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So Long the Journey: A Study of Women in the American West

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ABSTRACT

Prior to the last few decades of the twentieth century, the story of Westward expansion in the United States had centered on the heroic endeavors of men. Women's activities were viewed as peripheral, and scholars largely ignored their contributions in rearing families, and establishing communities and businesses in rural outposts.

This paper will examine a selection of the most influential literature on the subject in order to frame the topic within the larger study of that of the American West. It will argue that despite the assumption of non-traditional roles assumed by women while in the West, they generally always sought to uphold accepted contemporary notions of virtuous womanhood and femininity. These women should not be seen as the pre-cursors to an early feminist movement, but as mothers, wives, and daughters working to adapt to the harsh environment in which they found themselves.

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Prior to 1970 few scholars had attempted any serious study of the contribution and participation of women in Westward expansion. Since that decade, a substantial body of work has evolved that reflects the increasing interest in the study of women and minorities. The aim of this paper is to examine a sample of the extensive literature that is now available and to place the subject matter within the larger study of

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that of the American West. The material presented will be assessed chronologically (with the exception of the comparative study) according to the date of publication. The common themes uniting all these works is the fact that although women undertook non-traditional roles out of necessity, they rarely abandoned deeply entrenched Victorian notions of proprietary, either through choice or because of the successful transportation of this dominant culture. Women of the West in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represented a diverse range of ethnicities, class and religious affiliations; however, non-Anglos of both sexes have experienced disproportionate levels of discrimination, both economic and social. Anglo-males were, and continue to be, the most dominant force in the American West, leaving women to play the subordinate roles.

John Mack Faragher is a Professor of History at Yale University where he teaches courses on the American frontier and the history of Native American Indians. *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* was the winner of the Frederick Jackson Turner Award in 1980. Faragher has written a preface to the second edition; and although he admits he would probably devote more time to character and narrative, he remains steadfast to the underlying premise; "a construction of gender as a socially determined and culturally constructed system, a set of interrelated roles for women and men" (Faragher, 2000). The second edition includes a supplemental bibliography and appendices which detail the methodology employed for this study.

The division of labor on the trail was exhausting for both sexes; however, Faragher's sympathies clearly lay with the women who "probably played almost no role in the decision to emigrate in the first place" (Faragher, 2000). He painstakingly details the on-going list of chores that kept women far busier than men, and diary entries support the notion that nearly every minute in camp revolved around domestic duties. Faragher explains that women undertook the dual burdens of exhausting physical labor and guardianship of community morality. This thesis is supported by numerous examples including the entry by a male diarist who stated, "Our company [was] 'a band brought close together,' and humanized and refined by the presence among us of women- God bless them" (Faragher, 2000). That women were viewed as intellectually inferior yet possessed a superior moral framework, is something of a paradox that does not appear to have been questioned by males on the westward journey. Faragher does, however, present a logical assessment of the social constructs in which both males and females operated and notes that "… women were expected to conform to a domestic ideal. The social keystone of the system of separate worlds, however, was the very nearly total exclusion of women from public life …. Cultural sanctions separating the spheres of masculine and feminine were so effective that women rarely tested them," (Faragher, 2000). Faragher, unlike some female historians, does not attempt to inculcate nineteenth century women with a feminist mindset they simply did not possess. Faragher's study was a groundbreaking work that has maintained its relevance over the course of two decades.

Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey by Lillian Schlissel is a detailed and well-documented collection of journal entries. At the time of writing this book, Schlissel was the Director of American Studies at Brooklyn College. She holds a Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale University and has written numerous articles relating to women in the West. The ninety-six overland journey accounts and seven letters form an impressive assembly of primary sources. Augmented by numerous photographs, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* should be considered as one of the essential works on this subject.

