

range that the Extension Service touted, but the realities of Great Plains farm life rendered such equipment utterly useless and therefore undesirable. Greater attention to other of the numerous contrasts between life on the midwestern prairies and life on the midwestern plains would have enriched the collection as a whole.

Taken in sum, the essays in this volume also fall short of proving the existence of a uniquely midwestern female identity. None of the characteristics of midwestern women's experience that Murphy and Venet describe in their introduction, and that the essayists explore in their various contributions to the anthology, are exclusive to women in the Midwest. For instance, the editors' statement that "women's religious affiliations maintained or increased women's leadership capabilities and their opportunities for political and social influence" (11) could apply equally well to New England women, just as the argument that "women suffered from isolation and what they considered unsettled conditions" (11) could as easily describe women in the Far West as those in the heartland.

The editors note, however, that this anthology represents only a beginning attempt to define a specific midwestern women's history. Let us hope that it is just the first of many works to address midwestern women's history as a distinct field of study. Although the scholarship represented in *Midwestern Women* does not quite measure up to the editors' stated objectives, the essays do raise issues and questions to be built upon in the future and thus make an important historiographical contribution. Murphy and Venet have also constructed an excellent bibliography for the volume that provides a comprehensive list of existing scholarship on midwestern women.

Building and Breaking Families in the American West, by Glenda Riley. Calvin P. Horn Lectures in Western History and Culture. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. xi, 204 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY BARBARA HANDY-MARCHELLO, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

In *Building and Breaking Families in the American West*, Glenda Riley argues that distinctive patterns of courtship, marriage, and divorce mark the social history of the American West. Her statistical and anecdotal evidence suggests that we can place little hope in marriages contracted in a western setting, but she uses this gloomy conclusion to suggest ways marriage might be socially and legally restructured.

Riley supplements her extensive reading of secondary material in history, sociology, and anthropology with primary accounts of successful and unsuccessful marriages. Using a broad definition of the West that includes all states and territories west of the Mississippi (including Iowa and Minnesota), Riley examines the experience of Hispanic, Native American, and Asian and European American peoples. She also treats western ethnic groups often overlooked, such as the Punjabi who settled in California early in this century. Sometimes her categories are not very precise, which muddles her analysis of ethnic relationships. Although Riley applies the colloquial term *Anglo* to everyone of European descent, a German immigrant to the American West is not culturally an "Anglo," and would not likely have been allowed to forget the distinction in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Riley presents a major premise in each of the four chapters of the book. In the first chapter she argues that courtship in the American West did not prepare couples for successful marriage because the great variety of ethnic traditions did not merge into a new, effective process of mate selection. Courtship in the diverse, often competitive or adversarial cultures of the West was "incoherent."

In the second chapter, Riley maintains that marriage was subject to a variety of pressures that could as easily destroy the relationship as sustain it. For instance, love could hold a couple together against negative community and familial pressure, poverty, and other stressors. On the other hand, high expectations for love or romance often led to unhappiness when illusion met reality.

In the third and most interesting chapter, Riley examines intercultural marriage. She asserts that the West afforded more opportunities for intermarriage than other parts of the United States, and that at certain times in the history of the West, intermarriage was acceptable, even desirable. For instance, fur traders who wanted to marry and live in a family necessarily married Native women. However, as the nineteenth century wore on, miscegenation laws directed at marriages between whites and African Americans, Asian Americans, or Native Americans limited intermarriage. As racism became institutionalized in the West, intercultural marriages suffered a higher rate of divorce.

In the fourth chapter, Riley asks why the West had a consistently higher rate of divorce than any other section of the nation. She concludes that "every characteristic identified as a causal factor of divorce" existed in the West (145). Prominent among those factors were liberal divorce laws in states with a desire to reap the profits of the divorce trade, and expanded economic opportunities for women, who sought more than two-thirds of the divorce judgments in some parts of the West.

Riley despairs over the state of marriage today. In the epilogue she offers her ideas for changing the institution legally and socially in order to help families survive. She dismisses the family as a location for the preparation of young people for marriage. Instead, she would place the task in the hands of educators and clergy. Using a peculiarly western simile, Riley likens the marriage license to a gun license and recommends a "cool-down period" before the license becomes valid (148).

It is difficult to conceive of an approach to a topic as complex as marriage that could successfully encompass so many cultures and personal experiences. Riley's effort is energetic but falls short in some important ways. She gives little attention to economic and social circumstances peculiar to time, place, and culture that influence marriage and family decisions. Lacking these important historical markers, Riley's research tends to float through time. In addition, she depends too heavily on the ideas (treated as myths in recent histories of the West) of individualism and equality as factors in western marriage and divorce. That these ideas are deeply rooted in European thought complicates Riley's effort to examine non-European-American marriages. Despite her attempt to be inclusive, *Building and Breaking Families* is dominated by "Anglo" tradition, law, and ideas.

Although inaccuracies of detail mar Riley's book, she has gathered together a wealth of information that encourages us to reconsider the social history of the American West and perhaps in the future to seek to record and analyze marriages in which common goals, mutual respect, and fidelity have fostered enduring marriages.

The Girls' Reform School of Iowa, 1865-1899, by Douglas M. Wertsch. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997. xiii, 151 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$79.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY SHARON E. WOOD, CHARLES WARREN CENTER FOR STUDIES IN AMERICAN HISTORY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

In *The Girls' Reform School of Iowa*, Douglas Wertsch traces the early history of this institution, the second of its kind in the United States. Drawing largely on records kept by the school itself and by the Iowa legislature, Wertsch's history emphasizes the role of the first superintendent, Lorenzo D. Lewelling, in shaping its programs.

In Wertsch's view, Lewelling and his wife, Angie, the school's first matron, successfully imprinted on the institution their vision of gentle, personalized discipline. Indeed, their influence was so strong that, while they served from 1873 until the mid-1880s, "well into the twen-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.