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Review of *Women on the North American Plains* edited by Renee M. Laegreid and Sandra K. Mathews

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Despite over thirty years having elapsed since Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, in “The Gentle Tamers Revisited,” called for new approaches to western women’s history, popular stereotypes of what constitutes a Great Plains woman remain deeply ingrained in the general public’s imagination. Although three decades of scholarship have slowly chipped away at the typecast, until recently no one piece has consolidated the diversity of women’s experiences within the Canadian and American Great Plains.

We should herald, therefore, the arrival of *Women on the North American Plains*. This long-needed collection delivers a powerful corrective to scholarship’s and popular imagery’s shortcomings. The contributors recognize that there was, and is, no all-inclusive Great Plains woman. Her characteristics have always varied; she did not live in a certain time or place, have a particular religion, belong to one race or ethnicity. She was not always married, or even heterosexual. There was, and is, no one type.

Underscoring the significance of space, editors Laegreid and Mathews effectively employ Great Plains maps as well as discussion to situate the collection geographically, avoiding the failure of some scholars to differentiate Great Plains spaces from the rest of the American West.

But where the authors’ contributions strengthen western women’s history, they also keep women of the Great Plains confined to the past. We hear little about the millions of contemporary women living in the American and Canadian Great Plains. What are the intricacies of life for Asian females in Winnipeg or in rural Kansas, for example? What are the experiences of Hispanic women living in the Southern and Northern Plains? Why are young adult females missing from many rural counties? How do different populations negotiate and experience the realities of domestic violence? Other disciplines—sociology, geography, economics—need to help fill...
the academic gap on the dynamics influencing contemporary Great Plains women. Other scholars, including historians, can likewise contribute by examining more recent times, like the 1980s and '90s.

The majority of the stories the collection’s contributors present are those of women living in rural areas—another stereotype, as the editors confess. Prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, most Plains women did live in rural areas. Sizeable urban centers, however, have existed in both the Canadian and American Plains since then; today, roughly half the region’s population resides in metropolitan areas. Learning more about how urban dynamics intersect with women’s lives remains a future research opportunity.

A refreshing, engaging, and necessary historical primer, *Women on the North American Plains* is also an updated echo of Jensen and Miller’s call for research. We continually need to improve our understanding of Great Plains women—to include even more voices and diversities of experiences, times, and places. *Women on the North American Plains* lays the groundwork for powerful works to come.

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