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Review of *Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860* by Anne F. Hyde

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BOOK REVIEWS

Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800–1860. By Anne F. Hyde. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. xv + 628 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.

This extraordinary book is a recasting and retelling of virtually the entire history of the trans-Mississippi West from 1804 to about 1860. Its solid source foundation ranges from early fur-trade documents to the most recent monographs. It is amply illustrated with rarely seen visuals from many archives and replete with scores of real women and men—Anglo-American, French, Native, and Métis. The focus is on family connections—marital, sexual, social, economic—and the crossing of racial boundaries and networks. Women are never absent, and their agency is evident. Every chapter opens with a vignette about a family member—man, woman, or child.

The book has three parts, forming a tightly wrought and impressive architecture. The first part, up to 1825, opens with a strong chapter on the fur trade, centering in St. Louis and extending northwestward to the upper reaches of the Missouri and Mississippi River systems. In the process, Anne Hyde achieves a genealogical triumph by unraveling the Chouteaus (many of the men were named Pierre or Auguste or both) and their spouses, both Native and white. This chapter alone will be essential reading for anyone interested in the fur trade in the Northern Plains and beyond. The next chapter recounts the history of Fort Vancouver and the McLoughlin family, including some pages on the Canadian Plains from the Selkirk

colony on west. The third chapter features the Bent family and their fort on the Arkansas, as well as Mariano Vallejo and John A. Sutter in northern California and Stephen A. Austin in Texas.

In part 2 (1825–1840), consisting of two chapters on “The Mixed World of Indian Country,” Hyde explains the problems caused by Indian “removal,” which, with John Faragher, she candidly and correctly calls ethnic cleansing. She also writes on the crowding of “removed” tribes onto land already occupied by others; on the Métis; and on the gradual shutting down of the fur trade. Intermarriage and gift-giving broke down “as land acquisition replaced trade as the central facet of the western political economy.” This shift took years, but it eventually destroyed the familial and economic system of the early years of the century.

Part 3, the final three chapters on “Imposing a State, 1840–1865,” describes how the Mexican-American War upset families and brought disorder, followed by “border wars” in the 1850s from the central Plains to Texas, California, and the Pacific Northwest, to the 1862 Sioux uprising in Minnesota and the Sand Creek massacre in 1864. By 1860 the American state “had just begun to use its muscle,” and with it came “racial definition.... Does it mean anything to be labeled a ‘half-breed’ or a Mexican when you used to be a Bent or a Californio? Can you talk or buy your way out of racial labeling?”

The book includes well-crafted pages on (to pick a few of many topics at random) the Osages, the Comanches, the Mormon

exodus from Illinois to Utah, the California and Colorado gold rushes and their ruinous impacts on family and trade networks, and much more. Throughout it all, families reappear—the Chouteaus, Sibleys, and Sublettes, Benjamin (Benito) Davis Wilson, the Vallejos, the McLoughlins, the Kit Carsons, and others, nearly all of them mixtures of Anglo, French, Native, and Spanish. Students of the Great Plains and the nineteenth-century West in general, at whatever level, will be well rewarded by a reading of Anne Hyde's fine book.

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