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Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915.

By Glenda Riley. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984. Notes, illustrations, photographs. 336 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

Glenda Riley, professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa, has long been interested in documenting women's role in settling the West. Author of *Frontierswomen*, *The Iowa Experience* and numerous articles on western women's history, Riley breaks new

ground in *Women and Indians on the Frontier* by focusing upon westering white women's attitudes toward and relationships with American Indians. Riley presents an interesting and controversial thesis, one that some western history scholars will challenge. After studying more than one hundred fifty westering women's diaries, log books, memoirs, and letters and an equal number of westering men's records, she concludes that attitudes of white men and white women toward American Indians differed. Although men and women equally displayed anti-Indian prejudices before starting the westward journey, having been saturated with exaggerated tales of Indian savagery, only women modified their perceptions of Indians to any considerable degree after prolonged contact with them in the West.

She reasons that the hardships endured in forging new lives in the West forced women to revise perceptions of themselves. After gaining a more realistic view of their roles and discovering that their alleged inferiority was refuted by the western experience—they were forced to endure and perform heavy physical labor—women were able to change their perceptions about Indians. They became more secure and sympathetic in their relations with Native Americans and began to see them as people like themselves.

Men, on the other hand, did not undergo this educational process. From the beginning of their westward trek, men were cast into an adversarial relationship with Indians. They had the responsibility of seizing native lands and protecting families from Indians who resisted these encroachments. There was little in white men's contact with Indians that fostered sympathy, affinity, or friendship. Women, taught to be nurturing in their approach to people and problems, did not share men's bellicosity. Women pursued a more gentle course, their relations with Indians often characterized by warmth and affection.

Although many Euro-American women changed their views about Indians, Riley points out that they did not often change their

views about Mexicans, Orientals, Blacks, and Mormons, primarily because they lacked opportunity for close or extended contact with members of these groups. But Riley develops this secondary theme only in relation to Mormons and to natives along the Panama route to California, even though photos accompanying the text lead the reader to expect an examination of westering women's relations with Southwest Hispanos.

Scholars and general readers alike will enjoy this attractive and well-written book, though some will question the author's conclusions. Still, Professor Riley has performed a valuable service by raising the issue of gender in relation to ethnic interaction on the western frontier.

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