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What, then, is the essence of this emerging way of looking at the western past? Preparing for a symposium called "Trails: Toward a New Western History" (held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in September 1989), one of the participants quite sensibly wrote me to ask what "New Western History" meant. In response, I wrote a summation, a one-page text that has had a prosperous career in copying machines and appears here in print for the first time:

New Western Historians define "the West" primarily as a place--the trans-Mississippi region in the broadest terms, or the region west of the

hundredth meridian. The boundaries are fuzzy because nearly all regional boundaries are.

New Western Historians do see a "process" at work in this region's history, a process that has affected other parts of the nation as well as other parts of the planet. But they reject the old term "frontier" for that process. When clearly and precisely defined, the term "frontier" is nationalistic and often racist (in essence, the area where white people get scarce); when cleared of its ethnocentrism, the term loses an exact definition.

To characterize the process that shaped the region, New Western Historians have available a number of terms—invasion, conquest, colonization, exploitation, development, expansion of the world market. In the broadest picture, the process involves the convergence of diverse people—women as well as men, Indians, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, Afro-Americans—in the region, and their encounters with each other and with the natural environment.

New Western Historians reject the notion of a clear cut "end to the frontier," in 1890, or in any other year. The story of the region's sometimes contested, sometimes cooperative, relations among its diverse cast of characters and the story of human efforts to "master" nature in the region are both ongoing stories, with their continuity unnecessarily ruptured by attempts to divide the "old West" from the "new West."

New Western Historians break free of the old model of "progress" and "improvement," and face up to the possibility that some roads of western development led directly to failure and to injury. This reappraisal is not meant to make white Americans "look bad." The intention is, on the contrary, simply to make it clear that in western American history, heroism and villainy, virtue and vice, and nobility and shoddiness appear in history (and with the same relativity of definition and judgment). This is only disillusioning to those who have come to depend on illusions.

New Western Historians surrender the conventional, never-very-convincing claim of an omniscient, neutral objectivity. While making every effort to acknowledge and understand different points of view, New Western Historians admit that it is OK for scholars to care about their subjects, both in the past and the present, and to put that concern on record.

Does all this add up to a revolution that should alarm westerners outside the ivory towers? A grumpy columnist for the *Arizona Republic* (October 23, 1989, p. A10), responding to news of the "Trails" conference, seemed to think so: "Why can't the revisionists simply leave our myths alone?" Phil Sunkel wrote. "Westerners—and most other Americans, for that matter—are quite content with our storied past, even if it tends to fib a bit." To this writer and others of his persuasion, the western public is composed of cheerful fools, people happy to deny their own lived experiences out of a preference for appealing and colorful legends.

My own experience, speaking to diverse public audiences around the West, leads to very different conclusions. Far from being a region filled with Hollywood's dupes and suckers, the American West in 1990 has a population well supplied with serious, concerned citizens, people doing the