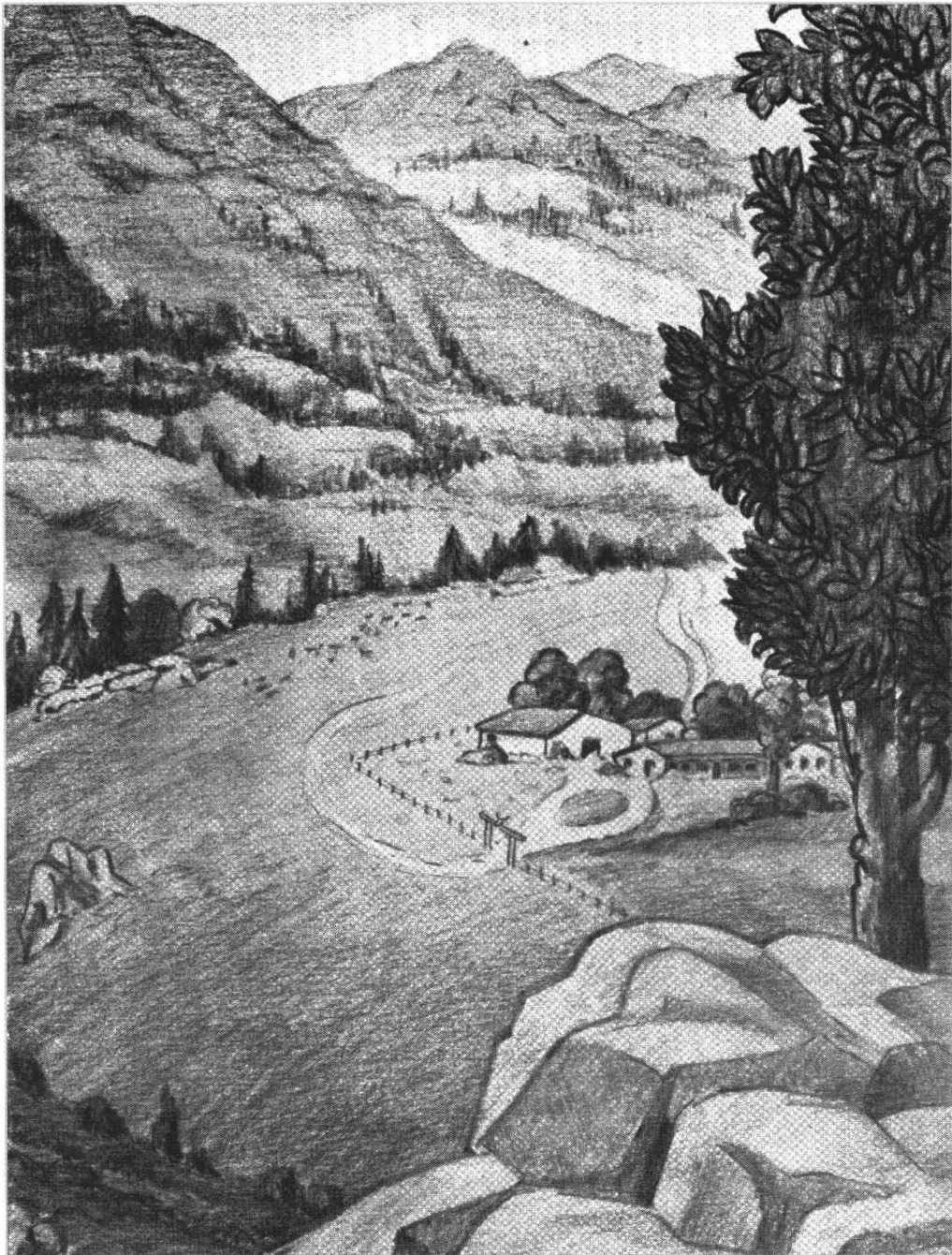


Nevada

Historical Society Quarterly



SUMMER 2001



Nevada Historical Society Quarterly

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C. L. R. James in Nevada

DENNIS DWORKIN

While recently on sabbatical in England, where I was pursuing research interests on the British Left, I had the good fortune to learn that the twentieth-century black revolutionary, C. L. R. James, had spent more than three months in northern Nevada in 1948. I have never begun an historical essay in the first person, but, because part of this story is that I had to go to England to learn about Nevada, it seems appropriate.

I was having a pint in the Highbury Barn with fellow British cultural historian Bill Schwarz.¹ The Barn is a nondescript north London pub that stands on part of what, in the nineteenth century, was a five-acre site, containing a concert hall, a supper club, and a four-thousand-square-foot open-air dancing area lit by huge gas globes. Now it comes alive only when Arsenal, one of England's best football teams, plays its home games just a few blocks away. On this damp December night, on the eve of the new millennium, neither the grandeur of its past nor the feverish enthusiasm of game days was evident. Bill and I were catching up after many years of being out of touch, and it must have been sometime during the second round of beers that he said to me: "Did you know that C.L.R. James once lived in Nevada? He spent nearly three months there in 1948 waiting for a divorce. While waiting, he worked on a ranch at Pyramid Lake, played the slot machines in Reno, and wrote a book on the dialectic."

I was as surprised that James had spent time in Nevada as I was at having had to come to Britain to learn of it. When Reno was the divorce capital of the United States, it drew the famous and infamous. But James certainly must count as one of its most singular visitors. Playwright, historian, literary critic, journalist, revolutionary Marxist, and pan-Africanist, Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-89) was one of the most remarkable intellectuals of the twentieth century. Born and educated in Trinidad, he lived throughout what Paul Gilroy has

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described as the "Black Atlantic," having spent significant periods of time in Britain, the United States, and Ghana, in addition to returning to Trinidad at the time of independence in 1962. James is perhaps best known for his book on the 1791 Santo Domingo slave revolt, *The Black Jacobins* (1938), a version of which was presented on the London stage as *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, starring Paul Robeson as the eponymous leader. He is also the author of arguably the most highly regarded book on cricket, *Beyond a Boundary* (1964), an autobiographical and analytical study founded on a lifelong passion and study of the game, including a stint as a cricket reporter for the *Manchester Guardian* during the 1930s.

I was in London for my sabbatical, and Reno seemed far away indeed. But now I found myself back there. As a result of my serendipitous discovery, I sat in the British Library, piecing together James's three months in Nevada. The task was helped along by a recently published volume of his letters to Constance Webb, many of which were written in Nevada. James came to Reno in August 1948 to divorce his first wife Juanita, a Trinidadian from whom he had been estranged since 1932 when he emigrated to England. He needed the divorce so that he could marry Webb. James had actually obtained a Mexican mail-order divorce from his first wife and had married Webb in 1946. But the divorce was not recognized as valid, and he sought it once again, leaving a pregnant Webb back in New York.

James's stay in Nevada proved to be an important moment in his life. Not only was it an intensive period of intellectual activity, but it was a time of reflection and soul searching: He sought to bring together the intellectual, political, and emotional threads of his life into a new synthesis. Others interested in James—including Bill Schwarz in a just-published essay—have recognized the importance of his stay in Nevada to his over-all development, but, not surprisingly, they have dealt little with the Nevada context.² Perhaps, since I live in Nevada and have a scholarly interest in Marxism, I am in a good position to make James's stay there more concrete.³ As I have sought to flesh out the story of James in Nevada, I have viewed it as being germane to black intellectual history, the history of American radicalism, and the development of postcolonial thought. Most important, in the present context it is also part of Nevada history, a history where "passing through" sometimes seems as important as "settling down."

When C. L. R. James first traveled to the United States in 1938 he was already a prominent intellectual in the British Trotskyist movement. Invited to this country by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), he embarked on a coast-to-coast lecture tour, speaking alternately on "The Twilight of the British Empire" and "Socialism and the Negro." Just after arriving, he gave a lecture to the New York intellectuals who wrote for the *Partisan Review*. In Chicago, he debated Bertrand Russell on pacificism, arguing that socialist revolution was the only genuine alternative to world war. In the spring of 1939, he met with Stalin's

rival Leon Trotsky in Mexico to discuss what was then known as the "Negro question." When James left for the United States, he imagined that he would return to Britain for the beginning of the cricket season. Rather than returning, however, he stayed in the United States, despite an expired passport. The reasons for his decision to remain are unclear. But for more than a decade, James lived a shadowy existence, writing under assumed names (notably J. R. Johnson), rarely making public appearances, and living under continual fear of discovery and deportation. He was finally forced to return to England in 1953.

During his lengthy American stay, James (in close collaboration with Raya Dunayevskaya, Grace Lee, and others) helped found the Johnson-Forest tendency, a minuscule but original Marxist group that broke with orthodox Trotskyism. Briefly, the Johnson-Forest group stood for three principal ideas. First, it argued that the Soviet Union, rather than being a degenerate workers' state—the mainstream Trotskyist position—was "state capitalist," a system of oppression whereby the state rather than capital exploited the working class. Second, it believed that the radical movement must be organized around the masses rather than around the party's vanguard. Third, it viewed the black struggle as being intertwined with the working-class movement but as having a vitality of its own. Perhaps James's most influential contributions to this initiative were that he clarified the dialectical method and produced the unified historical narrative that its logic revealed. He believed that the barbarities of Stalinism and the Third Reich and the collapse of bourgeois society would give way to a liberating breakthrough, made possible by the universalizing impetus of modernization and the increasing prominence of the masses as historical actors.

The distinctive feature of our age is that mankind as a whole is on the way to becoming fully conscious of himself. All the great revolutionary periods, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the French Revolution, all meant some further progress towards more complete consciousness. We are now on the eve, historically speaking, of a complete realisation of the purpose, meaning, and potentialities of human existence.⁴

As a Marxist writing in the 1940s, James, of course, assumed that the Soviet Union was pivotal to any such historical unfolding. "It is in the very nature of modern society and the Russian revolution that Russia today is symbolical of the whole fate of modern civilisation. There is no further stage. Either the revolution succeeds in encompassing the whole of the world or the whole of the world collapses in counter-revolution and barbarism."⁵ He also believed that in the United States the priority accorded to individual happiness and free association represented an unsurpassed level of human consciousness and expression that was being stifled by industrial capitalism. According to Kent Worcester, James gave a revolutionary twist to Henry Luce's notion of the American Century, envisioning "a kind of socialist and pluralistic model of

postcapitalist modernity."⁶

James's attitude toward American life must be set against his own background, which he described as British Victorian. He contrasted the stifling reserve and hierarchy of an exhausted Europe with the informality, openness, and dynamism of an evolving American civilization. Unlike the Frankfurt School or the New York intellectuals, who viewed American mass culture as debased and demeaning, James came to delight in it, becoming a fan and a critic of gangster movies, comic strips, pulp fiction, and popular music. James argued that the popular arts embodied "the clearest ideological expression of the sentiments and deepest feelings of the American people and a great window into the future of America and the modern world."⁷ He saw them as addressing genuine human needs under modern conditions and embodying the masses' expanding role in history. "The movies, even the most absurd Hollywood movies," James wrote, "are an expression of life, and being made for people who pay their money, they express what the people *need*—that is what the people miss in their own lives Like all art, but more than most, the movies are not merely a reflection, but an extension of the actual, but an extension along the lines which people feel are lacking and *possible* in the actual."⁸ For James, the movies and mass culture more generally had to be understood dialectically: They responded to the contemporary situation and prefigured a future where art and life were increasingly interdependent and intertwined.

James met Constance Webb during his American lecture tour of 1938-39. He was giving a talk at a black church in Los Angeles. Webb was an attractive white woman, blonde, eighteen, an aspiring actress, model, writer, and socialist. She was wearing a red dress. In the 1980s, she recalled her first impression of him

He was over six feet two inches; slim, but not thin, with long legs. He walked easily, with his shoulders level. His head appeared to be on a stalk, held high with the chin tilted forward and up, which made it seem that his body was led by a long neck—curved forward like that of a racehorse in the slip. Shoulders, chest, and legs were powerful and he moved decisively. But, as with highly trained athletes, the tension was concentrated and tuned, so that he gave the impression of enormous ease. He was without self-consciousness, simply himself, which showed in the way he moved, and one recognized a special quality.⁹

There were sparks between them. He wrote to her even before leaving Los Angeles. "I am writing in great haste; and regret very much that I could not see you before I left but if you are good, and better, you will drop me a line, Poste Restante, Mexico City . . . I am very glad to have met you, like you a great deal, and am sorry I did not see more of you."¹⁰ He continued to write—more than 150 letters written on approximately four-thousand handwritten pages over a nine-year period. The longest gap was between October 1940 and August 1943, a consequence of James's health problems. He suffered from an ulcer and nervousness of the fingers. In New York in December 1942, he "fell ill

in the street, was lifted home and operated upon that very night."¹¹

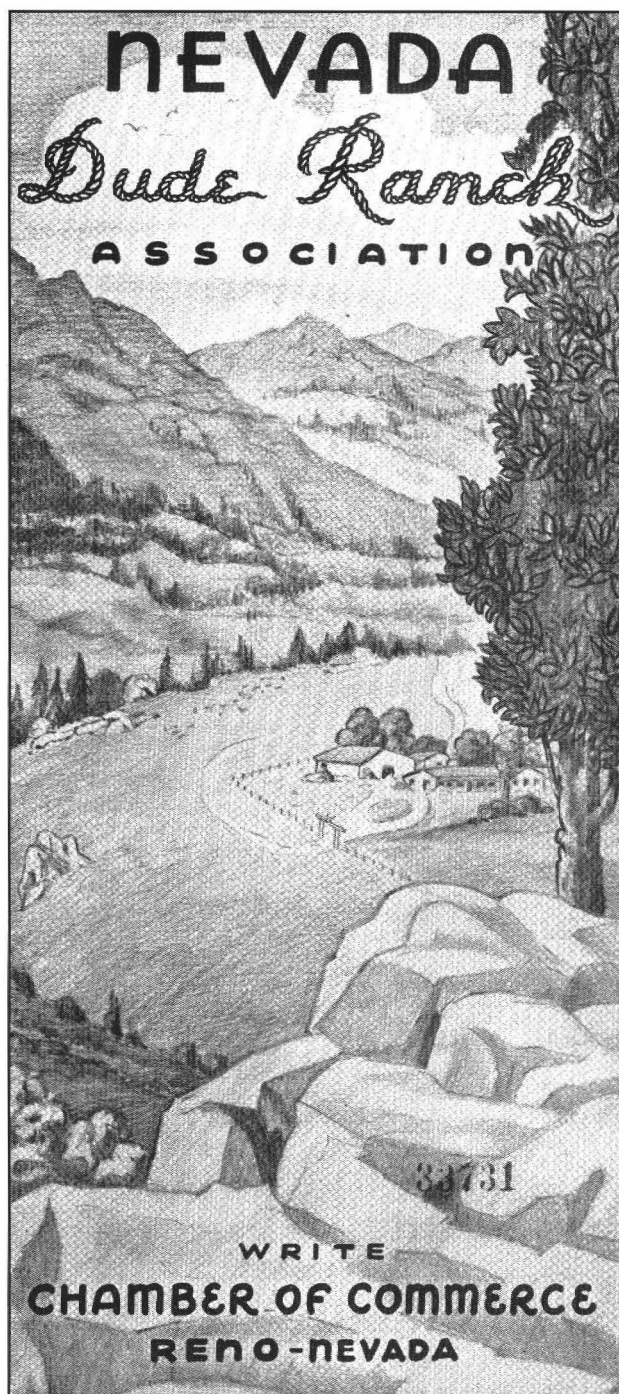
Webb responded to James's attention. At least it seems likely that she did, since, though her replies have not survived, his letters grew in warmth and intimacy. James's letters to Webb are key texts in any understanding of his intellectual development, revealing the remarkable range of his intellectual interests and the scope and depth of his reading, the closest that exists to an autobiography of his American years. They likewise chart his growing passion and love for her. Here, he is loving and compassionate, but also critical and sometimes patronizing. He seeks to seduce, befriend, encourage, shape, and father her. In his mind, Webb signified more than the woman that he desperately longed for and wanted: She was inseparable from the larger forces of history and culture, and, through her, James sought to resolve his own internal contradictions. On the one hand, she symbolized the new American civilization, supplanting the European culture that had intellectually formed him and that he now regarded as a spent force. As he wrote to her in July 1944: "You are young and gay and American, without the English or continental desire to 'waltz,' but ready to 'cut a rug' instead. I love it. Nowhere in the whole wide world could anything like you appear but in America of the post-war, and I am pretty certain that you are a special product of the West."¹² Later in the same year he wrote:

And I begin to realise too that the American woman, though she lacks so much of what her European sister has, is broadly speaking, a more compelling and more charming, yes, charming, personality than her European sister. The causes of these things go deep. But one learns about society in a woman's face as well as in economic documents. To know you and to love you and most priceless of all for you to love me would not only be a personal treasure to me but is also an education. You are to me an ambassador of American civilization—and you don't know it.¹³

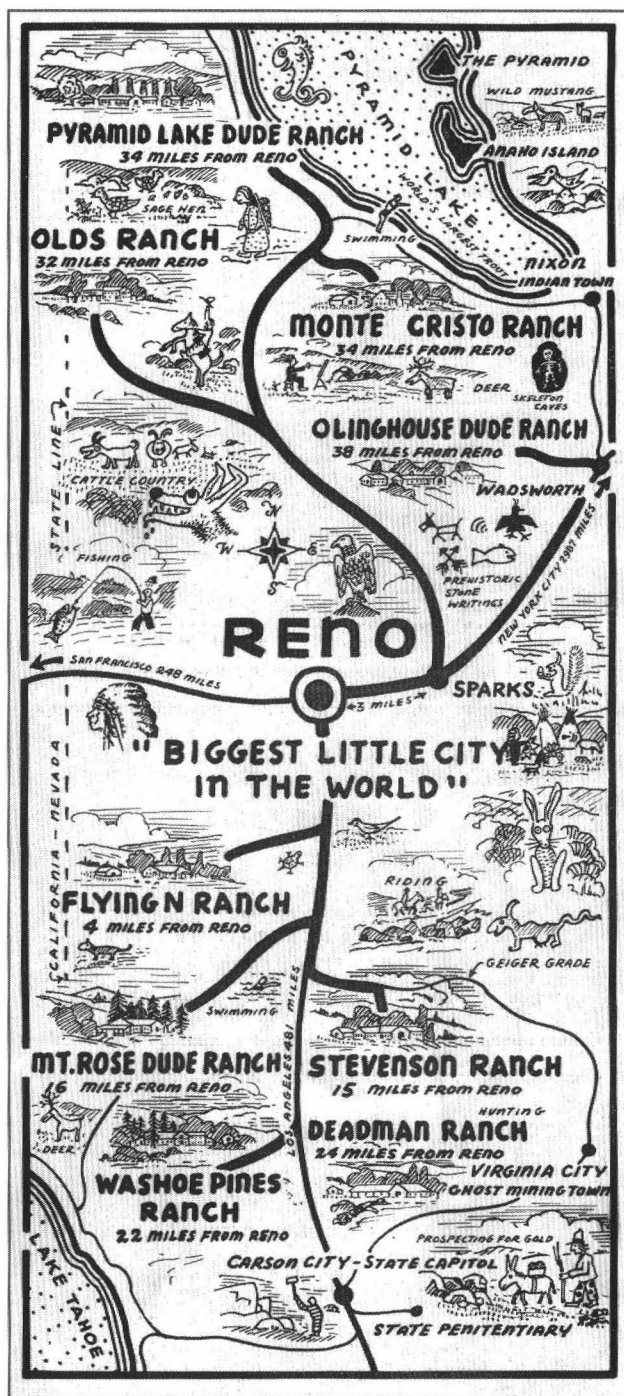
On the other hand, James thought of his union with Webb as part of the wider historical narrative he grappled with in his investigation of dialectical logic. In loving her, he sought to wipe away the contradiction between individual desire and revolutionary politics. In his mind, their relationship adumbrated the socialist world that was on the brink of being realized. In a remarkable letter of October 1947, he all but admitted this:

This is the man who loves you. I took up dialectic five years ago. I knew a lot of things before and I was able to master it. I know a lot of things about loving you. I am only just beginning to apply them. I can master that with the greatest rapidity—just give me a hand. I feel all sorts of new powers, *freedoms*, etc., surging in me. You released so many of my constrictions. What are you going to *do*? I am bursting all over with love for you This is our new world—where this is no distinction between political and personal any more."¹⁴

James and Webb lived on opposite coasts, and, until she moved to New York in 1943, met only once—and briefly—when James was on a political trip that included Los Angeles. In the course of their letter writing, she was married not



This is the cover panel of a brochure for the Nevada Dude Ranch Association, 1936. (*Nevada Historical Society*)



This back-panel map of the brochure shows the locations of Nevada Dude Ranch Association ranches in the Reno area. (Nevada Historical Society)

once—but twice. Following the second marriage, she was briefly engaged to Jack Gilford, an actor who later appeared in *Catch 22* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and was nominated for best supporting actor in 1974 for *Save the Tiger*. James's passion for Webb barely survived her fling with a West Point cadet, but he persisted, and they eventually were married in 1946 by a justice of the peace in New Jersey. The marriage was witnessed by two bigoted policemen who, according to Webb, all but dared them to kiss and "became red in the face with anger when we did so."¹⁵ Marriage did nothing to solidify their relationship, and in 1947 Webb left him. A year later they were reconciled and Webb was expecting a child. James went to Reno because the American authorities did not recognize his Mexican divorce, and he was legally a bigamist.

