
MURPHY, MARY. *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41*. Women in American History Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. Pp. xviii, 279. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$16.95 pb., \$39.95 cb.

In *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41*, Mary Murphy constructs an engaging, detailed, thoughtful tale of a town that defined itself through a tradition of hard work and hard play. Murphy's central arguments—that work structures and gender ideologies defined leisure practices and that conflicts over class, gender, and ethnicity were revealed and negotiated

through leisure activities—will not surprise most readers. However, her focus on a Western town built almost literally on a copper mine suggests some intriguing differences from the leisure culture we have become familiar with through the work of historians such as Elaine Tyler May, Roy Rosenzweig, Kathy Peiss, and David Nasaw. While the broad outlines of Murphy's sketch are familiar, Butte's version was sometimes rougher, a little behind the times, and less civic-minded.

Mining Cultures traces some familiar patterns in the history of gender roles, leisure culture, and community studies. Murphy's picture of Butte fits the popular rough-cut image of the West while suggesting that the city was more urban, more diverse, and in some ways more typical of the rest of the country than we might expect. This view of Butte as both similar to and different from the rest of the country is a central theme in the book. The leisure developments presented in *Mining Cultures* reflect trends we might associate with big cities of the period, but with a twist. Work patterns influence leisure practices; social activities are divided along ethnic, racial, and class lines; men and women jockey for the right to do as they please. But Butte's history as mining camp populated primarily by single men who did not plan to settle permanently shades these familiar patterns in interesting ways. Butte's single-male-oriented culture, a legacy of mining-town history, slowly gives way to a more family-oriented culture, yet the sense of Butte as a "wide open," rough-and-tumble place never fades entirely. That roughness surfaces in the continuing popularity of boxing and informal fighting, gambling, and drinking, activities the community did little to regulate. Women eventually gained increased economic opportunities, yet prostitution—another part of that mining camp legacy—appears to have had a bit more influence and even acceptability in Butte than in other cities. Social clubs flourished in Butte, but they failed to develop into the kind of community-building groups that other cities saw. Little was invested in public parks or arts programs, and it is significant that the only leisure pursuit that engaged the entire town was not a community-sponsored program but a commercial enterprise—the town's first radio station.

Mining Cultures offers a rich, detailed scrapbook of Butte history, and Murphy draws effectively on private writings, public documents, newspapers, photographs, and interviews to construct her tale. The sheer labor of gathering so much material suggests, quite appropriately, that the book's title might refer not only to life in Butte, Montana, but also to Murphy's own research process. One can almost imagine her digging and hauling cart after cart of valuable archival ore. The documentary evidence occasionally threatens to become tedious, though Murphy's strong storytelling skills usually rescue the material. She creates characters and atmosphere that help bring her sources to life and make the book enjoyable as well as informative.

Still, the evidence and the central story of *Mining Cultures* deserve more thorough analysis. In part because the patterns Murphy describes are already familiar to scholars of leisure culture and gender studies, the differences between Butte's cultural history and the similar but not identical histories of places like Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago could have been highlighted more forcefully. Murphy suggests that a study of Butte "can offer insights into the urban

development of many cities in the United States” (p. xiv), arguing that too much of the analysis of city life has been based on the largest cities rather than the smaller communities where most people lived. In the end, however, she appears to shy away from making any large claims about just what it is her study tells us about life in mid-size cities. She could have been more aggressive in identifying the insights of her work and the ways Butte’s cultural history might alter our understanding of urban leisure culture during the first half of the century. Without such an argument, *Mining Cultures* remains an excellent community study that would be valuable to those interested in the cultural history of Western mining towns, but for scholars of leisure culture and sporting experience, urban life, or American diversity, it offers a rich documentary history of one case study. In other words, *Mining Cultures* does what it does very well; it simply does not do enough.

—SHERRY LEE LINKON
Youngstown State University