

she did not teach school long, until she married a well-to-do farmer in Oklahoma. The older girl got her wages raised until she got one hundred and twenty-five dollars per month. I have worked at farm work and tree husbandry all my life. My oldest daughter bought me my first suit of clothes I ever had.”



ESSAYS

The western frontier looms large in the history of the United States. Historians like Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt (who became president of the United States) helped enshrine the frontier experience by portraying the West as the rough-and-tumble setting in which “white” Americans forged their commitment to political democracy and social equality. Today, historians depict the frontier differently. Patricia Nelson Limerick of the University of Colorado at Boulder emphasizes interpersonal dynamics. Rowdy, bigoted individuals competed violently for what they wanted. Limerick speaks for a generation of “new western historians” when she argues that western settlement was continuously multiethnic and fundamentally antidemocratic. Maria Montoya of Princeton University focuses on how people fitted their lives within the structure of the law. She argues that impersonal ideas about property, imposed by governments, had as much or more to do with whether or not different population groups triumphed or lost out. As transportation and communications shrunk the world, foreign companies headquartered thousands of miles away battled for a piece of the frontier, too. They found that laws could work for or against them as well, with unexpected results. Montoya’s work implies that the frontier “opened” and “closed” multiple times.

The Frontier as a Place of Ethnic and Religious Conflict

PATRICIA NELSON LIMERICK

In 1871 an informal army of Arizona civilians descended on a peaceful camp and massacred over one hundred Apaches, mostly women and children. Who were the attackers at Camp Grant? The usual images of Western history would suggest one answer: white men. In fact, the attackers were a consortium of Hispanics, Anglo-Americans, and Papago Indians. However different the three groups might have been, they could agree on the matter of Apaches and join in interracial cooperation. Hostility between Apaches and Papagoes, and between Apaches and Hispanics, had in fact begun long before conflict between Apaches and Anglo-Americans.

In the popular imagination, the frontier froze as a biracial confrontation between “whites” and “Indians.” More complex questions of race relations seemed to be the terrain of other regions’ histories. The history of relations

between blacks and whites centered in the South, while “ethnic conflict” suggested the crowded cities of the Northeast, coping with floods of immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As blacks moved north and European immigrants crossed the Atlantic, new populations put the adaptability of American society to the test. Could native Americans of northern European stock tolerate these “others”? Was it better to deal with them through assimilation or through exclusion? How could old-stock Americans defend their valued “purity” against these foreign threats?

These are familiar themes in the history of the Southern and Northeastern United States, but ethnic conflict was not exclusive to the East. Western America shared in the transplanted diversity of Europe. Expansion involved peoples of every background: English, Irish, Cornish, Scottish, French, German, Portuguese, Scandinavian, Greek, and Russian. To that diversity, the West added a persistent population of Indians, with a multitude of languages and cultures; an established Hispanic population, as well as one of later Mexican immigrants; Asians, to whom the American West was the East; black people, moving west in increasing numbers in the twentieth century; and Mormons, Americans who lived for a time in isolation, evolving a distinctive culture from the requirements of their new faith. Put the diverse humanity of Western America into one picture, and the “melting pot” of the Eastern United States at the turn of the century begins to look more like a family reunion, a meeting of groups with an essential similarity—dominantly European, Judeo-Christian, accustomed to the existence of the modern state.

The diversity of the West put a strain on the simpler varieties of racism. In another setting, categories dividing humanity into superior white and inferior black were comparatively easy to steer by. The West, however, raised questions for which racists had no set answers. Were Indians better than blacks—more capable of civilization and assimilation—perhaps even suitable for miscegenation? Were Mexicans essentially Indians? Did their European heritage count for anything? Were “mongrel” races even worse than other “pure” races? Where did Asians fit in the racial ranking? Were they humble, menial workers—or representatives of a great center of civilization, art, and, best of all, trade? Were the Japanese different from, perhaps more tolerable than, the Chinese? What about southern and eastern Europeans? When Greek workers in the mines went on strike and violence followed, was this race war or class war? Western diversity forced racists to think—an unaccustomed activity.