Schlissel, perhaps more than any other author examined in this paper, underscores the point that although some women deviated from the accepted social mores of the day, the vast majority of those traveling westward remained entrenched in their traditional roles. This *status quo* remained despite horrendous conditions on the trail. Wives and daughters may have *compromised* their standards but they rarely fully gave up on the moral and social codes that defined nineteenth century womanhood. As Schlissel points out, "In their steadfast clinging to ribbons and bows, to starched white aprons and petticoats, the women suggested[ed] that the frontier, in a profound manner, threatened their sense of social role and sexual identity" (Schlissel, 1982). That many of these women recoiled from the thought of even attempting the westward journey is without doubt, however, the more common response to a

husband's desire to travel to the West was acquiescence or resignation. As evidenced in a letter written by Elizabeth Stewart Warner, many women "… would not, or could not, openly dispute … [a] husband's decision" (Schlissel, 1982). Others insisted on accompanying their husbands as their determination to keep the family unit intact was the "passion that drove women forward" (Schlissel, 1982). As Schlissel notes, "The decision to go West was not theirs to make, and they were reluctant to embark on a journey that meant a complete break with their old lives, but if the women understood and responded to any principle, it was the need to keep their families together … That purpose, above all, made the hardship bearable" (Schlissel, 1982). Schlissel argues that men and women experienced western expansion differently. In reality, this difference was simply an extension of the social divisions of the day.

The Hidden Half: Studies of Plans Indian Women is an example of early scholarship in the field of Indian women in the West. The collection was edited by Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine and published in 1983. Albers received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin at Madison and is now the Chair of the Department of American Indian Studies and a Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota. She has published a number of works on American Indians, her latest including two articles: "Eastern Dakota" and "The Ojibwa" both in the *Handbook of American Indians* (Albers, 2001). Beatrice Medicine is from the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. She received her undergraduate degree from South Dakota University. Medicine was awarded a Master of Arts degree in Sociology and Anthropology from Michigan State University and studied towards a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, although it is unclear whether she completed the requirements for this degree.

Albers and Medicine state that the group of essays forming the work is not meant to present an inclusive overview of conditions relating to Plains Indians women. Rather, this collection of papers (originally presented at a symposium in 1977) attempts to highlight specific areas of contention in the hope of prompting further study and discussion. The volume focuses on the pre-reservation period and only includes two papers that deal with the condition of women outside of this time frame. The data used in the studies "are drawn from ethnological, ethnohistorical, and contemporary field research" (Albers & Medicine, 1983).

Albers accuses historians and anthropologists of either neglecting the study of Plains Indian women or producing studies that are biased or prejudicial. Most significantly, she believes that the status of Indian women has been diminished by the notion that the female's role in the home was less valued than the male's experience in the wider domain. She directly links this to a Euro-centric evaluation that the "domestic life is separated from and subordinated by a public sector; but while this state of affairs is obvious in the organization of European societies, it is questionable whether it applies to many native communities in the Great Plains and elsewhere" (Albers & Medicine, 1983). Thus, non-Indian historians have not only largely ignored the contribution of Indian women to their communities but have applied alien value systems to inaccurately survey the roles they undertook. This assessment could be applied to women's history in the West in general and is certainly not unique to Native Americans.

The work, although a little dated, still provides some useful information, and the Indian heritage of the authors lends a degree of authenticity, in addition to a natural bias, to their assumptions. Most of the sources referenced in the notes were secondary; however, this may be because there has been very little effort made by any official organization to record the history of Plains Indian women. When such attempts were undertaken, male tribal elders typically only related their own history to white males. Women were also hesitant to explain female roles as "they believed it was dangerous to discourse on matters touching upon spiritual power before persons who have not been properly instructed to handle such knowledge" (Albers & Medicine, 1983).

Covered Wagon Women. Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1849 is a selection of journal entries and diaries edited by Kenneth L. Holmes, a former Professor of History at Western Oregon State College. Holmes has attempted to present previously unpublished diary entries but acknowledges that some material may have been printed in small numbers at the request of historical societies. He has not

corrected any faults with grammar or punctuation but has arranged the daily journals into diary format. Holmes examines the writings of thirteen white women all of whom were Protestant except for Patty Sessions, who was Mormon.

Holmes believes that "immediacy" is the key reason that these diaries are of such significant historical value (Holmes, 1983). Memories recorded within a few hours, sometimes minutes, of events reflect a more honest and frank assessment of the situation and the feelings of the women involved. The diaries record, as other examples have done, the daily domestic tasks of pioneer women and their acceptance of their subordinate role within the family.

