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Newspaper Accounts of Indian Women in Southern Nevada Mining Towns, 1870-1900

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THE second half of the nineteenth century was a critical period for our understanding of native societies in the Great Basin because it bridged the time of independent native existence and the initial ethnographic investigations of those aboriginal cultures.¹ It was a period of tremendous change in Indian life as control of the resource base was taken from natives who were forced to coexist with an alien cultural group. In southern Nevada, discovery of metals precious to Anglos brought about extremely rapid conquest and the intrusion of entire communities of Anglo-Americans--not over a series of generations as in most other areas of North America, but in a matter of a year or two. Natives lost control of the areas immediately around the mining towns, which were often located on strategic water and food resource sites. Indians were driven either into remote hinterlands or into the towns themselves, or were forced to create some complex combination of these two existences.

We know little enough about how Indian societies anywhere in the Great Basin adjusted to these massive changes, less about their lives in the mining towns, and very little about natives in the towns of southern Nevada, more than 400 miles from the better documented Comstock Lode (e.g., Hattori 1975). In particular, there is nothing in the literature on native women and their role in the adaptation of Indian society to southern Nevada mining towns (Euler 1966; Fowler and Fowler 1971; Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada 1976). I shall discuss here the

limitations of the sources and explore the available data. While detailed data are irritatingly few, they are sufficient to show that native women were active participants in the historical adaptive process. Their role was more than simply intercalary (Martin and Voorhies 1975: 250), for they were not passive pawns bridging the gaps between two groups of competing males. While retaining vital relationships with native men, Indian women interacted with Anglo men, who controlled access to the novel goods and opportunities provided by the intrusive Euroamerican culture. Within a matter of a few years, a regional interethnic and sexual hierarchy of economic and political dominance/subordination was created in which Indian women had a definite and distinctive status.

THE SETTING

Early Euroamerican travelers rarely stayed long in Nevada; rather, they moved on to California, down the Old Spanish Trail in the south, or across the Humboldt River route in the north. Only after the Comstock Lode was discovered in 1859 did many settlers come to stay. By the end of the next summer, the non-Indian population had jumped to over 6,000. Prospectors spread rapidly into remote areas to search for gold, silver, and other minerals of value. Towns of hundreds and even thousands of men appeared suddenly, thrived as long as the ores were readily available, but dwindled and disappeared when "the diggings gave out."

Pioche, in southeastern Nevada not far

from the Utah state line and 120 miles from the Colorado River, was one such town. When it was founded in 1868, the only other non-Indian settlement in the southern half of the state was a string of tiny Mormon farming villages 80 miles farther south along the lower Muddy and Virgin rivers and at nearby Panaca. Pioche immediately became the center of a mining district, housed the major stamp mill for ore processing, and was the primary transshipment point for the region. Within two years of its establishment, it had a population of over 1,100, which grew to a peak of 5,000-6,000 by 1873 (Hulse 1971:22). After the principal mine failed in 1876, population declined rapidly to 745 in 1880 and 242 by 1900, where it remained stable for the next 40 years (Hulse 1971:40, 49).

This mining population was predominantly male and unmarried; the 1870 census showed a population of 936 white males and only 83 white females, with a mere 42 families (Hulse 1971:22). At its peak, Pioche sported 72 saloons and 32 houses of prostitution (Davis 1913, II:933).

There were also 20-30 families of Indians in two camps about a mile outside of town. One camp was Southern Paiute and the other Shoshone, but Anglo newspapers most often failed to differentiate between these two groups and simply referred to "Indians" in and about town. Although the papers recorded no details of this native community, the 1880 U.S. Census documented twenty of these households in "Indian camps in the vicinity of Pioche" (U.S. Department of Commerce 1880) with a total population of 48. Among these were 10 nuclear families, of whom only six had any children and in no case more than two. Six households were male-only and four were female headed.

Although a small reservation was established for Southern Paiutes in 1872 at Mo-

apa, nearly 100 miles to the south, few Indians voluntarily left their scattered native areas to assemble there nor were they ever compelled to do so. Rather, they continued to live in small groups throughout southern Nevada in both the countryside and in Anglo towns.

Indian agents assigned to Moapa used Pioche as their nearest rail head and contact point with the outside world, but they left little information about town-dwelling Indians because these people were not their official responsibility. Even with regard to those Paiutes who were in their charge, they remained silent on sex roles and behaviors. The few other government officials who passed through the region saw themselves as properly dealing with native leaders, assumed to be male, and left virtually no observations on Southern Paiute women. Nor did local Anglos record much of Indian life in extant letters and diaries, and Indians themselves left no written records from this period. Newspaper articles therefore provide virtually the sole contemporary source of information about Indians living in mining towns such as Pioche.

It was the rare mining camp that existed for more than six months without a newspaper springing up in a tent somewhere along one of its side-streets. Pioche was no exception. As the leading village of the southern part of the state before the turn of the century, Pioche had one of the most long-lived and complete of the several hundred nineteenth-century Nevada newspapers. Its coverage of local Indians was quite full--over 150 articles between 1872 and 1900. In those articles, Indian women figured prominently. The newspapers reported frequently on the relationships between Indian women and native men, Anglo men, and the Anglo community as a whole.