Over the twentieth century, writers of Western history succumbed to the easy temptation, embracing a bipolar West composed of “whites” and “Indians.” Relations between the two groups shrank, moreover, to a matter of whites meeting obstacles and conquering them. Fought and refought in books and film, those “colorful” Indian wars raged on. Meanwhile, the sophisticated questions, the true study of American race relations, quietly slipped into the province of historians who studied other parts of the country.

In 1854, in the case of *People v. Hall*, California Supreme Court Chief Justice J. Murray demonstrated the classic dilemma of an American racist wrestling with the questions raised by Western diversity. Ruling on the right of Chinese people

to testify in court against white people, Murray took up the white man's burden of forcing an intractable reality back into a unified racist theory.

No statute explicitly addressed the question of Chinese testimony, but Murray found another route to certainty. State law, he argued, already prevented blacks, mulattoes, and Indians from testifying as witnesses "in any action or proceeding in which a white person is a party." Although state law did not refer explicitly to Asians, this was, Murray argued, an insignificant omission. Columbus, he said, had given the name "Indians" to North American natives while under the impression that he was in Asia and the people before him were Asians. "Ethnology," having recently reached a "high point of perfection," disclosed a hidden truth in Columbus's error. It now seemed likely that "this country was first peopled by Asiatics." From Columbus's time, then, "American Indians and the Mongolian, or Asiatic, were regarded as the same type of the human species." Therefore, it could be assumed, the exclusion of "Indians" from testifying applied to Asians as well.

Judge Murray found an even more compelling argument in the essential "degraded" similarity of nonwhite races. The laws excluding "Negroes, mulattoes, and Indians" from giving testimony had obviously been intended to "protect the white person from the influence of all testimony" from another caste. "The use of these terms ["Negro," "mulatto," and "Indian"] must, by every sound rule of construction, exclude everyone who is not of white blood."

Concluding that Asians could not testify, Murray spelled out the "actual and present danger" he had defused. "The same rule which would admit them to testify, would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls." With a smoke screen of scientific racism, using anthropology, Murray thus declared the essential unity of darker mankind. He did his best to keep power, opportunity, and justice in California in the hands of God's chosen, lighter-skinned people. And he did a good job of it....

To white workingmen, post-gold rush California did not live up to its promise. Facing limited job opportunities and uncertain futures, white laborers looked both for solutions and for scapegoats. Men in California came with high hopes; jobs proved scarce and unrewarding; someone must be to blame. In California, capital had at its command a source of controllable, underpaid labor. White workers, the historian Alexander Saxton has said, "viewed the Chinese as tools of monopoly." The workers therefore "considered themselves under attack on two fronts, or more aptly from above and below." Resenting big business and resenting competition from Chinese labor, frustrated workers naturally chose to attack the more vulnerable target. The slogan "The Chinese must go" could make it through Congress and into federal law; "Big business must go" was not going to earn congressional approval.

The issue of the Chinese scapegoat became a pillar of California politics, a guaranteed vote getter. In 1879, a state referendum on the Chinese question brought out "a margin of 150,000 to 900 favoring total exclusion." Opposition to the Chinese offered unity to an otherwise diverse state; divisions between Protestants and Catholics temporarily healed; Irish immigrants could cross the

barrier separating a stigmatized ethnic group from the stigmatizing majority. Popular democratic participation in the rewriting of the California constitution showed this majority at work. "[N]o native of China, no idiot, insane person, or person convicted of any infamous crime," the constitution asserted, "... shall ever exercise the privileges of an elector of this State." Moreover, in the notorious Article XIX, the framers went on to prohibit the employment "of any Chinese or Mongolian" in any public works projects below the federal level or by any corporation operating under state laws. These provisions, the historian Mary Roberts Coolidge wrote early in the twentieth century, "were not only unconstitutional but inhuman and silly." They were also directly expressive of the popular will.

"To an American death is preferable to a life on a par with a Chinaman," the manifesto of the California Workingmen's Party declared in 1876. "... Treason is better than to labor beside a Chinese slave." Extreme threat justified extreme actions; extralegal, violent harassment followed closely on violent declarations. In harassing the Chinese, white Californians did not seek to violate American ideals and values; they sought to defend them. "They call us a mob," a female organizer said, single-handedly demolishing the image of women as the "gentle tamers" of the West. "It was a mob that fought the battle of Lexington, and a mob that threw the tea over-board in Boston harbor, but they backed their principles.... I want to see every Chinaman—white or yellow—thrown out of this state."