The Women's West, published in 1987, is a collection of essays written by a veritable "who's who" of scholars of the 1980's devoted to unraveling the place of women in the West. Susan Armitage, the Claudius O. and Mary Johnson Distinguished Professor of History at Washington State University, co-edited the book. Armitage received her education from the London School of Economics and Political Science and is a powerful voice in the Coalition for Western Women's History. Elizabeth Jameson, Armitage's co-editor, has taught Women's History and United States Social History at the Universities of Michigan, Colorado, and Virginia and has written numerous articles, among them "Women and Men in Western History: A Stereotypical Vision." *Western Historical Quarterly* (Jameson, 1997).

Armitage and Jameson, quite correctly, contend that it is vital to extend the study of women in the West beyond the pioneer-stage. If we do not examine what happened to these women after their initial encounter with the West, then we do women a disservice as we omit the process of adaptation and conquest over difficult environments and social conditions. The editors appreciate New Western History as a means by which the continuities between the experiences of twentieth-century immigrants and that of the "fabled" nineteenth-century pioneers may be assessed. She contends that men may have been preoccupied by a sense of individualism and adventure, but women were principally concerned with separation, loss, tedium, fatigue, and the daily effort of living (Jameson & Armitage, 1997).

This comprehensive work takes the reader to neglected areas of gender research in America's West. The role of pre-conquest Indian women is examined and conclusions are drawn that women played an active role in trade and influencing the direction of village life in general. However, this is principally a work about Anglo and non-Indian minorities. The wide range of topics includes two essays in particular that present the reader with a fascinating account of twentieth century women. The essays are Patricia Zavella's, "The Impact of Sunbelt Industrialization on Chicanas" and Micaela di Leonardo's "The Myth of the Urban Village: Women, Work, and Family Among Italian-Americans in Twentieth Century California." Although this latter study is based on a small survey of fifteen women and ultimately only discusses four, it does offer a picture of the lives of Italian-Americans as an ethnic group that is quite distinct from their compatriots in the East. Glenda Riley is the Alexander M. Bracken Professor of History at Ball State University. She received a Bachelor's degree from Case Western Reserve University, a Master's degree in History from Miami University and a Ph.D. in History from Ohio State University. She has written a number of works on the experiences of women in the West including: *Frontierswomen*: *The Iowa Experience, Women and Indians on the Frontier: 1825-1915* and *Inventing the American Woman: A Perspective on Women's History, 1607 to the Present*. She is the president-elect of the Western History Association and was the recipient of a Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Award. *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* is a logically constructed account of the experiences of the women of these regions.

Riley views the difficulties women faced in the construct of the frontier. The term "West" or "western" is absent from the title but could easily be interchanged with the term "frontier." Indeed, Turner's notion of a continually advancing frontier presents the setting for this book. The lives of the women were only extraordinary because of their geographical position at a specific time- the cusp of an advancing line of civilization where conditions were often demanding, disheartening, and often dangerous. The women who live on the Plains and prairies today may indeed live in the West but they almost certainly do not live

on a frontier. The question then must be asked, how does this book fit into a study of the West? It does so by evaluating the lives of a group imposing a form of Anglo society onto an environment that had no long-term experience of Roman-Judeo culture. Therefore, for most of the works studied, the term "the West" is only applicable if associated with a particular place at a particular time. The West, however, may be interpreted in a much broader way if such a definition relies on a list of criteria, such as those put forward by Walter Nugent or Patricia Limerick.

Riley attempts to bring frontierswomen out of their "one-dimensional stereotype." She suggests that they were more substantive than the compliant "Madonna's" or the worn-out "figures that either begged to return home or persevered until they were broken entirely" (Riley, 1988). Ultimately, she draws the conclusion that lifestyles of women on the prairies and the Plains was significantly similar; for despite geographical, religious, class or socio-economic disparities between the two groups, their principle energies focused on their domestic responsibilities. Women, who tried to operate outside of traditional female areas, were censored and considered as oddities within their own communities but women who made curtains out of old flour sacks unconsciously exported their notions of civilization, providing that gender was more powerful than location (Riley, 1988). The voices of the women are heard through an impressive list of primary source documents that include a variety of diary and journal entries and letters. Glenda Riley's book provides an extensive account of the trials and small victories experienced by Anglo women on the American frontier.

