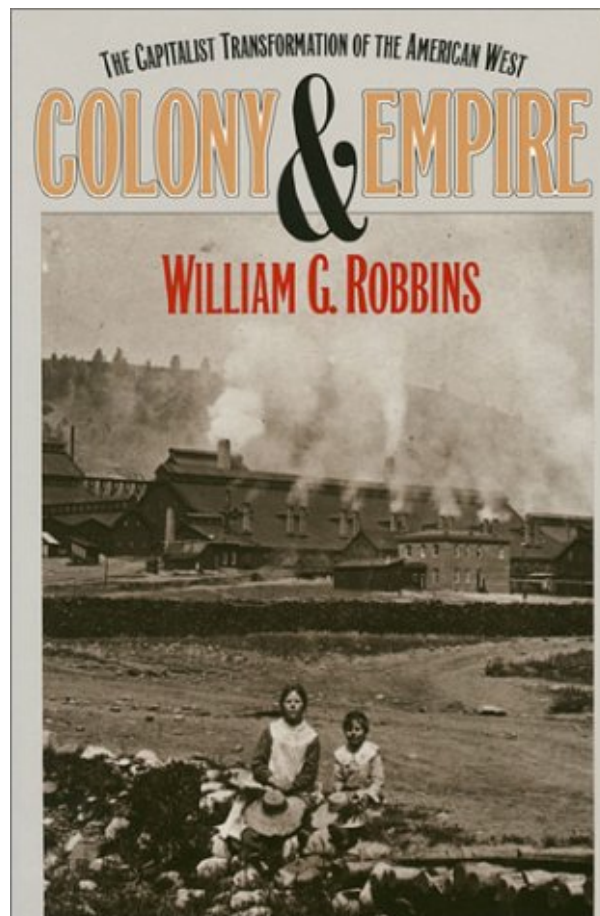
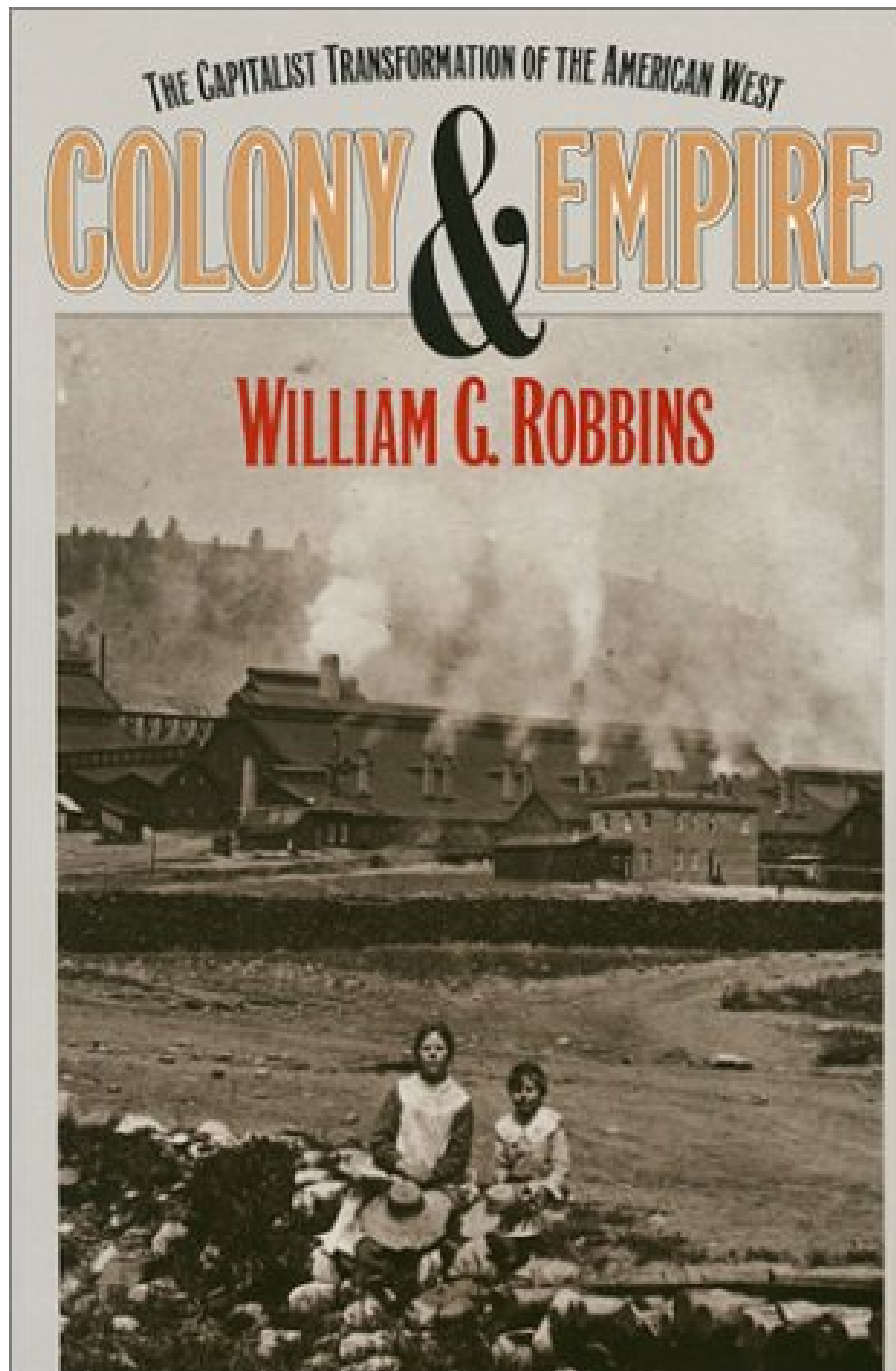


