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Review of *Uncommon Common Women: Ordinary Lives of the West* By Anne M. Butler and Ona Siporin

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The authors have used an interesting, but somewhat problematic, blend of history, fiction, and photographs. The photographs, for instance, enhance the text, but lack of captions or numbers makes it arduous for readers to correlate photographs with the numbered photo credits appearing at the end of the book, a puzzling problem since it could have been easily foreseen and avoided. The blend of factually historical narrative with fictional narrative is also problematic in those instances where one mode ends and the other begins is somewhat unclear. Generally, but not always, the fictional narratives appear to be italicized and to alternate with the nonfiction. It seems, however, that some of the italicized narratives are historically factual; some are certainly about actual rather than fictional women. Although this blurring of the lines between fact and fiction is unnecessarily confusing, the book remains well worth reading.

Butler and Siporin begin with prairie and Plains women of Kansas and Nebraska. Their recognition of complex and troubling aspects of frontier settlement "at the expense of other western residents" is contrasted effectively with W. H. D. Koerner's somewhat simplistic painting of the "Madonna of the Prairies." The angelic young woman portrayed by Koerner reflects the purportedly benevolent, civilizing female influence of western myth and legend, but the authors note the far more weathered beauty of actual, diverse western women. Examination of the experience of African Americans who migrated from the south to the Plains is of special interest, particularly as that experience has been so often ignored. In a subsequent chapter on European immigration, the powerful Nebraskan voice of Siporin's immigrant great-great grandmother, Fruma, is perhaps clearest and strongest among all the book's female voices.

Uncommon Common Women explores not only the lives of Plains women, but also of indigenous women, educators, activists, criminals, and Asian immigrant women throughout much of the West. Through both its substance and style, the book offers an en-

Uncommon Common Women: Ordinary Lives of the West. By Anne M. Butler and Ona Siporin. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996. Photographs, suggested readings. x + 138 pp. \$34.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Written for a general audience, *Uncommon Common Women* examines "ordinary" female experience in the American West. Although the women who appear in this book are ordinary in the sense of having gained neither fame nor notoriety, most of them expressed remarkable courage and fortitude in the face of hardship. *Uncommon Common Women* also emphasizes diversity in western experience.

gaging and absorbing glimpse of the breadth
of western female experience.

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