THE EVIDENCE

Shoshones and Southern Paiutes who lived near Anglo towns generally did so for employment with which to replace the traditional subsistence cycle so rapidly disrupted by Euroamerican arrival. Their wage labor nearly always was of a menial and seasonal nature. Men sawed wood, did ranch and farm tasks including crop harvesting, and even gathered desert holly for Anglo Christmas wreaths (*PWR* 18 May 1878 3:3; *PWR* 29 August 1885 3:1; *PWR* 19 January 1889 3:2; *LVRJ* 23 December 1933 1:3), but they were not employed in mines, the most productive occupation in the regional economy.

In these women-short mining towns, native women's labor was if anything in greater demand than men's, but their work was not considered by Anglos to be the same as that of non-Indian women. The few available Anglo women provided institutionalized and commercialized extensions of the wifely role for the predominantly unmarried miners by operating restaurants and boarding houses (Kendall 1980). Indian women, however, were not welcome to do food processing and housekeeping tasks. They were employed in a variety of other sex-specific jobs, most commonly washing clothes. Anglo reliance on native labor became so great that during the season when the entire Indian community left town to harvest pinyon for their own subsistence, the newspapers often announced the natives' departure from town and warned: "Ye that have been employing Indian labor take notice and do your own work for a month or two" (*PDR* 22 August 1875 3:2). In particular,

the poor house wife, having dislocated her backbone leaning over the washtub, wearied and tired at night, heaves a heavy sigh and wishes the nasty squaws would return, and can't see the use of

them remaining out in the mountains for a three months' feast. They would willingly permit them to linger around the kitchen-door awaiting for "muck-a-muck" and "nogadi," and they would be permitted to rub their dirty faces on the clean window-panes without threats of being branded with a hot poker or scalded with a dipper of boiling water. The usefulness of the Indian, as it cannot now be obtained, will hereafter be appreciated [*PWR* 10 October 1885 3:1].

Thus newspapers documented that Indian women's labor was desired at the same time that Indian women as persons were berated and kept at great social distance.

At the same time that Indian women were perceived as unlike Anglo women, they were also seen as like them and socially different from Indian men. As Euroamerican concepts of chivalry dictated gentle treatment of Anglo women, so too Indian women were seen as proper objects of charity. In the earliest mention of whites succoring ill Indians, during an apparent epidemic among the native population in 1873, an old woman was brought into Pioche by horse-drawn ambulance and fed at public expense until she died (*PDR* 3 April 1873 3:2). By the turn of the century, several women had been cared for in the county hospital, first in Pioche and later in Las Vegas (e.g., *LV Age* 29 July 1911 8:4; *LV Age* 6 November 1920 6:2). In 1919, the Clark County Commission even voted a \$15 per month subsistence allowance, the only one of its kind in the budget, to an Indian woman in the mining town of Searchlight, for unstated reasons (*LV Age* 6 December 1919 1:4). This type of public charity seems to have been an economic resource alternative not equally available to Indian men, for there was no mention of welfare assistance to males during this time period.

Through a similar logic, Anglo law dealt

more charitably with Indian women than men. By the turn of the century, for example, they were being cited for public inebriation nearly as frequently as males, and yet they received suspended sentences or verbal warnings, while native men were imprisoned (e.g., *LV Age* 13 May 1911 4:5; *LVRJ* 9 July 1934 1:7). Thus, Anglos began early to cast Indian women into sex-specific occupations and also to incorporate them into the formal social structure of the mining communities as representatives of an Anglo-defined female sex group.

The newspaper accounts treated Indian women not only as a single group, but also within a variety of male-female relationships. Editors mentioned most frequently the inter-ethnic dyad of Indian women and non-Indian men; the opposite, Indian men with non-Indian women, was never reported. From the earliest period of the 1870s and in the outlying districts, there were accounts of violent attacks on native women but no rapes were reported as occurring in the town itself. In one such incident, which caused great public outcry,

six creatures in the shape of men, while camped down in Dry Valley, waylaid three Indians--two males and one female--tied and gagged the warriors, and outraged the squaw, an old gray-haired woman on the verge of the grave, until her life was endangered [*PDR* 31 January 1873 3:3].

At least three of the men involved were named in the paper, arrested, placed under \$1,000 bond to appear in court, and jailed despite their pleas of innocence. In a similar instance, two white men traveled well out of town "and being provided with liquor distributed the beverage among the Indians, and afterwards outraged one or more of the squaws. The Indians were greatly incensed . . ." (*PDR* 15 December 1872 3:3). Such use of alcohol to lure Indian women or to dull

their resistance was often reported, as when a Chinese restaurateur and his Hispanic employee kidnapped a 16-year old Indian girl and two small boys who had been accompanying her. The two men locked them "into a cellar under the rear of the restaurant and got them drunk, presumably with the intention of debauching the girl" (*LV Age* 7 July 1913 1:4). The two men pleaded guilty and were jailed for 90 days.

Perhaps unexpectedly, such rapes were treated as punishable offenses in this area where merely killing an Indian was not considered a crime. The explanation of this apparent paradox was that Indian women were being perceived first as women, and then secondarily as representatives of a scorned ethnic group. In an area so chronically short of female population, rapists at large in the community constituted a threat to the few resident non-Indian women. Rapists' identities were therefore published, they were described as subhuman "creatures in the shape of men" (*PDR* 31 January 1873 3:3), and they were dealt with severely, by local standards. In this regard it is interesting that the papers repeatedly denied that Indian women were ever attacked in the vicinity of towns themselves, that all rapes purportedly took place in remote areas, cognitively shielding Anglo women from proximity with such violent men.

