

Powell, John Wesley. *The Exploration of the Colorado River*, New York, Anchor Books : Garden City, 1961, Foreword, 171 pages

Power, John Wesley. *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*, ed. by Wallace Stegner, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1962.

Gloria Griffen Cline

Volume 11, Number 22, 1967

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/020707ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/020707ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département de géographie de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0007-9766 (print)

1708-8968 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Cline, G. G. (1967). Review of [Powell, John Wesley. *The Exploration of the Colorado River*, New York, Anchor Books : Garden City, 1961, Foreword, 171 pages / Power, John Wesley. *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States*, ed. by Wallace Stegner, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1962.] *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 11(22), 147–149.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/020707ar>

ment, de *bogbacks*, d'ennoyage... à vrai dire, l'image est si explicite et la collection si complète que la connaissance de notre Nord est maintenant à la portée de tout apprenti-géographe de langue française. Puisse le *Nord canadien* être bientôt édité et diffusé hors des pays d'expression française, et M. L.-E. Hamelin nous offrir, en d'autres séries, quelques dizaines des plus remarquables documents de sa *photothèque*.

Pierre CAZALIS

L'OUEST AMÉRICAIN

POWELL, John Wesley. **The Exploration of the Colorado River**, New York, Anchor Books : Garden City, 1961, Foreword, 171 pages, \$1.25.

POWELL, John Wesley. **Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States**, ed. by Wallace Stegner, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1962.

One of the most significant figures in the history of the American West was John Wesley Powell for as Wallace Stegner points out he was a « multi-purpose American. » Powell is unique for he not only had a love for adventure, but was able to correlate his field findings with theoretical knowledge which resulted in his gaining a comprehensive view of the American West which was certainly unequaled in the nineteenth century.

John Wesley Powell developed his interest in natural history while teaching school in Illinois and on his many specimen collecting trips in the adjacent region. However, the Civil War interrupted his studies, and he played an active role in that conflict rising from private to brevet lieutenant colonel in the course of which he lost his right arm at the battle of Shiloh. At the close of the war he accepted a professorship of geology at Illinois Wesleyan University, and in the following year he took a similar post at Illinois State Normal University.

But it was not in the lecture hall but in the field that Powell gained his early reputation. In 1867 he led his first expedition under the sponsorship of the Illinois State Natural History Society to the Rocky Mountains, and in 1868 he led a second expedition to the Rockies which explored west of the Continental Divide and wintered on the White River in western Colorado. These two expeditions set the stage for Powell's navigation of the Colorado in 1869 which brought him lasting fame.

In 1869 Powell and a party of ten men in four boats navigated the Green and Colorado rivers, this being the first such attempt by Caucasian or Indian on record. The expedition followed the Green River (the main channel of the Colorado River and not a tributary) from Green River, Wyoming, to the mouth of the Colorado and even the Grand Canyon itself had been known since the days of Coronado, Alarcón, and Cárdenas in the sixteenth century, and Spanish priests and tracers of New Spain had followed in their wake in the succeeding period, virtually no understanding of this plateau-canyon country existed until Powell traversed it in 1869. All previous expeditions, with the exception of Alarcón in the Gulf of California, were made by land and the parties were generally forced to avoid the canyon country, thus knowledge of the Colorado and the lower reaches of its tributaries were limited.

The real significance of Powell's 1869 navigation of the Colorado is that it gained for him national recognition which readily accorded him Congressional support for further exploration of the Rockies in 1870, and in 1871-72 it visited the canyons again. Doubleday's Anchor Books in conjunction with the American Museum of Natural History present in paperback form for a very reasonable price Powell's famous journal of his navigation of the Colorado. *The Exploration of the Colorado River* is composed primarily of the diary of the 1869 trip, but observations and place names from the second expedition are included in the guise of original journal entries and disagreements with his men and certain events are either omitted, condensed, or, in some cases, exaggerated. Nevertheless, Powell's *Exploration* is fascinating and enlightening reading not only for the student, but for the general reader. The excitement of the voyage, the uncertainty and apprehensiveness regarding the course of the rampaging Colorado, and the vivid descriptions of the topography of the country are rewarding. The naming of rivers and other natural phenomena

along the course, the discussion of Indian life and folklore of the area and the inclusion of information about specific Mormons and Mormon activities in the region make this little volume of interest to the social scientist, while the physical scientist, especially the geologist, will find in it the first descriptions of the geological processes of the Colorado Plateau.

To most Westerners, Powell is best known as the leader of the first party to navigate the Colorado River, but to the initiated in the West, East, North, and South, Powell is remembered as one of the founders of the United States Geological Survey and its second director as well as the Director of the Bureau of Ethnology within the Smithsonian Institution. Or perhaps his name is first recalled as the author of the Report on Arid Regions, one of the most controversial and important books to be published on the American West.

In 1962 Harvard University Press published Powell's *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* in order for this very worthwhile volume to reach a wider audience. It was originally published in 1878 for the use of Congress and went into a second edition the following year for Congressional as well as Department of Interior utilization. The basis for the volume under review is the March 1879 edition which differs from the first only in a minimum number of factual and typographical changes.

Powell's *Report* is not a mere description of the arid lands of the American West, but a blueprint for a reform movement in this region. Powell, then Director of the United States Geographical Survey of the Rocky Mountain Region, jeopardized his own career and survival in Washington to cry out for a long-range national policy which if implemented would curtail the business interests of many influential groups. During the course of the Congressional debates of 1879, the Report was called dangerously revolutionary and Powell himself was denounced as un-American.

