



Museum of Human Beings

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A Shoshone woman, Sacagawea, leads Lewis and Clark to the Pacific at the turn of the nineteenth century. On her back is a tiny infant. He is her son, Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau, the youngest member of the Expedition—a child caught between two worlds who is later raised by Clark as his foster son.

When the teenage Baptiste attracts the notice of the visiting Duke Paul, Prince of Württemberg, Clark approves of the duke's "experiment" to educate the boy at court. A gleeful Duke Paul has Baptiste trained as a concert pianist and exhibits him throughout Europe as a "half gentleman–half animal."

Eventually Baptiste turns his back on the Old World and returns to the New, determined to find his true place there. He travels into the heart of the American wilderness, and into the depths of his mother's soul, on an epic quest for identity that brings sacrifice, loss, and the distant promise of redemption.

Museum of Human Beings Details

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Author : Colin Sargent , Colin W. Sargent

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From Reader Review Museum of Human Beings for online ebook

Maria says

The Museum of Human Beings written by Colin Sargent, is a fictionalized accounting of Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau's life. He was the infant that is depicted on the Sacagawea golden dollar coins, and was the son of Sacagawea and Toussaint Charbonneau. There were some clever features to this book such as the description of signs from the Native American sign language at the beginning of each chapter. The signs give an added dimension to each chapter, and are a fitting and entertaining reminder as to who the story is about. [return][return]There were two journeys described in this book, one being the Lewis and Clark expedition and the other being Jean-Baptiste's journey of self discovery. During his voyage to Europe, a powerful revelation is provided about Jean-Baptiste. He forgot his mother, and he knew Clark had forgotten him. He began to steal from himself (pg. 60). It is very clear that the reader will witness the psychological destruction of this character, not only by his benefactor, but by himself. Even though Jean-Baptiste was provided an excellent education, he paid a very heavy price for it. I did have a difficult time relating to the characters in this book, especially Jean-Baptiste, and at times believed that the author should have given us a little more insight into his thoughts. Readers are provided with snippets and at times powerful insights from this character; however, considering the complex and serious issues faced by him, the scarcity of insights occasionally creates an uncomfortable disconnect from this character. This being my only complaint with the book, I thought over all it was very well written. The Museum of Human Beings painted a interesting picture of what life may have been like on the American frontier in the 1800s for European Americans and Native Americans, and it left me wanting to learn more about this period of history.

Jamie Elliott says

Early in American history there was a time when racial lines were not nearly as solidly drawn as the stereotypes which haunt the country to this day. Native Americans, Asians, blacks, whites, and children of every combination of mixed heritage struggled to define their roles in a land in flux, a land they all felt a claim to. Colin Sargent has explored this state of yearning and confusion in the life of Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau, the son of the illustrious Sacagawea. Jean-Baptiste is not only one of the last inheritors of his mother's traditions, but he is also the illegitimate son of William Clark. He is the conflict between Europe and Native America, old world and new, embodied in human form. Museum of Human Beings is the fictionalized story of his life, from his flirtation with the culture of old Europe to his retreat to the American wilderness, always trying to find himself among the disparity of his inheritances.

This is clearly a promising premise, and the writing and characterization of this first novel largely do justice to it. The plot and construction of the novel are weaker. Jean-Baptiste's life is presented in fits and jumps, and it is unclear why certain episodes are emphasized, while there is no harmony in the structure of the novel. The narration is emotionally distant, with Jean-Baptiste's travels presented in a far-away panorama, never approaching too close to his heart.

Despite these flaws the pathos of Jean-Baptiste's situation is clear. I also found my interest in this time in American history stoked, surely a good side-effect of any historical novel. I feel that the novel could have benefited from some thoughtful editing and restructuring, but anyone with an interest in early American history or the ambiguity of race will be likely to enjoy the read.

Ann says

Pompey (also called "Pomp") was born to Sacajewea as she led Lewis and Clark on a famous/infamous journey exploring the American West. Son of the Native American guide and her fur trapper husband, Jean Baptiste Charbonneau lived a fascinating life that included Captain Lewis serving as patron and father figure, long years of European travels with minor royalty, working the western fur trade, scouting for various military figures, acting as mayor of Mission San Luis Rey, mining in the early California Gold Rush and more. His life reads like a Forrest Gump who's who and who was where of his time.

Sargent imagines what it might have been like for this extraordinary man (fluent in numerous languages, classically educated, world-traveled) to find his place in the world. The book is heartbreaking as it details a lost soul escaping, losing love and his bearings, never quite fitting in. I might have liked it better if I hadn't been left with such a sadness and regret for Baptiste, who in this telling was a renaissance man, but not admirable. His lost soul longing overshadows his accomplishments.

Still, a fascinating look at a man and his time.

Coleen says

This is an interesting account of Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, the son of Sacagawea and Toussaint Charbonneau, of Lewis and Clark fame. The author acknowledges that it is a product of imagination, but the historical background certainly appears to me as fairly accurate. The mystical and psychological explanations are no doubt somewhat of an invention, but certainly could be as reasonable as any other explanation of the characters thoughts and actions.

I found the book to be an easy read and totally enjoyed it. The author has previously published books of poetry which could explain his seemingly easy style of prose.

