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The Lions of the West

Robert Morgan
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There is properly no history, only biography. Admired for his bestsellers, a novel*, Gap Creek,* and a biography of Daniel Boone, Robert Morgan subscribes to Ralph Waldo Emerson's epigraph as he chronicles the lives of Americans who influenced the development of the Western frontier in *The Lions of the West.*

Using detailed historical notes, illustrations, portraits, maps, a brief chronology, and appendixes, Morgan analyzes his subjects' intentions and actions as he traces the settlers' hunger for land and America's creed of Manifest Destiny. His biographies include Thomas Jefferson, architect of The Declaration of Independence, who plans the Lewis and Clark expedition for decades and, who, with the Louisiana Purchase, effects the largest real estate transfer in history; Andrew Jackson, who with ruthless brilliance in battle and treaty secures lands from Native Americans; John "Johnny Appleseed" Chapman, who plants apple seeds and good will between whites and Indians in the ever-westward zones; and David Crockett, whose humorous stories became legendary—owing in part to his death while defending the Alamo—and who inspires Texans under Sam Houston's leadership to secure independence in the Mexican-American War. Houston and Winfield Scott, General-in-Chief of that war, are likewise showcased.

Morgan's fine book also includes James K. Polk, as he acquires California and New Mexico and, in a treaty with England, gains the Oregon Territory; Kit Carson, the mountain man and Indian agent whose service plays an important part in securing California for the US; and Nicholas Trist, who negotiates the treaty which ends the war with Mexico. Morgan concludes with a short epilogue describing John Quincy Adams' resistance to the war and US expansion into Texas and the Southwest: "I want the country for our western pioneers," he said. Adams' development of a federal transportation system links roads and canals, even while he argues that war is not justified by land gain.

By delineating the lives of ten exceptional men, exploring their family backgrounds, education, and interwoven allegiances as well as vendettas, Morgan gives a truthful and comprehensive view of our westward progression. At times their biographies overlap, creating a more complex picture of significant events and individual accomplishments. The author's analysis reflects the American dream while delivering an unflinching report of our nation's imperialist attitudes and effects. Historians and general readers alike will appreciate the accuracy of this significant literary anthology.

Morgan, a professor at Cornell University since 1971, was inducted into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame. His awards include Guggenheim and Rockefeller fellowships and an Academy of Arts and Letters Award for Literature.

MARY POPHAM (August 30, 2011)

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