



Men to Match My Mountains: The Opening of the Far West 1840-1900

Irving Stone , Lewis Gannett (Editor)

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Stone has created a pageant of stories of the great westward drive.

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From Reader Review Men to Match My Mountains: The Opening of the Far West 1840-1900 for online ebook

Thad says

A really fascinating exploration of the history of the west. The story focuses on the development of California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado. Three of the four states were established essentially as byproducts of the exploration, discovery and exploitation of precious minerals (mostly gold and silver), and then the exploitation of those who found the gold and silver. His stories are replete with sad vignettes of those who came so close to success only to fail, and those who succeeded against great odds... or just got really lucky.

He shares the stories of individuals who made incredible riches from gold and silver and parlayed them into empires which they ruthlessly protected, often cannibalizing one another to stay powerful. There was a rather nasty sense of the corruption bred by power, and how those in power used whatever means necessary to keep it (see particularly the men who developed San Francisco and the Western Pacific Railroad).

Utah was unique of the four, in that mineral wealth was not the source of its development, but rather the religious faith of the Mormons who colonized it. As a Mormon, I was impressed by the even-handed story the author provided, especially given that this book was written in the 1950s; he was, for the most part, spoke highly of Brigham Young and his ability to muster a people in unity of purpose, and accomplish great deeds with his colonization of the West. He didn't pull punches however; he pointed out the Mormons' handling of "Gentile" businesses in Utah, and how they worked to edge them out of competition in the territory; and he pointed out how Mormon leaders hid from law enforcement for years in order to continue their practice of polygamy, only to finally acquiesce to the government's demands to abandon the doctrine in order to achieve statehood (mind you, I understand both parts of this from the perspective of a faithful Latter-day Saint, but I also felt that his description and perspective were a very well thought out conclusion based upon well documented facts).

For anyone wanting a better understanding of the gold rush, the development of the west, the challenge to earn statehood, the successes and failures of the gold seekers of the late 19th century, this is an excellent place to start.

Lloyd says

This is one of my favorite books of all time. I read it several years ago, recently found it again and read it again. He makes history read like a novel. If you love history, especially of the Old West, this is a must read.

Sue says

I am a history nut, so I am probably prejudiced, but I thoroughly enjoyed this book. History of the founding of Colorado, Utah, Nevada and California. Colorful descriptions, entertaining as well as educational. Long read, but worth it.

Carol says

This was quite a reading project. I'm sure I didn't retain 10% of the factual history of this book but I did find it fascinating. Living in the west myself, I was surprised at how little I knew about household names (they have streets, buildings and towns named after them) such as Crocker, Stanford and Huntington. Interesting to see what kind of men they were. I particularly enjoyed reading about the transcontinental railroad and the Chinese who were brought over by boat to build it. The Bank of California was a real piece of work. Corruption in the stock market isn't a new thing. There were so many men and women to admire as well. They literally cleared the way to the west. It was a good reminder of what my pioneer forebearers have done to make my life so luxurious. While I was reading the book, I received a copy of a letter written by my 2 great grandmother written from Sacramento in 1851. Sure collaborated what Irving Stone had written, Sacramento at that time was full of thieves and no place for a lady to be alone (she was young and recently widowed). She quickly remarried a German carpenter, also a widower. I have been to Coloma and Sutter's Fort and the usual tourist spots associated with my area, but would love to see them again and more since reading this book. A very slow, arduous read but very worth the effort. I will probably read it again in the future.

KatieSuzanne says

My mom told me my grandpa loved this book and talked about it all the time so I'm trying it out. There's already been a chapter titled "An honest scoundrel thicken the plot" ...so it's sort of awesome already.

Fran says

This is quite an old book, and I think I picked it up at a used-book sale. It had set in my closet waiting to be read for years, and I finally got to it. I had read Stone in the past (even in high school, and that's a LONG time ago) and I had forgotten how much I liked him. This is his entertaining and VERY informative take on the Opening of the Far West, notably California, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. The explanations and details about mining in the first three of those states were AMAZING and fascinating. I had no idea what all was involved, AND the extent of the wealth taken from the mountains. (I had to keep reminding myself that he was using gold and silver prices from long ago too.) The Utah history was lots about the Mormons, and I found it less interesting. But the whole book was very good, and I am glad I discovered it, even decades after it was written!

Joe Stack says

This is a wonderfully written history of California, Nevada, Utah, & Colorado filled with many colorful people. The bibliography indicates a lot of research. It is remarkable how much the author coalesces into the salient aspects for a highly readable history book. Regardless what is left out (and some would ask where are the women), for a single volume I think this is a good go-to book for the period and region covered. Until reading this book, I didn't realize how long it took for Southern California to develop and that real estate was

to the LA area what mining was to Northern California, Nevada, & Colorado. This history is peopled with the ambitious, the hucksters, the promoters, the speculators, swindlers, visionaries, the dishonest & the honest, the hardworking, rogues, the deserving & the undeserving, tycoons & tycoon wannabes; fortunes gained & fortunes lost, and fortunes gained, lost, & gained again; the 48ers, the 49ers, & those who came later. In addition to the people, the land, the physical terrain, is as important to this history as the people. This is particularly evident in the sections on Colorado. It's also history of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Leadville, Denver, Virginia City, Salt Lake City, and many places in between, places that are no more and places that still exist.