When James arrived in Reno, it was still the American divorce capital, though probably past its 1930s heyday, when it was the subject of national attention. It was beginning to feel the effects of competition from Las Vegas, put on the media map by the Clark Gable-Ria Langham divorce of 1939, and very shortly of the liberalization of divorce laws in other states. Although the media portrayed divorce seekers as wealthy easterners, they were from every socioeconomic level, from all forty-eight states, numerous foreign countries, and, popular perception notwithstanding, there was only a slightly higher percentage of women over men. According to Mella Harmon's research, New Yorkers were the largest group of divorce-seekers (27 percent), but in second place were Californians (17 percent).¹⁶ Those seeking divorce came from thirty-two countries, Canada and England making up the highest percentage. Women represented 59 percent of the divorce seekers. Thus, James was a unique divorce seeker not because he had financial problems or because he was not American: It is because he was black. Earlier divorce research on Reno does not consider race. But James's account of living in Reno helps fill the gap, providing compelling evidence of the racial discrimination that a black divorce seeker—and black residents more generally—confronted. The details that he provides are invaluable.

James was a black Trinidadian and a British colonial subject. His historical research, undertaken in the 1930s, contributed to understanding the international dimension of the black struggle, but he never experienced racial segregation first hand until he lived in the United States. According to Anna Grimshaw, his personal secretary and editor, "He was acutely aware that his experiences of discrimination as a black man in the Caribbean and later in Britain, were not of the same kind as those which he now faced; and he was apprehensive, being unfamiliar with all the unspoken codes and conventions of a racially divided country."¹⁷ James first encountered American segregation following his meeting with Trotsky, as he traveled at the back of a bus through the South on his way to New York City. His marriage to Webb brought down upon both of them racist hatred as well. In her words: "As far away as Greenwich

Village, most bohemian and liberal area, black and white couples were being attacked and beaten, often dragged from restaurants. And New Jersey was notorious for its hatred of blacks, particularly when they coupled with whites."¹⁸ Yet James, predominantly operating in New York's revolutionary intellectual circles, seems to have been somewhat insulated from the everyday racism encountered by most blacks. He told his friend and comrade Lyman Paine: "We all, me included, are apt to forget that I am a Negro."¹⁹

It would have been unnecessary to remind James that he was a Negro in Nevada. From the moment of his arrival on August 2, 1948, he felt the effects of segregation, but he also found immediate acceptance among Reno's small black community. After arriving at the train station, he asked a white taxi driver where he might find lodging and was taken to 539 Sierra, a "black person's place," where he rented a room, a "kind of annex," for ten dollars a week. It was nine-feet-square and private. The house had hot water, but the upstairs bath and shower available to him had none. The landlady, who was only temporary, agreed to cook meals for him if he bought his own food. She could not, however, guarantee the arrangement after she left. James hoped that he could continue to eat there but, as he explained, "If not I shall eat in restaurants. The Jim Crow here in restaurants is powerful. But there are 2 or 3 places set aside for Negroes—one joint, the Chinese restaurant, and a Negro place. However, one can eat."²⁰

The degree to which blacks stuck together in Reno made an impression on James: "Boy, the solidarity among Negroes is something."²¹ Upon arriving, he was befriended by a young black man (introduced to him by his landlady) who agreed to take him to Lake Tahoe with some friends. James's account of their trip gives us some insight into what blacks confronted in northern Nevada as well as how James related to black Americans. Traveling in a 1941 Chevy, they picked up the young man's friends, stopping at the house of a "dark fellow who had a hangover" and who lived with two other black couples. James was struck by the fact that one of the women was rearing a blonde, blue-eyed, white boy, about a year old.

The parents had given him to this young woman to keep. *All* these Negroes loved him. They played with him and fondled him and just loved him. If he had been Nob [the nickname given to James's and Webb's baby to be] he couldn't have been more secure . . . All of the time playing most lovingly with the kid. Not one of them showed the slightest, the faintest hint of ill-feeling. I think they loved the kid more than usual because it was white and there could be warm feeling without prejudice.²²

For James, such a pure act of love, among a group of people who were excluded and discriminated against, was the day's highlight.

He was particularly impressed by one of his new acquaintances, Paul, a mechanic and former merchant seaman. The way that Paul related both to his girlfriend and to James provided a contrast to what James was accustomed to in England. "Their easy relationship with one another, and with me, the

sophistication, what Paul really thought and what he did all day, all of this is very very different from the English workers I know." James believed that if Paul "could exercise his *savoir faire*, his way of dealing with all sorts of people, and his terrible need for friendship in a movement of some kind he would accomplish great things for himself and his friends."²³ However, he was reluctant to draw Paul into a political discussion. During his entire stay in Nevada, James was guarded about his past and his background, largely because he did not want to draw attention to himself. On this particular day, he seems to have wanted to relate to his companions strictly as friends as well as being able to study and observe them.

The trip to Tahoe was punctuated by three or four stops for whiskey and cokes and "stupid, dull, and vulgar jokes" to which there was uproarious laughter (though James was certainly not among the laughing). As so many visitors before and since, James was taken by this "superb lake." Yet few commentators have left such a vivid recollection of the implicit racism pervading its social environment. "The lake was lovely," he wrote, "the drive splendid. It should have been a perfect outing. Yet it wasn't. For there were no colored people in sight. We were excluded. All around exclusion was always present. It did not ruin the day but it poisoned it."²⁴

James hoped to find a black lawyer to handle his divorce case. When he learned that Mayfield, the only likely candidate, had yet to take his exams, he settled on a white woman, Charlotte Hunter, who, in his estimation, was liberal, sympathetic to radicals, and strong on the Negro question. Hunter was thirty-six, from a family of Russian-Jewish immigrants, and a graduate of Northeastern University in Massachusetts.²⁵ She was by her own account perhaps the second or third woman to practice law in Nevada, having passed the bar exam in 1947, the year prior to taking James's case. Hunter had not planned to end up in Nevada. She was an adventurous young woman on her way to Tahiti when World War II broke out and altered her plans. She settled in Reno largely because her father had been living there since the 1930s, following his own divorce. Hunter was not particularly political in an ideological sense, and in retrospect believes that she was politically naïve. Her liberalism was heartfelt. According to James, Hunter described herself as someone who was performing a service rather than practicing law. She took his case despite his legal difficulties, telling him (according to James) to keep quiet about his immigration problems and his politics.

James wrote to Webb of an encounter with Hunter that is worth recalling in this context. They were to have lunch, and Hunter suggested that they go "to a big restaurant where she had influence, just to see if they would have the nerve, etc" not to serve them.²⁶ Being "a very modest, retiring person," he persuaded her to eat at the Negro restaurant. He thought that she was wonderful but that her determination to break the social codes was a sign of inexperience. Hunter's memory of the event has a slightly different emphasis. She

remembers wanting to have lunch at a place for white patrons, the Trocadero, a restaurant in the El Cortez Hotel. Her father had married the mother of the two owners, and she could not imagine being turned away. She also vividly remembers James's gentle effort at dissuading her. "Miss Hunter, let's just have lunch today," he said in a quiet voice.²⁷ They ended up eating in the restaurant nicknamed Little Harlem. It was the first time that she had ever been there.

Hunter also helped James to find employment and permanent lodging. He recalled it this way: "So, discussing finances, I told her I was a writer. She as I said seemed interested. Did I wish to work? I said I would be glad to. What? Did I want her to arrange a lecture for me? I said No, I preferred to be quiet. I said I would like to work outdoors on a ranch."²⁸ Hunter called Harry Drackert, the owner of the Pyramid Lake Ranch, and recommended James, citing his educational credentials. According to Hunter, Drackert was not a political person. He would not have understood that James was unable to go into the five - and-ten and have a cup of coffee. But he also was not the kind of person who would have cared about James's color. Although he was reluctant to hire someone well educated to perform menial labor, Drackert invited James to stay as a guest and indicated that he would find something for him. He soon offered James a job as a handyman. By August 18 James was writing Webb from Sutcliffe at Pyramid Lake.

The Pyramid Lake Ranch was one of several divorce ranches in northern Nevada, the state's distinctive contribution to western dude ranching. Drackert, who took possession of the ranch in 1947, stated that it was originally a stage station. It developed as a dude ranch "in a day when such ranches were rough-and-ready, becoming known for its open-handed hospitality, and during the period when tourists and divorcees were not so exacting the ranch had a certain measure of success."²⁹ A. J. Liebling, the *New Yorker* reporter who first stayed at the ranch in 1949, featured it in articles on Reno and Pyramid Lake and discussed its origins from a slightly different perspective, explaining how a white-owned ranch ended up in the middle of an Indian reservation. According to him, it was established by an old-timer named Sutcliffe, who turned a squat on Indian land into a roadhouse popular with fishermen in pursuit of the lake's once plentiful trout. Pressed by the federal courts to give the land up, he paid a few thousand dollars to the reservation and legalized the possession of it.³⁰

The ranch was on the lake "in a charming grove of cottonwood, elm and other trees" and formed "a pleasing variation to the desert scenery." It consisted of a main house which "stood fairly close to the road, behind an old established lawn with flower beds and trees" made possible by irrigation. Behind the house were "company streets of one-room cabins with porches, set around a swimming pool."³¹ There was a store selling local Indian crafts, a restaurant, and a bar that held the only obtainable liquor license for the hundred miles between Reno and Gerlach and hence frequented by guests and

PYRAMID LAKE Dude Ranch



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WRITE FOR FOLDER

This information, promoting the Pyramid Lake Dude Ranch, was published in the Nevada Dude Ranch Association brochure. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

locals. The ranch had no gaming. The guests were predominantly divorce seekers, mostly women, in some cases with their children, passing the time while fulfilling Nevada's six-week residency requirement in an environment that was more wholesome than that available in town. On his first morning at Pyramid Lake, Liebling's most vivid impression—besides the breathtaking scenery—was of children of all ages "whom I took to be the unhappy offshoots of broken homes, careered whooping through all the interstices between the buildings" and their mothers who "looked all right—very all right, some of them, in shorts and halter things." Concluding that neither was conducive to literary output, Liebling changed his room to a more remote location.³²

Liebling's representation of the Pyramid Lake Ranch is from the point of view of a guest whose credentials as a journalist allowed him to mingle easily in Reno's better social circles. He learned of the ranch while having a drink in the Riverside Hotel, the city's premiere establishment. At the Riverside, he met Drackert, a national bronc-riding champion in the 1920s, who was part of the rodeo circuit for nearly ten years and who was billed as "Cowboy of America" at Madison Square Garden. It was Drackert's description of his desert-lake

retreat that enticed Liebling to pack his bags and head north. In his *New Yorker* articles, Liebling portrayed Drackert as one of Nevada's colorful characters. If they were not friends, they were certainly on friendly terms. Liebling's decision to return to Drackert's ranch a few years later is probably partially due to a combination of fascination and fondness for him.

James's experience of the ranch was dramatically different. He was the gardener and handyman: He cleared the yard of leaves and paper, supervised the irrigation system, mowed the lawns, took care of the grounds, helped put guests' suitcases in the ranch's station wagon, and even did dishes twice a day. For a middle-aged man who seldom exercised, the work was tiring and difficult, but also satisfying. "I am out in the sun and the dust for hours," he wrote. "I am very stiff sometimes—bending down constantly. *But it is good for me . . .* I don't overwork myself, but the sudden transition from sedentary habits *is* a jump. But between us, I am surprised at how well I am standing it."³³ One of the attractions for James of being a laborer was the opportunity it presented for interacting with other workers. He had "never been in the kitchen nor in the pantry before, nor in the garden; working with them, from the inside." He had had "intimate contacts" with workers previously, but it was in the context of political activism. "I do not discuss politics [with the workers at the ranch]. Furthermore the isolation of the ranch throws everybody on to everybody else. I am fascinated."³⁴

What interests James about the ranch then is neither the soon-to-be divorcées nor their children nor even those drinking at the bar, not least because the help was not allowed to fraternize with guests. His account of life at the ranch is from the bottom up, dominated by the petty jealousies, daily struggles, and love entanglements of his fellow workers: Budd the Indian cowboy, Joe the Filipino cook, Viola the maid from "Ioway," Mary and Romana the waitresses, Peggy the bartender, and so forth. The one exception to this is his employer Drackert, whom he cryptically describes as an old rodeo man and a gentleman: "50 odd, fit, still competes in rodeos, wrestling cows and riding bucking-horses, a good shot, busy with the ranch, but busy with the girls."³⁵ Even here, what mostly intrigues James about Drackert is the impact he has on the female workers, who resent the women who "come around" and "monopolize" his attention. James was confused by their jealousy. "Curious business. It was not their business whom D [Drackert] slept with."³⁶ He attributed his lack of understanding to the fact that he tried so hard to be reasonable and was "quite lost with the average citizen."

James explained to Webb that he "could have lived in Reno and been miserable—or at least just going to the show and scribbling in my room."³⁷ But Pyramid Lake was altogether different. Living there, he felt a sense of renewal. He realized how little natural beauty and physical exertion there were in his (and Webb's) life and the importance of living an "active life" in the future.



Guests gather in the living room of the Pyramid Lake Dude Ranch lodge. (*Nevada Historical Society*)



The cottages at the Pyramid Lake Dude Ranch lodge. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

Down here I am in the open, sun and the lake and physical exercise and dirt and sweat and fatigue. God! If you know what the afternoon shower is like. I haven't had that feeling for fifteen years. And we have not had it. We haven't been anywhere, walked on beaches, etc. I can. I am doing it here because I have to. But I get up in the a.m. and go round fixing my irrigation before eating—fitter than *after* breakfast at home. Somehow, sweetie, I have to live a more active life. I'll be better in myself and better for you.³⁸

The ranch's environment also proved to be an ideal place for getting work done. "Even in the intervals of my gardening and cleaning," he wrote, "I found that for a variety of reasons I could work here as I have not worked for some dozen years."³⁹ He read French literature "from the beginning"—Racine, Corneille, Molière—as well as beginning to translate into English the French Trotskyist historian Daniel Guérin's *History of the French Revolution* from which he hoped to make "some good cash."

Thus, James found life at Pyramid Lake agreeable, and he was becoming interested in the region and its history, learning "about agriculture, irrigation, and the early pioneers and the life of the West, and the people."⁴⁰ However, what he did not become curious about (at least in his letters to Webb) was the Paiute Indians on whose reservation, of course, the ranch was sitting. A. J. Liebling, on the other hand, a left-liberal reporter who had made a reputation for himself writing about the "colorful antics of eccentric characters," made the Paiutes the central focus of his 1955 *New Yorker* articles.⁴¹ When he arrived at the ranch, he, like James, was vaguely aware that he was in the middle of an Indian reservation. He first learned about the Paiutes from Martin Green, the reservation's policeman, with whom he had a conversation in the ranch's bar, the bar from which James was excluded. His interest evolved from reading a book that he discovered in the ranch's living room, *Program of the Carson Indian Agency, Jurisdiction Nevada-California, 1944*. It described the tribe's long-running battle to repossess land held by squatting white ranchers.

In brief, the conflict had originated at the time of the Civil War, when the commissioner of the General Land Office, with the approval of the secretary of the interior, sought to create a reservation for the Paiutes by ordering a survey of the Pyramid Lake region. President Ulysses S. Grant gave the reservation further legal status in 1874 by issuing an executive order endorsing the land survey. Despite the legal efforts at creating a reservation, and Indian protests, a small group of white ranchers (originally of German and Irish, but later Italian, descent) squatted on Indian lands in the 1860s, claiming retroactive legitimacy for their land tenure on the basis of the 1874 executive order. Pivotal to the unfolding of the land dispute was a 1924 act of the United States Congress allowing the ranchers to buy the land at a bargain price. But when by 1936 the ranchers had not paid up, the Department of the Interior took steps on behalf of the Indians, leading to a federal court order evicting the ranchers from the land.

As Liebling freely admitted at the time, the plight of the Paiutes was not

high on his list of priorities. In addition, he assumed that the federal court order evicting the ranchers from the Paiutes' land would have been fully implemented in the five years since the book's appearance. Liebling's interest grew as he began more fully to appreciate the involvement of Nevada's Senator Patrick McCarran, who for several years had tenaciously intervened in Congress on behalf of the ranchers. For Liebling, McCarran was more than a senator from a peripheral state who used his connections to add a little frosting to the cake of centuries of Indian oppression. A supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy, he was a powerful symbol of reactionary interests, embodied in the anti-immigrant McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act. Liebling was driven by the social injustice suffered by the Indians, but he also likened his interest in their conflict with McCarran to "the odd fascination of an honest wrestling match." "In the Pyramid Lake case I liked the Paiutes, and although I have never met Senator McCarran, I didn't think I would care for him."⁴² The resulting *New Yorker* articles have recently been collected for the first time by the University of Nevada Press.⁴³

Whether James came across the same volume on the Paiutes as did Liebling, or whether, in fact it was actually sitting there on the shelf the previous year, is not known. Nor is whether, despite his exclusion from the ranch's bar, he met tribal members as Liebling had. It is certainly plausible that James, as a Marxist and a British imperial subject, would view the Paiutes as shaped by the same world-historical process of capitalist imperialism as he himself. If he had, it would have made a remarkable story more remarkable. Yet aside from his acknowledgment that the ranch's location was on an Indian reservation, there is not a shred of evidence that James concerned himself with its inhabitants, let alone the land conflict. It is of course conceivable that his letters to Webb do not reveal an interest that in fact existed, but given the encyclopedic scope of political and intellectual subjects that these letters to her explore, I find this unlikely.

It is more plausible that James was otherwise preoccupied at the Pyramid Lake Ranch. He was consumed by his own problems and intellectual projects as well as the internecine conflicts of the Trotskyist left. To use a present-day phrase, his plate was full, and it became fuller as a result of Drackert's decision to dispense with his services. James's position on the ranch never really solidified. Drackert had been reluctant to hire him, and James was, at first, uncertain how long he would be allowed to stay on. He worried that he would be perceived as taking up a room that could be rented out at a time when the ranch was full. Still, when James was let go, he seemed somewhat surprised: "Then after I had carefully gained assurance that my job was safe, I lost it."⁴⁴ He was pleased, however, that Drackert allowed him to remain as a lodger, glad that he no longer had to work, and, most important, looked forward to devoting all of his time to writing, although the added expense of forty dollars a week for room and board weighed heavily on his mind.

Between the time of his dismissal (September 13) and the final dated letter from Nevada (November 9), James's letters convey the impression that he was more alienated from the ranch and the people on it. He speaks of it as a place of refuge, but no longer discusses its daily happenings, and in the November 9 letter he tells Webb, "I am not boasting about it but I simply live my own life. I talk to the servants, the help a bit. There are women around but I don't see them—a pleasant word or two. Barbara, about 3, is my genuine friend and now and then asks me if she still is my cutiepie."⁴⁵ James also highlights his isolation in his description of attending a University of Nevada football game, one of his few references to the guests at the ranch: "Whom do I go out with? Nobody. Sad but true, for all I care. The guests, or some of them go. We have seats that D [Drackert] has reserved. They are—guests, and I am a kind of non-descript. The formalities are observed, but even in walking from the carpark to the seats for the game, our isolation from each other stands out. I am not hostile, but I am not over-friendly."⁴⁶

Taken as a whole, the letters of these final weeks reveal a man who is more inward looking and self-reflective, in part because he is consumed by work, but also because he is confronting the hard realities pressing down upon him. James was worried that the American counsel, who was serving the papers to his first wife, might tip off the immigration authorities as to his whereabouts, and that he might be jailed and deported before being able to marry Webb legally, which he was counting on to strengthen his case for remaining in the United States. "The lawyer [presumably Charlotte Hunter]," he wrote, "has warned me that my situation is as bad as it can be."⁴⁷ He was also concerned about how he was going to support a family. Limited in his ability to make a living by his legal status, he depended upon financial support from the organizations for which he worked and the generosity of friends in the movement. Now he realized that he had to find "bourgeois work." But how was he going to negotiate supporting a family and being a full-time revolutionary? James likewise struggled with how to protect his relationship with Webb from the meddling—some well-intentioned—of his Johnson-Forest comrades. In a letter to Lyman Paine, his close friend in the group, he complained of the deleterious effects that such activities had had on them:

We had our own troubles for which nobody was responsible but ourselves,"[but] "to our own strictly personal problems, was added this constant interference, criticism, analysis, illumination of me, which made it doubly difficult for her to steer a road between me as a politician and as her husband. Much of it was stupidity, some of it well-meaning, and, I regret to say, a good bit of it was malicious. We struggled through this additional burden and in the whole mess, I nearly lost her."⁴⁸

In addition—and in a more strictly political vein—James confronted the toll that keeping a small revolutionary group afloat was taking on him and his associates. The Johnson-Forest tendency was not simply a Trotskyist group

within a larger revolutionary left, which was in fact small by European standards. For much of the forties the tendency was a minority within the Workers' Party, itself a breakaway minority from the larger SWP. At a personal level, he spoke of "in the last seven years" being "the loneliest man in the world": "Our ideas and plans and perspectives are so big, our work, and our concrete sphere is so small. It is a terrible, a breaking strain upon the personality."⁴⁹ More analytically, he pointed to the "terrible discrepancy between the range, the boldness, the philosophical basis, the concreteness of our ideas, and the miserable little places we do hold, both as a group and individually." He concluded that the "constant underlying strain, exasperation, impotence and frustration" was organic to their situation.⁵⁰ James did not discuss how this might be circumvented, but clearly his distance from the day-to-day grind of activism helped him to see himself and his group in a clearer light.