California may have "catalyzed and spearheaded the movement for exclusion," but, as Stuart Miller has shown, this was not a matter of a narrow sectional interest pushing the rest of the nation off its preferred course. Negative images gleaned from traders, missionaries, and diplomats in China predisposed the whole country to Sinophobia; the use of Chinese workers as strikebreakers in Eastern industries clinched the question. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, a product of national consensus, met little opposition....

In their anti-Oriental crusading, white Westerners often referred to the South and its "problem." In a search for case studies of discrimination and conflict in black/white relations, they did not need to go so far afield. During the nineteenth century, black people were sparsely represented in the West. Their numerical insignificance, however, did not stop white people from being preoccupied with the issues of black migration. Despite visions of Western fresh starts and new beginnings, the South's "problem" had long ago moved West.

The extension of slavery into the Western territories had, of course, been a prime source of sectional tension before the Civil War. The struggles over the admission of new states, free or slave, had alarmed those concerned with the survival of the Union; "a firebell in the night," Thomas Jefferson called the conflicts preceding the 1820 Missouri Compromise. Fantasies of Western innocence aside, the Western territories were deeply implicated in the national struggle over slavery.

In 1850, California was admitted as a free state; in 1857, Oregon was admitted with a similar status. That fact alone can give the impressions that the Westerners

were, in some principled way, opposed to slavery. That impression needs closer examination.

Most white settlers in Oregon opposed the intrusion of slavery into their territory. However, they also opposed the intrusion of free blacks. Following on earlier territorial laws, the 1857 Oregon state constitution included a provision excluding free blacks and received heavy voter support. "The object," one early Oregon leader explained, "is to *keep* clear of this most troublesome class of population. We are in a new world, under most favorable circumstances, and we wish to avoid most of these great evils that have so much afflicted the United States and other countries." To the white Oregonians, this was a principled position. The project was to create and preserve a better social order and to steer clear of the problems and mistakes that plagued other, less pure regions. Oregon's exclusion of blacks thus appeared to be "a clear victory for settlers who came to the Far West to escape the racial troubles of the East."

The particular conditions of Oregon added another reason for black exclusion. The question of the admission of free blacks, Oregon's delegate to Congress explained in 1850,

is a question of life and death to us in Oregon.... The negroes associate with the Indians and intermarry, and, if their free ingress is encouraged or allowed, there would a relationship spring up between them and the different tribes, and a mixed race would ensue inimical to the whites; and the Indians being led on by the negro who is better acquainted with the customs, language, and manners of the whites, than the Indian, these savages would become much formidable than they otherwise would, and long and bloody wars would be the fruits of the comingling of the races. It is the principle of self preservation that justifies the actions of the Oregon legislature.

Beyond actual armed conspiracy, white Westerners saw in black rights the first link in a chain reaction. Permit blacks a place in American political and social life, and Indians, Asians, and Hispanics would be next. Western diversity thus gave an edge of urgency to each form of prejudice; the line had to be held against each group; if the barrier was breached once, it would collapse before all the various "others." White Southerners could specialize, holding off one group; white Westerners fought in a multifront campaign.

Post-Civil War Reconstruction thus posed a challenge to the institutions of the West as well as to those of the South. Western members of Congress could often join in imposing black rights on the South; the South had rebelled, after all, and deserved punishment. One punishment was black suffrage. But imposing black suffrage on Western states that had not rebelled—that was another matter, and the occasion for another round in the westward-moving battle of states' rights.

