

Butler is to be commended for her efforts to include the stories and portraits of many African-American women in her study. In fact, the number of photographs of African-American women from mountain states is greater than their representation either in the general population or in prison! Their case is also exaggerated by the inclusion of more evidence from Texas, a state notorious for its brutal, inhumane, racist, and corrupt prison system, than from any other state. Furthermore, by intentionally excluding the incarceration of American Indian women, some of the most salient issues having to do with racism, violence, and criminal justice in the American West do not come up.

Although some of Butler's conclusions may be problematic when viewed within a broader context of aggregate data, her book makes a very real contribution to the precious little we know about individual experiences of western women who wound up in prison between 1865 and 1915. As Kate Richards O'Hare, whose voice frequently informs Butler's study, observed, "It was a tragic tale which that line of weary, toil-stained women told as they shuffled by—a challenge to our civilization, an indictment of our social system."

The Important Things of Life: Women, Work, and Family in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, 1880–1929, by Dee Garceau. Women in the West Series. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. x, 215 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BARBARA HANDY-MARCHELLO, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

Dee Garceau's study of two generations of women in a western Wyoming county adds texture to the complex picture emerging from the growing body of literature on women in the American West. Sweetwater County was the home of Elinore Pruitt Stewart, whose books about homesteading prompted Garceau to ask if women were liberated by the frontier experience. Analyzing women's experiences in coal-mining towns and on ranches, Garceau concludes that women did not find the kind of freedom that was mythologized in literature about the West. Rather, they maintained close family ties, drawing on kin and community resources for economic and social support and giving the same to friends and family. Garceau suggests that women such as Stewart who wrote about the liberating influences of homesteading were part of a literary trend that had more to do with the New Woman than with real life on a Wyoming homestead.

The differences between urban and rural communities illuminate the complexities of western settlement. Sweetwater County towns were coal-mining centers controlled by the Union Pacific Railroad. By 1900, immigrants from Eastern Europe, particularly Croatia and Slovenia, made up a large part of the urban population. Women stabilized these ethnic communities in an irregular economy by providing room and board in their homes for newcomers and bachelor miners. Boarding likewise provided needed income for their own households. Young women of the first generation worked as domestics in boardinghouses and hotels. Daughters of these "commercialized housekeepers," if they could complete a high school education, moved into clerical, sales, and various skilled work until they married. Some continued to work after marriage.

Ranch women tended to be of American or "old immigrant" heritage. Their work was more varied than that of the housekeepers in town because it included both indoor and outdoor work. There was, however, a carefully constructed gender boundary around cattle herding, which was men's work. Women whose interests led them to work as cowboys, or whose labor was temporarily required during the seasonal peaks, were considered "hired men." First-generation ranch women accepted, even supported, these gender definitions, though some became important ranchers themselves.

In her best chapter, "Group Partnership and the Cowboy Myth," Garceau examines this paradox of women's ranch work. Masculine gender roles were protected by characterizing women's work with cattle as temporary or by identifying these women as "occupational men" (111), allowing the western myth of the independent and masculine cowboy to prevail. As long as the work was temporary or performed by young girls, there was little concern for their femininity. Garceau's explanation of how women cross gender boundaries without challenging the masculine nature of the work provides a model for examining gender in other agricultural communities where gender boundaries are so often broken.

Sometimes Garceau's conclusions are drawn a bit too broadly. For instance, she suggests that urban immigrant women, with new authority over their households and the ability to control their fertility, contributed to an "erosion of patriarchal authority within marriage" (158). Generally, though, her finely detailed analysis of the data is convincing. As all good historians do, she leaves us asking the question that lurks behind her analysis: did the West liberate men, or did their freedom depend on the background work and income of the women of their households?

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