

Patricia Nelson Limerick (1951-)



Patricia Nelson Limerick is one of the nation's leading public intellectuals as well as a historian of the American West. Born in Banning, California she earned her Bachelor's Degree at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 1972. She then went on to complete her Ph.D. in American Studies at Yale University in 1980, where she wrote her dissertation under the direction of Howard Lamar. Her dissertation was published as her first book, *Desert Passages*, in 1985. After teaching at Harvard, Limerick headed back west to the University of Colorado, where she is a

Professor in the Department of History. While at Yale, Harvard, and the University of Colorado she also held the position of Official University Fool, a job she takes seriously as she reminded her students and colleagues to be intellectually adventurous and not to take themselves so seriously. Today she is also the Faculty Director and Chair of the Board of the Center for the American West.

Limerick is best known for her book, *Legacy of Conquest*, which clearly articulated the guiding ideas emerging out of the field of "New Western History." Limerick's engaging synthesis of this body of scholarship influenced the next generation of scholars who sought to better articulate the place of race, class, gender, and region within their work. The book helped to earn her numerous awards, including a MacArthur (Genius) grant in 1995.

In addition to *Legacy's* impact, her greatest contribution to the field of History of the American West, however, has been her presence as a public intellectual on a national stage. Not only does she have numerous and extremely engaging essays that have appeared in academic journals such as the *Journal of American History* and the *Western Historical Quarterly*, but she also has written prolifically for more popular publications such as the *Denver Post*, *USA Today*, and she had a turn as a guest Op-Ed contributor for *New York Times*.

Limerick is also known as one of the most engaging public speakers and for her ability to engage a wide of variety of constituents on both sides of the political spectrum. Few other conference organizers can boast of bringing together both Richard Lamm, former Democratic Governor of Colorado, and James G. Watt, former Secretary of Interior under Ronald Regan, in the same room talking about energy and land policy. Indeed, Limerick has become the public face of Western History in her ability to bring state, regional, and national leaders in discussions that impact the future of western peoples and resources.

Sources:

Center of the American West: <http://centerwest.org/about/patty/>

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