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Review of *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* by Eric Jay Dolin

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Although many individuals who reside in the Great Plains tend to think of furs in connection with the early nineteenth-century trade conducted along the upper Missouri River valley and in the Rocky Mountains, Eric Jay Dolin takes a broader view of the fur trade's role in history. Dolin explains that the role of furs can easily be traced throughout ancient civilizations. To make his point, he briefly mentions that early Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans engaged in the fur trade and that, during the Middle Ages, furs became a major part of commerce. The focus of his book, however, is on the fur trade's crucial role in American history from the early colonial period through the late 1800s.

Dolin divides his narrative into three parts, with part 1 addressing the fur trade during the
early colonial period in North America, and part 2 focusing on the fur trade as a means of competition among European colonial rivals vying for control of the continent. For those whose interest is the trans-Mississippi West, part 3, “America Heads West,” will be especially appealing. Given the role that beaver and bison played in the fur and hide trade and their impact on the Great Plains, individual chapters of special interest include “The Precious Beaver,” “Fall of the Beaver,” and “The Last Robe,” the latter looking at the demise of the bison during the nineteenth century.

Readers who share a general interest in the history of the fur trade will appreciate the breadth with which Dolin examines the topic and will learn a great deal about the role of the fur trade in different regions and during various periods in American history. However, specialists in the upper Missouri River and Rocky Mountain fur trade era may find Dolin’s treatment too general. Chapters titled “Up the Missouri” and “Mountain Men” provide good overviews of Lewis and Clark, Manuel Lisa, John Colter, and William Henry Ashley, among others, in connection with Great Plains history, although experts on the role of the rendezvous and the Rocky Mountain fur trade era will find little to add to the historiography of these topics.

Nonetheless, I am confident that readers will appreciate the scope of Dolin’s fur trade history. As the author states in his introduction, the fur trade served as a critical force during the colonial period, as well as advancing the expansion of the United States.

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