Important as such challenges were, there was a deeper level to the conflict that James was undergoing. He wrote on October 11 that he was struggling with the demons of his past, a struggle that he knew would take him to a new threshold.

In many ways I think I have crossed a great milestone in my own life down here. I knew for years that something was wrong somewhere. The evil spirit, the demon, fought to hold me in the old groove. I know now exactly what the writers in Scripture wrote about, they and their demons. But I am sure now that that is over. But there are a lot of pieces to be picked up and patched together. I shall make it, I'll do the best I can.⁵¹

James frequently reverted to biblical language to discuss his crisis. However, the demons that James fought to vanquish were the accumulated weight of deeply ingrained intellectual habits and training and a Victorian upbringing, which he clearly associated with the decaying bourgeois world. He saw them as barriers to reciprocating Webb's love and ultimately posing a threat to their relationship. In a powerful passage, James vividly described what he was going through.

But I think of you all the time, all the time. I wonder when I return, how it will be. The demon is waiting for me, I know the old habits, sitting down and reading and all the time so nervous about you, so nervous, nervous fifteen hours out of eighteen. I *know*, I shall have to break resolutely out of it. I am preparing . . . I think often of my return, and how it is going to be. You should know the long, long solitary hours I have spent, reading—reading—reading, thinking, writing. Since I was about four years old. It is the ingrained pattern of a life-time . . . I have been writing so easily and reading so easily I say "Jesus. If I could only express myself to you as easily, as naturally." It is something to strive for. You are O.K . . . But I am different. Years and years, and the British bourgeois training ingrained.⁵²

He identified with a poem by D. H. Lawrence in which a British bourgeois is portrayed as "washed and clean and strong" but incapable of human understanding and feeling. James was determined "to break these old patterns once and for all, once and for all."⁵³

As James struggled with his inner demons, his behavior was becoming increasingly frantic. Writing had always been easy for him, but in Nevada he wrote at a pace unknown for twenty years. "I could do 10,000 words a day without stopping to put a comma, and then read all sorts of books, and start off again in the morning. It has not stopped. In fact I seem just to have begun."⁵⁴ Later on he vividly portrayed his frenetic work schedule as well as his alienation from those around him.

But the work comes pouring out. I cannot stop it. Many days I rise at 9. Am back from breakfast at 10. Work til 1; come back at 2; I sleep sometimes from 3-5; work til 7; come back at 8:15 and work til 3; sometimes 4. Continuously. If I do not sleep in the afternoon I work til about 2. I sit at the table and do not move for hours on end. The people here look on me as some freak, the natives and the visitors.⁵⁵

James's principal diversion was to play the slot machines in town: "Whenever possible I rush into Reno, for this place is absolutely isolated, 35 miles from Reno. And I play the machine *and lose*. I am a gambler now."⁵⁶ He would receive a ride into town from Drackert, who led (in Liebling's words) "a detail of the women in to shop and have their hair done."⁵⁷ They signed up the night before, and Drackert dropped them off at the Riverside before lunch, collecting them in the late afternoon for the return journey. On such jaunts, James assumed whenever possible his "much-loved place in the back among the baggage." Once in town, he went his own way, going to the library, the Negro restaurant, and the drugstore to play the slot machines. James worked "feverishly day and night to make up for the loss."⁵⁸

What James was feverishly working on was a series of philosophical reflections on the Hegelian dialectic, privately circulated as *Notes on Dialectics* (1948). All through his American years James wrestled with the complexities of Hegel's *Logic*, recognizing "from early on that the *Logic* constituted an algebra, made to be used in any analysis of constitution and development in nature or in society."⁵⁹ In *Notes on Dialectics*, his understanding of dialectical logic provided the foundation of an independent Marxist position: a rejection of orthodox Trotskyism, state socialism, and the vanguard party in the name of working-class spontaneity, creativity, and self-development.

James intended the book to be read by his comrades in the Johnson-Forest tendency, yet, in writing it, Webb was never far from his thoughts. Indeed, he never wrote a line that did not have her in mind.

And all the time, consciously, sometimes subconsciously, I am thinking of you. Page after page on the dialectic, I am saying how you will be amazed and pleased; and I am hoping you will be able to use it for yourself. I think about us. I take a little walk around the place sometimes. Or I stop writing, or I lie in bed after turning off the light, or in bed on mornings. I am working on two planes—it and us.⁶⁰

As James wrote about Hegelian logic out on the Nevada desert, he was simultaneously combating psychological, political, and financial problems. At

certain points, he felt triumphant, certain that he was entering a new, higher stage, where (as discussed earlier) the personal and the political would be fused. But the fight undeniably had its price, and sometimes it seemed as if he were losing control.

I am somewhat tired. I have been beating at the Doctrine of Being, there is my peculiar self—between wind and water. All I can think of is just writing down a lot of things. About money, about you and the party and me, you and clothes, our monthly expenses, everything boiling in my head. What a mess! I wish I could take a brush and scrub it out, scrub it out, but I can't. I have to dig it out. And the demon. Jesus! He says "You are writing because you can't talk." But I ain't budging. I shall write *to-day* otherwise I shall be putting it off for *to-morrow*. But it is shaking me.⁶¹

James was wracked by self-doubts that he feared would never end. He wondered whether he and Webb would "always be nursing each other," although he believed—or perhaps hoped—that they would find "some spot"—by which he meant perhaps a place that would be free of the friction produced by numerous personal and political challenges. James's way of fighting off his demons was to write, but he knew that it was a double-edged sword, a way of avoiding "talking" or emotionally giving of himself. Yet it was finally writing and his love for Webb that were his salvation. "I write. I develop things. So I say: get with it. Nothing is *wrong* with you. You work O.K. You are closer to your wife than ever before."⁶²

James might have been closer to his wife than ever before when he left Nevada, but the relationship did not endure. Despite the long years of courtship, the endless stream of letters, two wedding ceremonies, and the birth of their son, they were separated by 1952, although he tried to win her back. "I see Constance often," he wrote. "We talk. For hours and hours at a time. She is preaching, in fact has knocked a lot of sense into me! You thought it would be easy to get her back. Freddie [Paine] that will be the most difficult thing in the world. But that is what I want. We shall see."⁶³ Not long after this was written their marriage was finished, and Webb was dating someone else. The details of the collapse of their marriage are hard to know, but, according to Kent Worcester, the challenges they faced as an interracial couple and the fact that Webb never felt fully accepted by James's Johnson-Forest comrades figure prominently. Most important, the inner demons that James struggled with in Nevada—"the British bourgeois training ingrained"—continued to haunt him. Webb recalled, "Rather than have any disagreement, Nello's [James's] method was to simply retreat behind an impenetrable wall. He could not express his emotions. Instead, he walked about the Bronx carrying on lengthy, furious arguments with me and with himself—all inside his own head."⁶⁴ Retrospectively, James could see that his "virtues as a husband were entirely negative" and that he did not pay "any attention" to his wives "as human beings sharing a life with" him. Despite his behavior, his letters to Webb suggest that from a distance he wanted her to realize her full potential.

Intellectually, the years immediately following James's departure from Nevada were more fruitful. He wrote *American Civilization*, a detailed sketch for a proposed book representing the culmination of his many years of thinking about American culture and politics. It was eventually published in 1993, after his death, and deserves to be seen as a landmark in Marxist cultural theory and a precursor of contemporary cultural studies. At the time, the only segment of the manuscript to be revised for publication was his analysis of Herman Melville, whom he argued had brilliantly captured the contradictions of American historical development. James wrote the book *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* (1953) while interned on Ellis Island awaiting deportation for passport violations. Confronted with imprisonment, suffering great pain from his ulcer because of indifference of the authorities to giving him proper food and treatment, James characteristically turned to writing. He regarded the book as central to his application for citizenship and sought to establish his American credentials in a final chapter that, among other things, paid tribute to the nation's liberal traditions and its liberation from "the weight of the past which hangs so heavily on Europe." The United States did not have a culture so much as "a need for human relations of a size and scope which will in the end triumph over all deficiencies."⁶⁵ James was sent back to Britain in autumn 1953.

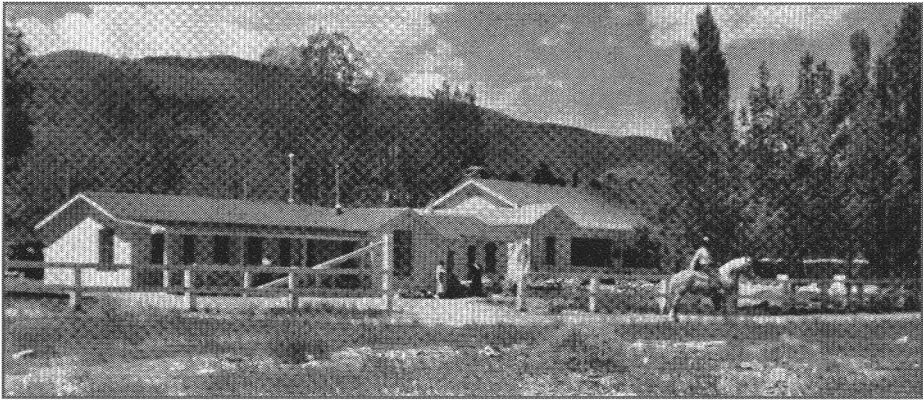
Looking back from the vantage point of the 1970s, James regarded his years in the United States as "the high water mark" of his long life. Until recently, this was difficult for James scholars to document. Living an underground existence and writing under pseudonyms in low-circulation journals, James's American years were shrouded in mystery. With the discovery and publication of both his correspondence with Webb and *American Civilization* this is no longer true. It is now possible to see, as Anna Grimshaw has observed, that "it was, above all, his *experience* of living in America which changed and moulded his mature perspective on the world."⁶⁶

Within this pivotal period of his life, James's brief stay in Nevada must count as a significant moment. He produced a major statement of his theoretical method and his most thoroughgoing critique of orthodox Trotskyism up to that point. He confronted a multitude of personal, political, and intellectual challenges. Ultimately, he wanted to bring together his love for Webb and his commitment to socialism, seeing them as different aspects of the same revolutionary struggle to transform himself and the world. The fact that he never was able to integrate them should not denigrate the heroic effort involved.

The time that James spent in Reno and at Pyramid Lake is also part of Nevada history. His observations on what it meant to be black in Nevada in 1948 are themselves noteworthy. Equally important, Nevada was not just an abstract backdrop for his intellectual pursuits. James became enmeshed in Nevada life: from divorce and divorce ranches, and lawyers and cowboys, to gambling and the scenic sublime. Yet, as should be clear, I think that the story of James in Nevada would have been even more compelling had he, like A. J.

Liebling, supported the Paiute's efforts to regain their ancestral lands. It still may turn out that he did. But, as I have suggested, there are plenty of reasons why the Paiutes might have escaped his attention. It is even possible that, riveted by the broad sweep of history, James might have viewed the land conflict as a local skirmish. Still, I can not help but wonder what might have transpired if James had made common cause with the Paiutes.

Since learning of James's trip to Nevada, I have returned from England, ready to give my full attention to the cultural politics of postwar Britain. Yet I cannot easily shake the image of James, writing about the Hegelian dialectic, Marxism, and world revolution on a divorce ranch in the middle of the Nevada desert, taking time out only to write letters to the woman that he loved and to lose money playing slot machines in Reno. It is a truly singular moment in the life of an extraordinary man. It is no less singular in the history of Nevada.



This photo of the Pyramid Lake Dude Ranch appeared in the Nevada Dude Ranch Association brochure. (*Nevada Historical Society*)

NOTES

¹I could not have written this essay without the help of numerous friends and colleagues. Bill Schwarz stimulated my interest in James in Nevada, and Stuart Hall encouraged me at the initial stage of curiosity. Jerome Edwards, Laura Gorman, Caroline Musselman, Elizabeth Raymond, William Rowley, and Hugh Shapiro read early drafts (or parts of drafts) of the essay and made invaluable suggestions. I presented this essay at the department's research colloquium. Those attending helped me to see the potential of the project from a number of perspectives.

²Bill Schwarz, "Becoming Postcolonial," in *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie, eds. (London: Verso, 2000), 268-81.

³Most notably in my *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

⁴C. L. R. James, *Special Delivery: The Letters of C.L.R. James to Constance Webb, 1939-1948*, Anna Grimshaw, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 191.

⁵C. L. R. James, "Dialectical Materialism and the Fate of Humanity," in *The C. L. R. James Reader*, Anna Grimshaw, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 158.

⁶Kent Worcester, "C. L. R. James and the American Century," in C. L. R. James, *His Intellectual Legacies*, Selwyn R. Cudjoe and William E. Cain, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 173.

⁷C. L. R. James, *American Civilization*, Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 119.

⁸James, *Special Delivery*, 73.

⁹Constance Webb, "C. L. R. James: The Speaker and His Charisma," in C. L. R. James, *His Life and Work*, Paul Buhle, ed. (London: Allison and Busby, 1986), 169.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 70.

¹²*Ibid.*, 132.

¹³*Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁵Quoted in Selwyn R. Cudjoe, "'As Ever Darling, All My Love, Nello': The Love Letters of C. L. R. James," in C. L. R. James: *His Intellectual Legacies*, Cudjoe and Cain, eds., 232.

¹⁶See Mella Rothwell Harmon, "Divorce and Economic Opportunity in Reno, Nevada during the Great Depression," M.S. thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1998, 74-77. Harmon's research is based on looking at 3,007 divorce records, a sample of records between 1931 and 1934.

¹⁷Anna Grimshaw, Introduction to James, *Special Delivery*, 8.

¹⁸Quoted in Cudjoe, "'As Ever Darling,'" 233.

¹⁹James, *Special Delivery*, 346.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 311.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*, 312.

²³*Ibid.*, 314.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 313.

²⁵Charlotte Hunter, interview, Reno, Nevada, 17 November 2000. In addition to representing James, Hunter was to represent another famous Trinidadian in a divorce case. She was the attorney for Eric Williams, an historian and politician who became Trinidad's first prime minister following independence in 1962. Williams, who had been James's student while at secondary school, was referred to Hunter by James.

²⁶James, *Special Delivery*, 322.

²⁷Hunter, interview, 17 November 2000.

²⁸James, *Special Delivery*, 315.

²⁹Harry Drackert, "Pyramid Lake Ranch," prospectus for sale of the ranch, ca. 1957, The Records of Harry and Joan Drackert (Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno), 2.

³⁰A. J. Liebling, *A Reporter at Large: Dateline: Pyramid Lake, Nevada*, Elmer Rusco, ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000), 7.

³¹*Ibid.*, 10.

³²*Ibid.*, 10-11.

- ³³James, *Special Delivery*, 320-21.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, 334.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, 323.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, 324.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, 334.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, 332.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, 341.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 325.
- ⁴¹Elmer R. Rusco, Introduction to Liebling, *Reporter at Large*, xv.
- ⁴²Liebling, *Reporter at Large*, 101.
- ⁴³A. J. Liebling, *A Reporter at Large: Dateline: Pyramid Lake, Nevada*, Elmer Rusco, ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2000).
- ⁴⁴James, *Special Delivery*, 341.
- ⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 376.
- ⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 375.
- ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 345.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 344.
- ⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 352.
- ⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 348.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, 349-50.
- ⁵²*Ibid.*, 373-74.
- ⁵³*Ibid.*, 374.
- ⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 341.
- ⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 359.
- ⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 342.
- ⁵⁷Liebling, *Reporter at Large*, 6.
- ⁵⁸James, *Special Delivery*, 349.
- ⁵⁹C. L. R. James, *Notes on Dialectics* (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 8.
- ⁶⁰James, *Special Delivery*, 359.
- ⁶¹*Ibid.*, 371-72.
- ⁶²*Ibid.*, 372.
- ⁶³Quoted in Cudjoe, " 'As Ever Darling' ," 238.
- ⁶⁴Cited in Kent Worcester, *C. L. R. James: A Political Biography* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 101.
- ⁶⁵C. L. R. James, *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways* (London: Allison and Busby, 1953), 168.
- ⁶⁶Grimshaw, Introduction to *C. L. R. James Reader*, Grimshaw, ed., 12.

Ruby Duncan, Operation Life, and Welfare Rights in Nevada

EARNEST N. BRACEY

The name Ruby Duncan once reverberated throughout the Las Vegas community. For those who know her, she is a legend. For many living in Las Vegas today, however, Ruby Duncan is hardly known. More important, the nation has all but forgotten her in the national backlash against welfare mothers, a crusade fostered by the Reagan era's taunt: "the Cadillac welfare mothers." Nonetheless, Ruby Duncan has become an acknowledged and powerful figure in Las Vegas's black community over the years, and even in her well-earned retirement. In fact, this matriarch has blazed new trails in race relations in Nevada and mapped the way politically for many voiceless minorities.

Born on a sharecropper's farm in the backwoods of Tallulah, Louisiana, on June 1, 1932, she might have lived a hard and miserable life. Indeed, one has only to read Alice Walker's Pulitzer-prize-winning novel, *The Color Purple*,¹ — the fictionalized life of poor Celie, the book's main black female character—or view Steven Spielberg's movie of the same name, to get an idea of how Ruby Duncan's life perhaps might have been.

Working a dawn-till-dusk existence on the infamous Ivory Plantation in the rugged Louisiana cotton fields, her bittersweet life started out as a struggle to exist—and to survive. Even then, as a black child of the depression, Ruby Duncan would not give up. She was ambitious, street-smart, and proud—qualities necessary for the survival of poor blacks at that time. Those early years in Tallulah were filled with pain and hardship, and suffering. However, Duncan hoped for a better life, even as she was as a little girl being physically and sexually abused by trusted male relatives. Psychologically traumatized for years, and initially with low self-esteem, she struggled on.

Ruby Duncan knew neither her parents, who died before she was four years old, nor her siblings, a sister and three brothers. Little Ruby was unceremoniously shuttled from relative to relative to live. Nevertheless, she kept on

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Photo of Ruby Duncan taken while running for the Nevada state legislature in 1977. *(Photo courtesy of Ruby Duncan)*

striving, eking out a meager existence for herself, almost alone, going to school when she could by walking eight grueling miles to a small, decrepit, grey wooden church that served also as a makeshift school for black children from October to December each year. According to historians Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame

Southern whites wanted to limit black education to elementary schools where the chief focus would be on industrial education, teaching trades and manual skills. The black schools [were] organized around the labor needs of southern planters and consequently close[d] during planting and harvesting times.²

After learning the rudiments of mathematics, reading and, writing, Ruby Duncan dropped out of school in the ninth grade, receiving no further formal education until she earned her general equivalency diploma—the GED—as an adult in Nevada. She regretted dropping out of school, but thought it was her only alternative under the harsh circumstances. Duncan had always dreamed of attending the predominantly black Grambling State College in Louisiana, now Grambling State University, but it was not to be. Therefore, it was not an easy decision, as it began a difficult time for her as a full-time waitress and barmaid for \$9.50 per week for more than eighty hours a week. Unfortunately for Ruby Duncan, this was the only type of work she could find in segregated Louisiana. Pregnant, at sixteen, the result of a rape by a rejected suitor, she gave birth to her first child, a bright-eyed baby boy. Her motivation was always to do the right thing, to do a good job, to make a better life for herself and her small child. Young and naïve, mostly a child herself, she could not properly take care of a new baby all by herself while trying to earn a living working long, hard hours. Therefore, to help out, Duncan's favorite aunt Mamie Lynn, in Las Vegas, took sole responsibility for raising the boy.

Sad, lonely, tired, and missing her beloved child, Ruby Duncan later took her Aunt Lynn's welcomed suggestion (or advice) that she move immediately to the sprawling city of lights, where the wages were considerably better than in the racist and segregated South. Indeed, in Las Vegas blacks could earn fair wages for an honest day's work. And the lure of decent work became almost irresistible. In fact, many blacks were seeking their fortunes and opportunities outside the South. The black community in Las Vegas, for example, increased from just two hundred in 1940 to more than sixteen thousand in the 1950s. Historian Nell Irvin Painter explains:

Leaving the sexual abuse, poverty, and multifaceted disabilities that plagued them, the [black] women and men who made the break from their bad "Old Country"—the rural South—were seeking their fortune (with all the meanings of the word in folklore) in the way of other immigrants to the United States. Southern [black] migrants exercised their freedom and reached a better land.³

Consequently, and without more thought, Ruby Duncan set off in 1952 for

the unknown desert of Las Vegas, only to be disappointed as she debarked from the broken-down Greyhound Bus. To her absolute amazement, and perhaps humiliation, Ruby Duncan found racism and discrimination against blacks just as virulent and prevalent in southern Nevada as in the Deep South, with similar segregated black and white communities, and private prejudices. Nevada was even called the Mississippi of the West, because of its unofficial and unwritten discriminatory policies toward blacks and other minorities.⁴

Moreover, Duncan discovered that her Aunt Lynn lived in a surprisingly dilapidated, ramshackle hotel building of sorts in the hot desert east of Las Vegas, where poor black people had to share communal bath facilities, sometimes with unknown neighbors. Equally important, water had to be carted to that black community in rusty steel drums from ten miles away in Henderson, a neighboring and thriving city today.