I won this book in a Goodreads giveaway.

Annette says

Sacagawea was a Shoshone woman who guided the Lewis and Clark party on the journey to find a Northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean.

She carried her son, Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau with her. Also in the party was Baptiste's father. He was not talented enough to actually be the guide Sacagawea was. He was drunk most of the time and he was physically abusive to Sacagawea.

This book illustrates the past cruelties of man to his fellow man. It is fiction, but it is an example of the historical mistreatment of anyone who was not seen as a superior being. Native Americans fell into the same classification as any other person of color.

Baptiste is treated as a lesser human being no matter where he goes nor what he does. He is used and abused by everyone he meets in every degrading manner imaginable.

I admire the writing ability of Mr Sargent. His talent is evident.

But, his outlook on the world and his fellow man made me depressed. I am aware that people in the 19th century had very different viewpoints than are common today. There was little or no tolerance around. But, I was not comfortable believing that there were no people who had any kindness in their hearts.

The writing was exceptional. The story itself provided me with a dark and depressing outlook on the world.

I won this book in a contest. I am voluntarily writing this review and all opinions are my own.

Mary Greiner says

It's a good thing the author is married, because I am so in love with his sentence structure after reading two of his novels, I would propose to him on that basis alone.

Baptiste is the son of Sacajawea, and moves between the spiritual world of the "Indian," and the largely greedy, sinful world of the whites. His adventures are large, and his connection to his mother's spirit is powerful. Most enjoyable adventure.

Glen says

I won this book in a goodreads drawing.

After the Pacific Expedition, the son of Sacagawea goes to live with Meriwether Clark. Attracting the notice of a visiting Duke, he is taken to Europe and raised to be a gentleman. Eventually, he returns to the new world, and wanders the frontier to find out who he really is.

Very literary.

Nicole Bishop Baker says

I love it! I normally read for entertainment during my spare time but this was a wonderful change. Don't get me wrong I was entertained but I learned so much. Thank you!

John Szalasny says

I obtained a copy of this book through a Goodreads giveaway.

This is a fictionalized story of Jean Baptiste Charbonneau, son of Sacagawea, who starts the book strapped to his mother's back as part of the Lewis & Clark expedition. His story is of one looking for his place in life, while filling the role of the curiosity, by virtue of his famous parents and his mixed race. His story is also one looking for inner peace as he struggles with the early death of his mother, and his anger at the abandonment of his father and the uncaring foster care by William Lewis.

The author gives a good historical portrayal of a man who dealt with discrimination at home, going to Europe as a zoo animal, returning to America cultured, multilingual, and still not part of the White or Indian worlds. The title refers to the collection of William Lewis that was on display in St Louis but is now lost to time. Charbonneau was as much a part of this collection as the arrow heads and plants in the museum.

My rating is 3.5 stars. As Charbonneau, the story moves from event to event seamlessly, but there is no one scene that gave one the reason to have a strong emotional attachment to the book to give it a higher rating.

Patricia says

While I could appreciate the quality of Sargent's writing, I found Jean Baptiste Charbonneau's story so sordid and heartbreaking that I had to stop reading it. Sargent reveals how horribly 19th century white societies (worldwide) treated the Indian/any darker skinned person. Jean Baptiste Charbonneau was the son of the great Indian scout, Sacagawea, who led the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Ocean. Baptiste was actually the "product" of the rape of Sacagawea by the drunken brute, Toussaint Charbonneau, also a guide for Lewis and Clark. This ignominious beginning was emblematic of Baptiste's life. 19th century people, including Capt. William Clark, considered Sacagawea and her son "savages" or "not quite human." Even though Sacagawea probably saved Lewis, Clark, and their expedition from total annihilation or death from starvation, she was still considered "less than." Once the expedition was over, Clark sort of took Baptiste under his wing, provided him with education, but not like a true father or even loving step father. When Sacagawea died at age 24, Baptiste was shunted from school to the entourage of the corrupt "Euro trash" Duke Paul of Wurttemberg who had been visiting the US. Duke Paul takes Baptiste to Europe, and after "grooming" and raping him, proceeds to trot the young man around, displaying him like one would display a rare museum find. Baptiste's life was spent trolling between worlds, trying to find his place, but never finding it. Museum of Human Beings is a stinging indictment of how the dominant society dehumanizes then subjugates indigenous people.

Chaya Nebel says

Very interesting historical fiction novel about the son of Sacagawea. Good historical detail, very nice writing. A little tough to read certain parts, and very harsh on the "white man."

Thank you to the author and publisher for a review copy.

Audrey Terry says

Very interesting subject matter, highly recommend this one.

Charlotte says

I won this in a GoodReads giveaway.

This a fictional account of the life of Jean Baptists. Also the adventures of Lewis and Clark.

I gave this 3 stars keeping it neutral. I didn't care for this one. I think its probably because I have never really liked history.

This book seems to be well written.

Tena says

I won this in a GOODREADS giveaway.

Anthony Cleveland says

Never really captured my attention. Writing was OK but somewhat disjointed; the connections from chapter to chapter were challenging to follow. Not sure I would recommend.
