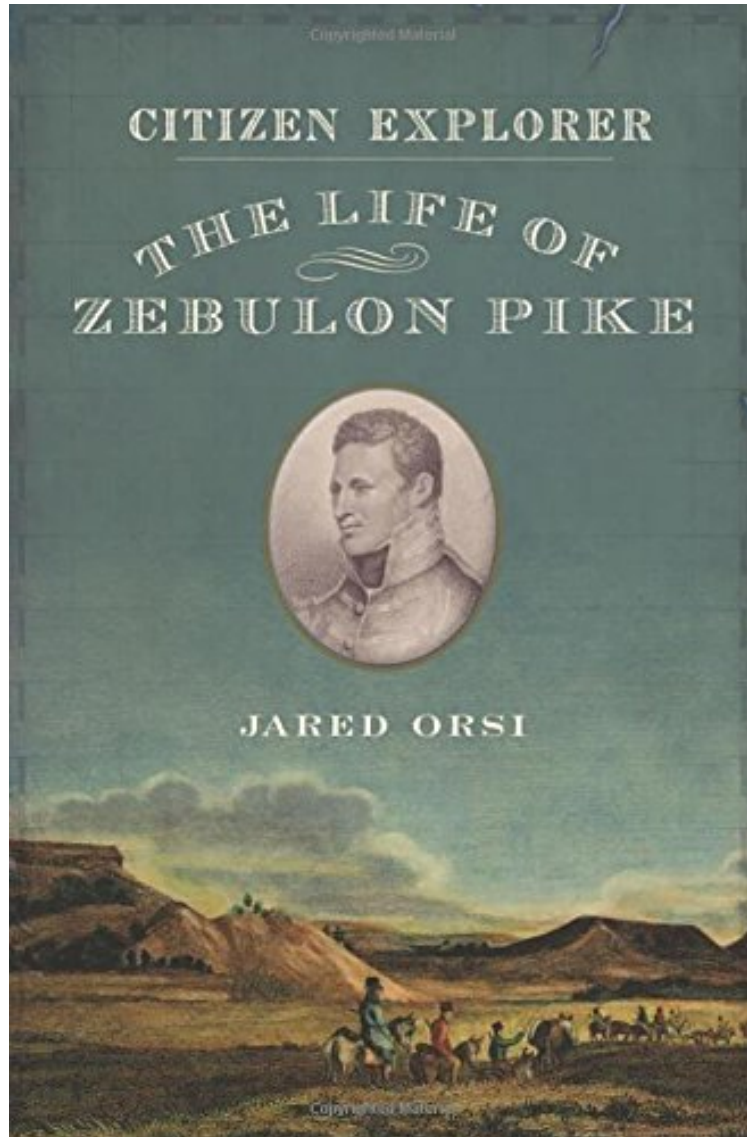


(Free pdf) Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike

Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike

Jared Orsi

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Jared Orsi : Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. a fan of American history looking for a good read, so I make no apologiesBy WFBJIt is perhaps unfair to the author of Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike that I read one of Tony Horwitz's popular histories before tackling this book. On the other hand, both compete for generally the same reader, a fan of American history looking for a good read, so I make no apologies. There is a good story here, with

meticulous research backing it up. But just as visitors to the magnificent virgin forest in Olympic National Forest in the northwest USA encounter not only a functioning ecosystem and beautiful towering trees, but also older and still older trees that have died and fallen in every direction which impede the hikers progress, so the reader here may feel like one of those hikers as he or she encounters the fallen timbers over which one must climb to get on with this story. Such things as energy flows (do humans, like coal and crops, really convert sunlight into energy in the 18th and 19th century?), conversions to and from monetary capital, tensions between allegedly incompatible impulses, and pedagogy of various named varieties, occur and reoccur every time the story begins to lope along. I doubt that the protagonists in this tale ever thought of their actions in these lights. I view these fallen rhetorical timbers as the sacrifices the author makes as he stretches, indeed, strains, for higher purpose in the Pike story, seeking to abstract from the actual facts a broader and more universal alleged meaning. Don't let these artificial obstacles spoil your read. My advice, unless you are one of the author's historian colleagues, is to skip over these tributes to the gods of academia. This would be easier if they had been isolated into their own paragraphs. As it is, they intrude into otherwise perfectly good factual paragraphs, so the reader must be alert. There is the occasional typographical error, so much more so these days than in a time when proof readers had not been replaced by auto-correct. More common is strained grammar or syntax. But again, this is a good read about an interesting figure in an early time in our nation's history, and I appreciated that. One final note: the title, *Citizen Explorer* implies to me that Pike was the type of explorer that Alexander von Humboldt was. This Pike was decidedly not, as anyone remotely familiar with his story knows. He was a soldier, not a scientist or capitalist, from the age of 15 till the day he died, and his explorations were military missions. I believe the author means to highlight the civic virtues he believes Pike embodies, but the phrasing is awkward, if not misleading. It reads like *Citizen-Explorer*. Better would have been *Citizen and Explorer*. Perhaps best would be *Explorer and Citizen*. But in any event, don't be confused by this.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. More than just an explorer, a magnificent hero