Las Vegas was not the promised land she had hoped for and expected. But even with the debilitating effects of racism and discrimination in downtown Las Vegas and elsewhere, Ruby Duncan got busy and started working right away to make a decent life for herself and, after reuniting with her son, for him.

Racial divisions and Jim Crow laws were the order and business of the day in the glittering city. Black businesses and black clientele and tourists were barred even from the infamous Strip at that time. But Ruby Duncan was resolute and never discouraged. From her point of view, anywhere was better than the back-breaking labor of picking cotton in the backward South. She wanted to build a new life in Las Vegas and quickly forget her terrible past and unremarkable existence in Louisiana.

But Ruby Duncan did not escape the heavy toil and physical labor of menial tasks. She worked as a hotel maid in many of the best of Las Vegas's posh casino-resorts. After five years of continuous back-breaking labor and an inhuman workload, as well as a disabling physical injury, Ruby Duncan had all but given up. Her harsh work experiences in casino hotels led her to say, "Slavery is not over," to anyone who would listen. Along the way, Ruby Duncan married an airman from Nellis Air Force Base, but eventually divorced him, and ended up on the Nevada welfare rolls. By this time, her family had grown to five boys and two girls.

Reluctant to become a welfare mother, Ruby Duncan believed she had no other option after a life-threatening accident: She slipped on hot cooking oil on the polished kitchen floors of the Sahara Hotel. Incapacitated for almost a year because of the accident, she still somehow had to take care of her little children. Swallowing her considerable pride, Ruby Duncan accepted welfare for the first time in her life. Meanwhile, she began to acquire a political education of sorts after her slow medical recovery. For example, she spoke up about welfare rights when no one else would in the black community; and she attended political meetings to voice her opinion about the inequality of Nevada's meager welfare offerings to the poor.

In 1974, Duncan was a candidate for the State Assembly from District 17 in Las Vegas.⁵ She lost that election. But, in 1977, Ruby Duncan spoke before Nevada State Senate and Assembly committees advocating full employment, food stamps for the poor, and even welfare reform. And in 1980 she also served as a Nevada delegate to the National Democratic Convention.⁶

Although Ruby Duncan has been ridiculed for her strong southern accent and squeaky little voice as well as a lack of higher education and public speaking acumen, many listened to her solemn pleas and candid statements about the rights she and other welfare recipients thought they deserved. And never did she lose her opinionated voice, even when critics dubbed her a violent militant and false messiah.

Ruby Duncan became an important social activist and organized many of the welfare fights and demonstrations in the state of Nevada, particularly in Las Vegas, serving as the president of the Clark County Welfare Rights Organization.⁷ She later became involved in the National Welfare Rights Organization, becoming a dedicated and devoted member of the executive board, which was chaired by the late George Wiley, the first black research chemist for DuPont.⁸ Wiley was extremely proud of Duncan's political savvy and activism in the state and her stance on welfare and right for recipients. He often praised her stellar performance.⁹ Although Duncan was on welfare for approximately six years, she was never ashamed of having received help when she needed it the most. After all, the state welfare system was designed to help needy mothers and poor Nevada families, and their battle cry for entitlements became a rallying point for many disadvantaged mothers. They became known as the welfare mamas.

During the late 1960s the state of Nevada, despite the righteous cry of Ruby Duncan and other single mothers, cut benefits for the so-called welfare mamas. This action by the state ultimately incited Duncan and other welfare mothers to action. They even marched in front of the state capitol in Carson City to protest the lowering of welfare grants, as welfare benefits were called then.¹⁰ But politicians and other Nevada leaders initially paid them no heed. And to add insult to injury, the state essentially waged a campaign against the recipients in 1970, to stop "welfare cheating." Unfortunately, during these trying and tumultuous times "many welfare recipients sought anonymity rather than notoriety, and feared (with justification) that any protests on their part would make it even more difficult for them to regain their income."¹¹

In response, Ruby Duncan helped organize a protest march on the Las Vegas Strip in 1971, aided by the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) and George Wiley. It became a defining moment for the issue of welfare in Nevada. According to historians Nick Kotz and Mary Lynn Kotz,

The effort had taken two months of groundwork, with Wiley orchestrating every move. The lawyers filed suit in federal court, charging that Nevada officials had violated the rights of the state's welfare recipients, depriving them of due process. The

organizers carried out the painstaking work of locating the seventy-five hundred persons whose checks had been cut off or cut down, and then, with lawyers, interviewing them to determine the details of their individual cases, and at the same time trying to convince them that they should join the demonstrations and become members of NWRO. This was the most difficult part.¹²

Nonetheless, many welfare mothers attended the demonstrations and thousands of poor people came to that first Strip march. They were joined by Jane Fonda, Sammy Davis, Jr., and the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Reverend Ralph Abernathy.¹³ An unwieldy group of angry, but peaceful demonstrators, led by Ruby Duncan herself, slowly marched down the Las Vegas Strip, chanting songs of righteous protest—and finally stopping at Caesars Palace, shouting loudly and repeatedly in unison, “We are in Caesars Palace . . . We shall not be moved.” Tourists, Strip casino workers, and the like, were flabbergasted and no doubt annoyed. Other hotels on the Strip closed their doors, outraged and disgusted.

To say the least, this disrupted the tourist trade and the gaming businesses on the Strip, and made for Duncan some dangerous enemies. In the turmoil, she received her first death threat.¹⁴ But Ruby Duncan persisted. The fear of an all-out riot on the Strip and the loss of business effectively quashed the idea of actually doing her harm. She was only lambasted and excoriated. But Ruby



The late Rev. Ralph Abernathy with Dr. George Wiley, Director of the National Welfare Rights Organization during the march on the Las Vegas strip. (Photo courtesy of Ruby Duncan)

Duncan hadn't finished with protesting. Another massive demonstration on the Las Vegas Strip took place in 1972, and included hungry, disadvantaged children. The enthusiastic group of black children and their parents formed a human chain of determined marchers, ending up at a four-star restaurant in the famous Stardust Hotel. For this outlandish and defiant act, Ruby Duncan and many other black welfare mothers were ultimately detained, manhandled, and arrested.¹⁵

Duncan was always proud that before her actual arrest, these neediest of black kids were served some of the finest gourmet dinners at any Las Vegas casino, which she helped order for them. When it came to paying the enormous tab for the very expensive meals, Duncan fondly recalled telling the Stardust casino bosses to take the bill and shove it.¹⁶

The demonstrations and protest marches on the Strip eventually produced positive results, because in 1975 the Nevada state government reinstated the grant benefits denied to welfare mothers and other needy families in the state. In fact, many Nevada leaders and gaming executives "met secretly and passed their strong judgments to state officials: The demonstrations must stop. Let the poor have their dole."¹⁷ The state finally and reluctantly agreed.

Ruby Duncan became more emboldened by the demonstrations. Her struggles for the disadvantaged poor identified her as a sincere and committed community leader, as well as an important social activist in Las Vegas. The state of Nevada and even the nation began to take notice of this personable, heavy-set, formidable, black former welfare mother. Ruby Duncan never sought notoriety. It came as a price of leadership. In 1972 her job as the founder and later president of Operation Life put her in direct competition with the bureaucrats who ran the state welfare department. Operation Life was noted for being a Westside community self-help organization that organized poverty programs. Originally, according to journalist Bob Palm, Operation Life "was a small operation dedicated to helping the poor in West Las Vegas get the bare necessities of life,"¹⁸ and which ran a "phalanx of programs that [catered] to the most needy . . . the poor, the sick, the ill-housed, those without health care, [and] those without warm clothes."¹⁹

Needless to say, Ruby Duncan has never had a great love for the Nevada Welfare Division. This was one of the reasons she decided to establish Operation Life, a private, nonprofit corporation. Operation Life was also designed to help the poor and underprivileged everywhere in Southern Nevada, even beyond the black community. An unpublished account of the organization points out:

Operation Life started in 1972 with one silver dollar donation and ten volunteer workers, welfare mothers with a mind to achieve economic independence. Within the first year, the women . . . negotiated with First Western Savings Association for the rent-free occupancy of a five story former hotel [the Cove] in the heart of the low income community [the Westside].²⁰

Duncan started out her operation under the auspices of the Welfare Rights Organization, which she chaired in Nevada, in one of the many offices at the famous Moulin Rouge resort in Las Vegas. But her group was ordered to vacate the premises, in her words, by "the white owners at the time," and without a full explanation.²¹ Later, however, Duncan set up shop for Operation Life in the abandoned and now defunct Cove Hotel. It was noted for housing black entertainers who performed on the Strip in an earlier incarnation of Las Vegas—singers such as Lena Horne, Pearl Bailey, and Sammy Davis, Jr. They could not stay at the various white casino-resorts until the first integrated hotel in Las Vegas, the Moulin Rouge, was opened in 1955.²²

After convincing the board members of the First Western Savings and Loan to give her fledgling organization the outright lease for the boarded-up Cove, at D and Jackson streets on the Westside, Ruby Duncan became one of the first black women in the state to operate a viable self-help organization. But the dilapidated building was no gem. It was an eyesore, an empty shell of its former glory. This did not deter Ruby Duncan, however. She helped renovate the place with the strong support and help of loyal friends, volunteers, and later, paid employees. An Operation Life newsletter explained:

In 1973, the women [volunteer workers and welfare mothers] purchased and renovated a 10,000 square foot [part of the] building for \$84,000, with 100% financing provided by a team of four local lending institutions. At the same time, a commitment was secured from the Clark County Library District to lease the renovated building for the first branch library in West Las Vegas. Monthly lease payments service[d] the debt and continue[d] to build equity for Operation Life.²³

Duncan still had to fight the establishment to keep the place going, insuring that the building had heat in winter, and air conditioning during the stifling summer months. Duncan pressed on, ensuring also that the Westside community had a reliable day-care center for poor working mothers, recreational facilities, a much-needed swimming pool, a youth program, and a black-run, locally written, community newsletter—all operating or functioning in and around the depressed property located at the Cove Hotel.

Duncan brushed aside her detractors. With the help of hired consultants, she learned how to write proposals for federal economic development grants. She was able to provide local welfare mothers with "intellectual (educational) training" and emotional support to empower them to take care of themselves and their many children and to stand up for their guaranteed and appropriate rights.

When it came to lobbying and fund raising, Ruby Duncan became a sort of Zen master. Her gentle suasion enabled Operation Life, over the years, to receive millions of dollars in contributions, grants, and other funds. Duncan even applied directly, and successfully, to the Nevada state government for grant money. She also received money from wealthy white philanthropists who believed in her cause. "Remarking on Ruby Duncan's lobbying ability," the unofficial story of Operation Life reports that "Nevada's former United States Senator



Ruby Duncan outside the Operation Life Headquarters building in Las Vegas, Nevada. (Photo courtesy of Ruby Duncan)

Howard Cannon once advised the late Senator Hubert Humphrey, 'Don't ever get her mad.'²⁴ Clearly Ruby Duncan was a human dynamo and a force to be reckoned with. With several city, state, and federal grants, plans for a new building emerged for Operation Life on West Owens Avenue on the Westside. Thanks to the personal supervision and careful administration of Ruby Duncan, the building eventually was constructed. Later, the Cove Hotel mysteriously burned down. Fortunately, the new facility on Owens Avenue had already been occupied, but invaluable historical files were destroyed in the Cove Hotel fire.

The new facility housed the first Westside community medical center, in 1973, for low-income and welfare families, and it was also federally funded. In fact, as "The Operation Life Story" notes:

Health and nutrition programs have consistently been the core of Operation Life's strategy. With its clinic, WIC program, summer feeding program, day care center and library, Operation Life . . . consistently served the victims of poverty and dependent children who were malnourished and anemic, and therefore undereducated, and adults who were underemployed.²⁵

Operation Life lost its protracted battle to operate the medical clinic independent of city government, Carson City, and the federal government. The state of Nevada eventually took over the organization's medical efforts. Ruby Duncan's big success, however, came in 1973, when her organization brought

the Early Periodic Screening program to Las Vegas. The over-all goal of the program, which was federally funded, was to improve health care for the poor. Operation Life has also been credited with helping to define welfare standards for the state. Eventually, the organization leased some of its larger offices to the now embattled local Las Vegas NAACP, and to many other beneficial Westside community entities. The place has also become a focal point for the entire black community, as it continues to provide health care information, food, self-help guidance, advice, and business assistance programs for thousands of residents. It should be noted that at one point, Operation Life was Westside's largest property owner. The building it erected on Owens Avenue is still owned by the operation.

Ruby Duncan has no regrets, especially as she remembers being charged, along with Operation Life, with corruption and fraud by Nevada state prosecutors in the 1980s. She believes the campaign against her was "well planned and organized."²⁶ During one memorable court session, Duncan was verbally attacked, abused, ridiculed, called an "animal," mocked and pronounced guilty before the evidence was even presented.²⁷ But one day, in an act of sheer bravado and outright defiance, she rose before the Nevada state court and prosecutors and loudly exclaimed, "Yes, your honor, I am guilty . . . guilty as charged for helping poor people."²⁸ Such is the heart and character of Ruby Duncan. Orleck explained it another way:

Prosecutors were so abusive—going so far as to call Duncan "an animal"—that after one cross-examination, Duncan collapsed and had to be carried out of court. One Judge accused prosecutors of playing not to the jury but to state higher-ups, and ordered them to tone down their attacks.²⁹

Duncan and her organization were exonerated every time they were taken to court, because they had apparently done no wrong, and because of the organization's accurate bookkeeping. Perhaps the powers that be were frustrated that they could not cow this poor, marginally educated—but highly motivated and intelligent—black woman, or close down her Operation Life. Perhaps state prosecutors at the time had no great love for Ruby Duncan, either.

Or maybe they were jealous of her phenomenal success in administering the multimillion-dollar, self-help programs under Operation Life?³⁰ Who can say? Confronting the sometimes one-sided court system helped Ruby Duncan understand that not everyone in Nevada believed in the ability of Operation Life's high ideals and solutions to motivate poor people to improve their lives. Nonetheless, as "The Operation Life Story" clearly maintains:

One of the most acknowledged strengths of Operation Life over its lifetime has been its ability to garner support for its programs and proposals. The first believers were the Clark County Legal Services programs, and the Catholic Church. In short order, health providers, day care professionals, educators, politicians followed in lending their support to the Operation Life experiment.³¹

Thinking in terms of her own situation, Ruby Duncan is especially disturbed about the state of things regarding welfare mothers for the future, particularly what she perceives as the continuing disparities and inequities of the welfare reform measures instituted by the Republican majority in congress and signed by President William Clinton. She is extremely concerned with the long-term effect of the recently passed Welfare Reform Bill; she asks, "How can poor people start out with nothing and be expected to obtain jobs without training and education?" And more important, "Who will take care of the children?"³²

The fight in the Nevada state courts took its toll on Duncan's time and energy, perhaps even dampened her spirits a bit, but she still never gave up. Unfortunately, however, her recurring health problems and medical complications forced her finally to resign as the president of Operation Life, which by that time was a \$3-million community-development corporation with approximately a thousand members.³³ Today Duncan fights a different battle with serious medical difficulties.

But Ruby Duncan will always be associated with welfare rights and the Operation Life organization. She persevered in her love of her enemies and the poor. Moreover, Duncan is prominent in other ways. In 1971, *McCall's Magazine* named her as "first among women making the most significant [life-changing] contributions to our nation" that year.³⁴ In heart, robust size, energy and demeanor, Duncan is comparable to the late and remarkable Fannie Lou Hamer of Mississippi, who also rose to national prominence as a civil rights activist and crusader to empower the poor through collective action.³⁵ In a personal letter to Duncan, Earl G. Graves, editor and publisher of *Black Enterprise* magazine, who featured her in a March 1981 issue, writes:

Your tireless efforts to promote and develop new ideas and change—in the wake of decreasing government influence—have proved most significant in the fight to provide meaningful opportunities for all Americans. Hence, your inclusion as one of the 30 Future Leaders [for the 1980s] in America . . .³⁶

It must also be pointed out that Duncan served six years as second vice-chair of the Clark County Democratic Central Committee, and as President Jimmy Carter's appointee both to the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity and to the White House Conference on American Families in the late 1970s.³⁷ Ruby Duncan was also described in the Las Vegas press as the poor people's Black Santa Claus because of the help and benefits she provided to the poor and indigents of Las Vegas in the past.³⁸ Furthermore, as recently as 1996, she was presented with an honorary associate's degree from the Community College of Southern Nevada, and, in 1999, a Distinguished Nevadan Award from the Nevada State Board of Regents.³⁹

Ruby Duncan is a remarkable woman, a living community and cultural icon. She has certainly stepped on some people's toes to get what she wanted, but ultimately she believed it was necessary. And Duncan is still not afraid to tell

others about her hard life. Yet Duncan is not angry or bitter with the world. In the final analysis, Ruby Duncan's life is a compelling story that must be told, if for no other reason, to point out and inform the public that welfare mothers past and present, as American citizens living in the United States, have (and have had) rights under the law.

Although Duncan was extremely busy during her activist days, it did not keep her from rearing her seven children. All of them have been educated and have become productive citizens. The best known of her children is a prominent and popular criminal attorney in Las Vegas, David Phillips, who also served a term as an elected member of the Board of Regents of the University and Community College System of Nevada.

There are images of Ruby Duncan that are burned indelibly into the collective memory of some Las Vegas old-timers—and perhaps those who know her from the historical record. Many of these individuals had believed that welfare mothers were supposedly lazy and did not want to work. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Indeed, as journalist Ned Day explains,



Ruby Duncan received the Distinguished Nevadan Award from the Nevada Board of Regents in 1999. Her son David Phillips, himself a former Regent, is second from the right. (Photo courtesy of Ruby Duncan)

The stereotype of welfare mothers . . . as shiftless, lazy and incapable of caring for themselves was a cruel hoax. She [Duncan] . . . prove[d] that given adequate financial resources, welfare mothers possessed the determination, guts and industry necessary to take care of themselves and their children.⁴⁰

Ruby Duncan was once asked what would have happened if she had sat on her hands and done nothing to turn the tide for welfare mothers and the poor in Nevada. And she replied, "It may not have made any difference, but I believe the results of my efforts and all those who helped me and Operation Life would not have been the same."⁴¹ Though no longer actively involved in the black community or Operation Life, Duncan occasionally confronts hostility from old enemies and strangers with perhaps a score to settle. But she has never been harmed by anyone. And she has no regrets, because from her point of view, it was the right thing to do to improve the conditions and hopeless lives of the poor and destitute in Nevada, particularly in Las Vegas.

Finally, Ruby Duncan stated that if she had her life to live over again, she would do it the same way—a remarkable life, an indomitable spirit, and a remarkable woman. For Ruby Duncan the struggle and life goes on.

NOTES

- ¹Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (London: Women Press, 1983).
- ²Mary F. Berry and John W. Blassingame, *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 264-65. Note that this period was usually during the months of October, November, and December.
- ³Nell Irvin Painter, forward to *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), viii-ix.
- ⁴Elmer R. Rusco, "The Civil Rights Movement in Nevada," *Nevada Public Affairs Review* (1987), 75.
- ⁵"Elect Ruby Duncan - 1980 National Delegate," political flyer, undated. In author's possession.
- ⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁷*Ibid.*
- ⁸Nick Kotz and Mary Lynn Kotz, *A Passion for Equality: George A. Wiley and the Movement* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977). See also Nicholas Lehman, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 212. Lehman writes that the National Welfare Rights Organization was considered a left-wing organization for liberal goals and, of course, racial equality.
- ⁹Kotz and Kotz, *Passion for Equality*, 19-21.
- ¹⁰Jackie Brett, "Strengthening the Community," *Las Vegas City Magazine* (January 1986), 39.
- ¹¹Kotz and Kotz, *Passion for Equality*, 20.
- ¹²Kotz and Kotz, *Passion for Equality*, 19-20.
- ¹³Earnest N. Bracey, "A Shock to the System: Vegas Changed for Good After Ruby Duncan Gave Silent Minorities a Voice," *Las Vegas Life Magazine* (April 1999), 55.
- ¹⁴Bracey, "A Shock to the System," 55-56.
- ¹⁵Ruby Duncan, author's interview, 24 February 1998.
- ¹⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹⁷Kotz and Kotz, *Passion for Equality*, 18.
- ¹⁸Bob Palm, "Poor Mother's Struggle Leads to Success," *Las Vegas Sun* (27 January 1980).
- ¹⁹Ned Day, "A Real-Life Santa Claus Brings Cheer to Vegas Poor," *Las Vegas Review-Journal* (25 December 1985), 15B.
- ²⁰"Operation Life: Community Development Corporation Newsletter," undated, p. 1. In author's possession.
- ²¹Duncan interview.
- ²²See Earnest N. Bracey, "The Moulin Rouge Mystique: Blacks and Equal Rights in Las Vegas," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 39:4 (Winter 1996).
- ²³"Operation Life," 1.
- ²⁴"The Operation Life Story," draft, in the author's possession (19 March 1979), 3.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*
- ²⁶Duncan interview.
- ²⁷Orleck, *Politics of Motherhood*, 114.
- ²⁸Duncan interview.
- ²⁹Orleck, *Politics of Motherhood*, 114.
- ³⁰"Thirty New Leaders for the Eighties," *Black Enterprise* (March 1981), 35.
- ³¹"The Operation Life Story," 3.
- ³²Duncan interview.
- ³³"Thirty New Leaders," 35.
- ³⁴Brett, *Strengthening the Community*, 39.
- ³⁵See Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999).
- ³⁶Earl G. Graves, letter, dated 6 February 1981. In author's possession.
- ³⁷"Elect Ruby Duncan."
- ³⁸Day, "Real-Life Santa Claus," 15B.
- ³⁹Bracey, "A Shock to the System," 56.
- ⁴⁰Day, "Real-Life Santa Claus," 15B.
- ⁴²Duncan interview.

