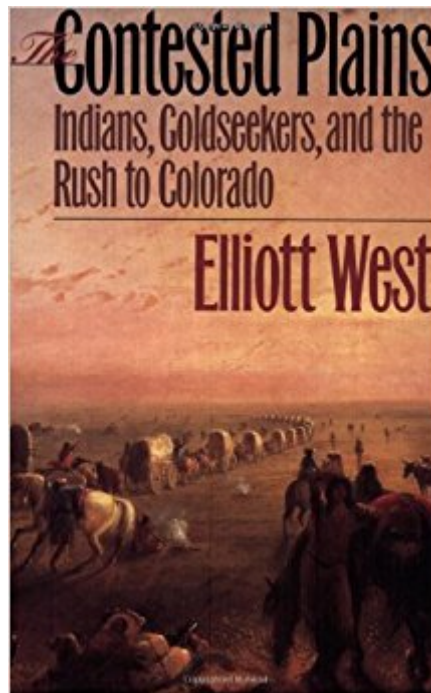




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# The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, And The Rush To Colorado



## Synopsis

Deftly retracing a pivotal chapter in one of America's most dramatic stories, Elliott West chronicles the struggles, triumphs, and defeats of both Indians and whites as they pursued their clashing dreams of greatness in the heart of the continent. The Contested Plains recounts the rise of the Native American horse culture, white Americans' discovery and pursuit of gold in the Rocky Mountains, and the wrenching changes and bitter conflicts that ensued. After centuries of many peoples fashioning many cultures on the plains, the Cheyennes and other tribes found in the horse the power to create a heroic way of life that dominated one of the world's great grasslands. Then the discovery of gold challenged that way of life and led finally to the infamous massacre at Sand Creek and the Indian Wars of the late 1860s. Illuminating both the ancient and more recent history of the plains and eastern Rocky Mountains, West weaves together a brilliant tapestry interlaced with environmental, social, and military history. He treats the "frontier" not as a morally loaded term—neither in the traditional celebratory sense or the more recent critical sense—but as a powerfully unsettling process that shattered an old world. He shows how Indians, goldseekers, haulers, merchants, ranchers, and farmers all contributed to and in turn were consumed by this process, even as the plains themselves were utterly transformed by the clash of cultures and competing visions. Exciting and enormously engaging, The Contested Plains is the first book to examine the Colorado gold rush as the key event in the modern transformation of the central great plains. It also exemplifies a kind of history that respects more fully our rich and ambiguous past—a past in which there are many actors but no simple lessons.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"In a way, Elliot West tells a familiar tale: that of Indians, goldseekers, and the ensuing conflict. But in this case, West is the first to assess the cataclysmic changes that the Colorado gold rush brought to the Great Plains. In addition, rather than casting the story in the usual terms of heartless aggressors and hapless victims, West supplies a large and insightful interpretation that at once softens and increases our understanding of the Anglo disruption of Plains Indian cultures. To understand where western history is now, and is likely to go in the future, one must read this book."—Glenda Riley, *American Historical Review* "An interpretive triumph, full of fresh insights into well-worn topics. For all-round excellence in the full sweep of the western story, West occupies the pinnacle. A truly fine book."—Robert M. Utley, author of *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* "Many books have been written about the Colorado gold rush. This one is different. The virtue of the book, besides its lucid writing, splendid design, extensive research, and the meaning it gives to the frontier concept that has been lambasted for thirty years or more, is the fact that it never scolds or trashes any culture. West's story is a story of cultural revisions and thus the imaginations and aspirations of many people."—William H. Goetzmann, *Journal of American History* "In Elliott West's company, the exploration of history becomes an adventure, a journey with surprises and unexpected insights sufficient to shake the most comfortable and settled of assumptions."—Patricia Nelson Limerick, author of *Legacy of Conquest* "A haunting history and a wonderful piece of storytelling. Rarely have historical figures been so deeply human, so funny and tragic, as they are in this stunning, clear-eyed and yet deeply empathetic book."—Richard White, author of *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*

Winner of the Francis Parkman Prize, the Pen Center West Award, the Ray Allen Billington Prize, the Caughey Western History Prize, the Western Writers of America Spur Award, and the Caroline Bancroft Prize "An interpretive triumph, full of fresh insights into well-worn topics. For all-round excellence in the full sweep of the western story, West occupies the pinnacle. A truly fine book."—Robert M. Utley, author of *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* "In Elliott West's company, the exploration of history becomes an adventure, a journey with surprises and unexpected insights sufficient to shake the most comfortable and settled of assumptions."—Patricia Nelson Limerick, author of *Legacy of Conquest* "A haunting history and a

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Arrived as advertised. Great transaction

Fun to read and yet amazingly insightful. Sheds light on the entire history of the Great Plains and western expansion.