Nevertheless, Powell's *Report* revealed that he was one of the really far-sighted men of the nineteenth century who perceived the danger of applying laws applicable to the humid areas to those with an arid nature. He also noted that a large portion of the United States, more than four-tenths of the country excluding Alaska, could be considered arid and that a comprehensive policy of modified land and water laws for this region must be developed before additional settlement would make reform impossible. Powell noted the pattern of land settlement in the Old Northwest Territory and pointed out that although this grid system was effective in the Midwest, it was and would be unsuited in the West where irrigation was necessary and cattle and sheep ranchers needed vast tracts of land and access to water. He, therefore, included in his Report model bills which provided for cooperative irrigation which he saw as beyond the abilities of the western farmer, and he called for clusters of small farms to which water rights would be definitely attached.

Surprisingly enough, many of Powell's opponents were not only the large business interests who saw in Powell's plan a curtailment of their exploitation of the West, but many of those who would and did benefit from his proposals. Many Westerners took exception to his application of the word «arid» to their area, a reaction which still may be aroused in the heart of a member of a western Chamber of Commerce. Even today, almost a century after Powell's *Report*, Western politics seem to reflect a resentment to the «encroachment» of the Federal Government even in the beneficial realm of reclamation.

Powell's *Report* includes a tremendous amount of information about the American West and more particularly about the Great Salt Lake region. One is amazed at his broad grasp of geographical problems and his ability to speak knowledgeably about watersheds, evaporation rates, water tables, soil composition, numbers of acres of land under cultivation, etc., in specific areas. Therefore, Powell's work is not only significant as a reform movement document, but as a storehouse of pertinent factual data.

The Harvard University Press edition of Powell's *Report* is enhanced by the superb introduction by Wallace Stegner. Professor Stegner of Stanford University is thoroughly familiar with Powell's works as well as the locale, having specialized in the Utah region. His nineteen pages of introductory remarks indicate a comprehensive understanding of nineteenth century land settlement problems and their history. His fine footnotes, chronology of Powell's life, honest treatment of the Powell text, and good index all add to this fine volume. Harvard Univer-

sity Press should be congratulated for producing a handsome volume which includes two valuable pocket maps : Powell's maps of the United States, one illustrating grants of land and the other representing the extent of irrigable, timber, and pasture lands.

Powell's *Exploration of the Colorado River* and his *Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States* are immensely important items which may be categorized as classics of Western Americana. As editor Stegner points out « one wishes it were possible to reprint not a single document, but a career » for Powell « was present and fighting all through the critical period when settlers' mistakes were being overtaken by consequences and, finally, by modified wisdom. » Nevertheless, the publication of these two single Powell documents will prove of great interest and value to the North American scholar.

Gloria Griffen CLINE,
Reno, Nevada and Dublin, Ireland.

L'AMÉRIQUE LATINE

DE CASTRO, Josué. *Una zona explosiva en America Latina : el Nordeste brasileño.* Buenos Aires, Salar, 1965, 240 pages.

FURTADO, Celso. *Le Brésil à l'heure du choix.* Paris, Plon, 1964, 158 pages.

Voilà au moins 6 ans que le Nord-Est brésilien retient l'attention de tout l'hémisphère occidental. Depuis que les journalistes, émus par le caractère insolite du problème, ont entrepris d'accorder une certaine publicité aux revendications des ligues paysannes animées par un avocat brésilien, Francisco Julião, le monde, inquiet, attend le remous que créera la révolution violente des quelque 25 millions d'habitants de cette région qui recouvre une superficie de 1,600,000 km². L'âpreté du milieu physique et la dégradation des conditions socio-économiques héritées d'une tradition outrancièrement conservatrice évoluant dans un cadre étroit sont à l'origine du sous-développement de ce secteur.

Aujourd'hui, l'idéaliste Julião a été privé de son droit de citoyenneté et, même dans le *Nordeste*, on l'a rapidement oublié, car son programme d'action n'avait pas su dépasser l'étape de la revendication et on avait espéré en vain que quelque chose de précis et de cohérent vienne le coiffer. À la suite de la difficile période de transition qui a suivi la révolution de 1964, la S. U. D. E. M. E. (*Superintendencia de Desenvolvimento del Nordeste*), antérieurement créée pour tenter de solutionner les problèmes du sous-développement de cette région, a repris du poil de la bête après avoir été laissée en veilleuse durant quelques années. Servant tour à tour de catalyseur, de planificateur, d'exécuteur, de stimulateur et d'intermédiaire, elle a contribué à infuser au secteur un certain dynamisme qui s'est concrétisé à divers niveaux par de meilleures routes, l'extension du réseau de distribution d'électricité, des barrages et des centrales, des écoles de formation technique, l'introduction de nouvelles variétés sélectionnées de coton, la culture des arbres fruitiers et du coprah et même l'élevage du porc.

Malgré ce nouveau départ encourageant, mais nullement à la mesure du sous-continent qu'est le nord-est brésilien, les problèmes restent à peine touchés. Le mérite du livre de Josué de Castro est de les reprendre, entiers et globaux, de nous les reposer dans toute leur ampleur, presque de nous les révéler à nouveau avec l'énorme fouillis de leurs racines issues d'un lointain passé colonial et latifundiaire.

Originaire du *Nordeste*, Josué de Castro a pu très tôt en associer le contexte historique aux réalités physiques et climatiques ; ce qui lui aura permis d'en dégager le dynamisme du milieu ambiant dans lequel évolue le paysan du *Sertão*. L'occupation extensive du territoire, la tradition obstinément monoculturelle, la rigueur du climat et, plus encore peut-être, l'attitude négative de la minorité possédante face aux pressions de la masse illettrée des travailleurs agricoles, l'auront conduit à s'interroger sur les paradoxes de la structure agraire, le faible rendement des sols, le sous-emploi endémique, la permanence du flux migratoire (qui prend des proportions catastrophiques lors des grandes sécheresses), sur la faim et ses multiples facettes.