By bb lambert
The book started a little slow until I realized where the author was going. Pike was larger than life, not just walking thru the Rockies, but showing amazing fortitude few men possessed and his motives were pure. I am reminded of his sacrifice in the words of "America the Beautiful": "Oh beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife, who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life." Well written if you stick with it till the end and get the message.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A Thorough Examination of a Fascinating Man and His Times

By D. King
Before reviewing this book I should disclose that the author, Jared Orsi, provided me a complimentary copy and used some of my research on the Pike family for its content. I hasten to add that no one asked me to review this book and that I like it so well that I have purchased a Kindle version and an additional hardbound copy which I gave away as a gift. I expect to purchase additional copies as gifts. I own a collection of books about Zebulon Montgomery Pike, and this one excites me the most. There are several qualities that distinguish Orsi's book from the other biographies: First, Orsi was able to draw from the latest research about Pike and his times. Second, Orsi actually re-hiked some of Pike's wanderings and thereby got a personal sense of the hardships Pike and his men endured. Third, as a history professor Orsi is well qualified to assess Pike's contribution within the larger menagerie of American history, and he does this very thoroughly. The result is a scholarly work that will appeal to readers with a serious interest in American history. The book contains maps, photos and copious footnotes (although a timeline would have been nice). As a serious work, I don't think the book is suited for, say, high school students with only a casual interest in history. But I would not discourage anyone from reading it who has a serious desire to understand what motivated early Americans. Those unacquainted with less well known incidents of history will enjoy learning about the Whisky Rebellion, the massacre of St. Claire's army, the Aaron Burr conspiracy, the notorious General James Wilkinson, and the competition for dominance of western lands by rival empires of America, Britain, France, and Spain. Zebulon Montgomery Pike was an exceptionally bold and tenacious individual whose life intersected with all these events and characters. In those years America underwent national expansion and significant controversy as the young nation continuously redefined itself through a series of internal and external struggles. Today, when we hear the words "Louisiana Territory" and "explorer" we immediately think of Lewis and Clark. We have largely forgotten the courageous efforts of many others who explored that vast wilderness. Pike's contemporaries actually considered him to be more important than Meriwether Lewis. In accordance with orders from General Wilkinson, Lieutenant Pike led two expeditions, one up the Mississippi River and the other into the southwestern territory. Pike proved himself a tenacious (if sometimes foolhardy) explorer who was loath to give up and go home until he found the prize he sought. In the second expedition, Pike literally hiked in circles seeking legendary but non-existent geographic features and became lost. Orsi details the extreme physical hardships of winter, hunger, and fatigue endured by Pike and his men. Orsi also describes how Pike dealt with delicate and sometimes dangerous negotiations with Indians, British traders, and Spaniards. In all these situations, Pike's opponents clearly had the upper hand in power and resources even as Pike steadfastly advocated (albeit awkwardly) for the interests of the American government. Pike did not prove himself much of a negotiator in these one-sided situations, but he did show himself to be a sly and canny improviser. After Pike and his men strayed into Spanish territory and were taken into custody by Spanish dragoons, Pike underwent repeated interrogations by Spanish authorities. They accused Pike of reconnoitering their territory preparatory for war, an accusation Pike adamantly denied. Yet, even as Pike worked to convince Spanish