Cindy says

Fascinating, colorful account of the settling of the West (1840-1900). It includes stories of the California gold rush, the transcontinental railroad, the Mormons in Utah, Colorado's Comstock Lode, the building of San Francisco and its colorful characters. I really enjoyed this account!

Jessica says

I have read two Stone novels in the past and have enjoyed them both thoroughly. I expected to enjoy *Men to Match My Mountains* just as much, and I did, however, it took a while to get into it. As a historian, I found that Stone's manner of writing history was rather jarring at first. I had to get used to his extreme attention to detail and narrative form. It is clear that Stone could have used a good editor for this collection; then again, an editor may have taken away its unique charm.

Within this book, Stone subscribes to the romanticized version of the West; a land where freedom and hard work built a strong, American character. He describes the Far West as the "hero" of his story. That being said I (one of my fields of expertise is American West history) learned a great deal from this book. The breadth of information provided in the book is astounding. As mentioned before attention to detail is impressive and at times mind-numbing. So many individuals and story lines are interwoven that it is hard to keep track of who is who, what is what, and where is where. Yet the stories provided seem to have something to offer everyone. I found that some chapters kept me riveted, while others I read without truly taking them in or becoming interested in the action. I found the chapters on the Mormons particularly interesting.

Overall, I highly recommend this book even though it has its flaws. It is a truly charming piece of history, and the energy and enthusiasm Stone must have had for the project are evident throughout.

Nina says

Best history of the far west I've ever read. Irving Stone wrote a lot of biographical novels. I think this is the only true history book he ever wrote, and it is terrific. It covers the original pioneers, the impacts of the Mormons, the gold and silver rushes, the building of the railroads, politics, consequences for the native Americans, and more. Wonderful details about the historic figures, and high praise for the women, who had a higher survival rate crossing the mountains than the men did. Of one tiny little lady with small children, the wagon party leader wrote, "She was the one who put the packs on the oxen in the morning. She it was who

took them off at night, built the fires, cooked the food, helped the children, and did all sorts of work when the father of the family was too tired, which was almost all of the time."

John Johnson says

My parents introduced this book to me when I was in high school. Since then it continues to be one my favorite books. I admire the bravery, resolve and courage of the early explorers and settlers of the far west. The book shares their stories in a well written tome that's become a classic.

Bruce says

I can not write a helpful review - I found this book to be utterly engaging but I have a strong bias to the time and place. Stone selects stories of various individuals and plays each of them out like a suspenseful plot. Just superb.

Andrew says

I recently re-read this wonderful history of the settling of California, Nevada, Colorado and Utah by American settlers during the 1800s. Stone tells a great story and you get it without footnotes or asides, even as he gives ample credit to source material at the end. It is a wonderful introduction to historical material from the period and should inspire more reading on characters or events of the time.

Each of the three times that I've read it, I've come away with different impressions. The first time, it was the first history that I'd seen of the Mormon Church and Brigham Young. This last time it was noteworthy how the passivity of the Mexican government allowed a territory to split off as others arrived to exploit its commercial potential.

It is a good read too in its description of how the Big Four used the Central Pacific railroad to create a monopoly on commerce in the Far West. The chapter titled "The Tiger and the Octopus" notes that "They could not run their railroad at a profit ... They reasoned that the only way they could survive would be to establish a monopoly over all railroading inside the Far West." Then Stone describes in detail the tactics used -- right down to refused public access across their rights-of-way and highly discriminatory pricing.

Rachel Jones says

Fascinating! I'm a Southern California native, with California native parents, I'm a Mormon with family and cultural ties to Utah, and I have been living in Denver for the past 7 years, so this history was especially interesting to me as I've been to or heard of most of the places Irving Stone writes about. I would recommend this for anyone who loves American history though, as the settling of the West was a unique experience.

Donna says

This is turning out to be a slow read. The book is interesting but I am also struck by how ethnocentric the book is, telling the story of history from a white North American perspective. Native Americans, Californios and Mexicans are only shadow characters in this history. That said, I sometimes found myself fascinated by the events as they unfolded. I learned a lot about the settlement of California, about rail monopolies, mining rushes and the role of real estate speculation in Los Angeles. It also was very interesting reading about the Mormon settlement of Utah and other portions of the West and their battles to defend polygamy against outsiders and the US Government.

This is an excellent book if you want an overview of the settlement period in California, Nevada, Utah and Colorado.

Gerilyn says

I LOVE this book! You know I'm always wild about good history books, but this is a particular gem. The history of the west is filled with larger-than-life characters of the sort we'll never see again (that's not all bad, by the way--a little bit of John C. Fremont, William Sharon and even Brigham Young goes a long way). Irving Stone is a novelist but this book is pure history, one of two that he wrote. Even so, he brings a novelist telling to the tale. I really enjoyed the outsider's view of Mormon history and found his take vivid, accurate and compelling. I couldn't sleep for days after reading the Donner party account. Highly recommended(that means I've read it at least five times).