By the mid 1870s newspapers frequently described young Indian women in the streets of Pioche who were extremely well-dressed. At a time when older women were still wearing rabbit skin robes and cast-off clothing, younger women appeared in red taffeta skirts and blouses streaming with multi-colored ribbons. Competition between white men and Indian men for the company of these young women occurred in Lacour Street, the location of the red-light district. The relative affluence of these women and

the proprietary attitude shown by non-Indian men would tend to imply that there were sexual relations of a commercial nature occurring between these two groups. Non-Indian prostitutes, often foreign-born and from southern European and Mediterranean countries, were frequently mentioned in the press, often in a positive tone. Unlike these non-Indian prostitutes, Indian women were never employed in the numerous bordellos of Pioche. In fact, there is only one case of an Indian woman actually being labeled as a prostitute by the newspapers; it was pointedly stated that she was from another town (*PWR* 10 January 1880 3:1), hence placing her at an acceptable psychosocial distance. In all other instances the newspaper's phrasing was merely suggestive, as an early incident in which a headman known as Captain Andy

tried to forcibly take a Shoshone squaw away from a house on Lacour street. . . . He had dragged her half across the road, she screaming at the top of her voice, when a gentleman [white] who happened to be passing interfered and released her, striking the buck two or three stunning blows in order to do so. The squaw rushed back into the house she had been dragged from, when the buck, having partially recovered from the blows dealt him, sprang after her in a most threatening manner. By this time a number of white men had gathered, and the report being credited by all that Captain Andy wanted to get the squaw out to kill her for infidelity, according to the Shoshone and Piute custom, an intense excitement was precipitated, and the crowd rapidly increased . . . [*PDR* 25 March 1873 3:2].

The headman was chased over the hillsides on horseback, much to the delight of the audience, and escaped Anglo pursuers only after shots were fired. Later an English-speaking native risked presentation of the Indian version:

Jenny, the squaw Captain Andy tried to get away, is a young mother, he says, and that her infant was suffering for that nutriment which the only a mother could give; and Captain Andy was exercising his authority as subchief to make her go and relieve her child . . . the squaw never had been accused of infidelity, and that her life would not have been endangered . . . [*PDR* 25 March 1873 3:2].

The instant assumption of Anglo bystanders that Jenny was accused of adultery, plus the location of the "house" in the brothel district indicates that the white men assumed her to be a prostitute. They feared retribution on her account from the Indian man, as would have been the case in their own society; the headman, it is worth noting, was much more concerned that she fulfill her maternal responsibilities and was not insisting on sexual fidelity.

In another case in 1910, a white man in a distant camp "had been drinking, and in a fit of rage fired three shots at the [18-year old] squaw, who was lying in camp on a bed" (*LV Age* 18 June 1910 1:4). Although he was so drunk that only one bullet hit her, it was 36 hours before medical help could be obtained and she died of blood poisoning; he escaped "to the tall timber." In both of these cases, it appears that there was a close, and probably sexual, relationship between at least some young Indian women and non-Indian men.

Competition between Indian and Anglo men over Indian women seems to have been minimal. Great Basin Indian men were not sexual puritans and did not have power to demand rigid fidelity from women either in the traditional culture, or apparently, in the mining camp milieu. In the incident above, the headman retrieved the young woman to nurse her infant, not to remove her from Anglo sexual advances. The newspapers cited no instances of Indian men attacking Anglo

men over women, but the evidence may be misleading for one cannot discount the political realities of the times. Indians were vastly outnumbered by Anglos in the rapidly growing mining camps, were technologically noncompetitive, and were militarily in no position to resist Anglo sexual pressures, even if they had chosen to do so. Nevertheless, there were a few recorded cases of Indian men tactfully and peaceably removing their women from Anglo male presence:

On Lacour street, yesterday afternoon, a good-looking, young squaw--good looking for a squaw--was being beguiled by half a dozen white admirers of her voluptuous plumpness and amorously short flaming red skirt, when a buck with a dingy rooster feather decorating his greasy old slouch hat advanced with lordly strides, locked arms with her, and sauntered off down the middle of the road with an air of chivalric haughtiness [PDR 21 March 1873 3:2].

Reported far more frequently than conflict with Anglo men was competition among Indian men for women, although this evidence is hard to evaluate. The newspapers interpreted as sexually motivated any Indian fight at which any women were present, as would be normal in this traditionally egalitarian native society. In reporting one of the frequent street fights, the newspaper editorialized that "from what we could learn there was a woman (a squaw), *as there always is*, at the bottom of it, and the green-eyed monster was rampant" (PDR 1 August 1875 3:2; parentheses in the original, emphasis added). The motivation for these fights between Indian men may have been genuine sexual competition, or displaced hostility against politically unapproachable Anglo males, or misinterpreted completely by the sources. In any event, the record showed numerous frays among Indian men, such as the following:

Aboriginal Flirtation.--A Piutes [sic] was yesterday indulging in the ruling passion of her sex on upper Main street, by, flirting One young buck . . . was about to "get away with the pot," when another rushed to the assault . . . and carried off the prize in triumph [PDR 25 May 1873 3:2].

