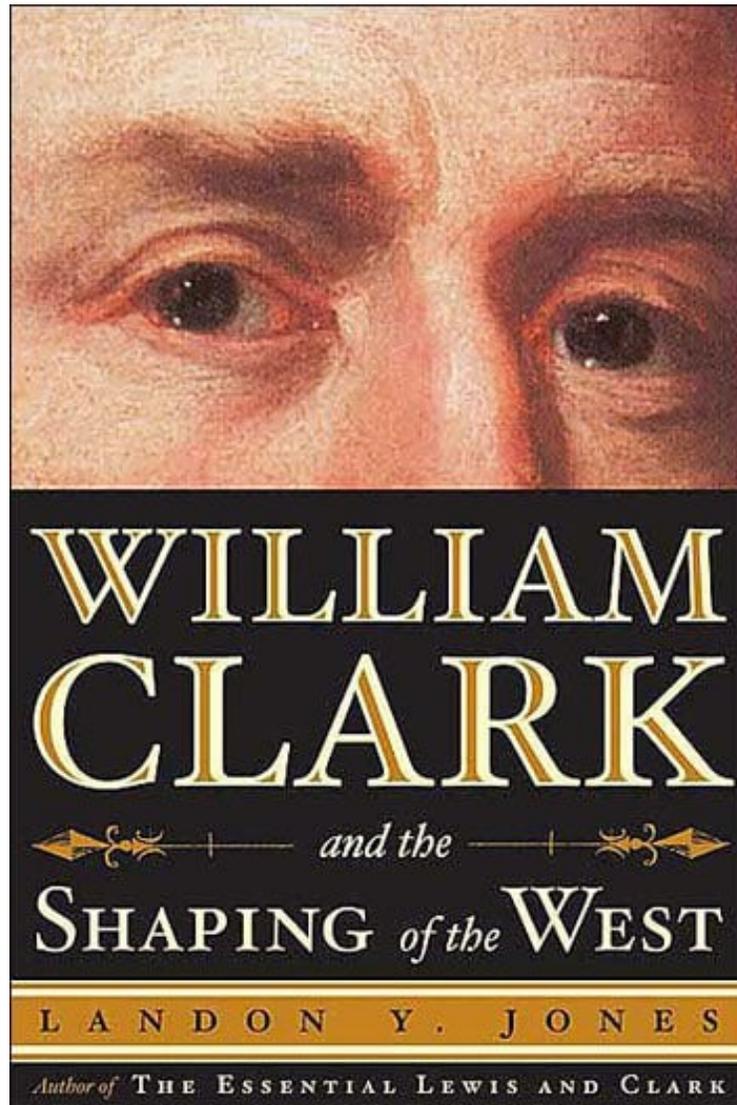


William Clark and the Shaping of the West

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Jaime Morales (Clickability client services)

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In a deeply researched, splendidly written biography (a part of which appeared in *Smithsonian*), *William Clark and the Shaping of the West*, Landon Y. Jones gives an impressive—if not always noble—American his due. In filling the gaps in our knowledge of Clark, who, along with Meriwether Lewis, led Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery expedition (1804-1806), Jones also revivifies the complex and compelling period when the West didn't reach very far beyond the ramshackle settlement of St. Louis. In 334 pages, he sharpens the

soft focus that tends to blur and compress our national historical view of the long struggle between European settlers and Native American tribes. In setting the stage for his close examination of William Clark's busy life—he outlived Lewis (who committed suicide in 1809) by 29 years and died at 68 in 1838—Jones vividly limns the tooth-and-claw savagery of the struggle for territory on both sides.

Much has been written about the expedition of the Corps of Discovery—Jones is the author of *The Essential Lewis and Clark* (the pair's edited diaries)—but after the fabled band returned, Clark began a long career as a military leader, chronicler, diplomat, territorial administrator and enforcer of the draconian Indian policies that largely contributed to, as the title states, the shaping of the West.

Jones is no hero worshiper, and he shows us Clark by turns enlightened, conniving and cruel. In the free-form society beyond the Appalachians, where opportunity favored boldness, and ethical behavior was less than consistently applied, Clark did not hesitate to pursue his own aggrandizement. In today's world, he would be the kind of canny, compromised rascal who might end up in jail, or in politics.

His older brother George felt that the only way to convince Native tribes not to side with the British was to "excel them in barbarity," and this harsh attitude influenced William. He once had four captured Indians tomahawked to death in front of a besieged fort, and one eyewitness claimed Clark had personally taken part in the killings.

But later, when the Indians were rarely an equal force in battle and Clark served as Jefferson's superintendent of Indian affairs, his approach became more nuanced, taking into account political as well as military realities. Working as a direct representative of the federal government, Clark could be fair and helpful to tribes that went along with his edicts but ferocious to those that resisted. Jones points out that Clark honestly felt his tactics of removing Indians from land coveted by settlers was the only way to save them; the author quotes a number of contemporaries attesting to the man's humaneness.

Yet Clark was a willing executor of a Jeffersonian policy of economic servitude that created in Indians a hunger for consumer goods, then encouraged them to cede land to pay their debts. In a time when many states still recognized slaves as legitimate property, this may not have seemed beyond the pale, but it is hardly enlightened public policy, and its short- and long-term effects were devastating. In this essential biography, Jones looks on his subject's behavior with a humaneness of his own: "The cruelties of Clark's time and the strengths of his character did not contradict one another; they lived within him. He was a man whose complexity encompassed both."

Landon Y. Jones
Hill and Wang