



How the States Got their Shapes by Mark Stein
Reviewed by Dhruv



Historical, Non Fiction

Give a summary without spoilers!

This book offers exactly what the title suggests: A history of the borders of every U.S. state and how they inherited them. There are basically 50 individual chapters which range from about five to fifteen pages. These chapters explain why every state's borders are the way they are. At the start of every chapter, there is a map of the state, and some questions about its borders. For example, why does it have a panhandle or a little blip in that spot? These questions are then answered in the rest of the chapter. There is also a general chapter at the beginning which talks about some events common to all the states and their borders. This book is really interesting because you don't have to read the chapters in order and you can skip around to states that interest you. There are many ways borders can be formed. They can be based on natural boundaries, prizes from wars, or just arbitrarily based on obscure treaties. This book covers many interesting and somewhat random events like these. It covers well known historical events such as the Louisiana Purchase to little known obscure facts. A lot of these stories are very humorous and generally connect to larger themes of the time period. The details cannot be covered in this short summary, but this is the basic concept.

What drew you to this book?

I'm personally very interested in history and geography. I love looking at maps, studying them, and finding all the intricacies with them. This book combined both of those topics. The multitude of maps presented in the book made it very interesting and the way it was written was humorous and genuinely fun to read. That is a very hard thing to achieve considering that a lot of the book is talking about obscure treaties and historical events that most people tend not to care about. The title of the book is also very clever. It is concise, accurately describes the book, and has a rhythm to it.

Did it remind you of something that you've previously read?

This didn't necessarily remind me of something that I had previously read or watched before. I haven't really seen another piece of media that explains the state borders in such detail. This makes the book even more valuable. I am also pretty sure that a

television show was made out of this book, but I have never watched it. That being said, there are parts of the book that show up in other media such as history textbooks. For example, the book talks about how Minnesota has a little blip of how a part of Washington is attached to Canada, inaccessible by road to the rest of the state. These peculiarities are presented in other media such as textbooks or Youtube videos.

To whom would you recommend this book?

I would recommend this media to anybody who has an interest in geography and maps. If you are curious about maps, and tend to wonder why it looks the way it does, then you should definitely read this book. I would argue that you don't even need to be interested in history to read this book. This isn't really a history textbook, it is based around the state borders. The best part is that you don't need to read the whole thing, you can skip around and learn about the states that interest you.

Overall, did you like it and would you recommend it to others?

Overall, I fairly enjoyed this book and would totally recommend it to others. It includes information that I had never seen anywhere else, and presents the information in a fairly engaging manner. The organization, maps, and humor of the book are very well done and complement the subject matter. It includes many interesting stories that connect to larger themes and give you a sense of the history of a certain state, what living there was like, and what issues prevailed at the time. My only real criticism of the book kind of undermines everything I said here. There were some parts that I did kind of find boring. It is not really the author's fault, but some states just don't have border stories that are interesting. Overall the eastern and western states were the most interesting. California and Texas were the most interesting. But still, the author infuses plenty of humor and makes it as interesting and possible.

Anything else that you would like to add to this review? What made you choose it? Did you like the cover? Was it recommended to you? Did you find it at the library?

I bought this book a couple of years ago at Barnes and Nobles. We were there to buy a gift for someone and this book caught my eye. I particularly loved the title and it just seemed very interesting to me. It was also really cheap and definitely worth the price. If this is available at your local library, I would recommend trying it out.