authorities that he had trespassed by accident, he discretely gathered intelligence on New Spain. Pike's arrest by the Spanish occurred at the same time the Aaron Burr conspiracy came to light, and this provoked great controversy and questions about Pike's intentions. When Pike was finally released and returned home, he had to convince his government and fellow citizens of his loyalty to America. For years Pike's reputation was tarnished by his unflinching personal loyalty to the scheming General Wilkinson, but all doubts were laid to rest when Pike became a national martyr while conquering York, Canada during the War of 1812. The book thus describes the adventures of a fascinating man. But it is more than pure biography; it portrays Pike as an archetype of the nationalist character of Americans that emerged during the thirty years or so that followed the Revolutionary War. The core question that arises again and again is of loyalty to country - a sentiment we often mistakenly assume that first generation of Americans simply possessed. But loyalty was actually a very complicated question at the time (just as it can be now). Why did Pike and his family remain loyal to the federal government when so many of other Americans wavered in this regard? How did Pike balance self-interest and national interest? Orsi discusses this subject in great depth, not only in terms of events in Pike's life but also in the context of the country as a whole. Here is a small sample of some the questions the book explores. Readers who find these questions interesting will surely enjoy the book.

1. How did the federal government fail Americans living in frontier areas, and how did this affect their sense of loyalty? How did the Pike family respond to these issues?
2. Leaders at the time (including President Jefferson, Spanish colonial authorities, and tribal chiefs) understood relationships between political power, land use, economy, and ecology. But they had different and incompatible values and visions for using the land. What was President Jefferson's vision and how was it connected to ideas of liberty? How did Pike's expeditions serve Jefferson's vision?
3. In what ways could Pike's second expedition be construed to support the private schemes of James Wilkinson and Aaron Burr? Both these men were later suspected and investigated for treason. What rationale does Orsi offer to argue that Pike was not a co-conspirator with their schemes?
4. In what ways were Pike's naive views of New Spain similar to his inaccurate understanding of geography and how were these views challenged? What was the Black Legend and what role did it play in Pike's perceptions and writings?
5. What was Pike's view about the link between nationalism and duty? What did he expect the country to give in exchange for sacrifice and military service? How did Pike's death help influence national policy regarding war veterans?

The book is well written, although I agree with another reviewer who found some of the discussion about energy expenditure a bit abrupt and awkward. Maybe subsequent editions can polish the narrative in those few places. Even with this minor blemish, however, I gladly recommend this book to anyone with a serious interest in the life and times of Zebulon Montgomery Pike.

It was November 1806. The explorers had gone without food for one day, then two. Their leader, not yet thirty, drove on, determined to ascend the great mountain. Waist deep in snow, he reluctantly turned back. But Zebulon Pike had not been defeated. His name remained on the unclimbed peak-and new adventures lay ahead of him and his republic. In *Citizen Explorer*, historian Jared Orsi provides the first modern biography of this soldier and explorer, who rivaled contemporaries Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Born in 1779, Pike joined the army and served in frontier posts in the Ohio River valley before embarking on a series of astonishing expeditions. He sought the headwaters of the Mississippi and later the sources of the Arkansas and Red Rivers, which led him to Pike's Peak and capture by Spanish forces. Along the way, he met Aaron Burr and General James Wilkinson; Auguste and Pierre Couteau, patriarchs of St. Louis's most powerful fur-trading family, who sought to make themselves indispensable to Jefferson's administration; as well as British fur-traders, Native Americans, and officers of the Spanish empire, all of whom resisted the expansion of the United States. Through Pike's life, Orsi examines how American nationalism thinned as it stretched west, from the Jeffersonian idealism on the Atlantic to a practical, materialist sensibility on the frontier. Surveying and gathering data, Pike sought to incorporate these distant territories into the republic, to overlay the west with the American map grid; yet he became increasingly dependent for survival on people who had no attachment to the nation he served. He eventually died in that service, in a victorious battle in the War of 1812. Written from an environmental perspective, rich in cultural and political context, *Citizen Explorer* is a state-of-the-art biography of a remarkable man.

.com A Look Inside: *Citizen Explorer: The Life of Zebulon Pike* [Click Images to Enlarge]