Confronted with the Fifteenth Amendment, giving blacks the vote, both California and Oregon balked. "If we make the African a citizen," an Oregon newspaper argued in 1865, "we cannot deny the same right to the Indian or the Mongolian. Then how long would we have peace and prosperity when four

races separate, distinct and antagonistic should be at the polls and contend for the control of government?" In California, opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment hinged on the prospect that suffrage without regard to "race, color or previous condition of servitude" might include the Chinese. The Fifteenth Amendment became law without ratification by California or Oregon. The Oregon legislature "in a gesture of perverse defiance rejected the amendment in October, 1870, fully six months after its incorporation into the federal Constitution." The amendment, the state senate declared, was "in violation of Oregon's sovereignty, an illegal interference by Congress in Oregon's right to establish voting qualifications, and a change in law forced on the nation by the bayonet." White Southerners might have been reduced to a state of temporary impotence, but they could take comfort in the fact that others had adopted their favored arguments.

In their ongoing preoccupation with purity, various Western State legislatures also moved to hold the line against racial mixing. California, Oregon, and—most extraordinary, in light of its current flexibility in matrimonial matters—Nevada all passed laws against miscegenation. Below the level of law, white Westerners practiced their own, more casual versions of discrimination. Labor unions excluded black workers; owners of restaurants, inns, and hotels limited their clientele; housing segregation was common. Scattered through historical records are incidents in which individual communities abruptly resolved to expel their black residents. "In 1893," Elizabeth McLagan has reported, "the citizens of Liberty, Oregon, requested that all black people leave town." In 1904, facing high unemployment, the town of Reno, Nevada, set out to reduce its problems by "arresting all unemployed blacks and forcing them to leave the city." "There are too many worthless negroes in the city," the Reno police chief explained.

In the twentieth century, as black migration from the South to the West accelerated, Western states' discriminatory laws stayed on the books. Although never consistently enforced, Oregon's prohibition on free blacks was not formally repealed until 1926. California's ban on miscegenation lasted until 1948; Nevada's remained until 1959. Oregon and California finally consented to a symbolic ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment—in 1959 and 1962, respectively....

Race, one begins to conclude, was the key factor in dividing the people of Western America. Its meanings and distinctions fluctuated, but racial feeling evidently guided white Americans in their choice of groups to persecute and exclude. Differences in culture, in language, in religion, meant something; but a physically distinctive appearance seems to have been the prerequisite for full status as a scapegoat. If this conclusion begins to sound persuasive, then the Haun's Mill Massacre restores one to a realistic confusion.

On an October day, the Missouri militia attacked a poorly defended settlement of the enemy, killed seventeen, and wounded fifteen more. One militiaman discovered a nine-year-old boy in hiding and prepared to shoot him. Another intervened. "Nits will make lice," the first man said, and killed the boy.

Is this the classic moment in an Indian massacre? The murdered boy, like the other victims at the 1838 Haun's Mill Massacre, was white—and Mormon.

In the 1830s, Missourians hated Mormons for a variety of reasons. They had unsettling religious, economic, and political practices; they were nonetheless prosperous, did not hold slaves, and could control elections by voting in a bloc. They were a peculiar people, seriously flawed to the Gentile point of view. Mormons were white, but the Missourians still played on most of the usual themes of race hatred. When the governor of Missouri suggested a war of extermination against the Mormons, he made one point clear: the absence of a racial difference could not keep white people from thoroughly hating each other.

Mormonism, moreover, was an American product. In the 1820s, in upstate New York the young Joseph Smith had brooded about American religious diversity. With so many sects making competing claims to certainty, how was the seeker to make the right choice? "I found," Smith said, "that there was a great clash in religious sentiment; if I went to one society they referred me to one plan, and another to another...." It was obvious that "all could not be right" and "that God could not be the author of so much confusion." Wrestling with this chaos, Smith began to experience revelations, he said, leading him to the acquisition of buried golden plates. Translated, the golden plates became the Book of Mormon, and the basis of a new American religion, offering the certainty of direct revelation in modern times. To its believers, Mormonism was not so much a new religion as an old one restored. Over the centuries, true Christianity had become corrupted and factionalized, broken into the competing sects that had once perplexed Smith. The Church of Latter-day Saints of Jesus Christ restored the lost unity.