They Saw the Elephant, Women in the California Gold Rush is an enthusiastic re-telling of one of the most colorful periods in American history. The lively narrative of the author reflects her academic credentials. Levy was awarded a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's degree in English from California's San Jose University where she now works as an Independent Scholar in the History Department. Levy's diverse academic background freed her to approach this study in a more creative manner than is normally seen in standard history works. An example of this is the oft-repeated story of Luzena Wilson, who was embarrassed upon entering "civilization" in clothes made ragged by a forty-mile desert crossing. When re-told by Levy, the reader sees Wilson as a flesh and blood person, rather than another "drudge" in the litany of long-suffering women. If the West really is a combination of time, place and unique human spirit, then Levy's work is invaluable. She successfully provides a personal insight into the lives of some of the individuals undertaking the Westward journey for she successfully transforms these hitherto one-dimensional historical figures into multi-faceted characters powerful enough to transform a history book into a "page-turner."

In addition to accounts of individuals, Levy also examines the plight of minority groups she provides anecdotes that highlight the low regard in which Spanish and Indian women were held and which also demonstrate the hostility faced by Chinese women who entered a life of prostitution, either voluntarily, or by force (Levy, 154). Despite a few examples of women operating outside the bounds of Victorian normalcy, the majority of women appear to have been determined to remain in their domestic sphere. Women, keen to augment the family income, turned to moneymaking schemes that utilized their traditional domestic skills in gender-appropriate jobs such as running boarding houses, baking pies or washing and mending. Women traveling to the gold fields were largely motivated by the same reasons as women traveling to the prairies or Plains: the belief that it was a wife's duty to accompany her husband and assist him in his endeavors; the hope of a better life for one's family or the notion that a wife who did not travel with her husband was in real danger of losing him forever (Levy, 1990).

So Much to Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier is a collection of nineteen narratives edited by Ruth Moynihan, Susan Armitage, and Christiane Fischer Dichamp. Encouraged to collaborate on this work by Professor Howard Lamar, the authors have produced a study that examines the experiences faced by women in three different geographical locations during three different time periods. The selected bibliography is somewhat disappointing; however, the introductions to each section ably place the particular narrative into a more general historical perspective. It is particularly interesting to note that even though the experiences of the women represented in these journals reflect

a diverse range of social backgrounds and economic status, they nevertheless rarely deviate from assigned gender behavior. "Women's insistence on clinging to Victorian sex roles is evident … and well documented … there is no doubt that nineteenth-century ideals of gentility – that a "true woman" should be passive, obedient, pious and pure – affected behavior among frontier women" resulted in attitudes relating to gender roles that would persevere well into the twentieth century (Moynihan, Armitage & Dichamp, 1990).

Many of the women record a life that was often physically and spiritually exhausting. A Mrs. Green, who was living in the Rocky Mountains, remembered a particular morning in 1870, when she awoke to see fifty head of cattle feeding on what remained of wheat not washed away by unremitting rain. Slipping out of bed she armed herself with a broomstick in the vain hope of driving the cattle away. Unsuccessful, she reminisced that, "I gave out before I had got half way across the field, and sinking to the earth I wept and prayed to God for a change in my wretched life, winding up with a wish that Horace Greeley and N.C. Meeker, the founders of the Union Colony, were in the bottom of the sea, and my family and I in the dear old Keystone state" (Moynihan, Armitage & Dichamp, 1990). Green, as in this instance, kept her frustration to herself and notes that on other difficult occasions she resolved to "cultivate a cheerful disposition… for at the rate I was going into despair at that time, I could not have retained my reason six months longer, and doubtless the brittle thread of life would have snapped ere this" (Moynihan, Armitage & Dichamp, 1990).

