

## Howard R. Lamar, 1923-



A southerner by birth (he was born in Alabama in 1923), Howard R. Lamar went North and studied the West. He earned his doctorate at Yale University in 1951 and has been a distinguished professor there ever since. The West, he has said, provides us with “a wonderful window on American history,” and his publications reflect his omnivorous interests in all aspects of this region’s past. In addition to producing important monographs such as *Dakota Territory* (1956) and *The Far Southwest* (1966), Lamar penned numerous articles, chapters, and introductions. He also edited the *New Encyclopedia of the American West*, published in 1998 as a revised edition of the 1977 version. Lamar’s interests span a remarkable breadth in terms of chronology, geography, and theme. He has looked at the 20th century as well as earlier eras; the Plains as well as the Southwest (not to mention comparisons to global frontiers); and diverse races, classes, and genders. He served as president of the WHA from 1971 to 1972.

Lamar’s commitment to an inclusive approach to the West influenced and inspired his many graduate students. In fact, as significant as his own work is, perhaps his greatest contribution is that he mentored a group of scholars, including Patricia Nelson Limerick, William Cronon, John Mack Faragher, and many others, who went on to play a central role in the revitalization and transformation of the field.

Given Howard Lamar’s prolific scholarship, his stature in the field, and his long-time involvement with one of the most prestigious universities in the nation (not only as a professor, but also as a chair, dean, and president, no less), one might picture him as someone who must be a bit aloof, perhaps even a little elitist. But this is emphatically not the case, as those who know him affirm. He is described as “a warm and gracious man whose genuine humility is surprising in one so accomplished.” Indeed, the title of the book that was produced in his honor, *Under an Open Sky* (1992), speaks to his openness in not only an intellectual sense, but also on a personal level.

Howard Lamar resides in Connecticut, where he remains active in western history, particularly through the center created in his honor: the Howard R. Lamar Center for the Study of Frontiers and Borders.

### Sources:

Howard Lamar, “Much to Celebrate: The Western History Association’s Twenty-Fifth Birthday,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 17 (October 1986): 397-416; Homer E. Socolofsky, et al., “Western History Association Prize Recipient, 1992: Howard R. Lamar,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 24 (May 1993): 149-154

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