Against that backdrop of sects and denominations, Mormonism offered its converts certainty and community. In Mormon doctrine, earthly labors carried a direct connection to spiritual progress; one's exertions in the material world directly reflected one's spiritual standing. With nearly every daily action "mormonized," as a later observer put it, Saints clearly had to cluster, constructing communities in which they could keep each other on track. In converting to Mormonism, one converted to a full way of life within a community of believers. In their first decade, Mormons were already on their way to becoming a new ethnic group, something new under the American sun.

As Mormon numbers grew, and the majority of the converts clustered in the Midwest, they came into increasing conflict with their Gentile neighbors. Their novel religion, their occasional experiments in communitarianism, their ability to vote in a bloc, their very separatism, made them targets for suspicion and hostility. When Joseph Smith summarized his people's experience, he could not be accused of much exaggeration: "the injustice, the wrongs, the murders, the bloodshed, the theft, misery and woe that has been caused by the barbarous, inhuman and lawless proceedings" of their enemies, especially in the state of Missouri....

When the "Indian problem" grew heated in the early nineteenth century, the remote and isolated West had presented itself as a geographical solution: place the Indians in locations white people would not want anyway, and end the friction by a strategy of segregation. Geography appeared to offer the same solution to "the Mormon problem." Relocated in the remote and arid Great

Basin, the Mormons could escape persecution by a kind of spatial quarantine; the dimensions of the continent itself would guard them. Even when the gold rush broke the quarantine and when Gentiles—and even Missourians—were suddenly provoked into crossing the continent, the Mormons had had the chance to reverse the proportions and become an entrenched majority in the territory of Utah....

The aridity of Utah meant that prosperity depended on a cooperation that the Mormons, uniquely, could provide. Land might be privately held, but water and timber were held in common and allocated by church authorities. The church leadership ordained the founding of towns and farms; communally organized labor could then build the dams and ditches that made irrigation possible. In their prosperity and good order, the settlements of the Mormons impressed even those who could find nothing else to admire in this peculiar people's way of life.

That peculiarity had become suddenly more dramatic. Established in their own territory, far from disapproving neighbors, leaders had felt empowered to bring the church's peculiar domestic practice into the open. In 1852, the Mormons stood revealed as practitioners of polygamy.

For the rest of the nineteenth century, the idea of one man in possession of more than one woman would strike most non-Mormon Americans as deviant, licentious, and *very* interesting—a shocking matter of sexual excess. In fact, Mormon polygamy was a staid and solemn affair. If the patriarchal family was a good thing, if bringing children into the world to be responsibly raised in the right religion was a major goal of life, then it was a logical—and very American—conclusion that more of a good thing could only be better. The Mormon family, properly conducted through this world, would reassemble in the afterlife. Adding more personnel to this sanctified unit gave Mormon patriarchs even greater opportunity to perform their ordained function....

... For thirty years, Congress tried to make the Mormons behave. Antipolygamy laws added up to a sustained campaign to change personal behavior, a campaign without parallel except in Indian affairs....

Antipolygamy laws finally drove the Mormon leaders into hiding, concealed—in defiance of federal law—by their loyal followers. The church had been placed in receivership; cohabitation prosecutions went on apace; zealous federal agents pursued the concealed leaders. Then, on September 24, 1890, President Wilford Woodruff of the LDS issued an official manifesto, advising the Latter-day Saints “to refrain from contracting any marriage forbidden by the law of the land.” The year was 1890, and one kind of frontier opportunity had indeed closed....

Whatever else it tells us, the Mormon example shows that race was not the only provocation for strong antipathies and prejudices. White people could also become aliens, targets for voyeuristic exploitation, for coercive legislation, even for the use of the U.S. Army. But, the Mormon example also shows that in the long run it paid to be white.

At the Utah statehood convention in 1895, Charles S. Varian gave a speech of reconciliation. Varian had earlier been U.S. district attorney for Utah Territory “and relentless in his prosecution of polygamy.” He had, however, found the convention to be an occasion of harmony. Every member, he thought, had

“been taught by his fellowmen that, after all, we are very much alike, and that the same passions, and the same motives, actuate us all.”

“After all, we are very much alike”—it was a statement no one at the time made to the Chinese or the Japanese. Once polygamy had been formally settled, the “differentness” of Mormons could be subordinated and their essentially American qualities celebrated....

