



Wilderness at Dawn: The Settling of the North American Continent

By Ted Morgan

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Wilderness at Dawn: The Settling of the North American Continent By Ted Morgan

This is the biggest, grandest, most sprawling epic ever told, filled with battles and hardship, courage, determination, daring voyages into the unknown, and eye-opening discoveries... From the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of FDR, Winston Churchill, and Somerset Maugham, *Wilderness At Dawn* is the sprawling, roughhouse epic of the unsung heroes, heroines, and rogues who tamed the rugged continent that became our country. Here is a masterpiece of history, research, and storytelling, the panoramic epic of the North American continent and the vast array of characters who thought they could civilize it. Concentrating on those previously ignored by "polite histories" (ordinary settlers, unknown soldiers, scalawags, pioneer women, slaves, and Native Americans), Morgan uses scenes and dialogue from actual letters, journals, and diaries to recreate the odysseys, adventures, human dramas, and inhuman suffering that shaped America. Beginning with prehistoric man's first forays across the Bering Land Bridge, Morgan unfurls a rich tapestry of lost civilizations and Indian accomplishments; ambitious explorers, would-be politicians and transplanted Europeans confronting the wilderness; scrappy newborn towns and dandified plantation societies; great river navigations and catastrophic explorations; the bloody Indian wars and the birth of the American revolution. All are here - the triumphs, tragedies, battles and intrigues from the Ice Age when Early Man roamed an empty continent to the achievement of the all-American dream of "Land for Every Man." Morgan takes us into the world of the lost Anasazi people, where inventive Indians built houses of 500 rooms, veritable "cities of stone" tucked among the canyon walls. He takes us into the lives of the Indians of the Southwest where a shipwrecked Spanish explorer named Cabeza de Vaca became an indentured servant (and later medicine man) to a tribe of Indian fishermen. We see the arrival of the first Jews in North America, the ha

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this "collective biography of ordinary Americans," Morgan (FDR) offers an involving, if a bit disjointed, popular history of North America to the end of the 18th century. He draws on memoirs, journals and academic studies for his colloquial, panoramic narrative; his anecdotes mainly eschew the famous for intriguing characters like William Fitzhugh, who in 1674 built a 13-room house, complete with Turkish carpets, on Virginia's "gentrified" northern frontier. As Morgan covers the advances of the European powers and the formation of the United States, he does not ignore the many depredations of the powerful. But the French-born author is, above all, an American enthusiast, and he concludes by celebrating the emerging nation's egalitarianism and "spirit of enterprise." Sometimes, however, Morgan's search for relevance--as when he links colonial tobacco propaganda to 20th-century ads for "Marlboro Country"--seems strained, and he makes few attempts to apprise the reader of ongoing debates about historical interpretation. BOMC main selection; History Book Club and QPB alternates.

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From Library Journal

Morgan, the biographer of Klaus Barbie (An Uncertain Hour, LJ 12/89), Franklin Roosevelt (FDR, LJ 11/1/85), and others, here turns his attention to the settlement of the frontier. Drawing on diaries, journals, letters, and similar sources, he begins with the first people to cross the Bering land bridge about 15,000 years ago, continues with the story of the European settlement of those colonies that played the most significant roles in the struggle among Spain, France, and Britain for control of the continent, and concludes by surveying the Western lands in the decades following the American Revolution. He tells a good story, emphasizing the ordinary people who did the actual settlement, but does not provide the analysis needed by specialists. The account is comprehensive for the years up to 1630. While it gets sidetracked for the period after that, this book is recommended for undergraduate and public libraries as a useful survey of the colonial frontier.

- Stephen H. Peters, Northern Michigan Univ. Lib., Marquette

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From Kirkus Reviews

A colorful portrait that boldly highlights the cruelty, sharp practices, disease, madness, and brutality displayed--or brought about--by the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch in their subjugation of Native Americans and enslavement of Africans. In the wake of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, few historians are resisting the urge to attack the European exploitation of North America. Morgan (An Uncertain Hour, 1989, etc.) is no exception: For him, "grand larceny" might be more appropriate than "settling" to describe the European seizure of the continent. He emphasizes, for instance, French Jesuits' disruption of Indian culture rather than their zeal or physical courage. Morgan is short on analysis here, however, offering no real understanding of how the major American cities blossomed, or why North America, with all its problems, continued to attract settlers. He uses a variety of contemporary diaries, letters, and other documents to flesh out his story, which ranges from the Stone Age crossing of the Bering Land Bridge to the early 19th century. Morgan aims to write "the story of mail carriers, sodbusters, circuit-riding judges, and Indian agents, of the people too busy occupying the land to make a claim on history." Although he veers a bit from his view from history's bottom rail (La Salle, the Virginian aristocrat William Byrd II, and Pilgrim governor William Bradford all receive excellent coverage), the author relates many an offbeat, sometimes jaunty, tale of ordinary people--including Edward Marshall, whose marathon 60-mile

walk in a day and a half helped William Penn's descendants swindle choice Pennsylvania land from the Indians; Eliza Lucas, who transformed the Carolinas' economy by introducing indigo; and PopŠ, the outraged shaman who masterminded the 1680 Pueblo revolt--the only Indian rebellion that successfully expelled a colonial power. Not strong on the reasons for European settlement, but a vivid panorama that makes one look forward to Morgan's projected next volume in this saga. (Four maps) -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Brian Paige:

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Janice Martin:

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