In another report the paper hypothesized that

The mating season of the Indians must have arrived last Tuesday and considerable fighting was indulged in by both the noble red men and women There were a number of fights between the bucks. Two brothers, who had changed squaws, had several fights during the day. One brother, who thought that he had got the worst of the bargain, wanted to trade back, but the other brother refused, and they were fighting at intervals during the whole of the afternoon, resulting in one buck getting both squaws [PWR 12 February 1881 3:2].

Sometimes these quarrels became more than simple fist-fights. In at least one case Indian men pulled knives in a dispute "about a dusky maiden whose affections both coveted" and one died of his wounds (PDR 22 April 1873 3:4). In an instance of outright murder between Indian men, the body was thrown down an Anglo well; the papers reported simply that "the cause [was] the possession of a squaw" (PWR 18 May 1878 3:3). In still another case, an Indian from the White River country to the north was killed about four miles outside of Pioche and the murder was attributed to another Indian called "Dead Beat" by the local Anglos. The paper explained,

Jealousy was the cause of the trouble at any rate. "Dead Beat" and the Indian killed quarreled in town in the morning, and Dead Beat's squaw was with the White River party, leaving him, and it is thought he followed the party and

committed the deed [*PWR* 15 September 1888 3:1].

Not all the intraethnic competition to which newspapers attributed a sexual motive was between Indian men. Women also were portrayed as intensely interested in the outcome of male competition. For instance, in describing a fight between two groups of Indian men for a woman, the editor said: "During the melee all the squaws were seated on the side hill, and as every knock down occurred, they exhibited their intense delight by yelling, laughing, and screeching" (*PDR* 20 June 1875 3:3). Furthermore, the papers reported a number of cases in which Indian women fought with each other reputedly for the favors of an Indian man, such as this

Squaw Fight.--Two squaws got into a fight yesterday afternoon down in the vicinity of the Floral Mill. They "made the fur fly"--The scene of the encounter, after the battle was over, looked as if a wildcat had been devouring a dozen cotton-tail rabbits on the spot [*PDR* 2 February 1873 3:3; apparently a reference to the traditional Great Basin rabbit-skin robes the women were probably wearing on this wintry day].

In another instance, it was reported that

Fighting commenced on Meadow Valley street between two gentle maidens, who had a quarrel over a handsomely painted buck. The girls stood their ground well and punched each other with their fists, in true white man style, affording much amusement for red and white spectators. After the battle the victor walked over and stood by the side of the prize she won [*PWR* 12 February 1881 3:2].

In 1906 squabbling between Indian women became so intense that a city-wide curfew was established in nearby Caliente for all Indians:

A half a dozen female Indians, more universally recognized as "squaws," were having one of those "fandangoes" the other night, disturbing the people for miles around. They fought and pulled hair, then pulled hair and scrapped, when in the midst of their sociability [Sheriff] Monahan swooped on the bunch and in one "pot shot" he got three of the "squaws" and locked the bunch together with Riley in the branch jail. The following morning Judge Maynard . . . notified the Indian ladies to keep from off the streets after 9 o'clock in the evenings and to stay in their own campodies. He let them go . . . he is determined that the society of Caliente will not be disturbed, so if they don't behave, they will surely have to drag their camps over to Pioche [*Caliente Express* 4 January 1906 1:6].

Once Indian men and women had established a marital relationship, newspapers portrayed their lives as still not peaceful. The same Indian called Dead Beat above, the newspaper declared seven years earlier, had received "a flogging at the hands of parties [of white men] in Pioche for stabbing and brutally beating his squaw" (*PWR* 22 October 1881 3:3). In many of the incidents, either the man or the woman was reportedly intoxicated at the time, as in one "drunken row" in which a Paiute "cut and stabbed his Indian wife until she will probably die from her wounds" (*LV Age* 17 June 1911 1:5).

Indian women often gave as well as they got in these domestic disputes. In one episode,

An Indian, the fore part of the week, at his wickiup down in the valley, was engaged in heating an old branding iron for the purpose of branding his horses. While the iron was heating the buck was engaged in inspecting his horses. While examining one of the animals, and being in a bending position, with his back

toward the fire, little dreaming of the dose he was about to receive, a squaw, standing by the fire just behind the buck, becoming imbued with that curiosity possessed by her sex, and wishing to make practical and scientific experiments with the branding-iron upon flesh herself, she jerked the heated iron out of the fire and pressed it against the buck's projected anatomy, burning through the pants into the flesh [*PWR* 26 September 1885 3:1].

The man promptly retaliated with interest, burning her "to the bone."

In their descriptions of female Indian character the newspapers conformed with general Anglo stereotypes of women. Indian women were said to be sexually passive, allowing native men to fight over them and then "carry off the prize." On the other hand, Indian women also were reported as jealous of the sexual attentions of men, competing actively for the possession of men. Coquetry and flirtation were said to be "the ruling passion of her sex" (*PDR* 25 May 1873 3:2). In the branding iron incident, the woman's motivation was attributed to "that curiosity possessed by her sex." In all these instances, the Indian women were declared to be representatives of their *gender*, not their ethnic group, and as such were perceived to possess the stereotypic characteristics attributed by frontier Anglo culture to women in general.

