

4-2014

Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Choice in Twentieth-Century Arizona by Mary S. Melcher (review)

Linda English

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, linda.english@utrgv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/hist_fac



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

English, Linda. Review of Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Choice in Twentieth-Century Arizona, by Mary S. Melcher. *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 117, no. 4 (2014): 445-446. doi:10.1353/swh.2014.0047.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts at ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

Pregnancy, Motherhood, and Choice in Twentieth-Century Arizona. By Mary S. Melcher. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012. Pp. 262. Illustrations, figures, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 97808165284462, \$50.00 cloth).

Mary Melcher examines a host of issues associated with reproduction in Arizona in the last century, including childbirth, midwifery, infant mortality rates, pre- and post-natal care, contraception, and abortion. She argues that “this vital component of women’s experiences—reproduction and the choices related to it—has been affected by environmental, political, and cultural factors in Arizona and the West during the course of the twentieth century” (178). With respect to environment, for example, birth attendants and caregivers in the state traveled vast expanses to reach patients in rural settings. Consider the difficulty of attending to the health needs of those living in isolated segments of the Navajo Reservation. Roughly 27,000 square miles wide, the reservation spanned over territory in three western states, including much of northeastern Arizona: this remote, expansive space was the challenge of public health nurse Mary Zillatus in the early 1950s. To access this often private world, Melcher included approximately thirty oral histories, memoirs, letters, photos, biographical collections, newspaper articles, and government documents. The result is a thorough examination of women’s health issues over a prolonged and often politically charged period, especially in the post-*Roe v. Wade* era.

Beginning with the period 1910–40, the first chapter focuses not only on process (birthing practices and the preponderance of midwifery), but also on differing cultural attitudes towards motherhood and controlling fertility, particularly among American Indians, Mexican Americans, African Americans, and Mormons. Although Melcher employs general terminology to describe the “Arizona women’s experience” (2), her study is mainly centered on the more-marginalized groups listed above. The author notes that “Euro-American families enjoyed greater privileges and public health information” (56); however, she provides little in the way of description or comparative analysis. I suspect this is because Melcher wants to concentrate on those left out of traditional histories. Further, the focus on American Indians and Mexican Americans helps to explain Arizona’s dismal infant mortality rates in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1922, Arizona’s rate was nearly double the national rate. While the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was charged with addressing the issue among native populations, the federal Sheppard-Towner Program was tasked with improving birth rates among Mexican Americans. Unfortunately, the program failed to effectually provide services to the state’s largest minority group by not properly staffing or providing proper training to midwives. During the New Deal, the federal government provided further medical outreach to those living in remote migratory camps through the Farm Security Administration.

Access to contraception expanded dramatically when Margaret Sanger—the face of the American birth control movement—moved to Arizona in the early 1930s. Sanger amassed a team of local volunteers, including Peggy Goldwater (wife to future senator, Barry Goldwater), to establish Planned Parenthood clinics in Tucson and Phoenix. Impeding the adoption of family planning practices among minority populations was both physical distance and cultural biases against

birth control. Tribal traditions and religious beliefs affected women's willingness to use contraception, especially the Navajos, Mexican Americans, and Mormons (although younger generations proved more open to birth control). Attitudes towards abortion in the state revealed deep cultural and religious fissures. Many of the latter chapters in the book focus on the abortion debate. Melcher opens chapter seven with the poignant retelling by Joanne Goldwater, daughter of Barry and Peggy, of her illegal and harrowing abortion in 1956. Indeed, it is the vignettes and personal stories strewn throughout this narrative that make this book special. While the author compares data with the neighboring states of New Mexico and Utah, there is no discussion of Texas. That said, Texas researchers will find useful comparative materials on reproduction amongst the Apaches, African American, and Mexican American populations in Arizona.

University of Texas-Pan American

LINDA ENGLISH

Mapping Wonderlands: Illustrated Cartography of Arizona, 1912–1962. By Dori Griffin. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013. Pp. 232. Illustrations, notes, appendix, index.)

“Cartographs” are “illustrated, narrative, not-to-scale maps intended for popular audiences” (7). In *Mapping Wonderlands*, Dori Griffin uses these maps and other popular ephemera to explain how place, identity, and history in Arizona were packaged and promoted to automobile tourists in the first fifty years of statehood. In seven chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, Griffin examines some of this selected imagery to suggest how illustrated maps can offer contemporary viewers insights into the cultural history and physical landscape of Arizona. While the scope of the book is a fascinating subject, the success of the work is problematic.

Mapping Wonderlands fits into the growing research about twentieth-century visual culture history. Illustrated maps like many other media forms have attracted scholarly attention because they help to unravel how imagery created a popular narrative about people and place. So-called cartographs are a specialized form of imagery that typically appeared in popular travel books, guidebooks, and promotional magazines and brochures. The maps can include symbolic and romanticized representations to illustrate themes like American Indian sites, Spanish colonial monuments, and other roadside icons potentially attractive to automotive tourists.

Griffin sets out by contextualizing Arizona's cartographic illustrations, perhaps the most useful chapter in her book. There is some discussion of the history of cartographs and a quite useful presentation about authors and artists (detailed in a biographical appendix) who created the illustrated maps. What follows are thematic chapters that explore identities, time, space, place, and cultural exoticism found in Arizona illustrated maps. These chapters are interesting on the one hand yet confusing on the other. While the author uses some 66 illustrations in the text, too often maps are described inconsistently, sometimes in excruciating detail but not illustrated, but more often they are not really analyzed in any meaningful way. When Griffin describes a map that is also an illustration in the text, there is frequently no corresponding discussion of what the description means and why or how it connects to the chapter theme. Further, there is considerable