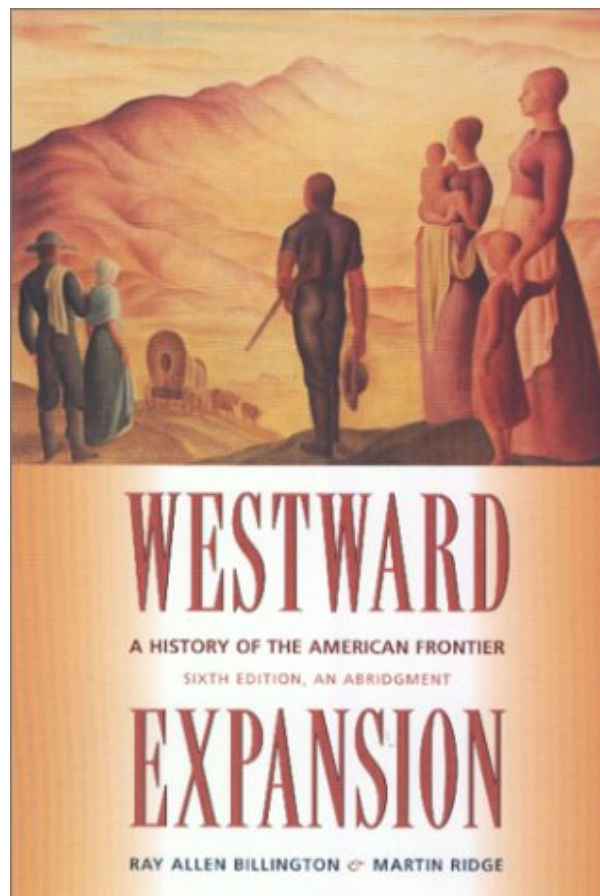
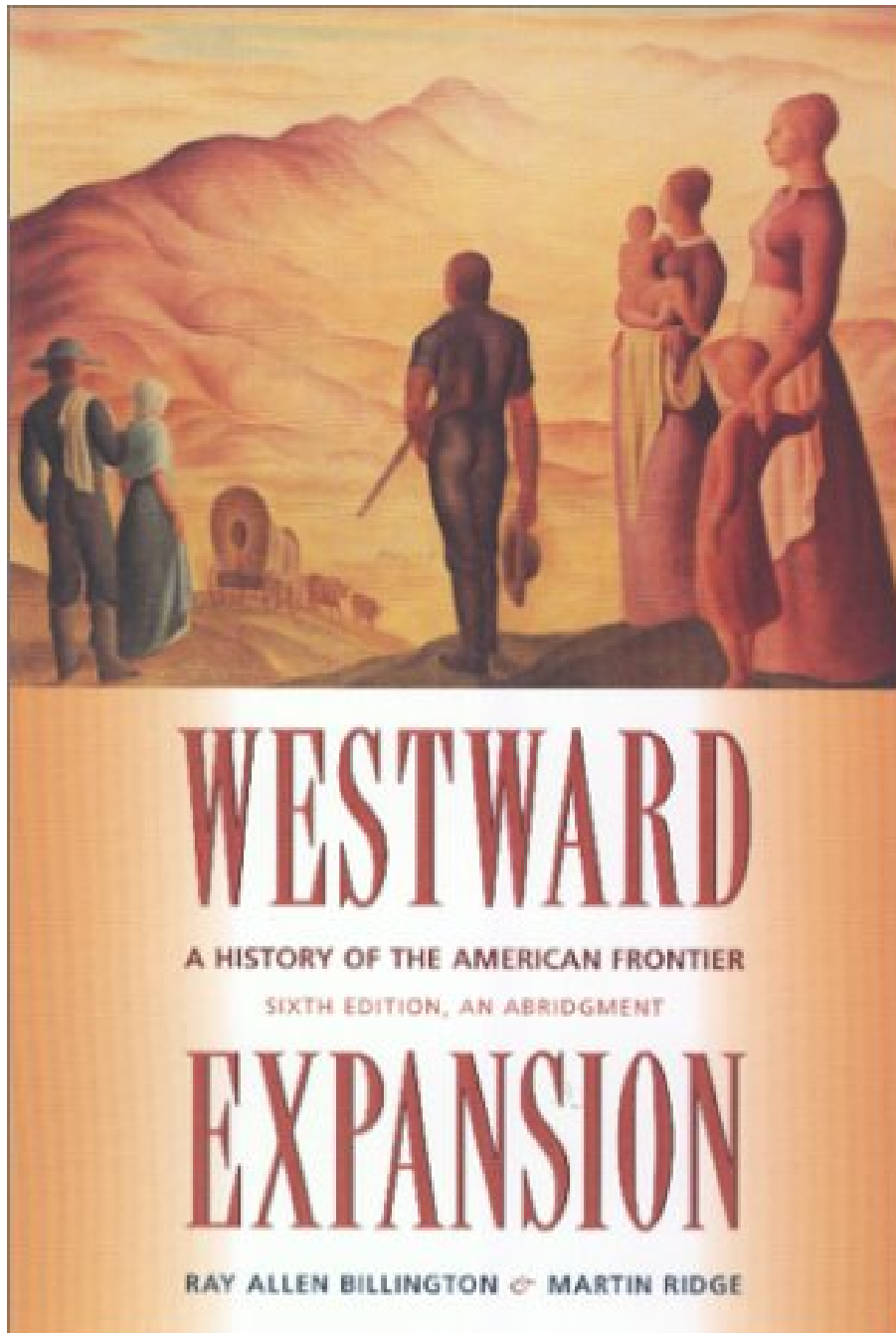