David Monson says

A very unassuming book until you get a little ways in and then BOOM! Some of the craziest events in history I've ever read! Settling the west, Mining for gold, fortunes made and lost, the scandals of the railroads, duels, pioneers, cannibalism, cities burned to the ground, crazy economic situations etc. This book truly gives meaning to the term "wild Wild West." Folks back then were tough as hell. I gained a lot of respect for them because of this book. It will seriously blow your mind!

Marty Reeder says

I don't remember who recommended this book to me. I know that it was years ago and they vividly described how the book contrasts the experiences of the various settlers of the Far West--pioneers, miners, homesteaders, enterprisers. I was fascinated. Since then, that contrast stayed with me. So much so that I based a story I wrote just off of the memory I had of its description. Then, when ordering a bunch of books, I remembered *Men to Match My Mountains* and eagerly added it to the list. Finally, book in hand, I read the story that I had placed on the top of a mountain of expectations for years. I wanted to see if it had earned its elevated station. The result? The Book Matched the Mountain of Expectation ... though it had its valleys as well.

Ivring Stone, a historical/biographical fiction author by trade, must have found stories in the Far West that

exceeded his ability to improve upon them through fiction. He was right. The stories of the settling of the Far West are fascinating, complicated, harsh, and beautiful in ways that many fiction authors could only dream of. In fact, they go beyond that. I, who do not delight in assigned readings, feel that *Men to Match My Mountains* should be required reading for any person living in the Far West area. A proper respect for the wildness of the country we live in, the hardships of the pioneers who tamed it, and the fragility between civilization or savagery, survival and mortality, is something that I think we all lose sight of in our comfortable existences. While reading the incredible accounts of the first pioneers, I could not help but look at the geography surrounding my home and realize that, without years and years of work from farmers, surveyors, engineers, and irrigators, I would be fairly well trapped and without resources. I enjoyed the mountains before for the vista, but I did not wholly respect them for their awesome dominance. Stone helped me to return to the native view of the land that hid beneath the gravel and pavement. He helped me to realize that the pioneers did so much more than walk a long way--they truly caused the desert to bloom.

While enthralled with the settling and original acts of taming the Far West, I was less interested in the thick portion in the middle of the book that covered all of the gold and silver discoveries, their subsequent mines, and the booms and busts that resulted. Here and there an interesting tale could be told and dynamic characters passed in and out of the narrative, but learning about those things, for me, was ultimately as shallow as the mines turned out to be themselves after a few years ... and without the luster that comes with a successful strike.

As a native Utahan, I was very intrigued by Irving Stone's approach to the Mormon exodus and settlement of the eastern Great Basin. I also appreciate the fairness that he gives in judging the Mormons, choosing to come to conclusions by fruits of their labor rather than the rumors of their rituals. The Mormons were appropriately vaunted for their teamwork and industry. At the same time, the detailing of the Mountain Meadows Massacre horrified me, as it should any humanity-loving person--even within context, it is a truly despicable act. I only wish that Irving Stone would have included a chapter on the noble tragedy of the handcart pioneers. I believe (perhaps in a biased way, as my ancestors were a part of it), Stone would have concluded that, in the actions of those pioneers and their rescuers, the Men Matched the Mountains.

Perhaps the most refreshing part of Stone's story is that it is written well before far-too-sensitive political-minded historians would rip the glory from these enterprising individuals. Stone shows us these people in the context of their time, he judges them by that same measure, and he refuses to allow modern sensitivities denigrate truly courageous and noble acts. Equally, he also properly derides what then and now should be considered horrendous and repulsive. Yes, he could have spent more time on the native Mexicans and Indians in the region and attempted to show their point of view. I would have been interested in that. However, he is not altogether ignorant of these perspectives either. They simply do not fit within the scope of his narrative, which covers the transition of the Far West from remote outposts of scattered groups to civilization due to westward migrating Americans.

In the end, the scope of Stone's work is impressive, and his management is trustworthy and also worthy of a great storyteller. Stone gets it, and he helps us to get it too. And although the path is rugged in parts along the way, I still feel that the journey is worthwhile. If you are a westerner, in fact, it's indispensable. Heck, I suppose it wouldn't hurt for those soft Easterners to be allowed a glimpse also!

Hayley says

Irving Stove didn't disappoint. I truly enjoy his writing style. This subject matter of opening the West could

have been difficult, bogged down with multitudinous information, but he kept it concise, engaging, and opinionless (as much as possible). I was completely absorbed with all if the Utah sections and learned a great deal about the Mormon settlers.

Robin says

This is a good book to learn about the settling of the West. I believe it gives a balanced perspective. While its hard for me to remember all the facts put forth in the book (its been awhile) I think it would be a must read for anyone who wants to learn about the American West.