Newspapers presumed native marriage took on the same exclusiveness and possessiveness as did the Anglo cultural ideal. In the article about Captain Andy's attempt to retrieve the young mother, onlooking Anglos assumed that she was being charged with infidelity and that jealous male protection of sexual rights to women would be protected to the point of death. Such an attitude was even editorially declared to be "in accordance with Shoshone and Piute custom"

(*PDR* 25 March 1873 3:2). Anglos took it for granted that Indian men were jealous of each other and would repeatedly fight over possession of women; in describing Indian fights, the papers declared that "a squaw [was], as there always is, at the bottom of it" (*PDR* 1 August 1875 3:2). In one instance, because of the frequency of fighting among both men and women, the newspaper stated pejoratively that "the mating season" of the Indians had arrived (*PWR* 12 February 1881 3:2); it did not seek other causes for the community violence. Indian men were said to be violent with their women once attained, with frequent accusations of knifings and beatings. Women in turn were seen as competing violently for the "prize" of an Indian man. In short, newspapers declared that both Indian men and women believed in rigid, sexually exclusive monogamy, and were willing to defend violently their possession of sexual rights in each other.

The numerous reports of cohabitation clearly show that Anglo miners perceived native women as sexual objects, but little information appeared about the offspring of such unions. Since their mothers' relationship with their white fathers was by law denied the formalization of marriage (Rusco 1973:60, 77), these children almost always grew up in the Indian community, where there seems to have been some hostility towards them. In one case, a woman was killed by other Indians "because she had given birth to a red-headed pappoose" (*PWR* 22 November 1879 3:1). A red-head born at that time period was undoubtedly the result of miscegenation. In another case in a distant mining camp on the Mojave Desert, local Indians "heretofore considered a peaceable and even cowardly set," having a grievance against a white miner, took it out on his common-law Indian wife, and "brutally murdered her and her half-breed daughter"

(*Pioche Tri-Weekly Record* 19 November 1876 2:1).

Mixed-blood children were not only treated with suspicion by the Indian community, but were actively discriminated against by the white society as well. The papers reported the fate of a petition to establish a school district at El Dorado Canyon, a mining camp south of present-day Las Vegas: "It was denied them on the grounds that many of the children were half-breeds" (*PWR* 28 February 1885 3:1). As elsewhere in the West, mixed-blood children were not fully accepted by either society, but found readier acceptance among the more-tolerant Indian community (Ewers 1962).

ANALYSIS

The entire body of data we are dealing with here was recorded by male Anglo reporters and editors. There is no input from native men or from either Indian or non-Indian women. That fact alone may introduce a sexual bias to the data, but that might not be the only source of bias to be considered when evaluating this material. Newspaper editors, like the transient miners for whom they wrote, arrived in Nevada carrying with them their own cultural freight of stereotypes which dictated what Indians should be like, there as elsewhere in the West. Since Anglos rarely remained in an area long, these journalists did not learn enough about local natives to replace the stereotypes with more accurate information. When they witnessed local Indian events, their preconceptions influenced what they saw and subsequently colored their interpretations of the meaning of those events. They responded with their own culturally derived categories, attributed unproven motives to native actions, presumed that Indian women's character would resemble that assumed for Anglo women, and anticipated that

Indian sexual relations would duplicate their own. In these stereotypes, they often tell us more about Anglo culture than about Indian behavior. Nevertheless, the very biases in these reports become data for they represent the attitudes of the dominant Anglo males who largely defined the roles available to native women in nineteenth century southern Nevada mining towns.

Just as biases become evidence, so too does the systematic failure of the newspapers to report certain events and information which was available to them. Omissions included the total absence of articles on the day-to-day home life of native families. There was no sense of the structure of the Indian community or of social or political relationships within it. Since the newspapers reported on Indians only when they entered the Anglo world, the interethnic pattern they recorded was a one-sided one of displaced natives operating within an alien cultural environment. The papers then interpreted these forays according to the standards set by Anglo culture. There was no coverage of Indian thoughts, interpretations, or views of the changes resulting from the arrival of Anglos. Native understanding of these historic events and the native perception of the changes being brought about in women's roles are utterly lacking in the newspaper accounts.

Furthermore, the coverage lacks time depth. Reporting was "on the spot" and did not involve "deep background" research to create any sense of cause for the actions described. This problem may have been more acute in nineteenth-century Nevada than it is in today's newspapers, for most of the articles about Indians were very short by modern standards, consisting of one or two paragraphs, rarely more than four column-inches, and occasionally simply a single line in a string of local events.

In addition to sexual bias, cultural distortion, and lack of depth, which are true of newspaper coverage in all times and places, nineteenth-century Nevada newspapers suffered from another important source of bias. Dispassionate and factual reporting, which are now considered professional journalistic standards, were not held then. The numerous competing newspapers vied for customers by providing them entertainment through the use of colorful, often flamboyant, language. Exaggeration and humor were standard techniques; remember that it was in Nevada newspapers that Samuel Clemens developed his distinctive style. Indians were considered legitimate subjects for writers' prose. Indian lives frequently were described with humor, irony, and sarcasm, but native events were not taken as serious human drama.