Despite the hardships, Green, and thousands of other women, persevered with their new life, often because they had exhausted all of their capital on the outward journey and simply could not afford to return east. Other women stayed because they believed it to be their duty to do so. Yet despite the number of works written about women traveling to the West and the constant references to the discontent many of these women experienced, not one book examined for this paper records any women *leaving* the West. Although it is obvious that some women must simply have turned their backs on "the land of opportunity," the authors examined thus far have chosen to disregard this important group. Particular scholars generally appear determined only to relate "success" stories in order to justify the validity of the women's experience. However, "failures" and "failed attempts" can often provide the historian with valuable insight and should not be overlooked in the misguided belief that dwelling on such accounts will somehow detract from the accomplishments of other women. It would have been courageous of the authors of this work to include at least one narrative where a woman *truly* exerted her independence by simply refusing to stay.

Uncommon Common Women: Ordinary Lives of the West is a relatively short work by Anne Butler and Ona Siporin. Butler holds a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland and is Emeritus Professor of History at Utah State University. Siporin is an assistant editor at the *Western Historical Quarterly* and an adjunct instructor at Utah State University. The underlying thesis of this work is that the women of the West were ethnically and culturally diverse and that their experiences of ordinary life were quite varied. Butler and Siporin attempt to highlight the presence of African-American women in the West by detailing the journey of the Exodusters. The Asian experience is addressed in a brief overview of the history of Chinese immigration and anti-Chinese sentiment. The pages devoted to the Japanese women, who came to the United States as picture-brides in the first few decades of the twentieth century, are a welcome reminder that not all immigrants were destined for the prairie, the Plains or the diggings. One of the most fascinating sections of the book is the chapter on American Indian women, the pioneer women who were not pioneers … but for whom the varied lands called 'the west' had always been home" (Butler & Siporin, 1996). Women of Spanish-speaking families are also studied with the authors acknowledging that many of these women had arrived in the Anglo's "West" long before there was any English presence (Butler & Siporin, 1996). The role of teachers, the condition of female prisons, the presence of prostitutes and servants are all given space. What becomes clear, however, is that the Anglo community held white women to a higher standard of conduct than that of their non-Anglo sisters. For example, white female teachers were recruited for their "civilizing" properties in addition to their classroom abilities while Spanish, Indian, Asian, and African-American women were excluded from this profession and, in the eyes of the Anglo

community, always appeared to be teetering on the border of disrepute. Although Butler and Siporin reinforce the reality that the West was made up of an eclectic group of people, nonetheless, it is clear that the Anglo community established the reigning moral and social codes of the day.

The exceptional nature of this collection is that the "stories" included in the text are merely *based* on historical figures; however, Butler and Siporin argue that the re-telling of the tales are no less valuable because of the occasional inclusion of myth or legend. Indeed, they contend such myths and legends are just as much as part of the history of the West as are the painstakingly researched histories. One of the aims of the book is to develop a sense of empathy in women of the twentieth century to their counterparts who lived one hundred and more years earlier. Siporin explains that this can be achieved if research and primary documents act as a catalyst to inform imagination, instruct diction, and propel voice. The narrative then "focuses on incident and detail, rather than broad statement – listening for the spirit of a person or a people and creating a situation to echo that spirit with integrity" (Butler & Siporin, 1996). It is interesting to note that the only authors in this study who attempt to employ this style are women, though it is unclear why only women and not men should feel themselves so unfettered by convention. Butler and Siporin's alternative approach is instructive; however, as the reader is not provided with any sources, this work should be used as an adjunct to develop a fuller understanding of the female experience after having initially undertaken more traditional research of primary source documents.

Pioneer Women: The Lives of Women on the Frontier by Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith is a worthy pictorial companion to be examined in conjunction with more traditional works. Peavy graduated from Mississippi College with a B.A. in 1964 and was awarded an M.A. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Smith has produced two other works with Peavy, *Frontier Children* (Peavy & Smith, 1999) and *Women in Waiting in the Westward Movement: Life on the Home Frontier* (Peavy & Smith, 1999). *Pioneer Women* was not intended to provide the reader with more than a "snapshot" of women's lives in the West. Such "snapshots," however, whether visual or written, vividly transport us from a dugout in Eastern Montana to a field being ploughed by a "team" of Russian immigrant women in Saskatchewan.

