

The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of The American West. Patricia Nelson Limerick. New York” W. W. Norton & Company, 1987. 396.

Patricia Nelson Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest* is a well constructed challenge to traditional frontier theory. She presents an intriguing new look at western America as a place of continuity and conquest. Limerick challenges the nationalist theory presented by Frederick Jackson Turner and his distant and singular point of view. She brings life to the west through her interpretation and synthesis of the complex views of the west. Limerick presents the history of the frontier, not as a stagnant topic ending with the conquest of the Pacific coast, but as an ever-evolving place.

One of Limerick’s themes throughout the book is the economically driven process of western expansion. Pioneers did not expand with the intent of malice or subjugation, their conquest was the product of economic interests. From the western settlement, conquering resources and the opportunities available to whites as they displaced the native populations, to the financial risks and gains associated with mining, farming, and more recently nuclear power and waste. Perhaps one of her most intriguing economic points is the western tradition of federal subsidies which also transcend the end of the frontier that Turner described, actually increasing in the 20th century. Many of Limerick’s points are still valid into the 21st century, including land speculation, economic success producing political power, and her assertion that property was the core of adventure. “The passion for profit was and is a passion like most others...It was the passion at the core of the western adventure” (p. 77).

Limerick refreshingly addresses the west as a more realistic place, with complex people who faced real hardships; she certainly does not present the traditionally romantic view of the western pioneer. Interestingly, she discusses the tendency of pioneers to view themselves as victims whenever misfortune confronts them. Aggrieved when they can’t continue west and

victims of poor harvests or non-producing mines, pioneers never saw themselves as villains even when they were ecologically destroying the land they were conquering. The conquest of nature was another of the continuities Limerick addresses. The difficulties of westerners in environmental conflict both with the land and with environmentalists are ongoing.

Limerick's most noticeable divergence from the nostalgic frontier tradition is her inclusion of all groups of the west. She covers, in a general manner, the women, Native Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese and Mormons, something previous historians had neglected. She presents the west as a place with inhabitants prior to white western expansion, as opposed to others who treated them as historically insignificant. The diverse meeting ground that she portrays provides every group a stake in the development of the west both past and present. Limerick does not retreat to the traditionally romantic view, but rather shows the white man's propensity to rank the races and always need someone to blame for any perceived misfortune or threat. Again she addresses continuity of the west, not ending with the settlement of the Pacific coast but continuing through the 20th century with Japanese Internment camps and Mormonism.

Limerick leaves her readers with several points that reflect the conflict of the modern west. Her descriptions of the legal battles being won by Native Americans provide a sort of poetic justice. She offers challenges to the traditional white interpretation by presenting the reader with intriguing concepts about Manifest Destiny and modern immigration into the southwestern United States. She also addresses the current state of racial conflict where all races and groups are more likely to see the stereotypes of each other rather than the individuals they are (p. 349). Perhaps, however, her most provocative statement comes from the last chapter

when she states that white America's "most popular origin myth concerns the frontier," (p.322).
However, this origin myth is one that she very soundly debunks with her interpretation.

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**Also, please note that the citation should be at the top of the paper using the same format as this sample.

SAMPLE REVIEW