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Review of *Into the West: The Story of Its People* By Walter Nugent

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Into the West: The Story of Its People. By Walter Nugent. New York: Knopf, 1999. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. xxiii + 493 pp. \$35.00.

Walter Nugent's *Into the West: The Story of Its People* adds an outstanding volume to the canon of Western history, reminding readers of the intellectual vitality that fuels this discipline. The book undertakes a grand sweep of Western history, from the speculative past of prehistoric tribes to the speculative future of the twenty-first century. On this epic journey across and through the American West, Nugent delivers exactly what he promises: a book about people.

Despite romantic notions about the region that haunt Americans, Nugent sees the West as a definable place with a history larger than images of a "frontier heyday." He presents a chronological account centered on five factors that impelled migration into the West: land hunger, valuable resources, improved quality of life, regional nostalgia, and desire for personal betterment. He writes of the assorted people who, across time, responded to one or all of these forces. Nugent's West is a cultural kaleidoscope. Shifting his lens from Native people to Spanish-speakers to Asians to Euro-Americans to African Americans, he details their successes and failures as they competed for contested spaces. Few authors can so successfully combine sterling scholarship with a warm personal prose marked by insight and wit. The writing moves so easily one can hear the author speaking its words.

This is not, however, merely a collection of interesting vignettes about the known and the unknown, the Leland Stanfords and the Mabel Tom Lees of the area, but a balanced, inclusive treatment of the various subregions of the West. Nugent paints a richly textured Western mural, drawing on voluminous evidence to show how the West turned on an axis of rural and urban exigencies. Those interested in the Great Plains part of this narrative will not be disappointed. The homesteaders' West is there, with its economics and demograph-

ics, its ups and downs, from the past to the present, all ably portrayed.

Walter Nugent argues that the West deserves historical treatment that eschews parochialism. Accordingly, this is a book of vision and synthesis. To search out faults would be nit-picking at a graceful, compassionate work that embraces the West with scholarly and critical affection. With striking photographs and powerful descriptions, it weaves irony and contradiction, despair and hope, optimism and humor, greed and frustration into our understanding of the West. This is history—frontier, Western, regional, national—at its best, and Walter Nugent well deserves every accolade he receives for *Into the West*.

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