

Across The Wide Missouri

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Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the Bancroft Prize. *Across the Wide Missouri* tells the compelling story of the climax and decline of the Rocky Mountain fur trade during the 1830s. More than a history, it portrays the mountain fur trade as a way of business and a way of life, vividly illustrating how it shaped the expansion of the American West. Like many U.S. historians, cultural critic Bernard DeVoto believed that the American character was rooted in the experience of westward expansion. Unlike those who championed the civilizing graces of the agrarian frontier, however, DeVoto drew inspiration from the mercenary, imperial designs of the fur trade. Originally published in 1947, *Across the Wide Missouri* is arguably the best known of his studies in American history, examining the rise and fall of the U.S. fur dynasties in the 1830s. The book chronicles the competition between John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, an "opposition" group of trappers (including Jim Bridger and Kit Carson) descended from the earlier entrepreneurial activities of General William H. Ashley. DeVoto specifically narrates the major expeditions and the daily experiences of the Western divisions of these companies, which scoured the northernmost regions of the Rocky Mountains for beaver. He contends that, by exploring the recently charted Northern plateau, fighting off interlopers, and setting up trade networks, the loose confederation of trappers, traders, and Native Americans shaped the materialism that typifies modern American society. In his densely detailed description of the company "rendezvous," DeVoto shows how the activities of trading, partying, and resource pooling created a shared experience for competing cultural and economic parties on the frontier. While the centrality of the fur trade in the development of the American character may strike some readers as overemphasized, DeVoto's thesis still carries much relevance for modern American studies. --John M. Anderson Bernard DeVoto (1897-1955), winner of the Pulitzer Prize, was a renowned scholar-historian of the American West and one of the country's greatest men of letters.

Other Books

Missouri River Master Manual.

“... that by the 1840s the big companies were living on buffalo robes and other trade , and the beaver were supplied primarily by small companies for manufacturing of coats and other apparel . (DeVoto , *Across the Wide Missouri*) .”