COLONY AND EMPIRE: THE CAPITALIST TRANSFORMATION OF THE AMERICAN WEST BY WILLIAM G. ROBBINS



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From Library Journal

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Dorothy Lilly, Grosse Pointe North H.S. Lib., Grosse Pointe Woods, Mich.

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Review

"A worthwhile book. Has much to say about the West's past and how it has become what it is today." -- Colorado History

From the Back Cover

"A compelling survey of the ways capitalist ideology and institutions transformed the West. Few historians of the American West have written as provocatively and as forcefully as Robbins."--James P. Ronda, author of Astoria and Empire

"For one hundred and fifty years, the pace of historical change in the American West has been rapid and disorienting. This book gives us the map and the compass we need to chart our course through the confusing terrain of the Western past and present. Drawing our attention to the central role of capitalism as a shaper of attitudes and social relations, Robbins offers us a new and valuable vantage point. His knowledge is as wide-ranging as his style is fair and compassionate. This book will be frequently consulted by historians, and-one

hopes-by residents of what is proving to be the nation's most contested region."--Patricia Nelson Limerick,
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Popular writers and historians alike have perpetuated the powerful myth of the rugged-individualist single-handedly transforming the American West. In reality, William Robbins counters, it was the Guggenheims and Goulds, the Harrimans and Hearsts, and the Morgans and Mellons who masterminded what the West was to become. Remove the romance, he shows, and a darker West emerges—a colonial-like region where "industrial statesmen," aided by eastern U.S. and European capital, manipulated investments in pursuit of private gain while controlling wage-earning cowboys and miners.

Robbins argues that understanding the impact of capitalism on the West—from the fur trade era to the present—is essential to understanding power, influence, and change in the region.

Showing how global capitalism had a more profound impact on the modern West than individual initiative, he explores violence and racism along the Texas/Mexican border; colonial-style company towns in Montana and the Northwest; contrasting traditions astride the U.S./Canadian boundary; pace-setting agribusiness and exploitation of labor in California; the growing power of metropolitan centers and dependence of rural areas; and the emergence of a sizable federal influence.