Peavy and Smith use a wide range of source materials to provide fascinating accounts of the lives of a variety of women of whom Mrs. Shaw is a number. After Shaw crossed the threshold of her new home on the Michigan frontier, she stood in silence until "something within her seemed to give way, and she sank upon the ground" (Peavy & Smith, 1999). This reaction was apparently not unique to this particular hapless housewife; however, she and others like her rallied and transformed their frontier dwellings into crude replicas of former homes in the East. The level of women's commitment to home and family overcame the numerous obstacles frontier life inevitably placed in their paths. This book, despite its "coffee-table" appearance, is a rich and worthy contribution to the field of literature detailing women's lives in the early West.

Armitage and Jameson's second collaboration produced a book incorporating a more realistic view of western women's history. *Writing the Range. Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* was published ten years after *The Women's West*. Twenty-nine essays are divided into seven sections that place issues in a clear chronological context. The authors have assured a degree of inclusiveness by printing articles on topics such as: intercultural marriage, gender and the "Citizen Indian," Chinese Pioneer women, African American Women's Clubs, and a history of Japanese Pioneer women in Washington State. One of the most notable sections in the book is the selection of six bibliographies that provide details of works on African American, Asian, Native American, and Hispanic women. The diverse academic backgrounds of the contributors, which include professors of Asian Studies, Sociology, English and Chicano Studies, allow data to be interpreted from a variety of perspectives using a number of different methodologies.
Mormon Midwife: The 1846-1888 Diaries of Patty Bartlett Sessions is notable in that it provides the reader with an intimate look into the life of a Latter-day Saints (LDS) woman over an extended period. Sessions was one of the early followers of Joseph Smith and lived in Nauvoo before finally settling in Salt Lake City. Her diaries chronicle more than the experience of women on the journey westward; they also

provide important first-hand accounts of the personalities and rituals unique to this infant religion. Descriptions of "sealings" and other ceremonies and rites make this a worthwhile work on the LDS in general. The diaries are also important because they provide the "immediacy" considered so important by Kenneth Holmes. Examples of the difficulties faced on the trail reflect those of Session's non-Mormon sisters. Sessions is typical of other pioneer women in that she keeps meticulous records of expenditure and no summary purchase for the home is too small to exclude from her accounts. Of somewhat greater interest are the entries recording events that were to become milestones in the development of the LDS. Smart provides extensive and useful footnotes alleviating the need to materially alter the text, thereby retaining its authenticity and meaning. The bibliography includes references to works by noted LDS scholars, Leonard Arrington and Thomas G. Alexander, in addition to a varied selection of primary source documents.

African Americans on the Western Frontier is a collection of fourteen essays edited by Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Hardaway. Billington holds a Ph.D. from the University of Kentucky and is Professor Emeritus at New Mexico State University. Hardaway is a Professor of History at Northwestern Oklahoma State University. He received a B.A. in History and Political Science from Mid-Tennessee State University, a Master of Arts degree in History from New Mexico State University and a Doctor of Arts in History from the University of North Dakota.

Billington and Hardaway are the first authors examined for this paper who physically define the West. It is "those contiguous states whose areas are totally or in part west of the one hundredth meridian" (Billington & Hardaway, 1998). They also allocate specific dates to the frontier era (1850 to 1912) and note that the beginning date is important in relation to this study on African Americans, as much of the West was first organized under provisions of the congressional Compromise of 1850 (Billington & Hardaway, 1998). The purpose of the book is to present "the essential history of African Americans in the West from 1850 until the end of the frontier era" (Billington & Hardaway, 1998). The list of contributors to this volume includes Anne M. Butler and Glenda Riley. The essays by Butler and Riley are the only two which deal specifically with African American women; however, reading the other essays greatly helped in placing the experiences of this group into a framework of community. Riley notes that most African American women, the "double-minority" in the West, labored (like their counterparts of other races) at traditional chores, including childrearing and housework (Riley, 1998). Butler, however, makes a fascinating study of one group of African American women temporarily excluded from domestic life; women in prisons during the period of 1865-1910. She describes how Louisiana and Texas (part of the former slave-holding confederacy) imprisoned far more African American women for minor offences than white women and argues that the criminal justice system of frontier states, "discriminated against black women in a variety of ways" (Riley, 1998). Butler does not see the West as a place of hope for black women. Rather, she believes that black women were more vulnerable to racial victimization and sexual exploitation. This article, like all the others reproduced in this work, was previously published. However, her findings are so disturbing and her research so extensive that it would be negligent for any scholar compiling a book of the history of African American women to exclude it.

