

# PREFACE

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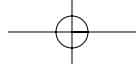
The American West is a vast landscape, larger than Western Europe and ranging across geographic variations from deserts and mountains to fertile valleys and swift rivers. This great and varied landmass became home to successive waves of immigrants who, over ten thousand years, shaped it and were shaped by it. The immigrant groups were as varied as the landscape in which they came to live. Indian peoples were the first, moving steadily south and west over generations, changing as the landscape they encountered challenged and then supported them. Soon after the opening of the 16th century, representatives of several European nations appeared, at first singly and then in small groups. Although initially few in numbers, they made their homes across the West; interacted with Indian peoples through trade, missions, and sometimes alliances; and publicized the new (for Europe) land. This connection with Indian peoples would lead to a great exchange that profoundly affected both groups. Europeans received knowledge of new agricultural crops (principally corn, but also beans, squash, and chili peppers), the wildlife that would form the basis of their sustenance, and soon trade and the lore associated with survival in this vast landscape. Indian peoples received the horse (a gift that would refashion the lives and cultures of those Indian groups on the plains), European iron tools, and diseases. The last would become significant in reshaping Indian populations for the next three hundred years.

The horse allowed the Indian peoples of the plains to remain sovereign over their great grass land, but elsewhere across the West, representatives of European nations and large trading companies began to penetrate into the distant reaches of the landscape, initially in motion and then in permanent settlements. By the middle of the 18th century, as the colonies on the East

Coast fought a war for independence, in the West, Russians had moved down from the north into what would become California, the Spanish had established missions in Texas and California, and British trading ships and naval vessels cruised the waters off the Pacific coast. Within three generations, the rise of the now-independent United States changed the political landscape of the West, and soon, its human habitations as well. In a series of diplomatic and military triumphs, America annexed Texas, acquired the Oregon Country by treaty, and immediately thereafter, California, Arizona, and New Mexico by conquest. By the middle of the 19th century, European nations—so significant in the West's history for more than three hundred years—had been reduced to bystanders. Thereafter, the United States would lay sole claim to sovereignty.

The discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought immigrants from all over the world in response to the fever occasioned by the news. Within a few months, they came from Hawaii to the west; Peru and Chile to the south; Mexico to the southwest; and, within a year, Americans and Europeans added large numbers to the total. Soon, Chinese and Australians had joined the flood of immigrants. With the arrival of these varied peoples, California became the most ethnically diverse place in the world. This was only the beginning of the great immigration that would change the face of the West and its peoples. By the opening of the 20th century, the West was home to Germans and Russians (North Dakota), Basques (Nevada), Chinese (in railroad and mining towns), Irish miners (Montana), Mexican agricultural laborers (interior valleys of California), and a dozen other groups from the plains and across the mountains to the shores of the Pacific.

From the beginnings of European occupation, with its missions and fur trading posts, the West has been a



place of urban centers. In the 20th century, these have become great cities. For some five hundred years of European presence, the West has become a place of hope and opportunity. The enumerations of the decennial census note that the West is the most rapidly growing part of the nation and the most rapidly urbanizing. Large groups of new immigrants from around the world have come to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle, among other places. Questions of the relationship of the nation to its new arrivals have been

posed and answered more than in any other places. Its story and the story of its people continue to unfold into the 21st century. The editors begin in these volumes to document the past and raise questions for the next generation of readers interested in the topic of the American West.

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