



Montana: An Uncommon Land

K. Ross Toole

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Perhaps once in a generation it is possible for a historian to reinterpret the long sweep of an area and a period in our history. K. Ross Toole has chosen Montana for this purpose, and the brilliant success of his achievement must be apparent to all who read these pages.

He has consciously avoided a systematic presentation of the history of this "uncommon land," Instead, he has chosen to put the great and many of the smaller but significant episodes of a century and a half into new perspective. The record, in its colorful and romantic aspects, stretches from the days of Lewis and Clark; and in its more recent aspects, from the subjugation of the Indian to the predominance of big mining and timber enterprises. The resulting portrait is sharply drawn by a man who knows not only how to interpret the remote and recent past but how to write with great effect.

Montana is best remembered by most Americans as the state in which the Indian played his last dramatic role with the annihilation of General George Armstrong Custer. But it was also the area in which the fur trade had its roots; where the sheepherders and the cattlemen vied with each other for the right to graze the land; where the "honyockers" tried-and often failed to master the land and the seasons; where copper interests have played a powerful role in politics and in the lives of the people; and where, only recently, the oil industry has followed the boom-and-bust cycle so well known in the state.

This story of Montana points up particularly the position which is and has been occupied by the state in relation to the nation as a whole.

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