I greatly enjoyed this history of western Kansas, eastern Colorado, southern Nebraska and adjacent areas. The author does a fine job of integrating technological, economic, and environmental effects upon the American Indians that inhabited those areas. The effect of the Colorado Gold Rush upon those Indians is a principal focus of the book. The Euro-American tribe meets the Great Plains Indian tribes. The effect, as we all know very well, was not pretty. The invasion of North America was truly a catastrophe for the American Indians as is well documented in countless other books. What makes this book extremely interesting to me--in addition to being set in a part of the country, central/western Kansas, that I was born and raised in--is how it took a more sophisticated and less sentimental look at white and Indian relationships. Until the plains Indians got their hands on the horses of the Europeans, they lived a pretty ecologically limited life. They could not fully take advantage of the wealth of the grassland prairies--and the buffalo that inhabited it. They needed the horse to more ably hunt the buffalo. Prior to that, they were riparian gardeners and hunters afoot on the surrounding prairie. Once they had the horse, they could greatly expand their populations and territories. Caloric consumption surely sky rocketed. The Plains Indian horse based buffalo hunting culture was an historical exception. It only lasted for around 100 years before it was brought to a sudden end by the US Army, the white ranchers and farmers, and the general Euro-American settling of the plains. The horse was also a mixed blessing. Like the white man's firearms.... Both increased the level of violence and warfare on the plains. The horse gave tribes better mobility and something of great value to steal from other competing tribes. The warfare stakes became higher in terms of horses, land, and access to buffalo. The tribes that engaged in this way of life had ecological limits to their lifestyle. They had to maintain large horse herds to support their hunting lifestyle. That was not a problem during the good weather. But in the winter time, the only protection for the tribes and their horses on the plains were the wooded creeks and rivers. The large horse herds and their need for feed in the wintertime resulted in the degradation of the riparian woods.

This was especially a difficult problem for the more northerly tribes with their intense winters. Eventually, even without the Euro-American invasion, the plains tribes would have faced environmental crises and limits to their growth and expansion. It was a zero sum game in terms of resources--or rather more accurately, a negative sum game in the long run with the continuing degradation of the wooded riparian areas on the plains. Without the whites invading, Indian plains warfare amongst the tribes would probably have gotten more bloody and intense resulting in the successful tribes monopolizing the resources of the plains. Then again, without the horse, the introduction of firearms and consumer goods, and pressures from Eastern Indians forced west by the Euro-American invasion, things probably would have remained fairly static for the plains tribes. However, since their resources would be a lot fewer without access to the horse, they would be far fewer in number and probably substantially poorer in a material sense. The author deals at some length about the Indians dependency on European goods. It is somewhat comforting to know that consumerism is a universal human condition, not just a 20th and 21st century Western mindset. Humans desire "things" or "goods". Sometimes those goods nurture and promote human life--sometimes they simply degrade people and cultures. I was rather charmed by the fierce Kiowa chief's, Satanta, love of his Euro-American manufactured French horn and small table used for his household. Satanta was a fierce hater of the whites--but he loved those goods. Not an uncommon predicament for the American Indian. In the long run, it seems that all cultures use military force to take and hold territory. The tribes bloodily fought each other over the resources of the plains prior to the coming of the whites. And they certainly bloodily fought their great enemy, the whites, when they made their entrance on the plains. Not much room for pacifists in the story of human nations and countries--admirable as the pacifists' spirituality, religion, and philosophy may be. Unfortunately, Americans may live to see the day when they, too, will be fighting to defend their resources from hungrier--and possibly stronger--other tribes and nations. At one time the conqueror, the next moment the defeated. The endless--or at least seemingly so--cycle of history.

The Contested Plains is a good source book of the Indian history, the gold seekers and struggle for crossing uncharted lands. Good history resource.

excellent read and review of the "facts" that shaped the situation confronting the New Frontier...follow the resources!! recommend.

Good book!

for history lovers

This iOS a great book!

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