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Review of *Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women's History* Edited by Sarah Carter

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Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women's History. Edited by Sarah Carter, Lesley Erickson, Patricia Roome, and Char Smith. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2005. xii + 420 pp. Map, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95 paper.

Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West Through Women's History arose out of the same-named conference held at the University of Calgary in 2002. This edited collection brings together a broad spectrum of contributors and a variety of "modes of expression." The incorporation of region and gender is an ongoing theme; it is, as well, the "glue" that holds everything together throughout all of the articles. The major contribution of the book is the connection among gender, place, and the processes that shaped the diversity of women's experiences in the settlement of the Canadian West.

There is a broad range of articles, narratives, speeches, and biographies in the collection, including articles about Aboriginal women, black women, and pioneer women ranging from women we know very little about (e.g., Sarah Riel, Louis's sister) to well-known pioneers (e.g., Henrietta Muir Edwards). The majority of the articles are written from a feminist perspective offering us an in-depth analysis of how gender intersects with race, class, culture, or, in some instances, religion. The dominant positions, patriarchal assumptions, and the "feminine ideal" of urban middle-class British Canadians often clashed with the regional and material realities of women living on the prairies. The authors discuss how this often gave rise to "conflict, tensions and contradictions" in the lives of these pioneer women. Many of the authors have linked their

articles by commenting and incorporating references to the others in the book.

Several of the articles on Aboriginal women provide insight into the cultural and patriarchal assumptions and practices that underpinned their colonization. Kristin Burnett, for example, suggests that because of the presupposition of the "feminine ideal," Aboriginal women were thought only redeemable through their roles as mothers; otherwise they were dismissed. Other articles illustrate the subordination of non-Aboriginal women. Cristine Georgina Bye in her essay "I Think So Much of Edward" demonstrates this very well by analyzing the power relations within a patriarchal farm family. On the other hand, Aritha Van Herk's "Washtub Westerns" offers a humorous and insightful look at the hauling of water for the farm household, and Mary Leah de Zwart's "White Sauce and Chinese Chews: Recipes as Postcolonial Metaphors" includes an actual recipe for Chinese Chews.

This book would be an excellent text for a women's history class or a class in Women's Studies, while the general public with an interest in history would also find it enjoyable. It is divided into five parts, each focusing on a general area (e.g., culture, leadership, femininity), and most of the articles are followed by detailed endnotes. A number of engaging photos appear throughout, and there is an exceptionally rich bibliography. The book, with its new research, makes a valuable contribution to the literature on women, their history, and their lived experiences in western Canada.

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