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THE AMERICAN FRONTIER BY RAY ALLEN
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From the Inside Flap

Sets out the remarkable story of the American frontier, which became, almost from the beginning, an archetypal narrative of the new American nation's successful expansion.

About the Author

Ray Allen Billington (1903-81) trained several generations of western historians and published numerous books on American frontier history, including *America's Frontier Heritage* (UNM Press).

Martin Ridge is a senior research associate in the Henry E. Huntington Library. He has taught at San Diego State University, Indiana University, and the California Institute of Technology. He is the former editor of the *Journal of American History* and the past president of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association and Western History Association. He is the author of numerous scholarly and review articles dealing with the American West. He is the coeditor of *Histories of the American Frontier*.

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When it appeared in 1949, the first edition of Ray Allen Billington's *Westward Expansion* set a new standard for scholarship in western American history, and the book's reputation among historians, scholars, and students grew through four subsequent editions. This abridgment and revision of Billington and Martin Ridge's fifth edition, with a new introduction and additional scholarship by Ridge, as well as an updated bibliography, focuses on the Trans-Mississippi frontier.

Although the text sets out the remarkable story of the American frontier, which became, almost from the beginning, an archetypal narrative of the new American nation's successful expansion, the authors do not forget the social, environmental, and human cost of national expansion. While most Americans take pride in the nation's frontier heritage and its associated myths, they also share that history with others--especially with people of color--in whose collective memories the story of the American west is rendered both dark and painful. *Westward Expansion* encourages an understanding of American "westering" that is mindful of the racism and excessive nationalism that frequently marred the Western frontier experience. At the same time, the authors understand a sense of optimism, a profound faith in individuals' own abilities, the willingness to innovate, and an abiding trust in democracy to be the transcendent values of the frontier experience, traits that continue to influence the character of America's people long after the close of the western frontier.

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A Comprehensive Overview of the Development of the American West

By Roger D. Launius

When this book's first edition appeared in 1949 it was warmly received as an outstanding explication of western history using as its organizing principle Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis." Since that time it has gone through six editions, the last two with Martin Ridge as a co-author, an especially important development since Ray Allen Billington died in 1981. I first encountered "Westward Expansion" as an undergraduate in the mid 1970s--by then the book was in its fourth edition--and recognized it as a comprehensive overview of the subject.

It is still a massively significant book, mostly because of its detailed sweep of the history of the westward movement that it relates. It begins with an explanation of the "Frontier Thesis" first crafted by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, with its emphasis on American exceptionalism and subjugation of the North American continent. Reflective of an earlier perspective on the history of the West, the first editions of "Westward Expansion" viewed the movement of Euro-Americans westward as a positive development. This perspective is still present in the 6th edition, but there is much more questioning of the conquest of place and peoples, exploitation without concern, environmental wastefulness, political corruption, Euro-American misbehavior, and other inefficiencies. This edition concentrates on the trans-Mississippi West, rather than earlier periods in American history. It also treats the West as more a place than a process, something Billington routinely did. This is probably the result of the powerful influence of the "new western history" in the last quarter century and the work of Martin Ridge in revising Billington's work.

I recommend this edition of "Westward Expansion" as a detailed exploration of its subject. It is not perfect, but it is highly useful and remains an important reference work on my bookshelf.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

good read

By tired teacher

Don't be put off because this book is used as a college textbook. It is also just a good read for American history buffs. This isn't the usual history of presidents and wars. It's about how the American people moved west across the continent and settled the country. No matter what state and region you live in, you will probably learn more about how your area was settled. Dr. Paul Hutton, of PBS and the History Channel, was a student of co-author Martin Ridge at the University of Indiana and uses this book in one of his excellent courses at the University of New Mexico. Even though the course in which Dr. Hutton uses this book ends at 1860, I had to finish reading the book on my own. It's that good.

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As a genealogist tracing multiple lines in migration across the continent, I am finding this book invaluable in understanding not only the routes they took, but the means of travel, the places they stopped at (and why), and clues to the reasons they migrated- and at times, how some of them came to converge in the same place.

The maps helped me understand how five brothers migrating from New England ultimately ended up in five different places as trails diverged and conditions changed. This is now an essential in my research library.

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