Peruvian Shepherders in the Western United States

Will They Replace the Basques as the Dominant Ethnic Group in the Sheep Industry?

PERICLES LEON

It is midJune in Nevada's high desert. As the afternoon gets colder and chances for summer thunderstorms threaten, a Peruvian shepherd patiently tends two thousand sheep grazing among the sagebrush. Peruvian nationals working as shepherders are not limited to the state of Nevada; hundreds more are dispersed throughout the western United States. These temporary workers have been arriving since 1969, when the Western Range Association (WRA) placed a representative in Lima to actively recruit herders from this new source to replace the diminishing number of herders coming from Europe, primarily Basques.¹ Today, ownership in the Western American sheep industry is largely influenced by American Basques, whose beginnings can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Basque immigrants found opportunities as herders and later as owners of sheep ranches in the American West. If such impressive economic mobility was achieved by Basque herders, what has been the trajectory of the Peruvian shepherders in the last thirty years or so? Are the Peruvians following the same upward economic mobility as their Basque counterparts? In short, will the Peruvian chuyo replace the Basque beret as the dominant ethnic symbol of the sheep industry in the western United States?

HISTORY

The Peruvian shepherders began to enter the United States after the Western Range Association opened its Lima recruiting office in 1969. The association's recruiter was a former agricultural science teacher named Rigoberto Calle.²

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An errant lamb is hooked by a Peruvian sheepherder near Butte Valley, Nevada, 1976. (Photo courtesy of the Leon family)

The WRA is a nonprofit corporation of about 280 members who raise sheep in the western United States.³ Its purpose is to supply sheepherders needed by its members. From its headquarters in Sacramento, California, the WRA submits required paperwork to the Department of Labor for authorization to import temporary sheepherders into the United States. This labor importation is part of the H-2A agricultural guest-worker program designed to insure that agricultural employers have adequate access to farm labor.⁴ However, under the H-2A program, the WRA must first demonstrate that, (1) there is a shortage of minimally-qualified American workers willing to be sheepherders, (2) the wages paid to alien sheepherders won't adversely affect domestic farm workers, and (3) all the benefits offered to prospective American workers must also be given to the alien sheepherders. These benefits include proper housing, meals, transportation, worker's compensation insurance, tools and supplies, and a secure employment time period. After the applications have been certified by the Department of Labor, the WRA, acting with its members as a joint employer, submits the approval to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to import the requested sheepherders under H-2A visas. The process of labor certification and visa issuing takes approximately two months. Soon after, the Peruvian sheepherder travels to the site of the requesting rancher under a three-

year contract. Sheep ranches are primarily located in the states of California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Wyoming, and Washington.

The demand for Peruvian shepherders arose because Basques no longer wanted to enter the United States as shepherders, after improvements in the European economy that followed World War II had reached the Basque Country. For Basques during the 1960s and early 1970s, the European economic boom meant better opportunities at home. Moreover, the new Basque generation was not attracted by the prospect of making a fortune in America at the cost of spending extended periods of time in isolation, being on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.⁶ Thus, it became difficult to renew the pool of Basque herders, prompting the Western Ranch Association to find reliable and inexpensive labor elsewhere. Peruvians were an obvious choice for three reasons. First, the presence of large-scale sheep ranches in the highlands of central Peru, such as Corpacancha and SAIS Pachacutec.⁷ Second, the topographic and living conditions of these large operations somewhat resembled those of some western United States outfits.⁸ And third, the willingness of the Peruvian herder to take advantage of the wage opportunities offered to him. In short, the Peruvian highlander represented an inexpensive yet experienced labor source for the American sheep rancher.

By 1970 approximately ten Peruvian nationals had entered the western United States as shepherders. This number increased to about fifty herders by early 1972. By the end of 1996 the total number of Peruvian national herders easily surpassed two thousand.⁹ This figure represents the number of Peruvians who have entered the United States as temporary agricultural workers, which technically involves all agriculture sectors. However, all Peruvian nationals under the H-2A program have apparently entered to work exclusively in the sheep industry. For this reason, the totals shown in Appendix A closely reflect the migration pattern of the Peruvian shepherd to the United States. The implications of the large Peruvian presence are two fold: First, the Peruvians have replaced the Basques as the common shepherd of the American West, to the point that today it is almost impossible to find a Basque herder working under contract. It is difficult to assess when the Peruvians became majority. However, as early as 1991, of the 1,150 contracted herders, more than half were Peruvians, followed in smaller percentages by herders from Mexico, Chile, and a surprising eight recruits from Mongolia.¹⁰ And second, by filling the void left by the Basque shepherders, the Peruvians have not only alleviated the labor shortage but have helped to keep the sheep industry afloat in the western United States, in itself a vital economic contribution.

SHEPHERDERS FROM SAN PEDRO DE CAJAS

Like their Basque counterparts, Peruvian shepherders come from small mountain towns and villages. To provide a clearer picture of their background

and journey into the western United States, the following section focuses on herders from one town. San Pedro de Cajas, in the heart of the Andean mountains, has a population of more than eight thousand, and is the district's seat (of the same name) within the province of Tarma, department of Junin. Located in the highlands of central Peru, San Pedro de Cajas is 12,964 feet above sea level. Like many communities in central Peru, the residents' familiarity with each other stems from blood lines or having lived in proximity over the generations. As a result people know one another on a first-name basis. In varying degrees, the inhabitants are bilingual in Spanish and Quechua, an indigenous language spoken in the Andes. Although the town is situated on flat terrain, the surrounding topography is very rugged with a small river cutting through the outskirts of the town.¹¹ Summer nights may reach freezing temperatures while during the day the sun can be blistering.¹² Because San Pedro is located near the equator, winters are mild with sporadic snowfalls and a moderate rainfall.¹³ Agriculture is dominated by the potato crop, which is harvested in May. In June, the town honors San Pedro, the town's patron saint and protector, with annual festivities that begin on June 27 and end on July 5 with the cleaning of *cachipuzu*, a natural saline well. It is argued that the region was first incorporated into the Inca Empire during the reign of Inca Pachacutic, who may have sent a group of settlers to the area to harvest salt. It is possible that these settlers, known as *mitmaqs* or *mitimaes*, became the town's permanent settlers after the Inca Empire fell to the Spanish conquistadors.¹⁴

San Pedro de Cajas is known nationally and internationally for its weavers, who produce elegant hand-made blankets and the highly demanded *tapiz*, a hand-woven tapestry made with dyed sheep wool and depicting scenes of local daily life. During the late 1970s and 1980s the export demand for *tapices* was so high that it created a local labor shortage which was eased by migrant workers from nearby communities. At the height of the demand, *tapices* were being produced by San Pedro de Cajas residents in cities like Lima, Huancayo, Oroya, and Tarma. Because *tapices* provided high net returns, many non-San Pedranos began to copy and produce them in their own towns. But increased production soon led to market saturation, which led to the dramatic reduction in demand and price for *tapices* in the 1990s. Today many San Pedranos see *tapiz* production as a lost enterprise.

The first sheepherders from San Pedro de Cajas entered the western United States around 1970, thus being among the first Peruvian nationals to participate in the WRA's herder importation program. These sheepherders had first heard about the program while working at, or by visiting as merchants, the region's numerous large-scale sheep *haciendas*.¹⁵ Because of the high altitude, the residents of San Pedro de Cajas are less dependent on agriculture for income; rather, textile production and sales dominate the local economy. In the midst of this entrepreneurial spirit, the sheepherding profession is seen as lowly, and is performed primarily by women and children. Thus, it is understandable



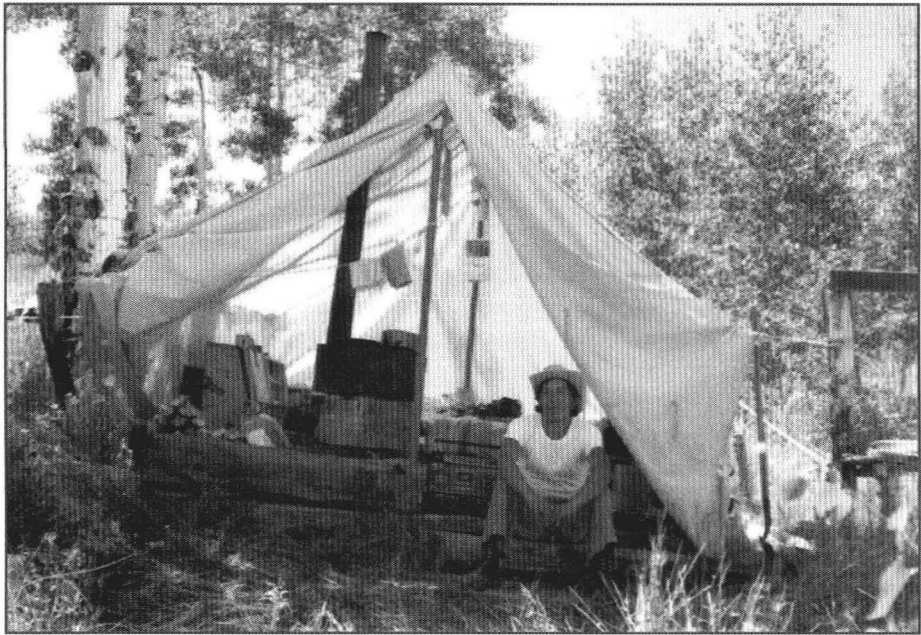
A Peruvian shepherd riding on a high trail near Hiko, Nevada, 1976. (Photo courtesy of the Leon family)



A Peruvian shepherd heads for high country near Cimarron, Colorado, 1976. (Photo courtesy of the Leon family)

why the early sheepherders and their families never admitted to the locals that either the husband, brother, or son had entered the American West as a *pastor*.¹⁶ For returnees and their families, *pastor* became a demeaning and derogatory word associated with a *paisano*¹⁷ who had abandoned entrepreneurship and self-respect for servitude in the United States. Obviously the local people's reaction reflected their inaccurate view of the sheep industry in the United States; for them, the importation of sheepherders was considered similar to the import of Peruvian women as nannies and house-maids by American families. However, by the 1980s the people's view of a *pastor* had changed, for four reasons: (1) the returnee had made tangible economic improvements such as buying a car, building a modern house, or increasing the size of his textile business, (2) the herder had made donations to city hall or local schools or had accepted *mayordomias*¹⁸ in one of the many communal celebrations, (3) the downward spiral of the national economy, which resulted in extremely high inflation and the devaluation of Peru's currency vis-à-vis the dollar, made sheepherding an attractive alternative, and (4) for the returnee, if single, the prospects of marrying the most attractive girl in the community had greatly increased.¹⁹ Within a few years, the combination of these reasons made the *pastor* a prestigious and hero-like figure, someone to look up to, highly requested as a godfather for baptisms, marriages, and graduating classes. But most important, locals now showered gifts upon the returnee in hopes of a possible recommendation to the American rancher so that they, too, could become *pastores*.²⁰ In the early days, the Peruvian herder gave the names of his nearest relatives to his boss so that he in turn would submit them to the WRA. But today, neighborhood friends, distant relatives, and basically everyone, including the college educated, wants to be recommended to work in the American West. This trend has solidified in the 1990s as access to mediums of communication have clearly delineated the lack of economic opportunities and social mobility in Peru as compared to the United States. In the early 1970s the residents of San Pedro had no access to postal service, telephone, or television. The absent sheepherder and his family at home communicated through relatives who lived in larger neighboring cities or by renting a post office box in a city where mail service was available. In either case, communication took a long time. But today, a herder's relative is just a phone call away. San Pedranos now watch American shows on their televisions and dance to American music in the two local discotheques.

The exact number of San Pedro sheepherders who came to the American West is unknown. However, the total does not exceed two hundred. Data on a sample of sixty-seven current and former San Pedro herders, shown in Table 1, indicate that the majority reside in the United States.²¹ Of those who went back to Peru, it is surprising that few have returned to San Pedro; most of them have relocated to cities like Huancayo and Lima, where the economic and educational opportunities are greater, especially for their children.



Living quarters for Peruvian shepherders—(top) in a trailer near Grand Junction, Colorado, and (bottom) a tent on a hillside near Montrose, Colorado, 1976. (Photo courtesy of the Leon family)

TABLE 1
San Pedro de Cajas Shepherders, American West, 1970-1995

Characteristics	Total	%
Did not complete contract	10	14.9
Completed contract	57	85.1
Completed multiple contracts	31	31.3
Reside in Peru	23	34.3
Reside in United States	44	65.7

Although the majority completed their three-year contracts, and even multiple ones, some did not finish. Some were unable to adapt to the rigors of sheepherding while others simply defected and remain illegally in the United States. Defection seems to be a problem that the WRA members worry about. But defection in the sheepherding business is not new. During the 1950s, many of the Basque sheepherders under contract just abandoned their jobs for higher-paying occupations as miners, janitors, and laborers.²² As with the Basques, the Peruvian defection might be a response to three factors: better earning opportunities outside of the sheep industry, the little or no cost of remaining illegally in the United States in terms of being caught and deported to Peru, and the presence of relatives, friends, and former sheepherders in nearby American cities who can serve as the initial information or housing providers to defectors. This last reason might explain why some ranchers have grown wary of outsiders visiting their sheepherders. But even with the problems of defection, San Pedro de Cajas still remains a reliable source of labor for the American sheep rancher.

The data on the forty-four San Pedro sheepherders who have made the United States their permanent home reveal four distinct trends, as shown in Table 2. First, most of them have entered the hotel, gas station, janitorial, or restaurant industries as wage laborers. For the most part individuals in this category are those whose transition from sheep ranch to urban setting has most recently begun. Second, some have remained associated with the livestock industry, either sheep or cattle. They work as camp tenders, ranch laborers, or foremen. In some cases, they have remained with the same sheep rancher, even after acquiring permits to work legally in the United States. In part, the sheepherder's motivation to remain engaged in the sheep industry is work and family related.

TABLE 2
San Pedro de Cajas Shepherders Residing in the United States, 1998

Occupation	Total	%
General laborer	18	40.9
Livestock laborer	14	31.8
Business owner	6	13.6
Technical profession	6	13.6

As explained by a shepherd working in Southern Idaho:

I would really love to find a better job elsewhere but the possibilities of bringing relatives under contract disappears the minute one decides to quit. I have already given my son-in-law's name to my boss and he has promised to request him before the next lambing season. I am hoping that my son-in-law will soon join me and start earning money to support his family. I can't jeopardize my son-in-law's paperwork by quitting this job.

Third, there is the entrepreneurial group that has used its textile and tapestry knowledge and business background to open stores dealing in hand-made textiles and crafts. This group complements its business by selling products at various county and state fairs, mainly in California. Another entrepreneurial group has entered the gardening, landscape, and grounds business, its work force consisting mainly of newly arrived San Pedranos. The fourth group has chosen higher education in the quest to attain economic mobility. These former shepherders have obtained college certificates in areas such as mechanical, electrical, and automobile engineering, and currently work as technical engineers at local production plants or as business owners. Gaining a college education not only entails fluency in the English language, but is influenced by the age and marital status of the herder. As noted by a former herder who first came to Nevada but today lives in California,

when I came from San Pedro in the early 1970s I was only eighteen years old. I had just finished high school and did not know what to do with my life. My years in the Nevada desert went by very fast. I soon found myself with a completed contract, a green card, and deciding what to do next. While some herders could not wait to go back to Peru and be reunited with their wives and children, I had nothing like that. So I found a job at a local mining company but soon realized that a technical degree and fluency in the English language were essential for earning higher wages and becoming prosperous in this country. But the nearest college in Nevada was hours away from where I worked. So, I decided to move to California in 1979 at the age of twenty-three to pursue a college education.

There are two other developments not captured in the data but which are worth mentioning. First, either as green-card holders or as naturalized American citizens, San Pedro de Cajas shepherders have filed requests for immigrant visas with the INS for their spouses, children, and immediate relatives. As a result, families have been reunited after years of separation. A San Pedro family living in northern California recently celebrated the arrival of its last member, twenty years after the father first entered the American West. Another family, in western Nevada, was permanently reunited after the wife and four children met the anxious husband and father at the San Francisco International Airport. These family reunions have tended to concentrate family units. Brothers and sisters who formerly lived in different cities have moved with their respective families to areas in western America where one family member is well established. Consequently, clusters of closely related San Pedrano families can be found in northern, central, and southern California. Other family clusters can be found in western and eastern Nevada, central Utah, and southern Idaho.

The second development is that the reunion and clustering of entire families has enabled San Pedranos to maintain their cultural heritage and local traditions. This is accomplished through an ad-hoc group of former shepherd families in the greater Los Angeles area. This group organizes an annual one-day event to celebrate San Pedro, the patron saint and protector of San Pedro de Cajas. The heavily attended event begins with a Catholic Mass followed by traditional music, food, drinks, and dance presentations. At the last event, for example, a cocktail prepared with freshly imported *maca*, a turnip-like root that grows in the mountains of San Pedro, was served to toast the occasion. Following San Pedro de Cajas tradition, the expenses incurred in organizing the event are fully paid by the *mayordomo* of the day. Donations collected at the event are sent to San Pedro de Cajas to benefit the community in an area or project deemed important by the *mayordomo*.

In summary, the data sample shows that the majority of the San Pedro shepherders prefer to reside in the United States permanently while mostly working outside of the sheep industry. This trend was reinforced by the political, economic, and social conditions affecting Peru in the 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, the currently stagnant *tapiz* industry and the meager returns for agricultural products such as potatoes have solidified their decision to immigrate to the United States. Consequently, unlike the Basques, who have ceased to enter the American West because economic conditions in Europe have improved, the San Pedro shepherders will almost certainly remain in good supply as long as Peru's economic condition remains poor vis-à-vis the United States. If these new herders choose to make the United States their permanent home, they will most likely follow the four distinct patterns of their predecessors.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY OF THE PERUVIAN SHEPHERDERS

Although Peruvians have entered the western United States in great numbers, as of January 2001, no Peruvian shepherd has entered the ranks of ownership and become part of any local, regional, or national sheep producers' or wool growers' association. One might explain the absence of such upward mobility as a direct result of Peruvians just not wanting to be involved in the sheep industry or the lack of a cultural inclination toward long-term sheep raising. However, neither premise is valid. Remember that the Basques became long-term shepherders because of the financial rewards the industry offered in a land that provided various economic opportunities, not because they had a cultural affinity for sheep raising. This is demonstrated by the fact that despite a large migration of Basques to Australia during the 1930s "not a single Basque is involved in the Australian sheep industry."²³ In addition, the Peruvians have proved over a period of thirty years to be great shepherders. Many have completed multiple contracts with the same rancher and are still in high demand with the WRA. And finally, the general feeling of current and former shepherders interviewed for this study indicates that it is economics rather than a lack of cultural affinity for sheep raising that is the main obstacle to upward mobility in the sheep industry. Simply, the economic factors that made the sheep industry a profitable enterprise are no longer present, and thus, the factors favoring mobility that were readily available to the Basques no longer exist. In large part this explains why the Peruvian shepherd has not achieved the mobility his Basque counterparts had attained in the past. As a former shepherd commented,

A few years ago my former boss in California passed away. Since I was working at the ranch for over ten years and had become the foreman, I became interested in buying the ranch when it was put up for sale by the widow. However, I soon realized that I could not afford even the down payment to buy it. The ranch was worth over a million dollars.

Thus, even if an individual has aspirations of becoming an owner, the initial investment for setting up a sheep outfit is financially impossible given the past and current shepherders' monthly incomes.²⁴ The figures for 1860 and 1993 shown in Appendix B demonstrate vividly the truth of this aspect of commercial sheep production in California.

Although faced with an industry where upward economic mobility is highly limited, the Peruvian herder has shown multiple abilities in his quest to integrate himself into society and participate in the American Dream. When interviewed, those working outside of the sheep industry talked fervently about their days as shepherders. They miss the serene open pastures spotted with grazing sheep and the company of their gentle horses. But above all, their faces turned to sadness when recalling their dearest companions, the sheep dogs, their loyal and constant friends during those lonely shepherding days. But

these herders left everything behind to pursue better economic opportunities elsewhere. As noted by a former sheepherder living with his family in northern California:

I worked as a sheepherder for almost ten years. This was fine while my wife and children lived in Peru. I sent them money orders every other month. But when they told me of their intentions to immigrate to the United States and live as a family, I just didn't know what to do. How would I support an entire family on a sheepherder's wage? As you know, a sheepherder's monthly income is not enough to pay for rent, electricity, and other basic necessities a family needs. Seeing no other avenue to support my family while working in the sheep industry, I left for the city. At first I was afraid because I didn't have a profession other than being a sheepherder. To make matters worse my English was terrible. I just don't know how people understood me back then. Over the years we worked very hard in multiple jobs. We saved every penny to buy this house. My oldest daughter graduated from high school last year and now she is attending the local community college; she wants to study journalism. I am glad for the decision we have taken as a family.

