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Review of *Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845-1910* by David M. Emmons

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Beyond the American Pale: The Irish in the West, 1845–1910. By David M. Emmons. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. viii + 472 pp. Tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

David Emmons's book on the *Butte Irish* (1989) helped begin a scholarly reassessment and investigation of the Irish experience in America, expanding it well beyond East Coast Irish communities and a few others in the Midwest. It had a significant impact on other scholars, myself included. His new book, which deals with the Irish experience in the "West," therefore, has been much anticipated. *Beyond the American Pale* will not disappoint those who have waited for Emmons's take on the larger picture of the Irish in the "West," although it may not be what many expect.

The book is not only a contribution to the study of the Irish in America, but has a great deal to say about the nature of the West, engaging key works from Frederick Jackson Turner to Patricia Limerick. Rather than look at the Irish in the West community by community, something the current literature really won't support, Emmons examines their experience at the macro scale through a variety of lenses. One of these is the scholarly debate on "whiteness" and the alleged process by which the Irish became white. Emmons does an effective job of showing the hollowness of the "how the Irish became white" trope when it confronts the reality of the Irish experience in America, especially in the West. Another of the lenses is religion, specifically Catholicism, which Emmons argues persuasively was a much more significant factor in how Irish were received than was race or ethnicity. Emmons is one of a number of scholars whose works suggest that religion, long downplayed by social historians, may need to be readmitted to the discussion along with race, gender, and class.

This is a book only a mature scholar could write. It brings together several discrete specialized

literatures in new and interesting ways. It argues its points with depth and breadth and with impressive evidence. Based on his own deep knowledge of the *Butte Irish*, a close reading of national-level census reports, as well as the literature on the Irish and other immigrant groups, and on the West as a region, Emmons has provided a framework for studying the experience of the Irish in the West that other scholars will be well advised to look to as a model for more detailed community studies.

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