Granting that the data are distorted and incomplete, how much can be learned from them about the native adaptations to the presence of Anglo mining towns and the role that Indian women played in that period of adjustment? Despite editors' predilection for portraying native women as passive female objects of male competition or squaw-slaves bound to an endless cycle of drudgery, they could not eclipse completely the dynamic activity of Indian women in these mining towns. Women were not passive observers and they certainly were not shoved protectively to the rear by Indian males. They appeared well-adjusted and comfortable in even the earliest records. They showed, in fact, a degree of personal independence on which Anglo observers commented with astonished disapproval.

Although biased and fragmentary, the data show that by the turn of the century native women in the southern Great Basin shared with native men a subordinate status within the interethnic regional structure. In

addition, however, native women had a doubly subordinate position--subordinate to Anglo males not only as Indians, but also as women.

Very soon after the arrival of Anglos, an interethnic hierarchy developed in which some groups were dominant and others subordinate. This pattern of dominance/subordination contained a number of aspects, but fundamentally consisted of unequal access to life-supporting food resources and unequal participation in political decision-making on public issues which affected both groups. Such inequality was supported by force of arms. This political and economic control found expression in hierarchical social relations and the imposition of cultural definitions of proper behavior during individual contacts between the two groups.

The newspaper accounts showed clearly that by the turn of the century, Indians in southern Nevada, both men and women, had been placed in a position of subordination within such a dominance hierarchy. Indians of both sexes had lost control over resources in the immediate vicinity of towns, including those productive for their own economy as well as those useful to the Anglo economy. Federal officials and local Anglos alike assumed that Indians "living in a tribal condition" were barred from ownership of mining claims, the most valuable resource in Nevada at the time, but natives were allowed to hunt and gather relatively unhindered on lands not yet claimed under private Anglo ownership. As these remote areas shrunk, natives sought subsistence substitutes in the towns, turned to flour and beef, and soon developed a taste for other mercantile products, such as metal pots, fabric, coffee, and the ribbons and bangles so frequently mentioned by the editors. These things were available only in Anglo towns and only on

Anglo terms. Since Anglos were interested in none of the goods produced by Indians in southern Nevada other than the seasonal pinyon nuts, the only thing natives could sell for the products they wanted was their labor. Anglos would hire them only for marginal service jobs. By the turn of the century, Indians were firmly tied into a subordinate economic position as laborers, not owners or entrepreneurs; as wood-cutters and clothes washers, not miners; as consumers of Anglo-manufactured goods, not as providers of desired commodities (Knack n.d.).

Politically, neither Indian men nor women had any input to the decisions made in the Anglo towns. They had no representation on city councils, were forbidden by law to run for office, and held no elected or appointed positions. They could not vote, serve on juries, or even testify against Anglos in court (Rusco 1973:60, 72).

Anglo political and economic domination was supported by the liberal application of physical force. In the collection of newspaper articles, there was specific mention of 26 interracial killings; in 19 cases Anglos killed Indians. In 11 cases, Anglo males killed Indian males, and in seven or eight more non-Indian men murdered Indians of unspecified sex when a camp was "wiped up." The newspapers' attitude toward these killings was not one of outrage, but ranged from contentment with a justified action well accomplished, to smug satisfaction at the natives being taught a lesson. An exemplary case occurred in the Pahrnagat Valley:

It seems that a party of old Indians were engaged in farming, on their own account, a small plot of ground on the lower end of the ranch owned by Mr. Sharp. A man named Frenchy, living near, owned stock that naturally en-

croached on the growing crops, and the Indians were constantly compelled to herd them off [*PWR* 22 July 1882 3:3].

One day a calf was killed in the process, and Frenchy "followed a venerable warrior to his wickiup and shot him dead." Although a complaint was filed, the Justice of the Peace "in private session" released Frenchy on grounds of self-defense (*PWR* 22 July 1882 3:3). Anglo beliefs in private ownership of property were supported by the technological superiority of the gun; Anglos used these two cultural factors together to consolidate their control of southern Nevada.

While Indian women shared important aspects of subordination in common with male members of their ethnic group, other elements of women's status distinguished them from native men and gave them a distinctive social position. Because of the scarcity of Anglo female labor, miners rapidly employed Indian women for "proper" women's work, according to Anglo sexually defined job categories. Especially younger native women moved rapidly into the labor force. Domestic service was seen by Anglo employers as particularly appropriate for native women, and yet in this they were not in quite the same class as Anglo women. Anglo women's commercial occupations were extensions of the wifely role; Indian women were not and legally could not be wives, and their labor was therefore in a different category. White women ran boarding houses and provided food for Anglo men; Indian women washed their dirty clothes.² Indian women indeed often were employed by Anglo women, placing them in clear subordination to even the most subordinate members of the dominant ethnic group.

Native women quickly acquiesced to other Anglo cultural demands as well, such as requirement for upper body coverage, and adopted Anglo materials and styles for cloth-

ing. As a result of their income, young native women's dress was conspicuously different from that of the average town-dwelling Indian, certainly from that of their older kinswomen. Young women were in the forefront of native acceptance of Anglo material goods, a consumerism which soon riveted Indians to Anglo towns whose labor markets provided the only access to cash and trade goods. They wore taffeta and multi-colored ribbons, but also demanded utilitarian items, such as cotton yard goods, metal cooking pots, steel knives, needles, and matches, to aid them in their domestic duties. Native women instigated cultural change by creating such consumer demand and furthermore generated access to those goods with their own wage labor.