FACTORS AFFECTING BASQUE MOBILITY

Clearly, from the time the Basques first immigrated to the American West, coming either directly from *Euskal Herria*²⁵ or via South America, they have made impressive upward progress in the sheep industry. "They have occupied every rung of the ownership ladder, from the most meager of itinerant operations to the largest landed sheep ranges employing dozens of sheepherders."²⁶ However, the key economic factors that explain Basque mobility are not currently available to the Peruvian sheepherder: The relatively easy access to land and water no longer exist, and the sheep industry itself is in a precarious condition due in large part to increased foreign competition and the substitution of synthetic fiber for wool.

PUBLIC LANDS: THE END OF AN ERA

The Homestead Act of 1862 was the culmination of decades of controversy over the distribution of public lands. If nothing else, homesteading allowed United States citizens involved in the sheep industry to file an intent to homestead with the sole purpose of securing access to natural springs. Although most homesteads were not suitable for self-contained sheep ranches, they did provide winter and summer homes for transhumance. However, by 1935 most of the public land suitable for homesteading was exhausted. The 1862 act remained in effect with various modifications, until it was repealed in 1977 in all the states but Alaska, where it officially ended in 1986.²⁷

Prior to 1934, itinerant sheep ranchers in the western United States still grazed the land with few restrictions, such as the grazing fees imposed in 1905 by the



Pack mules, carrying the shepherd's tent, stove, and provisions, on a trek from winter range to summer range near Uncompahgre National Forest, Montrose, Colorado, 1976. (Photo courtesy of the Leon family)

newly created Forest Service. However, public sentiment over range degradation, overgrazing, and itinerant sheepmen overpowered the strong opposition mustered by cattle and sheep ranchers, who saw government intervention as an encroachment in their lives.²⁸ In June 1934, the United States Congress passed the Taylor Grazing Act in order "to stop injury to public grazing lands by preventing over-grazing and soil deterioration, to provide for orderly use, improvement and development, to stabilize the livestock industry dependent upon the public range."²⁹ The act signaled the end of itinerant sheepmen by creating a system that favored granting grazing permits to individuals who owned property or water rights within the newly created grazing districts. Over the last few decades, this preferential system has resulted in a struggle between opposing views among the American people on how best to manage sustainably all public lands, the extreme position advocating the end of all livestock grazing in public lands.³⁰ For the moment, the United States Supreme Court has decided to uphold a previous decision that ended preferential grazing permits, thus enabling nonranchers to hold permits. In addition, a May 2000 ruling by the Court also gives the government ownership of any range improvement such as fences and water systems, even if installed by ranchers. Undoubtedly, these changes have greatly curtailed the opportunities for any individual, including the Peruvian herder, from entering into and becoming prosperous in the sheep industry.

MEAT AND WOOL

In general, the sheep industry in the United States has experienced a steep decline during the last fifty years. It fell from 56.2 million head in 1942 to 10.9 million head in 1989. As of January 2000, the total was 7.2 million head. This downward trend has resulted primarily from the low demand for lamb meat, low wool prices, the substitution of synthetic fiber for wool, and increased foreign competition for the American market.³¹ Today, imported lamb accounts for nearly 30 percent of the lamb market in the United States, coming mostly from Australia and New Zealand. The Asian financial crisis, the European Union's strict quota on imports, and the currency devaluations in Australia and New Zealand have made the American market an important outlet for foreign exports of lamb.³² The conditions for the United States wool industry are somewhat similar. American wool production has declined in the last twenty years while domestic wool consumption has increased over the same period. This demand has been readily met by Australia's stockpile of wool, which, according to the American Sheep Industry Association, has severely depressed wool prices worldwide for nearly a decade. Moreover, the United States textile industry, a major buyer of domestic wool, has felt threatened by increased textile imports and the prospect of textile-trade legislation in the future that would favor foreign wool and textile importers.³³ The implications of these trends for the Peruvian sheepherders are clear: They act as obstacles to the achievement of upward mobility in the western United States sheep industry.

CONCLUSION

Basques have shown an admirable upward progress in the sheep industry; they started as herders and ended as owners of sheep ranches in the American West. In the process, Basques have not only perfected open-range sheepherding but have also become influential in the sheep industry. Since 1969, Peruvian nationals have been entering the United States as sheepherders. Although the Peruvians have replaced the Basques as herders, they have not shown the comparable upward economic mobility of ownership. There are two explanations for this circumstance: First, Peruvian herders find themselves in an industry that has been in decline for the last several decades. And second, the factors that made the sheep industry a profitable enterprise, such as relatively easy access to land, water, and market, are no longer present. In short, the factors of mobility readily accessible by the Basques are not available to the Peruvians. Consequently, the possibility of an American sheep-industry ownership largely influenced by former sheepherders from Peru is very unlikely. The accuracy of this prediction is clearly demonstrated by the fact that San Pedro de Cajas sheepherders who have chosen to reside permanently in the United States work mostly in occupations outside of the sheep industry.



A mark on an aspen tree near Ward Mountain, Ely, Nevada left by a Peruvian shepherd. It reads "Cuzco Peru 1973." (Photo taken by the author in 1998)

APPENDIX A
*Peruvians Admitted to the United States as Nonimmigrant Temporary Workers
 1969 to 1996*

Year	Total	Type of Program
1996	299	Agricultural (H2A) ^a
1995	256	Agricultural (H2A)
1994	232	Agricultural (H2A)
1993	246	Agricultural (H2A)
1992	229	Agricultural (H2A)
1991	82	Agricultural (H2A)
1990	2	Agricultural (H2A)
1989	3	Agricultural (H2A)
1988	258	Other Temporary Workers (H2) ^b
1987	193	Other Temporary Workers (H2)
1986	164	Other Temporary Workers (H2)
1985	186	Other Temporary Workers (H2)
1984	139	Other Temporary Workers (H2)
1983	290	Temporary Workers and Trainees ^c
1982	179	Temporary Workers and Trainees
1981	194	Temporary Workers and Trainees
1980	no data	no data ^d
1979	45	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)] ^e
1978	48	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1977	37	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1976	59	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1975	63	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1974	125	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1973	67	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1972	56	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1971	11	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1970	3	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]
1969	14	Other Temporary Workers [H (ii)]

a) H-2A is a classification for temporary agricultural workers performing services not available in the U. S.

b) H-2 includes temporary agricultural workers.

c) Other temporary workers and trainees include temporary agricultural workers.

d) Data on nonimmigrants are not available for fiscal year 1980.

e) H-ii is a classification for temporary workers performing services not available in the U.S.

Source: Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service: *Statistical Yearbooks and Annual Reports* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-96).

APPENDIX B
*Commercial Sheep Production, Income and Investment in Selected California
 Counties, 1860 and 1993*

Calaveras County, 1860	
Investment	
800 sheep @ \$5	\$4,000
Wages of shepherd	500
Extra help in lambing season	100
One horse or mule	70
Salt	30
Total	\$4,700
Sales and Income	
800 yearlings @ \$5	\$4,000
1600 fleeces @ .50	800
Total	\$4,800
Fresno and Madera County, 1993	
Investment	
3,000 ewes @ \$75	\$225,000
75 rams @ \$200	15,000
6 dogs @ \$500	3,000
Equipment, pickups, trailers, etc.	90,000
Headquarters, land, corrals	30,000
Total	\$363,000
Cash Costs	
Feed	\$71,263
Veterinary and medicine	3,750
Shearing and tagging	8,888
Labor	45,900
Vehicle operation and maintenance	11,250
Hired trucking	25,000
Miscellaneous: office, accounting, etc.	3,000
Purchased replacements: ewes, rams	54,000
Interest on operating capital @ 9%	10,037
Total	\$233,088
Sales and Income	
Cash income from sales of livestock and wool	\$336,233
Less cash costs	233,088
Less depreciation and interests on investment	31,860
Operator's income from labor and management	\$71,285

SOURCES: For Calaveras County: *San Andreas Independent*, A Calaveras County Newspaper, 23 March 1860; William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975), 223.
 For Fresno and Madera County: Aaron O. Nelson, *Commercial Sheep Production, Sample Costs and Income, 1993, Fresno and Madera County* (Farm Advisor, Agricultural Economics Library, University of California, Davis).

NOTES

¹William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao, *Amerikanuak: A History of Basques in the New World* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975), 324.

²Louis Werner, "Contract with Loneliness: Latin American Herders Work Nevada's Great Basin," *Americas*, English edition, 43 (March-April 1991), 17.

³Werner, "Contract with Loneliness," 17.

⁴The H-2A agricultural labor certification program is based on the INA, 8 U.S.C. § 1101 et seq. as amended by Immigration Reform and Control Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a) (15) (H) (ii) (a), 1184 (c), and 1188, and 20 C.F.R. § 655.90-1 13. See United States Department of Labor, Office of the Administrative Law Judges (Washington, D.C., 28 August 1995), Case no. 95-TLC-27.

⁵The labor certification process tests the local job market. The employer, in conjunction with the State Employment and Security Agency, advertises the position. For example, an ad appearing in the Wyoming Job Bank, WY0022424, May 2000, reads: "Shepherd—tends flock of sheep grazing on range or pastures; moves sheep to and about area assigned for grazing, prevents animals from wandering or becoming lost, using trained dogs to round up strays; [guards flock] against predatory animals and eating poisonous plants. May assist in lambing, docking and shearing animals. May feed animals supplementary rations. 3 months experience and one reference required. Room and board furnished by employer. The salary is \$650.00 per month, full time. 72 weekly hours."

⁶Of course the typical work day and conditions vary from state to state. In California, shepherders generally work in fenced pastures, at times in close contact with the rancher and other herders. In other states, such as Nevada and Idaho, the shepherd's home is the open range where a *campo* or trailer is his house; a camptender, a horse, and two dogs are his only friends. But in both scenarios, the shepherd must be alert at all times watching for predators, unpredictable weather, etcetera and more so during lambing, branding, and shearing seasons.

⁷For the most part these large sheep ranches were developed to cater to the nearby mining operations.

⁸Mainly those of Nevada, Utah, and Colorado, where the terrain is largely semidesert. These large outfits in the highlands of central Peru are located near or above the tree line, where the vegetation is sparse and the *ichu* (wild grass) prevalent.

⁹Douglass and Bilbao, *Amerikanuak*, 319, 324. Also note that individuals might be counted more than once depending on the number of completed three-year contracts.

¹⁰Werner, "Contract with Loneliness," 12.

¹¹The name Cajas comes from the Quechua word *gagash* or *cacas* meaning a town situated in rocky terrain.

¹²Freezing temperatures during the summer nights enable the locals to freeze dried potatoes, known as *chuño*, a major dietary staple year around.

¹³Unlike most of the southern hemisphere, San Pedro de Cajas presents a microclimate which parallels the northern hemisphere, meaning that summer months begin in June and winter months begin in January.

¹⁴The possibility that the first San Pedro residents were Inca settlers might be explained by litigation in 1723 in which residents requested to be classified as *forasteros* (outsiders), a classification that would allow them to pay little or no tribute. The petition was granted in 1764. Carmen Arellano Hoffman, *Apuntes Historicos Sobre la Provincia de Tarma en la Sierra Central del Peru* (Bonn: Amerikanistische Studien, 1988), 52, 145.

¹⁵These large-scale *haciendas*, such as Corpachancha, Santa Ana, Conocancha, and Chicchausiri, located in various parts of the region, were a source of meat for the neighboring mining populations located in cities like Oroya, Cerro de Pasco, Casapalca, and Morococha.

¹⁶The Spanish word for shepherd. In most cases, an answer to a neighbor's inquiry might hint at an extended trip to Lima or a three-year scholarship from an American university.

¹⁷*Paisano* is Spanish for fellow countryman or an individual from the same town.

¹⁸The Spanish word for stewardship. All events in San Pedro de Cajas, such as the celebration of the town's saint and protector, require a stewardship or *mayordomo*, an individual who assumes all the financial responsibility associated with the particular function.

¹⁹In rare occasions, the prospective groom can petition the intended bride's parents for her

hand in marriage without having ever dated or courted her. This alternative way of getting married, in which all involved must be in agreement, is locally known as *concierto*, a practice that is rarely, if ever, used by the new generation of young adults.

²⁰The WRA implements the requests of its members, who, when requesting a herder, must supply the name of a man willing to work as a shepherd.

²¹Data on the sixty-seven shepherders was gathered over a period of three years through personal interview, with current and former shepherders, relatives, and neighbors, both in the United States and Peru.

²²Douglass and Bilbao, *Amerikanuak*, 314.

²³*Ibid.*, 412.

²⁴In 1974, a shepherd's income was approximately \$350 per month. In 2001, a shepherd's take-home pay is approximately \$700 per month, except in California where the amount has increased to \$900 per month.

²⁵The Basque term for Basque Country or Pais Vasco.

²⁶Douglass and Bilbao, *Amerikanuak*, 325.

²⁷The Homestead Act of 1862 limited homesteads to 160 acres. However, this restriction was lifted by the Desert Land Acts of 1877, which allowed settlers in arid regions to claim 640 acres. Later, the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 doubled homesteads to 320 acres. And finally, in 1916, the Stockraising Homestead Act again doubled homestead sizes, to 640 acres. See Douglass and Bilbao, *Amerikanuak*, 279; James A. Young and B. Abbott Sparks, *Cattle in the Cold Desert* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1985).

²⁸FR. Carpenter, "Establishing Management Under the Taylor Grazing Act," (paper presented at Montana State College, 8 January 1962); J.G. Francis and R. Ganzel, *Western Public Lands: The Management of Natural Resources in a Time of Declining Federalism* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Allenheld, 1984).

²⁹Act of June 28, 1934, codified as 43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.

³⁰Martin Vavra, "Public Land and Natural Resource Issues Confronting Animal Scientists and Livestock Producers," *Journal of Animal Science*, 76:9 (September 1998), 2340-45.

³¹Other factors include the lack of suitable labor and little improvement in slaughtering and marketing infrastructures. Hosein Shapouri, *Sheep Production in 11 Western States* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1991). For more information on the decline and characteristics of the Western sheep industry, see Kerry Gee and Richard Magleby, *Characteristics of Sheep Production in the Western United States*, Agricultural Economic Report 345 (Washington DC: USDA, Economic Research Service, 1976); Kerry C. Gee, Richard S. Magleby, Darwin B. Nielsen, and Delwin M. Stevens, *Factors in the Decline of the Western Sheep Industry*, Agricultural Economic Report 377 (Washington, D.C.: USDA, Economic Research Service, 1977).

³²It is argued that imported lamb meat undercuts U.S. prices 79 percent of the time by margins ranging from 20 to 40 percent. Moreover, this advantage is fueled by not including the country of origin in domestic labels so that consumers could make an informed decision. Interestingly the U.S. government has announced a \$100-million assistance package for the sheep industry to alleviate its current precarious position. Dennis Pollack, "Peril Looms for Sheep Industry," *Modesto Bee* 8 November 1988. Testimonies of Frank Moore, Cindy Siddoway, and others on behalf of the American Sheep Industry Association before the Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture of the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 29 April 1999.

³³The American Sheep Industry Association, which represents 80,000 producers of lamb and wool in the United States, is adamantly opposed to HR. 1360 and H.R. 1432 in the House of Representatives, which would give apparel and textiles from forty-eight African countries preferential, duty-free access to the American market. The sheep industry feels that such concessions would be at the expense of domestic fiber and textile industries, and thus not beneficial to American wool growers.

Notes and Documents

Ridin,' Ropin,' and Rodeoin': Champion Cowgirls of Professional Rodeo, 1930-1945

ANDREA MUGNIER

Alice Greenough was something of a late bloomer. After growing up on her father's ranch near Red Lodge, Montana, she and her younger sister, Marge, came across a copy of *Billboard Magazine* and saw an advertisement for a wild west show that was seeking bronc and trick riders. Alice and Marge responded to the ad, were hired immediately, and began their careers as professional cowgirls. The year was 1929. Alice was twenty-six years old.¹

The Greenough sisters were far from alone. Decades before female athletes were accepted by the general public, more than 450 women like Alice and Marge worked as professional cowgirls in rodeos, from makeshift arenas in small western towns to Madison Square Garden. Between 1890 and 1945, cowgirls competed, sometimes against men, for the chance to earn a living ridin,' ropin,' and rodeoin.' Before long Alice and Marge were at the top of their profession, earning as much as the some of best cowboys even during the worst of the Great Depression.

By the time the Greenough sisters left home, rodeos, in varying degrees of formality, had been in existence for at least forty-five years. Many were modest local events, but by 1915 several large rodeos such as the Calgary Stampede, Cheyenne Frontier Days, and the Pendelton Round-Up were well established. At the smaller rodeos, women often enjoyed considerable success when they rode and roped against men. A handful of women, Lucille Mullhall among them, defeated men in events such as steer wrestling. Even after all-female, cowgirl events were included in about a third of all rodeos, many women continued to compete in the men's contests, though cowgirl events were popular, particularly at larger rodeos. The dangers of bronc riding always made it an audience favorite, and relay races were held at most rodeos in the West. In addition, many women competed in trick riding and roping.

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Like many successful rodeo competitors (both men and women), Alice and Marge Greenough began their careers in wild west shows. Wild west shows were not exactly rodeos; they were more like circuses with a western theme, but sometimes it was difficult to determine where the entertainment of the wild west show stopped and the competition of rodeo began. Though bronc busting and roping demonstrations represented only a small part of a wild west show, they were very popular, especially in the eastern United States. The performers in these shows usually worked for a salary or on a fee-per-show basis. In contrast, rodeo cowboys usually paid entry fees to compete for prize money, though some also performed specialty acts on contract to ensure a steady income. Sometimes, the wild west shows invited local ranch hands to compete against the show's professionals for a prize. When wild west shows began their decline in popularity around the early 1920s, many show performers began working in rodeos as contract entertainers, as well as competing for prize money. Alice and Marge spent a season working in one of the last big touring wild west shows, the King Brothers Wild West Rodeo and Hippodrome Racing Unit, before moving on to competitive rodeo.

The cowgirls attracted to rodeo were like the Greenough sisters, strong, independent women who had been reared on ranches where they worked as hard as their brothers and grew up around cowboy competitions. Informal contests between ranch hands had been part of life in the West from the early days of cattle driving in the 1860s and 1870s. Several rodeos have claimed to be the first organized rodeo, but it is impossible to identify accurately which was held first. What is known for certain is that even before gigantic herds of cattle were driven across the grasslands of what is now the United States, Prescott, Arizona, held a Fourth of July cowboy contest in 1864.² Twenty-four years later, on July 4, 1888, Prescott's rodeo charged admission to spectators and awarded the first recorded prize to Juan Levias, who roped and tied a steer in one minute, seventeen seconds.³ By 1900, informal and formal rodeos were held throughout the West, especially on the Fourth of July, sometimes for bragging rights, sometimes for prizes such as a saddle or a commemorative medallion. Competitors were almost always working cowhands from local ranches. Tad Lucas, one of rodeo's most successful cowgirls, remembered the impromptu rodeos of her childhood in Cody, Nebraska. "During World War I, every Saturday night there would be bucking horses and bulls on Main Street. No corrals or anything. People would ride them for hat collections and give it to the Red Cross. That's how I got to riding broncs."⁴

Most rodeos had three events for women, saddle bronc riding, trick riding, and relay races, but some rodeos also featured exhibitions of women's steer wrestling and steer roping. Saddle bronc riding was the most profitable and most controversial of the women's events. In the 1930s about 60 percent of the professional rodeo cowgirls competed in riding untamed horses. To score, the rider had to stay on her mount for eight seconds (cowboys had to remain on



Cowgirl attire in the early 1900s ranged from full skirts to split skirts to bloomers. In this photograph, Prairie Rose Henderson shows off her rodeo costume, including embroidered bloomers and vest. (From the collection of the American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming)



Until the 1940s, rodeos often included cowgirl's races. From left, Margie Greenough, Polly Mills, Tad Lucas, Alice Greenough and Vivian White. This photograph was taken around 1939 after a race at Rockingham Park. (From the collections of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Ft. Worth, Texas)

for ten seconds). A female bronc rider was allowed to hold both of the horse's reins in her hand (cowboys were permitted to hold only one rein), but like her male counterpart, she was allowed to hold on with only one hand. She was disqualified if her free hand touched the horse.⁵ By the mid 1910s, saddle bronc competitions for women were regularly held at rodeos across the western United States.

Saddle bronc riding was the event with the highest prize money, but the risks were equally high. Though some cowgirls preferred to ride slick, with the stirrups unhindered, by the 1920s many adopted a technique called hobbling. Hobbles were supposed to make riding a bronc easier because the stirrups were tied together under the horse's belly, but hobbling was far more dangerous than riding slick. Should the rider be thrown, she could get her boot tangled in the hobbles and be kicked and dragged as the horse tried to free itself of the rider. In 1929 a popular, experienced cowgirl, Bonnie McCarroll, caught her foot in a hobble and was trampled to death before the crowd at the Pendelton Round-Up.⁶ McCarroll's use of the hobbles is a mystery. She rode slick as late as 1922, and was surely aware of the risk she was taking when she began riding hobbled. While McCarroll wasn't the first cowgirl to die in the arena, her horrifying death at one of the largest rodeos caused organizers across the country to reconsider women's bronc contests. Instead of simply moving to make hobbles illegal, opponents attempted to eliminate bronc riding as a women's event. Interestingly, while four cowgirls had died competing on hobbled horses by 1934, no deaths were recorded for cowgirls who rode slick.⁷

From an outsider's point of view, rodeo was flourishing in the early years of the Great Depression. Though some smaller rodeos closed their chutes, major

contests continued to fill arenas with crowds anxious to forget their troubles for a few hours. Top stars, including a handful of female participants, saw their incomes rise as rodeo's popularity spread, in spite of the fact that women had fewer competitive opportunities to win and their purses were substantially lower. Tad Lucas reported her income at \$12,000 in 1935;⁸ star cowgirls like Alice Greenough earned somewhat less but still enjoyed an income that was above average. Other less prominent cowgirls augmented their incomes by handling horses and performing stunts for the film industry.

