



The Contested Plains: Indians, Goldseekers, and the Rush to Colorado

Elliott West

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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 either 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.

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