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Review of *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920* by Linda Williams Reese

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Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920. By Linda Williams Reese. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xviii + 366 pp. \$28.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

In *Women of Oklahoma*, Linda Williams Reese traces the experiences of African American, Native American, and white women from the creation of Oklahoma Territory in 1890 to the decade following statehood. Using a wealth of source material including diaries, letters, newspaper articles, oral histories, and census materials, Reese reconstructs the lives of Oklahoma women—offering a record of the past often overlooked in Oklahoma history prior to this important work.

Reese captures the variety of experiences among Oklahoma women across racial, ethnic, class, and regional lines. She points out, for example, that the land run experience was different for black women and white women. Even within black communities such as Langston or Boley, freedwomen and other black women settlers recorded different experiences. Reese's study includes women participating in Oklahoma's frontier process as homesteaders, community builders, politicians, clubwomen, educators, proprietors, missionaries, students, and mothers. She also studies Oklahoma women's activism on a national scale through the work of Kate Barnard, Alice Robertson, and Edith Johnson.

The most interesting comparison in the book concerns the responses to acculturation among Cherokee and Kiowa women. Beginning in 1851, an elite mixed-blood and full-blood Cherokee population attended the Cherokee National Female Seminary in Tahlequah, the educational program of which was based on the curriculum at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts. Reese views the Cherokee educational system with its emphasis on Victorian refinement as the "ultimate example" of acculturation. The Cherokee Female Seminary students, according to Reese, "combined the education and public activism of New England, the refined graces of the South, and access to the land and wealth of the West gained by virtue of their Indian blood." Kiowa women, in contrast, experienced firsthand the federal government's mismanaged reservation administration. Kiowa parents often withdrew their children from school because of severe disciplinary action such as whippings. Certain individuals such as Baptist missionary Isabel Crawford encouraged the Kiowas to reassert a degree of autonomy within the system of government-imposed acculturation. In her final assessment, Reese maintains that both the Cherokee and the Kiowa women worked as cultural preservationists.

The book's emphasis on storytelling, on anecdotes, is perhaps its greatest strength. What is sacrificed, however, is analysis. The reader moves from one anecdote to another without pause to consider the larger significance of women in Oklahoma history. A general audience will enjoy the anecdotes, but scholars may ask how these personal stories account for larger trends in the history of western women.

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