Rodeo also took the top cowgirls to new audiences during the depression years. In addition to touring the American rodeos, Alice competed in France, Spain, England, and Australia. International rodeos offered high prize money and made rodeo stars celebrities the world over. Alice also endorsed commercial products, including cigarettes, though she loathed smoking. After winning the Melbourne "buck jumping" contests she endorsed a wide variety of consumer goods in Australia, from saddles to refrigerators.⁹

Most rodeo contestants, both men and women, struggled to make ends meet, however, and very few could afford to live on their rodeo winnings alone. In spite of a growing audience and apparent success, there was an undercurrent of discontent among the cowboys and cowgirls. For years, rodeo competitors had endured widespread deception among rodeo committees and promoters. Cowboys and cowgirls began to lose patience with low purses, unfair judging, and dishonest rodeo management. In 1936, angry that their entry fees were not added to the purse at the Boston Gardens Rodeo, the cowboys and cowgirls walked out. To protect themselves from further mistreatment by rodeo management, rodeo competitors formed the Cowboys Turtle Association, elected officers, and wrote a series of demands. The name Turtle is believed to have been selected because the cowboys were slow to organize and resisted sticking their necks out.

The impact of the Turtles on rodeo cannot be emphasized enough. They insisted that the purses include the competitor's entry fees and that judging be standardized, and they established rules for their members. Their presence jolted rodeo management and permanently changed the conditions under which cowboys and cowgirls worked. Equally important, they had the potential to shape a new role for women in rodeo. Though cowgirls were nonvoting members of the Turtles, they expected to share the gains being made by the organization. In spite of their willingness to bolster the cowboys, cowgirls received only inconsistent support at best. Though the cowgirls occasionally received assistance from their male counterparts, the men acted in their own interests, leaving the women to fend for themselves. The Turtles organization was short lived because of errors in judgment that undermined their effectiveness, and within a few years they had lost much of their members' support. Though the cowgirls didn't benefit as much as they might have, over-all, the Turtles did protect all rodeo competitors from being cheated, both by promoters and by judges.

Unfortunately, rodeo cowgirls had not seen the end of their troubles. Following Bonnie McCarroll's death at the Pendelton Round-Up in 1929, bronc riding came to be considered too dangerous for women and was phased out of rodeo. Since 1941 women's bronc riding has been absent from the largest rodeo in the country, New York's Madison Square Garden Rodeo. Since there were fewer events for cowgirls than for men, the loss of bronc competition was a severe blow. Cowgirls continued to compete in relay races, but not all rodeos held the races. Some of the most lucrative rodeos were held in large eastern cities where an outdoor event such as a relay race wasn't possible. In the mid-1930s, cowgirls, along with a few rodeo promoters who recognized their crowd appeal, anticipated the decline of women's bronc riding and began looking for new events that they could compete in. Roping events held the most promise. Calf roping was growing in popularity, especially at smaller rodeos in Texas. Women sometimes competed against men in roping events, but many rodeos began cowgirl calf roping contests in which women competed against each other. At the same time, Texas rodeos began recruiting businesses to send a local cowgirl to represent them at rodeos. These young women rode in rodeo parades, but in addition they were judged, primarily on appearance and attire, in a kind of western beauty pageant. Sponsor girls or glamour girls, as they came to be known, were also judged on their riding and roping skills. In a riding competition that became popular, the women had to navigate a figure-eight pattern around a set of barrels. This became a forerunner of today's barrel racing.¹⁰ Riding skills were secondary, however. While many of the contestants were superb horsewomen, the rodeo queens were primarily judged on poise, beauty, and social status. In 1939 glamour girls were invited to appear at the Madison Square Garden Rodeo to participate in a poorly received performance of riding around some barrels.¹¹ Unlike the bronc-riding cowgirls, who had received enthusiastic press coverage, the sponsor girls were a disappointment to the media.¹²

The outbreak of World War II had a significant impact on rodeo. Many rodeos closed for the duration, and those that remained open struggled. Top cowboys enlisted. Along the West Coast, rodeos were cancelled as a security precaution. In addition, tire and gasoline rationing discouraged spectators from traveling very far to attend an entertainment event, and limited stock contractors who trucked livestock to rodeos. Rodeos that remained open, such as the Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo, donated their proceeds to the Red Cross or used the funds to buy war bonds.¹³ To compound rodeo's problems, the American public had become far more urban and better educated. Rodeo's audience had changed, and to survive, rodeo had to accommodate these changes.

By the early 1940s, the closest most Americans came to a cowboy was at the westerns shown in movie theatres across the country. Stars such as Gene Autry and Roy Rogers rode across the silver screen following storylines that bore little resemblance to the real experiences of cowboys, and included cowgirls



Some cowgirls participated in steer wrestling, or bulldogging. Here Liz Cottrell is shown competing at the Colorado State Fair, Pueblo, Colorado. In the 1920s, both male and female steer wrestlers sometimes wore leather football helmets to protect themselves. (From the collections of the Denver Public Library, Western History/ Genealogy Department, Denver, Colorado)

only as minor figures or not at all. In 1942, Gene Autry decided to enlarge his entertainment enterprises by launching the Flying A Rodeo. As the Singing Cowboy, Autry was the real star of his rodeos, which brought back the pageantry of earlier wild west shows while eliminating all but five competitive events. The Flying A's rote presentation was a lavish patriotic production that recalled a Busby Berkley musical, with minimal competitive events, and traditional domestic values that left little room for cowgirls, even as contract performers. Female participants might appear as square dancers or parade riders, but the real action was reserved for the cowboys. Women's contests were banished from the Flying A's formulaic show and, like the women who appeared in Autry's films, cowgirls were relegated to peripheral roles.¹⁴

By 1943 Autry had purchased most of his major competitors and held a virtual monopoly on the larger rodeos, particularly those east of the Mississippi. He continued to use the same patriotic theme combined with Hollywood-style production, few competitive events, and only minor roles for women. At the same time, a handful of all-girl rodeos were being staged in Texas as morale boosters for soldiers and to give cowgirls an opportunity to compete. Despite high attendance and positive press exposure, the national tour planned for the all-girl rodeo never materialized.¹⁵ Still, the all-girl rodeos allowed women to compete not only in bronc riding but in bull riding, races, and roping events as well. Though barrel racing came to be a standard event for women, it was sev-

eral years before barrel races were routinely held at most rodeos, and it was 1985 before female barrel racers received purses equal to those in the men's events at the sport's annual premier show, the National Finals Rodeo.¹⁶

By the end of World War II, most cowgirls had left the rodeo arena permanently. From 1937 to 1941, an average of thirty-one rodeo cowgirls won money each year. These women competed in bronc riding, races of various kinds, and trick riding and roping. Between 1943 and 1946 the number of women making their living in professional rodeo dropped to an average of twelve per year, mostly timekeepers or contract performers for the Flying A Rodeo.¹⁷ This was a substantial decrease from the period prior to Autry's entrance into rodeo. The changes were clear to Alice Greenough, who retired from competition in 1941 at the age of thirty-nine. With long-time friend and steer wrestler Joe Orr, she launched a rodeo production and stock contracting business. Alice still gave bronc-riding exhibitions at all the Greenough-Orr rodeos. Together they produced rodeos until 1958 when Joe and Alice married and settled in Tucson. It was the first real home Alice had since she left her father's ranch thirty years before.

Some of the veteran cowgirls adapted to their lesser roles in order to continue their careers, but it was a difficult transition. Many found it frustrating to perform trick riding and other specialty acts while sponsor girls replaced their primary competitive event. To the mind of a seasoned, ranch-reared rodeo woman, youth and beauty were a poor substitute for strength, skill and grit. Fern Sawyer was a young sponsor girl in the Madison Square Garden Rodeo after women's bronc riding was cut from the program. She remembers the older cowgirls well. "I felt real bad because Tad Lucas and Florence Randolph and all those great cowgirls I admired so much were back there," recalls Sawyer.

"They were my idols. They weren't too nice to us at first because they felt we were amateurs. Some of us glamour girls could hardly ride. Here the rodeo knocked out a good event just to bring in a bunch of little old girls who weren't supposed to be anything. I don't blame them; I would've felt the same way. But they were always nice to me. I could ride, so they accepted me."¹⁸

Alice Greenough continued to live in Tucson, next door to her sister Margie, after she was widowed. She died in 1995 at the age of ninety-three, but not before she was recognized by the Professional Rodeo Hall of Fame, the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, and the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center. Her spirit lives on in cowgirls who believe that the best life on earth is one that centers on ridin,' ropin,' and rodeoin.'

NOTES

¹Teresa Jordan, *Cowgirls: Women of the American West* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 218.

²Kristine Fredricksson, *American Rodeo: From Buffalo Bill to Big Business* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1985), 4.

³*Ibid.*, 4.

⁴Jordan, *Cowgirls*, 201.

⁵*Ibid.*, 191.

⁶Mary Lou LeCompte, "Home on the Range: Women in Professional Rodeo: 1929-1947," *Journal of the History of Sport*, 17:3 (Winter, 1990), 324.

⁷*Ibid.*, 324.

⁸Fredricksson, *American Rodeo*, 39.

⁹Mary Lou LeCompte, *Cowgirls of the Rodeo: Pioneer Professional Athletes* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 102.

¹⁰LeCompte, "Home on the Range", 324.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 335.

¹²*Ibid.*, 336.

¹³Fredricksson, *American Rodeo*, 74.

¹⁴LeCompte, "Home on the Range," 324.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 341.

¹⁶LeCompte, *Cowgirls of the Rodeo*, 183.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 343.

¹⁸Jordan, *Cowgirls*, 232.

Book Reviews

The Land of My Fathers: A Son's Return to the Basque Country. By Robert Laxalt. Illustrations by Joyce Laxalt (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1999)

Time of the Rabies. By Robert Laxalt. (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2000)

Robert Laxalt's longstanding position as the leading American literary interpreter of the Basques, both in Europe and in the New World, is confirmed by his last two books, a travel memoir (*The Land of My Fathers: A Son's Return to the Basque Country*) and a novella (*Time of the Rabies*). Both titles should be regarded as remarkable additions to an impressive Basque series.

The Land of My Fathers is based on the journals kept by the author during 1960-61 and 1965-66 when he and his family traveled to the land of his parents in the Basque Country—in the Pyrenees mountains along the border of France and Spain. So, we are dealing with a book intensely personal, where Laxalt explores the traditional way of life in the land of his ancestors. Laxalt evokes in particular those characteristic elements of the Basques that seem more striking for a man born and reared in America, emphasizing the role of tradition among the Basques: "If one listens to tradition, the Basques say, life can be made much more bearable" (p. 78).

The book consists of sixty-five vignettes or sketches, some of them of extreme brevity, where Laxalt portrays several traits of Basque character and different scenes of traditional Basque social, cultural, political, and economic life. Indeed, we may define the book as an impressionistic mosaic of Basque experience in the 'sixties, which Laxalt uses to reveal the real nature of his ancestral homeland and some of the main features and secrets linked to the Basque identity.

In his approach to the traditional Basque lifestyle Laxalt employs a series of statements, in some cases old sayings or proverbs, that seem to summarize different aspects of Basque character: "The Basques are not much for words" (p. 6), "They hate unanimity" (p. 17), "Basques are intensely curious" (p. 39), "The Basques are strong and passionate, but they keep their emotions concealed" (p. 78). By using these statements, Laxalt obviously runs the risk of overgeneralizing on the Basques, but in this way he provides his American readers with an over-all perspective on the features that he considers to be more representative of Basque idiosyncrasy.

The Land of My Fathers often reveals Laxalt's affection for the traditional lifestyle of the Basques and a sense of longing for an almost bygone era. However, his nostalgic identification with the land of his forefathers coexists with his commitment to achieve objectivity in his treatment of the Basques. Because of that, Laxalt does not hesitate to disclose the other side of Old World Basque life in the 'sixties: the drama of poverty in Basque villages, the rigid social barriers, the hypocritical attitudes about sexual matters, the political and cultural oppression under Francisco Franco's regime in Spain.

In his attempt to reveal the nature of Basque character Laxalt disregards recent socioeconomic transformations or contemporary political and cultural events in the Basque Country. Thus, the resulting vision of the Basque society that Laxalt presents to us in this book may be viewed as fragmentary, just as the structure of the work itself. However, this is not to Laxalt's discredit because it is not his intent to offer the reader a comprehensive, exhaustive view of Basque reality. Instead, he focuses on the most traditional aspects of Basque experience. In fact, most sections of the book are devoted to village life, a field that Laxalt knows first hand and where he seems to find the essence of Basque character.

Laxalt's emphasis on rural Basque life, and the repetition of certain motifs, scenes, and characters present in some of his earlier works, such as *In a Hundred Graves: A Basque Portrait* (1972) or *A Time We Knew: Images of Yesterday in the Basque Homeland* (1990), may evoke a sense of déjà vu in readers familiar with Laxalt's other Basque books. We might even consider *The Land of My Fathers* as a sequel to those two, in particular, *In a Hundred Graves*, taking into account their similarities in theme and structure and also their common origin. Besides, four chapters of the book have been previously published, in somewhat different form, in two short pieces by Laxalt: "Land of the Ancient Basques" and *Chillida at Gernika*. Nevertheless, *The Land of My Fathers* does not merely revisit familiar topics and scenes. Instead, it deals with subjects that so far have played a minor role in Laxalt's Basque works, such as the main symbols of Basque nationalism, the impact of Franco's dictatorship on Basque culture, or the attitude of the Basque towards the *bohemes*. And, of course, this is a rewarding experience for any who have newly come to Basque traditional lifestyle. They will find themselves well guided by Laxalt's expert handling of this topic.

Most of *The Land of My Fathers* is written in a poetic mood, and poignant descriptions of the traditional Basque Country are common in the narrative, though humor also plays an important role. In fact, this book is both tender and hilarious, and contains Laxalt's usual clean, direct, and engaging prose. The inclusion of several terms in Basque contributes to the authenticity of the character portrayals.

Laxalt's commitment to offer a faithful and convincing picture of Basque idiosyncrasy in *The Land of My Fathers* is also apparent in his decision to include photographs of various traditional scenes. These portraits of the Basque

Country by Joyce Laxalt, the author's wife, are primarily connected to Basque ways described in the book, and they help bring to life the true nature of the Basque land and its people.

In Laxalt's newest book, *Time of the Rabies*, the main characters are also Basques, but this time the setting is completely different: the mountains and deserts of northwestern Nevada. In fact, this novella embodies the two major themes in Laxalt's writing: the West (Nevada, in particular) and Basque character and experience.

Time of the Rabies is partly based on a real episode, an epidemic of rabies that swept across northern Nevada in the 1920s, killing a large part of wildlife and livestock herds. Laxalt focuses his attention on the serious damage in the sheep lands, and he sets his novella on a ranch near Carson City, owned by Pete Lorda, an immigrant Basque. The battle of this man, his family, and the ranch hands against the rabies epidemic becomes the central matter of the book, and it is depicted by Laxalt with epic simplicity and haunting insight.

This novella echoes Laxalt's lifelong concern with the experiences of Basque immigrants in the American West. In fact, since the publication of the now classic *Sweet Promised Land* more than four decades ago, he has been regarded as the main literary spokesman for the Basque Americans, a position he has consolidated with his trilogy of the Indart family, the novels *The Basque Hotel* (1989), *Child of the Holy Ghost* (1992), and *The Governor's Mansion* (1994). So, in this sense *Time of the Rabies* does not represent a novelty in Laxalt's fiction, and we may find in this book themes recurrent in most of his Basque-American works: the endurance of the Basque sheepherders, their hard work, their lean and solitary lives, their pioneering spirit, and the existence of certain ethnic prejudices towards these immigrants.

The Basque topics mentioned above coexist in *Time of the Rabies* with some interesting new perspectives in Laxalt's treatment of Basque characters. In particular, there is the emphasis on the close cooperation between cowboys and Basque sheepherders against a common enemy, instead of the classical western rivalry between these two groups. In addition, Laxalt moves from archetypal descriptions of itinerant sheepherders to focus on sheep-ranch life. In this way, he is able to illuminate other aspects of Basque lifestyle in the West, for example, the role of women, introducing two female characters in the novella: Mama Lorda, prototype of the Basque matriarch, and her daughter Marie, protagonist of a love story involving one of her father's ranch hands. Over-all, the language and characterization in this book demonstrates Laxalt's intimate acquaintance with the life of Basque immigrants in the American West.

Despite the prominent role played by Basque characters in this novella, *Time of the Rabies* is not merely a powerful tale of Basque immigrants, but also a compelling story of the West. Laxalt returns in this book to one of his favorite settings, the early Nevada, present in his writings since the beginning of his literary career in the 1950s. In this particular novella he offers the readers

a moving record of a place and a time, underscoring the close relationship between the people and the land in those days. In fact, it shares with his previous novella, the highly successful *Dust Devils* (1997), an unusual skill in conveying vivid pictures of the early West. This setting is a multicultural territory, as symbolized by the fact that, together with the Basques, Laxalt includes a Mexican sheepherder and an Indian blacksmith and tracker among the characters of *Time of the Rabies*. Thus, Laxalt integrates his superb portraits of Basque sheepmen in an impressive, vivid re-creation of rural Nevada, with an emphasis on the courage of its dwellers and the vulnerability of their lives.

Time of the Rabies is an action-filled book, written in the same lean, direct prose that has distinguished Laxalt's other works. It is neither a long nor a complex story. Nonetheless, its formal simplicity turns out to be deceiving because this book contains a carefully crafted style in which attention to detail becomes essential. Laxalt tells his story with extraordinary economy, but the novella also displays his powerful descriptive ability and his concern with authenticity, apparent in his decision to include several Basque words and expressions. The result is a convincing portrait of a vanished era and an engaging story.

In the end, both *The Land of My Fathers* and *Time of the Rabies* reveal Laxalt's artistry in depicting the traditional lifestyle of the Basques, whether in the Old World or in the American West. Furthermore, both books demonstrate his ability to capture the essence of time, place, and character in two different worlds.

David Rio

University of the Basque Country

Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1875-1883, Vol. 10. Edited by Kenneth L. Holmes. Introduction by Elliott West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000)

Volume 10 of *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1875-1883* is the last in a series of primary source materials from women on the emigrant trails from 1840 to 1883, published by the University of Nebraska Press. Editor Kenneth Holmes spent many years collecting and organizing various documents pertaining to the emigrant experience; this work was published by the A. H. Clark Co. in 1983. The current paperback series of *Covered Wagon Women* makes these compelling and significant sources available in an accessible and affordable format. Each volume in the new Bison Book series is accompanied by a scholarly introduction written specifically for the new edition. In providing the introduction for Volume 10, Elliott West joins an impressive list of scholars, including Glenda Riley, Anne Butler, and Susan Armitage, who

have contributed introductions to earlier volumes in this series. Like its predecessors, the latest volume contains rare primary source documents of women who endured the trail experience and felt compelled to preserve a written record of what for most was a singular event in their lives. Most of the sources have not been published in the standard studies, and many remain in the possession of descendants of the diarists.

Elliott West's introduction is an insightful, concise interpretation of the changes over time which are reflected in these documents (from the final years of the trail migrations) when compared to earlier accounts. Among the changes noted by West are the increasingly rare encounters with Native Americans, the intrusion of railway technology, and the agricultural development that transformed the previously pristine landscape. Despite such monumental change, West is ultimately most impressed by similarities between the women migrants of the 1840s and those who moved westward forty years later.

The large audience of trail aficionados will find some surprises in this volume. The trail documents pertain to journeys on less recognizable trails leading to new destinations. Significantly, none of the diarists settled in California; only two went to Oregon. Readers familiar with Gold Rush diaries filled with the terrors of the Forty-Mile Desert and Sierra blizzard will find no such hazards documented here. Rather, the diaries are replete with references to communities, ranches, and railway stations. Readers who expect references to dangerous crossings or raging rivers may be surprised and amused to encounter emigrants who load their wagons and cattle onto railway cars to navigate still-treacherous rivers.

While common references to railroads, towns, and an abundance of ranches may lead the reader to conclude that the terrors of the emigrant trails were a thing of the past, frequent images of death and danger indicate otherwise. Even with the passage of decades, parents still encounter the harrowing experience of the 'forty-niners in losing a child within miles of their final destination. Women still agonize over traveling on the Sabbath, animals still die from drinking poisonous water, and infighting within wagon parties continues to threaten the well-being of the emigrants.

The diaries included in this volume continue to engage the reader with humor, pathos, and indeed the entire range of emotions that emigrants experienced, regardless of time or place. One diary tells of one emigrant securing his tent and arming himself against "desperate characters"—in this case cowboys rather than Indians. Another emigrant describes the sadness of parting with a pet monkey on the trail. Such fascinating tidbits appear regularly in these well-chosen diaries.

