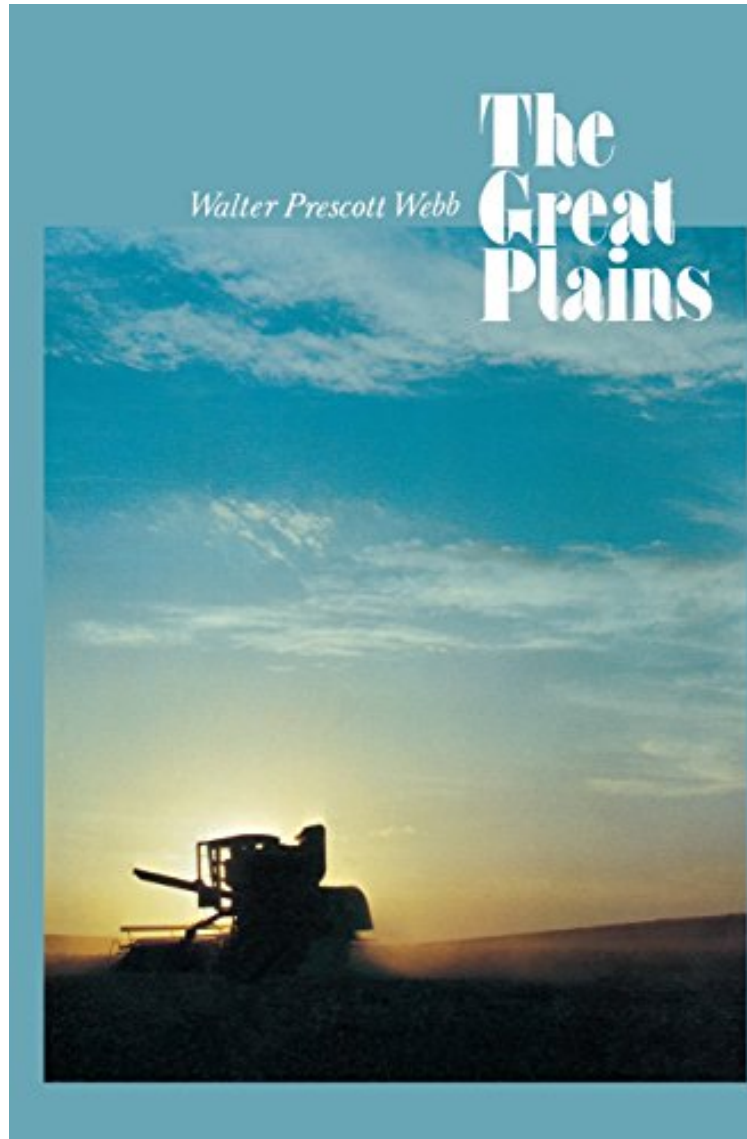


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## The Great Plains

*Walter Prescott Webb*

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**Walter Prescott Webb : The Great Plains** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Great Plains:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A Classic Work on an Important RegionBy Eric MayforthWhen I was in my teens and early twenties living within an hour or so of Fort Worth, I would sometimes hear those who had auto trips planned to New Mexico, Colorado, and points west say that they dreaded the drive across the plains of West Texas. I never identified with those who held that opinion, though--I have always enjoyed the sun, big sky, wind, and

seemingly endless vistas and have found the Great Plains scenic in their own threadbare way. In the eighty years since Walter Prescott Webb wrote "The Great Plains," the book has been considered maybe the definitive guide to the geography and history of the region. Webb's central thesis is that at the ninety-eighth meridian West longitude (a line, incidentally, that I crossed every day during the years of college that I commuted), the topography and climate changed so markedly that the institutions, traditions, and customs of Anglo-American life had to be reworked to make settlement of the Great Plains possible. Webb presents the history of the Great Plains in the centuries leading up to his time in the early 1930s. The Native American, Spanish, and Texan explorations and conflicts that took place before the region became part of the United States are recalled. The author discusses how the region blocked Southern expansion and slavery in the mid-nineteenth century and how it was an obstacle to the pioneers who were headed to Oregon. Also remembered are the cowboys and their famed post-Civil War cattle drives, and Webb looks at some of the region's literature and cowboy poetry, which in the nineteenth century was not subsidized by the federal government (grin). The author describes the flora and fauna of the region, including the horse and buffalo. Webb recalls how law, agriculture, and homestead laws had to be refashioned to succeed on the Great Plains, and talks about inventions such as sign language, the six-shooter, barbed wire, and windmills that those who lived in the region used to make life there possible. Then as now, water and water rights were of vital importance on the Great Plains. Webb discusses agriculture and irrigation, and looks at laws and customs that were eventually implemented to govern the use of water. The book is outdated in this section, as it was written before the Ogallala Aquifer was in wide use to irrigate the region. "The Great Plains" is still considered a classic work going on a century after Webb wrote it, and anyone who would learn more about this overlooked but fascinating part of our country would definitely find it rewarding. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Keys By Stuart McConnell Splendid. The horse, the Colt revolver, the windmill and barbed wire..the keys that unlocked the Great Plains. Very readable 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Where the Treeline Ends By BrokenArrow I have been reading up on Texas, the push west (Manifest Destiny), the Comanches, the "Dust Bowl" of the 30s, etc. and this book provides excellent background on the Great Plains. It is a well written history and I recommend it to anyone interested in the subject.

This classic description of the interaction between the vast central plains of America and the people who lived there has, since its first publication in 1931, been one of the most influential, widely known, and controversial works in western history. Arguing that "the Great Plains environment. . .constitutes a geographic unity whose influences have been so powerful as to put a characteristic mark upon everything that survives within its borders," Webb singles out the revolver, barbed wire, and the windmill as evidence of the new phase of civilization required for settlement of that arid, treeless region. Webb draws on history, anthropology, geography, demographics, climatology, and economics to substantiate his thesis that the 98th meridian constituted an institutional fault comparable to a geological fault at which "practically every institution that was carried across it was either broken and remade or else greatly altered."

"One of the most original, suggestive, and thoughtful contributions to the science of history in recent years." Henry Steele Commager