Women and the Conquest of California, 1542-1840: Codes of Silence was written in an attempt to provide a work that would address the contribution of women and minorities in early California. Virginia Bouvier, who holds a Ph.D. in Latin American Studies from the University of California at Berkeley, consulted a diverse range of sources which included: government and ecclesiastical correspondence; legal transcripts; oral histories; nineteenth-century ethnographic accounts; and journals of explorers, missionaries and foreign visitors to California (Bouvier, 2001). The bibliography is impressive and provides evidence of extensive reference to primary source documents. Bouvier adopts an "interdisciplinary" approach to her research calling on the fields of history, literature, anthropology, ethnic studies, and gender studies in order to provide a more inclusive account of the "code of silence," or how the experiences of Native and Hispanic women in Alta California were obscured or distorted. Examining the history of the area with the perspective firmly focused on gender, the historian can see that a plan of military and religious conquest can also be interpreted as an ideological and cultural undertaking

(Bouvier, 2001). To this end, Bouvier argues that notions relating to gender were a key component of conquest and shaped indigenous responses to the colonial Spanish forces. An example of this gender-driven resistance is the Indian revolt of 1775, when the ongoing abuse of Indian women by soldiers, and the rape of the Indian chief's wife at San Gabriel mission, resulted in eight hundred Indians uniting to form a well-planned attack on their oppressors (Bouvier, 2001).

Bouvier experienced some of the same difficulties faced by Albers and Medicine in relation to accessing information on the values embraced by Indian women. Indians often considered their female rituals as too sacred to discuss outside of their community, thereby unwittingly further denying non-Indians the ability to compile accurate accounts of their history (Bouvier, 2001). Many Indians saw silence as a defensive mechanism against an encroaching culture. Silence, advised one elderly Indian woman, "was the Indian's best weapon. Cut yourself off with silence any way you can. Don't talk. Don't give yourself away" (Bouvier, 2001). This self-imposed "code of silence" is compounded by the language and values of the conquerors recording the history of the period, making a definitive history of colonial Indian women all but impossible. Although not an exhaustive account, Bouvier has produced an important work that has contributed in a significant manner to the neglected study of non-Anglo women on the California frontier.

African American Women Confront that West 1600-2000 is a collection of essays that draws extensively on biographies, first-person narratives and interviews. Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore edited the book. Taylor is a Professor of African American History and History of the American West. He received a B.A. in American History from St. Augustine's College, an M.A. in American Urban History from the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in History of African Peoples, also from the University of Minnesota. He has written three books on African American history (one of which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize) and co-edited two volumes of essays, also on African American history. Taylor has two other books on African Americans in the West awaiting publication. Moore is a Professor of History at California State University, Sacramento. She received her B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley. Moore is the author of *The African Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* and is co-editor of *African American Women in the Trans-Mississippi West*.

The eighteen chapters cover both a wide time frame and list of topics and include contributions by Glenda Riley and Susan Armitage. The book is particularly noteworthy as it traces the history of African American women from the era of Spanish colonial settlement to postwar urban America. The underlying argument is that African American women have not only played critical and varied roles in the development of the American West but have often been dynamic innovators for change. African American migration westward to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle and Las Vegas permanently transformed this western region. This demographic revolution was partly as a result of thousands of black men and women who, having served in the armed forces, (Fort Huachuca in Arizona had the largest concentration of black soldiers in the nation) ultimately settled in their area at the end of hostilities. African American women may have served in the same military and lived in the same states as their Anglo counterparts but this book illustrates the fact that throughout the period under discussion, black women's experiences of the West were significantly different to those of white women, and even from women drawn from other minorities. The authors argue that the history of the West is shrouded in myth as it projects an unrealistic history of Anglos whilst simultaneously negating or ignoring the impact of blacks. African American women contributed in significant ways to the formation of this region; but in order for these accomplishments to be uncovered, the "mythic" West must be replaced by an inclusive and realistic portrayal of all who participated in its development.

