their content tell a good deal about the way scholarship on the West has developed since the 1977 version. Interpretive essays on African Americans (Negroes in the first edition), Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans have been expanded, new entries (Prostitution on the Frontier, for instance) have been added, and many more have been revised. To the editor's credit, however, Frederick Jackson Turner and his Frontier Thesis are not shunned or castigated, as is the fashion in some of the New Western History. (It is hard to understand why Turner has been so lambasted for being a product of his times, when, after all, the New Western Historians, also products of their times, will surely be eventually disregarded too.) A concern with the historiography of the West, as well as its actual lived history, is apparent throughout *The New Encyclopedia* in the large number of entries on historians, including Walter Prescott Webb, Dale L. Morgan, Angie Debo, and, deservedly, Lamar himself.

Of course, no encyclopedia, no matter how comprehensive, can be exhaustive, as the editor points out in his introduction, perhaps anticipating reviewers' gripes. And here indeed are one reviewer's. Despite entries on Disneyland, the motion picture industry, and John Wayne, the role of popular culture in the West takes second billing to a more standard academic interpretation. This may be reasonable, popular culture being by definition ubiquitous, but it would have been good to

see entries on, for example, Buddy Holly, Buster Keaton, and Jim Thorpe, all products of the West, perhaps at the expense of some of the more obscure politicians who populate these pages. More importantly, there is still an uneven treatment of Native Americans. This may seem an unfair criticism since there are lengthy entries on Indian languages, painters, pottery, and the Indian Power movement, to name but a few. For some reason, however, some Native American groups have their own entries, whereas others are represented only in broad family groupings. Of Plains Indians, the Sioux, Crow, Blackfeet, and Mandan get their own coverage, but the Ponca, Omaha, Kansa, Osage, and Quapaw are given only a cursory consolidated treatment as "Siouan tribes, Southern." The Arikara have their own entry, but their much more powerful relatives, the Pawnees, have neither an individual entry nor a grouped one under Caddoans. Their other relatives, the Wichitas, are missing too, but the Caddos are there. A logical explanation of these permutations is elusive. Finally, there surely should be an entry on Indian Claims, including Indian Claims Commission cases and important Supreme Court decisions, such as *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903). At the very least this would emphasize that United States-Indian relations are not just a matter of history and that in some areas little has changed in the West.

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