Anglo definitions of "proper" women's roles also affected other economic possibilities for Indian women. As seen above, native women were recipients of charity, while Indian men were not, projecting the Anglo conceptions of the male as worker and female as dependent onto the native ethnic group. Women were given hospital care when ill and lenient sentences when arrested. These pressures on Indian women to assume unproductive roles were ultimately unsuccessful, but we lack data on such interesting questions as whether Indian women were employed more frequently than men, or what the relative sexual wage scale was.

While Anglos established dominance over all Indians through violence, native women were treated differently in this regard. Newspapers repeatedly reported Anglo attacks on Indian villages, always justifying these as retaliation for initial Indian homicides or theft of property and stock. Anglos perceived native women as lusty and violent, but not as aggressive, vengeful, or threatening to the white community. Therefore

women were not accused of the crimes which instigated vigilante attacks and chivalry demanded that they be protected. This reduced their mortality and, in the coverage of nineteenth-century Anglo raiding, not a single woman is specifically mentioned as being killed.

On the other hand, Indian women were subjected to a mechanism for establishing and enforcing sexual dominance strictly parallel to the use of murder to establish ethnic control. This sexually specific form of violence was not experienced by Indian men; it was rape. As we have seen above, rape was common, reported in the newspapers, and interpreted as a crime for reasons relevant to the Anglo culture. The only reported specifically female subject of an interracial killing was the twelve-year old victim of rape-murder; the non-Indian culprit was tried and convicted on the rape charge only (*PWR* 17 October 1895 4:2; *PWR* 14 November 1895 4:2).

These economic and political factors of control were reflected in a sharply defined social role for native women. Even in extremely women-short mining communities, native women's sexual utility did not outweigh their racial and cultural unacceptability. Although occasionally adjudged condescendingly to be "good looking, for a squaw" (*PDR* 21 March 1873 3:2), Indian women were universally labeled as "squaws" rather than "women." The newspapers attributed sexual motivation to nearly all quarrels between Indian men and women, and amongst Indian women, thus implicitly acknowledging them as attractive sexual objects. A great number of the quarrels involving Indian women occurred on Lacour and Meadow Valley streets, which delimited the red-light district. Anglos felt free to intervene on the behalf of young women whom they saw as threatened by the pre-

sumed retributive justice of native society, thus assuming the role of male protectors of defenseless females as dictated by Euroamerican culture.³ Unacceptable to Anglo males as wives, Indian women were often clearly involved in some sort of sexual relationship with Anglo men, although they were never employed in the numerous brothels lining Lacour Street. Indian and mixed-blood children were rejected by the Anglo community and were not provided with public school education. Native women were kept at a social distance by Anglo wives who might drive them off with a fire poker or boiling water. Indian women did wash laundry in the back yards of Anglo homes and beg food scraps and cast-off clothing at the doors, but they did not enter the houses. They could press their faces against the transparent barrier of the window panes, but they could not come in.

The evidence from the newspapers shows that Indians as a whole, and Indian women in particular, were structurally subordinate to Anglo men and women by the turn of the century. Data concerning sex roles within the segregated Indian society are even more fragmentary. Some admittedly limited inferences can be made with the aid of measures such as those developed by Sanday (1974, 1981) for women's status and corresponding male dominance.

Sanday's women's status measure is a Guttman scale compounded of six independent variables. The first, flexible marriage mores, includes both the ability of women to initiate divorce and mild punishment of female adultery. The newspaper report, for instance, of "Dead Beat's" wife electing to run away with the White River band shows native women rearranging their marital relationships through their own choice, rather than at the manipulation of male Indians. The Captain Andy article indicates the mild

attitude toward married women's sexual freedom as well, showing the first factor present. Next Sanday turns to the economic, the production of socially valued goods and then the existence of a moderate or great demand for those products outside the household, in either local or long-distance trade. Indian women were producers of pinyon nuts, the only native product which Anglos regularly bought. Women also produced labor which obviously entered the interethnic market economy. Sanday couples issues of production and market with evidence for control over the allocation of the product. Women walked the streets alone, without male chaperons. They maintained their own social contacts with Anglo men and initiated economic relationships with Anglo women, without the apparent mediation of husbands or sons. They headed female-only households, even in their nubile years, and supported themselves and their offspring without the presence of resident males. This is suggestive, although not definitive evidence, of their economic independence in trade. There is no specific mention in the newspapers of whether men or producer women negotiated pinyon nut sales, but women seem to have been able to spend their wages on themselves, for instance by purchasing clothing and domestic goods, rather than having to turn their incomes over to native men.

Sanday's fifth factor is political, that women "have *at least* an important indirect influence in public decision making *or* there are at least a few political roles allocated to women" (Sanday 1981:250-251; emphasis in the original). None of the "chiefs" were women. There is reason to believe that at this time period Anglos had at least as much to do with the selection of these chiefs as native people did. Chiefs had no control over Anglo actions, rarely controlled inter-

ethnic relations, and their intracommunity influence is much debated. In the field of native decision-making, direct evidence of women's influence is lacking, perhaps due to the newspapers' general failure to cover native internal affairs. However, a few suggestive details are worth considering. Women were often their own actors in events reported as "competitions" over native men. When men of their community fought for whatever reasons, Indian women were interested spectators, calling encouragement from the hillsides. It may be conjectured that native women fulfilled Sanday's weaker qualification of at least indirect influence in decision-making, although this is far from proven. Her final factor is the presence of women's solidarity groups; there is no evidence for these, nor for men's organizations.

