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**Review of *Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains: Exploring the West from Monticello* By Donald Jackson**

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*Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains: Exploring the West from Monticello.* By Donald Jackson. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. xii + 339 pp. \$19.95.

The Founding Fathers knew almost nothing of that huge segment of North America bounded by New Mexico, the Pacific Coast, the Arctic, and the Mississippi. It became Thomas Jefferson's task, eagerly embraced, to dispel that ignorance. Here, as in so many other fields, he moved with a major current of his age: thousands of Americans, Spaniards, Russians, Canadians, and other British were converging on the trans-Mississippi West. Jefferson's awareness of this competition grew with his knowledge of the area and increased his conviction that the United States, not Europe, should control North America.

This engaging history falls into three parts. The first sketches the education and career of Thomas Jefferson to the eve of his presidency. We learn of Jefferson's teachers, books, and habits of mind. More particularly we learn of his desire to vindicate the plants, animals, and aboriginal Indians of America from the charge of degeneration abroad among European scientists. With backing from the American Philosophical Society, Jefferson drew up in 1793 an elaborate set of instructions to guide the western explorations of the French naturalist André Michaux. These were strikingly similar to those he later wrote for Lewis and Clark. Had Michaux not changed his plans in order to oblige the overseas policies of revolutionary France, the geographical mysteries of "the Stony Mountains" might have been solved a decade earlier.

The middle portion of this book covers Jefferson's presidency, during which he exercised his greatest influence on both the gathering of knowledge and the claiming of western territories. The publication of Sir Alexander Mackenzie's *Voyages* in 1801 and Spain's closing of the Mississippi the next year impressed on Jefferson the urgency of controlling the Mississippi Valley and scouting the un-

known lands beyond. By keeping his description of the Lewis and Clark expedition brief, the author has space for a fascinating account of its planning, organization, and record keeping. The last third of the book follows Jefferson to his old age at Monticello, where he gradually lost contact with western developments. The concluding chapters also contain an assessment of Jefferson's Indian policy, an evaluation of General James Wilkinson, and descriptions of minor but interesting expeditions led by William Dunbar (1805), Thomas Freeman (1806), and Zebulon Pike (1806-1807).

This book partly overlaps the classic account of early North American discovery and exploration by Bernard De Voto, *The Course of Empire* (Boston, 1952), but differs in its fuller explanation of Jefferson's role and of those political and scientific issues with which Jefferson was especially concerned. Donald Jackson displays a magisterial command of both the region and the era, derived in part from his past labors on behalf of George Washington, Lewis and Clark, Blackhawk, and John C. Frémont. His style is vigorously straightforward, his judgments wise, and his portraits of Jefferson and other leading characters equally fair and vivid. Fifteen maps illustrate the development of knowledge of the trans-Mississippi West, and generous notes at the end of each chapter contain many additional nuggets, not to be missed by anyone who loves this phase of American history.

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