terstate highway system, and the expansion of major-league baseball out of the northeastern quadrant of the United States into the southern and western states. “Town-team” baseball once meant a lot to millions of rural Americans, whose descendants now mostly live in and around cities. But as Vaught writes, “For country people, it served as the sport of choice, a powerful cultural agent, and, in the end, the true legacy of Abner Doubleday” (11).

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In a region whose history is almost inextricably intertwined with that of the Spanish Empire, it is easy to overlook the presence of other immigrants from the Iberian Peninsula in the history of the American West. Donald Warrin and Geoffrey L. Gomes attempt to correct this tendency in their recent study of Portuguese immigrants in the West. This account chronicles the lives and contributions of a variety of Portuguese settlers, ranging from fur traders in the early-nineteenth century to cattlemen, miners, shepherders, and even a playwright.

Beginning with an introduction that explores the historical context of Portuguese immigration to the New World and a chapter on Portuguese settlers who arrived prior to the Gold Rush, the book moves from state to state as each chapter investigates the diverse experiences of Portuguese settlers in a given area. The book’s geographic range is remarkable, especially given the exhaustive research that went into each chapter: in addition to amassing a voluminous selection of archival, newspaper, and government records, Gomes and Warrin have also interviewed dozens of descendants of Portuguese settlers. The result is a unique blend of narrative history, biography, and cultural anthropology, in which the authors skillfully use their subjects to tell larger stories about the American West while also shedding light on the immigrant experience. Sometimes this approach finds unheralded Portuguese settlers in the midst of climactic historical events, such as when John “Portuguese” Philips rushed to Fort Laramie with news of the Fetterman Fight in 1866. At other times the monograph reads like a family history or a pioneer who’s who, as it showcases a parade of notable immigrants, often bouncing from one standout individual
to the next.

These stories are also woven together by a larger narrative, summed up nicely in the conclusion, that illustrates both the unique challenges faced by Portuguese immigrants, as well as the cultural and old world experiential knowledge—the authors identify “dedication to the land, thrift, [and] business acumen” as essential “elements of the Portuguese immigrant-psyche”—that gave these newcomers a distinct advantage over other migrants in creating and adopting suitable land management practices, amassing land, and avoiding the vices of frontier life (137). But while the book does a fine job of highlighting the Portuguese experience in the West, its authors largely ignore the last several years of New Western scholarship, which might have helped the authors place the Portuguese experience into a richer, more dynamic context. Instead, the narrative is driven by a neo-Turnerian perspective (occasionally reinforced by quotations from Frederick Jackson Turner himself), which lauds the Portuguese for their achievements in America. Unfortunately, the authors forget that the smaller successes and individual failures of the majority of immigrants of any nationality are often invisible to historians, especially among the predominately illiterate Portuguese settlers who arrived in the West.

In any case, this book is a helpful and important contribution to the study of immigration in the West, and its discussion of Portuguese shepherders, ranchers, and farmers offers a new dimension for students of comparative farming cultures in the United States to consider. The Portuguese experience has long been overlooked in the American West, but Warrin and Gomes have done the necessary detective work to not only help correct this oversight, but to provide a cornerstone for future scholarship on this important yet often ignored segment of America’s immigrant population.

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