



Frontiers of Femininity: A New Historical Geography of the Nineteenth-Century American West (Space, Place, and Society) (Space, Place and Society)

Karen M. Morin

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British explorer and aristocrat Isabella Bird is, to the modern eye, a study in contradictions. One of the premier mountaineers and world explorers of her generation, in 1892 she was the first woman elected to London's Royal Geographic Society. And yet Bird's books on her travels are filled with depictions of herself and other women that reinforce the "properly feminine" domestic and behavioral codes of her day.

In this fascinating and highly original collection of essays Karen Morin explores the self-expression of travel-writers like Bird by giving geographic context to their work. With a rare degree of clarity the author examines relationships among nineteenth century American expansionism, discourses about gender, and writings of women who traveled and lived in the American West in the late nineteenth century-British travelers, American journalists, a Native American tribal leader, and woman naturalists. Drawing from a rich diversity of primary sources, from published travelogues to unpublished archival sources such as letters and diaries, to newspaper reportage, Morin considers ways in which women's writing was influenced by the material circumstances of travel in addition to the various social norms that circumscribed female roles. Ranging in scale from the interior of train cars, and the homes of these women, to the colonial projects of conquering the American West, the author illustrates how geography was fundamental to the formation of women's identity and greatly influenced the gendered and colonialist language found in their writing.

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