The last work to be examined is a diary of an Australian woman that is included to demonstrate that the pioneer experience was not unique to the American West. Ailsa McLeary is a lecturer in Communications at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and is the author and editor of *Catherine: On Catherine Currie's Diary*. Australia appeared to be a reasonable choice for the purpose of comparison as it shares a number of similar characteristics familiar to early America. Initial colonies for both centuries were

established on the Eastern seaboard and the first large towns and seats of government were constructed on or near the East Coast. Early white settlers came from England to pursue mercantile opportunities or to seek freedom from religious persecution. In Australia's case, in addition to elective immigration, the country was also "a dumping ground" for convicted criminals. Later immigration was notable for its ethnic diversity. The dominant religion was Protestantism, and the largest non-colonized tracts of land were separated from the established communities by thousands of miles of arid space and desert. Anglos of both countries originally viewed each land as *terra nullius*, empty of symbols and structure. Imported diseases decimated the indigenous population of America and Australia and the native peoples who did survive these previously unknown epidemics were encouraged, and then forced, to subdue their own culture and traditions in favor of imported western notions of civilization.

Catherine Currie moved to the goldfields in Victoria with her parents at the age of seven. After marrying, her husband decided that the family would stake a land claim and begin farming. As McLeary notes, "her journeys, both voluntary and involuntary, kept taking her further and further away from the center of the world she knew. Her husband had a clear function – he and his sons would clear the forest to create a farm. She would raise a family…" (McLeary, 1998). European values were packed with their belongings as Catherine and her husband traveled to the frontier. Their aim was to create a new home, as similar as possible to the one they left behind for, "That is what pioneering is – the quest for normality, a set of unwritten rules by which a community lives" (McLeary, 1998). Catherine's diary is filled with the record of hard and repetitive toil. In the stifling heat on December 14, 1878, she records "making raspberry jam, baking bread … doing milking for sick neighbors as well as coping with her own heard" (McLeary, 1998). An initial arduous journey followed by isolation, extended physical labor and an uncertain future, were experiences common to both Australian and American female pioneers. The reigning ideology and social system of both countries supported a male dominated society that successfully fostered gender inequality and disparate standards of moral accountability. These principles of operation and behavior extended into the frontier as can be seen by McLeary, who points out that Currie's account of life was "mediated through the context of her time which dictated that the masculine world of work and public service was more important than the women's domestic role" (McLeary, 1998).

Catherine Currie, and the women cited by Faragher and others, operated from within the same mindset, the Victorian cult of ideal womanhood or the cult of domesticity. This was a set of social mores so powerful that its influence dominated the frontier and spanned two continents. Currie and the women of the American frontier had their opinions formed by the culture, religion and society of the day that placed women firmly in the home.

Women did not lay the track for the great railroads, nor did they labor on the vast irrigation projects, lead cavalry charges or run for the office of President. They, for the large part, were the "enablers" of westward expansion. They freed men of the domestic responsibilities that would have inhibited geographical or commercial expansion by caring for the home and children, and by assuming farming or mercantile responsibilities when it was necessary, or financially expedient, for men to be elsewhere. Gender notions relating to domain were underpinned by the Pauline injunction and enforced by the community. This mindset relegated the contributions of women and emphasized the conquests of men to the point that the West has become mythologized into an unrecognizable exclusive, Anglo-male dominated force. Women helped to build and shape the West, and the cultural values of the nineteenth century should not be allowed to obscure this significant contribution. However, neither should twentieth century scholars transform these largely ordinary women into icons of their gender.

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