When it came to pitting Western people against each other, politics and economics could work as well as race or religion. When White people appeared to threaten order and prosperity, the lesson was once again clear: race was no protector from vicious conflict. Consider three examples:

- In May 1912, the middle-class citizens of San Diego, California, forcibly expelled the anarchist speakers Emma Goldman and Ben Reitman. San Diego was, in that year, “an established city of more than 40,000 people,” “progressive Republican” in politics. In their radicalism and also in their association with the Wobblies, the Industrial Workers of the World, Goldman and Reitman represented a threat that the city’s boosters would not tolerate. Goldman “escaped violence only by the narrowest margin,” a San Diego newspaper reported. But “treatment that the vigilantes would not give the woman was accorded to the man. Reitman was mysteriously spirited away from the hotel some time near midnight ... and, it is reported, tarred and feathered and branded on the back with the letters ‘I.W.W.’ He is furthermore said to have been forced to kneel and kiss the American flag. The branding was done with a lighted cigar, which was traced through the tar....” The concerned citizens and policemen of San Diego were not always so gentle. In other confrontations, “at least two radicals were killed.”
- On April 20, 1914, the Colorado militia attacked a tent colony of strikers and their families. Both sides had guns and used them, but bullets were not the major source of injury. In the middle of the battle, the tents burst into flames. Two women and eleven children burned to death. The Ludlow massacre “climaxed a labor struggle in Colorado which erupted into a civil war all over the state.”
- On November 5, 1916, two steamboats carrying Wobblies left Seattle for the town of Everett, to support a strike under way against the timber industry. Armed vigilantes and policemen tried to prevent them from landing; in the exchange of bullets, five workers and two vigilantes died, while over fifty were wounded and seven were reported missing. “The water turned crimson,” one historian has written, “and corpses were washing ashore for days afterward.”

The conventional approach of blaming Western violence on the “frontier environment” does not explain these incidents. Although most of the strikers at Ludlow were of southern or eastern European origin, racial or ethnic explanations of conflict are also of limited help. Judging by the written record alone, a

historian blind to actual physical characteristics might think that there were at least eight oppressed races in the West: Indians, Hispanics, Chinese, Japanese, blacks, Mormons, strikers, and radicals.

Exploring the ways in which “Mexicans, Chinese and Indians were shamefully abused by the Yankee majority,” [historian] Ray Allen Billington in 1956 placed the responsibility on the “corrosive effect of the environment” and “the absence of social pressures.” The abuse, he said, represented “a completely undemocratic nativism.”

This explanation has an innocent certainty now beyond our grasp. Nativism was only in an ideal sense “undemocratic.” The California votes on Chinese exclusion and the Oregon votes on black exclusion made the voice of democracy in these matters clear. Second, blaming “the corrosive effect of the environment” for nativism involved doubtful logic; white Americans brought the raw material for these attitudes with them, with little help from the “environment.” And finally, on close examination, over the duration of Western history, the very concept of “the Yankee majority” was a coherent entity only if one retreated to a great distance, from which the divisions simply could not be seen....

When the weight of Southern civilization fell too heavily on Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain offered the preferred American alternative: “I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before.” The West, the theory had gone, was the place where one escaped the trials and burdens of American civilization, especially in its Southern version. Those “trials and burdens” often came in human form. Repeatedly, Americans had used the West as a mechanism for evading these “problems.” Much of what went under the rubric “Western optimism” was in fact this faith in postponement, in the deferring of problems to the distant future. Whether in Indian removal or Mormon migration, the theory was the same: the West is remote and vast; its isolation and distance will release us from conflict; this is where we can get away from each other. But the workings of history carried an opposite lesson. The West was not where we escaped each other, but where we all met.

The Frontier as a Place of Global Competition and Gender Redefinition

MARIA MONTOYA

From the moment that its first human inhabitants, the Jicarilla Apaches, set foot on what would become known as the Maxwell Land Grant, people told stories that marked boundaries on the landscape. These stories and boundary markers were rooted in the particular culture of the group inhabiting the land. The Jicarillas, in particular, marked their territory by the natural boundaries of the four rivers that surrounded their homeland. In turn, the Spanish explorers gave