To grasp the essence of the West's dramatic transformation, Robbins contends, you must look to the mainstays of material relations in the region—the perpetually changing character of political and economic culture; the inherent instability of resources; and the larger constellations of capitalist decision making. Consequently, he shows shy Western success and failure, prosperity and misfortune, and expansion and decline were all inseparably linked to the evolution of capitalism at the local, regional, national and global levels.

In the tradition of Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Legacy of Conquest*, Robbins's study challenges some of our most revered images of the West and invigorates the ongoing debates over its history and meaning for our nation.

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5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.
straightforward and educational

By ehart

The history that people are told and retold about the early American West is not always true. Pre-existing and inaccurate ideas of the West are implanted into people's skulls by Hollywood, foggy-minded teachers, and misled scholars. American pride can even shield people from the truth or lead them in a more ideal direction of what they want the history of the West to be instead of what it actually is. William Robbins recognizes this in his book *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* and attempts to pull back the layers of romance and myth surrounding the West. In doing so, he reveals the true forces that shaped and carved the West into what it is today.

Robbins examines how previous authors have portrayed the progress and industrialization of the West. He builds his arguments up with harsh realities that knock down the pretty and gentle stories of other authors. He opens the book by defaming the myth that a few good men and elbow grease built the nation from the ground up. He shows how settlers only played a part in shaping the destiny of the frontier.

Arrell Morgan Gibson is one of the many victimized by Robbins's criticism. Gibson is attacked for his books that, according to Robbins, portray the West as a world of romantic heroes that was built solely on the power of goodness and righteousness. Throughout the book, Robbins makes it clear to the reader just how disgustingly far from reality these interpretations are. Many of his cited sources are referred to in order to criticize them rather than to support his own ideas.

Robbins looks at the history of decreasing manual labor as machines take over. This serves as a vital topic as Robbins discusses industrialization and changes in capitalism. These changes serve as Robbins's main thesis and were often fueled and influenced by foreign investors with interests of their own. One chapter focuses on the yearning for personal wealth and prosperity yet shady examples of this can be found throughout. It is a surprising look at who really had power in the West. This book is a compilation of drawn-out explanations of factors in an equation that equal what the American West is today. Vast amounts of land produce resources. Resources reap wealth and greed. Wealth and greed feeds capitalism. Capitalism supplies industrialization and mobility. Mobility multiplies technological progress and the quality of living. None of these things are magical or precious like many of the stories that are used to explain history today. Pointing this out takes up most of the pages in Robbins's book.

Robbins successfully accomplishes what he set out to do with this book. Unfortunately, Robbins's writing style rubs off as bossy and angry. This is because every chapter is just a new angle to disprove what others have written. His battle, however, is legitimate and noble. There is simply no way to criticize all of the kid-friendly works of history without looking like a jackass. The book serves as an educationally valuable resource for those wanting to learn more about the West. All in all, however, the book would provide little entertainment for readers that lack a pre-existing interest in the subject.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Transformation, yes - capitalism, no

By history rebel

William G. Robbins, in "*Colony & Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West*" dispels the myths of exceptionalism in the West. His approach is to demonstrate that the Turnerian theory of the American frontier is outdated and inaccurate. Robbins is extremely successful in providing evidence that the traditional history of the West is flawed and based in legend.

Robbins demonstrates that the West was strongly influenced by wage labor and capitalist ideals and motives. He does, however, attribute many other changes in the region to capitalistic causes. Even though he demonstrates that previous historians were wrong in their historiography, he fails to support the claim that

capitalism was the primary catalyst in this transformation of the West.

The book was originally written as a series of independent essays. This shows and detracts greatly from the flow of the narrative. Robbins is exceedingly redundant, bogging down the reader.

Overall, Colony & Empire has some very good research behind it and some very good history throughout. An overly aggressive label of capitalism as the motive force and extreme redundancy, however, makes the reader work very hard in order to find the good stuff. This book could easily be re-edited and get 4+ stars.

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