



"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West

By Richard White Ph.D

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"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West By Richard White Ph.D

A centerpiece of the New History of the American West, this book embodies the theme that, as succeeding groups have occupied the American West and shaped the land, they have done so without regard for present inhabitants. Like the cowboy herding the dogies, they have cared little about the cost their activities imposed on others; what has mattered is the immediate benefit they have derived from their transformation of the land.

Drawing on a recent flowering of scholarship on the western environment, western gender relations, minority history, and urban and labor history, as well as on more traditional western sources, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own* is about the creation of the region rather than the vanishing of the frontier.

Richard White tells how the various parts of the West—its distinct environments, its metropolitan areas and vast hinterlands, the various ethnic and racial groups and classes—are held together by a series of historical relationships that are developed over time. Widespread aridity and a common geographical location between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean would have provided but weak regional ties if other stronger relationships had not been created.

A common dependence on the deferral government and common roots in a largely extractive and service-based economy were formative influences on western states and territories. A dual labor system based on race and the existence of minority groups with distinctive legal status have helped further define the region. Patterns of political participation and political organization have proved enduring. Together, these relationships among people, and between people and place, have made the West a historical creation and a distinctive region.

From Europeans contact and subsequent Anglo-American conquest, through the civil-rights movement, the energy crisis, and the current reconstructing of the national and world economies, the West has remained a distinctive section in a much larger nation. In the American imagination the West still embodies

possibilities inherent in the vastness and beauty of the place itself. But, Richard White explains, the possibilities many imagined for themselves have yielded to the possibilities seized by others. Many who thought themselves cowboys have in the end turned out to be dogies.

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Editorial Review

Review

"An excellent new synthesis of Western history...[White] is a lively, graceful writer...and he tells a story very different from the traditional picture of the progress of Anglo-American civilization, but no less compelling."
—*New York Times Book Review*

"[White] has produced an exhaustively researched and near encyclopedic excursion into our Western past, and he pulls together an enormous amount of information about the social and political forces that shaped—and continue to shape—the most compelling region of our nation."—*Los Angeles Times*

"The book is nearly all-embracing in scope: in well-written and densely packed chapters organized topically, White takes us from the times of early Spanish explorers in the 1500s to the years of the Ronald Reagan presidency."—*Pacific Northwest Quarterly*

"Long on incisive interpretation, shorter on narrative, but vivid in details, this book will reach and enrich the understanding of a wide readership."—*Choice*

"*It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own* is steadfastly a history of the West as a region, and Euro-American expansion is treated as one of the several forces making that region's history. White's book is highly original, certainly the most innovative and challenging overview of western history written in the last couple of generations. His writing is vivid, straightforward, and occasionally quite entertaining, and he lavishes the reader with particulars, providing fine examples and case studies to argue his points. An exceptionally perceptive, boldly argued, and persuasive grand tour of the western past."—**Elliot West**, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

"This book represents a striking contrast to the conventional view of western history and the usual western history text. It will be a major contribution to the field and will enjoy a wide readership. White has a clear grasp of the available literature and seizes upon it to drive home main points about the nature of the western experience. He does so forcefully and pointedly. It is a book born of affection and of understanding for this remarkable part of America."—**Peter Iverson**, Arizona State University

About the Author

Richard White, Margaret Byrne Professor of American History at Stanford University, is author of *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* and *Remembering Ahanagan: Storytelling in a Family's Past*.

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