

Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men's Penitentiaries

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logue, since it forced the "heterogeneous minds" into an "Americanist whole."

If religio-ethnicity explains much about political behavior, one wonders why Gjerde did not explore the equally compelling nexus between religion and farming behavior. He differentiated the Yankee-Teuton topologies in terms of household modes of production and inheritance patterns, but left unexplored the evidence that religious beliefs influenced farmers' attitudes concerning cropping, animal husbandry, inheritance practices, and ultimately the care for their land itself. Given the wide sweep of the religio-ethnic landscape, Gjerde inevitably had to pass over some fine points. For example, he correctly states that on the issue of prohibition the Dutch community was divided, but then he fails to explain why and along what lines. Sometimes the writing is too tight, as in this lead sentence: "Whereas cultural diffusion that infused social change into ethnic communities illustrated internal friction, social interaction and political conflict revealed patterns of negotiation and division between the minds in the West" (21). These quibbles aside, this sparkling book is must reading for all students of ethnicity and immigration. Iowans especially will find here a fresh interpretive synthesis of their ethnic history.

Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men's Penitentiaries, by Anne M. Butler. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. xvii, 262 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DORSEY PHELPS, IOWA CITY

In *Gendered Justice in the American West*, Anne M. Butler tells some wonderfully vivid stories about individuals from the small group of women who were sentenced to state penitentiaries between 1865 and 1915. Butler's rich anecdotal evidence will impress historians of American crime and criminology, but will also be of interest to anyone who wants to know more about the economic and social histories of women in American frontier communities during the period of rapid expansion.

The stories of these women as Butler tells them are so compelling that it is difficult to realize the extent of their exceptionality. In 1910, 48,566, or 9.8 percent, of all prisoners in the United States were women; of these, only 1,577, or 2.7 percent, were incarcerated in state prisons and penitentiaries. The felonies considered serious enough to be punished by incarceration in state prisons (as opposed to county

or municipal jails, workhouses, or juvenile industrial schools, where the great majority of women convicted of crimes were sent) included homicide, assault, robbery, burglary, larceny, fraud, and forgery, some of the least likely crimes for women to commit.

As Butler has defined it for the purposes of her study, the American West includes the entire inland region west of the Mississippi River (what the United States Census Bureau calls the Mountain, West North Central, and West South Central territories or states). Butler suggests that the culture of violence in the western experience blurred any differences among the states within this region (4, 226).

Even if one accepts her arguments about cultural similarity, however, a number of other demographic and institutional differences among the states require consideration. First among these are differences in population density. In 1870, for example, one of the most populous states in the region, Iowa (which receives scant attention in Butler's study), had 1,194,000 people, a density of 21.5 per square mile; on the other hand, Wyoming, the second-smallest state, had 9,000 people and a density of 0.1 per square mile. This difference had a practical effect on how many crimes were committed, how great was the need for separate prisons for women, what resources (including manpower) were available for building them (as opposed to other institutions equally necessary to the community, such as state houses, insane asylums, universities, and schools), and when they were established.

Differences in population density are key to understanding western institutions but also bear on comparisons with the institutions in the East that served as their models. Again, consider the examples of Iowa and Wyoming. The Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison opened in 1839 and the men's reformatory at Anamosa in 1871; Iowa also had separate training schools for boys (1868) and girls (1880) and, in 1915, established a women's reformatory, which opened at Rockwell City in 1918. Wyoming, on the other hand, opened its first state prison in 1902 and did not have a separate girls' training school until 1925, forty-five years after Iowa's began. The practical consequence was that for most of the years of Butler's study, Iowa had multiple options for institutionalizing deviant women, while Wyoming's possibilities were extremely limited.

The two states also differ widely from each other where gender balance is concerned. In Iowa in 1870, there were 626,000 men and 568,000 women, a 52:48 ratio; in Wyoming, there were 7,000 men and 2,000 women, a ratio of 70:20, which makes it a little easier to understand why separate prisons for women were not being constructed in Wyoming at the time.

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.

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