The editor's comments introducing each document are retained from the original edition. Holmes had meticulously researched each diarist and included relevant family information, as well as the present location of the original document. Holmes also inserted occasional background notes on place names, indi-

viduals mentioned in the accounts, and historical context. These annotations are indispensable to understanding obscure references mentioned in the diaries. Indeed, the book might have been strengthened by additional annotation. Occasional photographs remind us again that the documents reflect the perceptions of average Americans engaged in an extraordinary journey. These haunting images also serve to reiterate the relatively short span of years that separates the reader from these restless Americans.

The University of Nebraska Press is to be commended for making available these precious documents that continue to thrill and astound us today. The series, scheduled to add a volume containing a bibliography, index, and collection of relevant reference materials for the entire series, is an essential addition to the personal library of any student of western history, women's history, or the emigrant trail experience.

Doris D. Dwyer

Western Nevada Community College

Home Away from Home: A History of Basque Boardinghouses. By Jeronima Echeverria (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1999)

Anyone who has ever visited a Basque restaurant in the American West must have noticed the hearty food and friendly service that go together at these family-style dinners. However, what few people know about these convivial places is that they are the last link of a chain that goes back over one hundred years and whose main representative is the Basque *ostatu* or boardinghouse created in the late nineteenth century. In *Home Away from Home: A History of Basque Boardinghouses*, Jeronima Echeverria, a scholar at California State University, Fresno, relates the history of this social institution in the United States, offering poignant insights on a subject that has been the subject of literary works, such as Robert Laxalt's novel *The Basque Hotel*. A rigorous work of scholarship in the field of Basque immigration history, Echevarria's book is part of the Basque series, a project launched by the University of Nevada Press and the Center for Basque Studies of the University of Nevada, Reno. As she shows, the *ostatu* was the major social institution created by Basque people in the United States between 1890 and 1930. Basque boardinghouses came out of the desire of Basque immigrants to establish safe places of accommodation to serve their newly-arrived fellow countrymen who came to work in the sheep industry. Boardinghouses were mainly concentrated in the American West, following the expanding sheep industry and the railroad lines of communication between the states. As a result, many Basque hotels sprang up in California, Nevada, Idaho, and Oregon, and others emerged in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New

Mexico, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and even New York. Those boardinghouses are the historical witnesses of a migration process based mainly on the sheepherding business that reached its peak during the period 1890-1930 and started to decline in the second half of the twentieth century. This comprehensive account of the history of the *ostatuak* in the United States discloses the historical events that prompted their creation, development, and further decline.

In the first decades of Basque migration to this country, the hotels served as the immigrants' job agency, recreational center, and social and cultural center. Boardinghouses were vital to the Basque immigrants' adaptation to their new homeland, and became the most important social and ethnic institution in their lives. The families involved in the boardinghouse business featured a mixture of Old World/New World ingredients that catered to the needs of the newly arrived as well as of the older fellows who made the Basque hotels their homes. The *hoteleros* acted as the immigrants' extended family and assisted them in completing different tasks, always using Euskara, the Basque language, to ease the newcomers' way into a foreign society. *Hoteleros* offered their clients economic support and the links needed to find jobs, and provided multiple services and a familiar way of spending leisure time in the adjoining handball courts. In addition, Basque boardinghouses promoted many marriages between Basques, and served as retirement houses for those who could not or would not make the return trip to the Basque Country. They also played an important role in shaping the community life of the Basque American family. In later decades, the *ostatuak* served as cultural centers where new generations of Basque Americans discovered and maintained their Basque identity, and shared a common heritage.

The book also provides vivid testimonies of people who worked in and ran those boardinghouses, as well as drawings and architectural descriptions that allow the reader to visualize exactly the way they looked. One of the most remarkable findings of Echeverria's study is that Basque boardinghouses were family businesses jointly run by husband and wife, in which women played a substantial role. The study shows how the boardinghouses helped Basque immigrants maintain their cultural identity in a time where they were struggling to make a living in a foreign country. Encompassing more than a hundred years of Basque immigration experience in the American West, *Home Away from Home*, allows the voices of the hotel operators and their clients to unveil a history that touches some chords in the heart of the American Basque community. Even though most of the hotels have been gone for some years, the memories of the people who built and ran them serve as witnesses of the presence of Basque people in the American West. When, after reading this book, you return to your beans and lamb stew at your favorite Basque restaurant, you will have a more accurate picture of the lives and feelings of the many immigrants who sat at similar tables and places in a less affluent time.

Javi Cillero Goiriastuena
WIPO, Geneva Switzerland

A Fateful Time: The Background and Legislative History of the Indian Reorganization Act. By Elmer R. Rusco (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2000)

Elmer Rusco has written an important book about American Indian self-government from 1920 to 1934. He examines topics such as the significance of judge-made Indian law and the large number of tribal governments that survived land allotment. The author also discusses the importance of ideology in determining historical events, the role of John Collier and a few outside experts who tried to reconstruct tribal affairs during the New Deal, and the importance of Senator Burton K. Wheeler in drafting revised legislation that resulted in the Indian Reorganization Act.

A Fateful Time provides valuable information about the status of tribal governments during the first part of the twentieth century. In his re-examination of this era, Rusco focuses on two major events. First, Congress did not abolish tribal governments under the 1887 Dawes Severalty Act. Second, federal courts, despite the plenary power of Congress, ruled that tribes had the right to govern themselves, validate custom marriages, operate their own courts, and use water, timber, and other natural resources in Indian Country.

The author provides a welcome reassessment of the policies of Commissioner Charles Burke. Even though he supported forced Indian assimilation, Burke recognized and organized tribal governments. For example, he created the Navajo Tribal Council to exploit oil reserves and sponsored the United States Pueblo Council to diminish the influence of the All Pueblo Council. Furthermore, in 1929 Burke requested updated information about tribal business committees. Superintendents identified thirty committees, nine of which had constitutions, and commented on the existence and vitality of traditional Indian councils.

Charles Rhoads, the next commissioner, relied on the 1928 Meriam Report to address complex problems associated with land allotment. Rusco demonstrates that Rhoads did not lay the groundwork for the Indian New Deal. Rather than strengthen tribal governments, the assimilationist-minded commissioner used administrative reform to operate a more efficient and effective Indian Bureau.

Rusco's research reveals interesting details about the origins of the tribal alternative to assimilation ideology that became a hallmark of the Indian New Deal. This ideology recognized limited tribal autonomy and the right of Indians to be culturally different. It first appeared during the Progressive Era, in legislation before Congress that allowed Indians to nominate and remove superintendents, and later in bills that permitted the Klamath and Menominee Indians to incorporate under federal law to better manage property held in common.

This book explores how John Collier's views were a critical component of

the tribal alternative to assimilation ideology. For instance, Collier advocated a form of indirect colonial rule to limit the bureaucratic power of the Indian Bureau. He also worked with Nathan Margold and the American Civil Liberties Union in the early 1930s to draft legislative proposals that upheld Indian civil rights, extended federal guardianship, and permitted tribes to adopt constitutions and by-laws.

This volume is the best account we have to date of those who drafted the Indian Reorganization Bill. Rusco uses material from the Wheeler-Howard File in the National Archives to show that Collier consulted with a few outside experts, rather than tribal leaders, to prepare this legislation. Felix Cohen, Robert Marshall, Ward Shepard, and Melvin Siegel provided the principal ideas found in the Indian Reorganization Bill. Like Collier, who thought he had discovered the remnants of a lost Red Atlantis in New Mexico, they mistakenly accepted the vacuum theory that most tribal governments had disappeared after land allotment.

This unfounded belief explains why the Indian Reorganization Bill proposed a Special Court of Indian Affairs, federal charters to protect tribal self-government, and mandated the collective ownership of allotted and heirship land. Collier, Cohen, Marshall, Siegel, and Shepard did not invite Indian input until the drafting process was nearly complete. Only then did they learn that a large number of tribes preferred to keep intact their existing governments, individual land allotments, and heirship property.

The last part of this book looks at why Congress disapproved of the Indian Reorganization Bill. The most significant opposition occurred in the Senate where Burton K. Wheeler remained committed to the ideology of forced assimilation. A radically revised version of this bill was drafted after Indian Congresses and a secret meeting between

Wheeler and Assistant Commissioner William Zimmerman. This amended legislation became the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. It granted tribes authority in three areas in addition to powers already vested in judge-made law. They were: the right to employ legal counsel, to prevent the sale of land without tribal consent, and to negotiate with federal, state, and local governments.

Rusco concludes that the Indian Reorganization Act does not represent the primary source of authority for tribes organized under its provisions. He points out that Congress did not specify other tribal powers when it passed this statute because judge-made law already recognized limited tribal self-government. Therefore, it was the intent of Congress under the act to uphold its plenary power over tribes, give Indians a choice on whether to accept a tribal alternative to assimilation, and leave open the ultimate direction of Indian policy.

This book emphasizes the importance of ideology in determining historical events. However, it does not show the significance of socialism as a driving force behind the tribal alternative to assimilation ideology. Collier, Cohen, Marshall, and Shepard disliked capitalism. Consequently, they were attracted

to the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Lewis Henry Morgan, who romanticized pre-industrial Indian kinship groups and stereotyped tribes as exemplars of primitive communism.

This was especially true of Felix Cohen. During the Great Depression, he joined the Socialist Party and National Lawyers Guild to create a better society. Cohen drafted the Indian Reorganization Bill to reconstruct model socialist communities. Cohen was convinced that tribal governments could use constitutional law and economic cooperatives to inaugurate a second American Revolution in Indian Country.

This is a minor criticism. Rusco's book is a well-written and welcome addition to the history of federal Indian policy. *A Fateful Time* is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the resiliency of tribal governments after allotment, the way in which a small elite of Euro-Americans influenced Indian affairs, the shortcomings of the tribal alternative to assimilation ideology, and the intent of Congress when it approved the Indian Reorganization Act.

Kenneth Philp
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Liberace: An American Boy. By Darden Asbury Pyron (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

Derided by critics for debasing classical music and pandering to an audience of midwestern grannies, Liberace nonetheless ranked among the nation's hottest entertainers in the 1950s and remained immensely popular until his death in 1987. His signature candelabra were instantly recognized by millions, and his extravagant fashions outshone even those of Louis XIV. Liberace presents a promising subject for biography to the extent that his greatest creation was, as Darden Asbury Pyron observes, not his stage show, but himself. Pyron's *Liberace: An American Boy* is a superb biography; it not only recounts the pianist's extraordinary career, but uses his unique life story to offer considerable insight into the relationship between high and popular culture and the history of sexuality.

Pyron suggests that Liberace's amazing popularity stemmed from his ability to fuse classical and popular music and flamboyance with social and cultural conservatism. Liberace led a life of opulence and self-indulgence that middle Americans found an enchanting version of the American Dream. Reared in a conservative Catholic family in Wisconsin, he retained a heartfelt regard for home and family (his brother George often played in his orchestra, and he mentioned his mother frequently in his stage patter) that his fans found reassuring. His music was not stylistically challenging, and he remained largely

untouched by the political and cultural currents of his day. Liberace, as Pyron puts it, was a cultural eccentric, but scarcely a rebel.

Born Wladziu Valentino Liberace in 1919, the boy quickly emerged as the most prodigiously talented member of a musical family. His father aspired for him to become a classical pianist, and, by his teenage years, he was earning flattering reviews for his concerts with orchestras in Milwaukee and Chicago. His recognition that he might never rank among the world's greatest pianists, coupled with his intense desire to please audiences and win success, led him to abandon the concert hall in 1939 for a nightclub act that mingled classical music, popular songs, and humor. Serious music critics scorned his new act and his father disowned him, but Liberace had discovered the key to success by offering listeners an accessible, appealing confection of high culture and pop, including everything from Tchaikovsky to "Mairzy Doats" in his repertoire. Shortly thereafter, he became known solely by his last name, Liberace. He had invented both a new musical hybrid and reinvented himself.

Pyron observes that, as a gay man in an era notably intolerant of homosexuality, Liberace had few male role models to emulate, and so had little choice but to fashion his new identity largely from whole cloth. Liberace's homosexuality was an open secret throughout his career, yet the showman strenuously denied both it, and his affliction with AIDS, until his death in 1987. In addition to reconciling highbrow and lowbrow, cosmopolitan and provincial, flamboyant and conservative, Liberace also linked gay and straight, winning the hearts of legions of adoring female fans and the admiration of thousands of others who either enjoyed or tolerated his "sissy" behavior and foppish style.

In the 1940s Liberace played many of the nation's finest hotels, supper clubs, and theaters. His rise to fame was inseparable from Las Vegas's growth as the nation's premier resort. The showman's style was perfectly suited to Vegas's mixture of faux elegance, self-indulgence, and cultural populism, and his career took off when he began playing Las Vegas hotels and casinos in the 1940s. By his own reckoning, he was no longer a musician, but proudly called himself a performer or showman, even Mr. Showmanship. Critics measured his performances according to canons of classical music, but Liberace offered audiences precisely what they wanted to hear. While critics fretted about the corrupting influence of mass culture in the 1950s and 1960s and pummeled Liberace's performances (when they deigned to take note of his work), the showman's millions of fans were responding enthusiastically to his accessible brand of musical elegance. Liberace, to his middle-class and working-class fans, embodied the grace and opulence conspicuously absent in their daily lives. Like P. T. Barnum before him, Liberace measured his success according to the audience's satisfaction, not critics' opinions. When one critic savaged his performances, he coined his most memorable phrase, replying cavalierly that he "laughed all the way to the bank."

Despite his successful club act, he deprecated himself as "a successful un-

known," and craved more fame. As television transformed American entertainment in the 1950s, he pitched his act to the fledgling networks, whose executives declined, predicting that he would bomb on the new medium. Instead, "The Liberace Show," produced for syndication, soon attracted more viewers than "I Love Lucy," and its star received thousands of letters from fans weekly. The showman's well-honed act and intimate connection with his audience proved almost ideally suited to the small screen, and he became, in the words of one journalist, the new medium's first "matinée idol."

Liberace's star plummeted in the late 1950s after a British tabloid published allegations of his homosexuality. It was not the allegation or the ensuing lawsuit that hampered his career so much as his strategy of donning more subdued clothing and muting his performing style in order to combat the charge. Shedding his spectacular garb stripped Liberace of his power to dazzle his audience. Between 1958 and 1963, he became, at least temporarily, a has-been. In the 1960s, he propelled himself back into the limelight, launching his remarkable comeback by returning to Las Vegas and to the mixture of classical music, popular tunes, and outrageous showmanship for which he was renowned. Remarkably, he sustained this popularity amid enormous changes in American popular entertainment over the next three decades.

By the 1980s Liberace even won the admiration of music critics, at least some of whom no longer drew stark, invidious distinctions between high culture and popular culture or between art and commerce. Liberace's melange of high and low culture, and his showman's emphasis on appearance dovetailed perfectly with the advent of a postmodern sensibility. After nearly fifty years of performing, he not only remained popular, but had even become fashionable. In the 1980s, he set all-time attendance records at New York's Radio City Music Hall. As the *New York Times* reported, decades of performing and enormous changes in American popular music had not diminished Liberace's appeal, and he took the stage with "glitter undimmed."

Liberace: An American Boy offers not only a fascinating account of a singular life, but intelligently discusses the relationship between high culture and mass entertainment and the history of sexuality. This is not only a fine biography, but an equally fine piece of cultural history. Liberace, secretive to the end, would doubtless be scandalized by the book's exposure of the most intimate details of his personal life, but would applaud Pyron's sensitive understanding of the paradoxical wellspring of his success.

Chris Rasmussen
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The Anointed One: An Inside Look at Nevada Politics. By Jon Ralston (Las Vegas: Huntington Press, 2000)

Jon Ralston is probably the most knowledgeable and respected political analyst in Nevada, and certainly the busiest: a twice-weekly newspaper columnist, conductor of a twice-monthly insider newsletter, occasional columnist for a business publication, freelancer, commentator and reporter for a Las Vegas television station, and host of a daily news and interview program on the city's 24-hour cable news channel. Somehow, he found time to write a book.

As the title suggests, this book is indeed an inside look at Nevada politics. More specifically, *The Anointed One* examines how Kenny Guinn was elected governor of Nevada in 1998. The quick and easy answer might be that he and his advisers defeated his Democratic opponent, former Las Vegas mayor Jan Jones, through better campaigning and better fund-raising, and by taking advantage of Nevada's trend toward political conservatism and supporting Republicans. As Ralston shows, however, there was much, much more to it than that.

"You've heard of company towns. Nevada is a company state," Ralston explains. "Here politics is much like any table game offered by the casinos. But nowhere is the deck more stacked; and, in the long run, the house always wins" (p. 3). In Nevada politics, the house is the gaming industry, whose leaders work hand-in-glove with the equivalent of what C. Wright Mills might have called Nevada's power elite: advertising agency owners and political consultants such as Sig Rogich and Billy Vassiliadis (the co-founder and current proprietor of R & R, respectively); gaming attorneys and lobbyists such as Frank Schreck, and gaming executives such as Mike Sloan of Mandalay Resorts.

These figures march through the pages of Ralston's book as Team Guinn. A former school superintendent/bank president/utility executive/interim UNLV president, Guinn was the frequent subject of mention as a possible candidate for more than two decades. He also participated in campaigns, most notably as co-chair of Republicans backing Bob Miller, the Democrat who served for ten years as governor, and he was friendly with such high-ranking Nevada Democrats as senators Harry Reid and Richard Bryan. While some Republicans might have questioned Guinn's credentials as a party loyalist and how conservative he was in his policies, he looked and sounded like a winner, and he had the right people behind him.

As Ralston makes clear, though, Guinn's victory in 1998 came less easily than might have been expected—certainly with the heavy political artillery surrounding him. First, Guinn faced a Republican primary battle with the outgoing lieutenant governor, Lonnie Hammargren, a party gadfly, and with former movie and record producer Aaron Russo, who seemed likely to tap into the antigovernment support that Ross Perot had won and that so many Nevadans like to express. It was an eye-opening experience for Guinn, who was new to

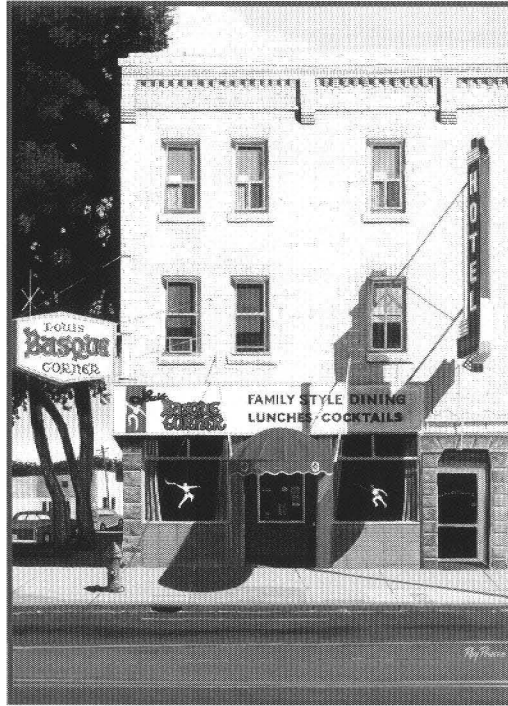
the real rough-and-tumble of partisan politics. Second, Team Guinn thought that it had neutralized any potential Democratic opposition, including Jones, who filed for office at the last minute. As in the primary, so in the general election: The commercials for both sides were negative, and the money was big. However, Ralston writes, the key was that Guinn had far more cash, and was able to spend it on a grass-roots effort that got out the vote throughout the state, especially in the rural counties, and undermined Jones's support in the traditionally Democratic African-American and Latino communities. Thus, in a strange way, while the big donors made success possible, old-fashioned door-to-door politics also made a difference.

This book would be useful to a general audience, although it is unlikely to reach one. Not that this is Ralston's fault; he wrote the book that he seems to have set out to write, and he has done a good job of it. It does provide an inside look at modern Nevada politics, meaning that the reader needs to be interested in the subject. Unfortunately, not enough Nevadans—indeed, American citizens—are sufficiently interested to want to know more or to get involved. Those who want to know how the process works, or who already know and want to know more about it, should find this book enthralling. They also may find it depressing: None of the characters comes out looking particularly heroic, and the main point is that elections may well be over before they technically start. Ralston concludes with a description of the early jockeying for the 2000 United States Senate race to succeed the retiring Bryan, and of Guinn lauding the eventual winner, John Ensign: "It looked like a torch-passing: the Anointed One of 1998 to the Anointed One of 2000. It had begun anew" (p. 236). And Nevadans seemed powerless to do anything about it—if, in fact, they really wanted (or should want) to do anything about it.

The Anointed One might be described as a Nevada equivalent of Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President* books, and it certainly provides a wealth of in-depth, inside information. What the book lacks is a deeper historical perspective. Guinn's anointment seems little different from the treatment accorded to the choices made by the bosses of the Comstock Lode and the Central Pacific Railroad in the nineteenth century, or by George Wingfield, Nevada's owner and operator for most of the first third of the twentieth century. However, the book does a lot to make a deeper historical perspective possible, and that is equally important. While Ralston's book is very good at what it offers, it simultaneously serves as a useful source for Nevada historians to analyze how—or whether—the state's political history and political economy have evolved all that much. Those who care about politics and government, then, now, and later, owe a debt to Jon Ralston for this exploration of the guts of Nevada politics.

Michael Green
Community College of Southern Nevada

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