Therefore, Indian women showed three and possibly four of the factors Sanday considers significant in measuring women's status. This places them at least in her category of "women have economic and political power or authority."

Inverting an examination of evidence of women's status is the search for indications of male dominance. For this Sanday's index of male aggression compounds five factors. The first factor, the taking of wives from hostile groups, gains no support from the newspaper evidence. The only group hostile to Indians was the Anglos themselves, and there were no reports of public social events of any kind involving Indian males and Anglo females, let alone marriages. Second, rape as an institutionalized form of intracommunity control was also absent, the only reported rapes being committed by non-Indian men. The third factor, moderate to frequent interpersonal violence, the newspaper accounts asserted was true. The Anglo assumption that Indians were funda-

mentally and inherently violent people, which was a part of the common frontier stereotype of "savage" Indians, might have colored these reports. The existence of sexually segregated space use within Indian communities was totally undocumented, perhaps because of newspapers' near-total lack of reporting on internal native affairs. Finally, the existence of an ideology of male toughness and supremacy received some support from the newspapers, but again much of this might be attributable to cultural bias in the writers; the actual Indian behaviors reported do little to confirm the general narrative tenor of machismo. Thus, with only two factors possibly present, native men rate in the low category on Sanday's (1981:254-255) male aggression scale.

Taken together, the women's status score and the male aggression score fit Sanday's condition of a sexually egalitarian society: "The sexes are considered equal when women have political and economic power and/or authority and male aggression in the form of rape or raiding other groups for wives is absent" (Sanday 1981:254).⁴

CONCLUSIONS

When ethnographers began recording traditional Southern Paiute culture early in the twentieth century, they discovered that women then had a strong and decisive social role (Knack 1984). They argued that this was the result of the substantial contribution women made to the aboriginal gathering economy, which in turn supported equal participation in consensus-based political decisions and independence in marriage alliances. Taken out of the artificial ethnographic present and placed in historical perspective, however, the preservation of this traditionally high female status until the twentieth century was not the result of cultural continuation alone, but also due to the

role which women played during the years intervening between aboriginal times and the advent of ethnographic recording. In the late nineteenth century, Indian women in southern Nevada were active participants in native exploration of the newly introduced Anglo culture. They did not resist the acceptance of foreign culture traits but actively sought out access to Anglo goods and participated in the native adjustment to the wage labor economy. They were not passive observers of the social changes of their times, but created social contacts by seeking out Anglo males and being sought out by these power holders. Women were significant actors in the native response to Anglo mining towns.

During that historical period of adjustment, newspaper accounts documented that Indian women, along with Indian men, were relegated to a position of subordination in the regional interethnic hierarchy. Anglos dominated natives as a group economically, politically, and socially, and they enforced that control through guns, horses, and superior numbers. Indian women, as a gender, fell into a still further subordinated position as Anglo cultural definitions of women's role and deportment were imposed on native behavior. The data contain no record of how native women, or native men for that matter, perceived or intellectualized the power positions which were developing around them.

Away from the interethnic social contact of the Anglo towns, within their own segregated native communities, Indian women retained much of the autonomy characteristic of their precontact role, even while forced by circumstances to modify some of the content of that role. Women continued to contribute significantly to the native economy, supplementing their food gathering with cash income from town. They brought useful and

exotic goods into the native community.

Anglo domination and Indian subordination had both geographic and temporal components. Although the newspapers spoke of Indians only within the context of Anglo towns, agency reports and even the newspapers themselves showed that until well into the twentieth century a substantial proportion of the Indian population of southern Nevada lived in rural areas, away from mining towns. Some Indians had traditionally lived in those distant sections, while others had intentionally isolated themselves from spheres of Anglo influence. For at least part of the late nineteenth century, Indians moved between Anglo-controlled towns and free native areas, perhaps adjusting entire clusters of cultural behaviors in the process. How long that dual-cultural pattern persisted, and exactly when Anglo control of the countryside finally became so complete as to condemn any effective pursuit of traditional native culture, remains to be discovered.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was read at the annual meetings of the Southwestern Anthropological Association, April, 1984, at Asilomar, California. I thank the staff of the Nevada State Historical Society in Las Vegas, especially Mr. David Millman, the newspaper archivist, for their help in gathering the data upon which this paper is based. The suggestions of discussants at Asilomar and of the anonymous reviewers for this journal were helpful and appreciated.

2. This sexual division of labor was in evidence as early as 1880, for the U.S. Census of that year described all married Indian women living in nuclear families as having the occupation of "Keeping house"; all adult women not so attached were listed as "washerwomen." All adult males were described as "Laborers" (U.S. Department of Commerce 1880: no frame numbers).

3. Indian men, verbally separated from hu-

manity as "bucks," were never described as sexually attractive for Anglo women, even in sarcasm or jest. Unlike does, according to Anglo conception, buck deer are not incidentally a game animal to be hunted and killed. Also, to continue the metaphor, deer are animals having a "mating season," as was at least once facetiously said of the Indians themselves.

4. It should be noted that if these scales of status and dominance are applied to Indian and Anglo ethnic groups instead of to female and male sexual groups, Anglo dominance is confirmed.

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