Book Review: African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000

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This collection chronicles the longstanding and diverse experiences of African American women across the regional West through a series of essays by leading western historians. Together, they bring new depth to a subject often ignored. On issues ranging from race relations to labor relations and from working-class as well as upper-class perspectives, the volume carefully reconstructs and considers the role of black women in varied western contexts.


As the title suggests, the editors and contributors make a clear analytical claim. In each of the pieces, African American women—regardless of particular circumstance—found that race in combination with gender proved the most important facet of their western experience. Consistently tackling racism and sexism with self-sacrifice and self-confidence, they not only contributed to western history but also shaped it through their individual confrontations. That so many of the essays resort to biography suggests the source limitations confronted—and transcended—by these historians as well as the work that remains to be done in this crucial subfield.

All told, the book succeeds in highlighting and reiterating the significance of African American women in western history. As the collection's chronological scope suggests, these women did not suddenly appear on the western scene at any given moment—they were in the thick of the region's most crucial dynamics from the beginning.

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