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**Review of *Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919* By Jane E. Simonsen**

Susan Bernardin  
*State University of New York Oneonta*

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919.* By Jane E. Simonsen. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. xii + 266 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$59.95 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

While the fields of western women's history and American Indian history have flourished in recent years, rarely have the two been brought together in such fruitful fashion as in Simonsen's remarkable study, *Making Home Work*. As her title suggests, Simonsen takes as her subject "the deliberate, arduous, and often self-conscious production of domesticity" in western spaces of cross-cultural "encounter." In doing so, she dramatically extends previous scholarly attention to the centrality of "women's work" to both the broad "mission" of indigenous assimilation and the particular project of Native women's "uplift." This book pursues the workings of white women's domestic discourse in specific regions of the trans-Mississippi West, while also attending to how some Native women refused domestication in favor of their own domestic strategies aimed in part at "affirming indigenous identity."

Perhaps the book's greatest contribution is its thorough reworking of the very notion of "women's work," reconceiving it as dynamic and unstable, shaped by shifting—at times surprising—discourses of professionalization, social evolution, and scientific rationality. Taking Amy Kaplan's notion of "manifest domesticity" to less traveled spaces of western American studies, Simonsen argues that "domestic imperialism was mediated not only by gender and race hierarchies but by economics, material conditions, and class divisions." More specifically, she explores how a range of cultural texts, from model homes to visual

displays, from fiction and journalism to photographs and field reports, yields conflicting visions of domestic power and authority. In its flexible and capacious conceptualization of "women's work," *Making Home Work* skillfully conjoins the most conventionally understood site of labor—the home—with less obvious arenas of artistic production and activism. In doing so, this study demonstrates the messy work of "civilization" while underscoring the challenges of Native women making themselves "at home" within often ill-fitting cultural practices.

It is commonly understood that middle-class white women found new venues of professional opportunity and moral authority in the spaces "provided" by Native dispossession. In six chapters, Simonsen furnishes crucial contexts for this paradoxical history, from the advocacy work of the Women's National Indian Association to regionally focused "contact zones" of domesticity. In her first two chapters, she turns to undertheorized ground: the literary and journalistic productions of white Iowan women. From Carolyn Soule's literary appropriation of indigenous history in her 1860 novel *The Pet of the Settlement* to feminists' appropriation of racially divisive rhetoric in the periodical *Woman's Standard*, Simonsen centers Iowa as a crucial site of instruction for the changing production of domesticity.

In subsequent chapters she focuses on three women: Jane Gay, whose photographs offer a "less tidy" view of indigenous domestication and land allotment among the Nez Perce; Anna Dawson Wilde, a Hampton-educated Arikara whose work as a field matron at Fort Berthold reservation in North Dakota was contested by tribal members; and Angel DeCora, Ho-Chunk artist and teacher at Carlisle Indian School whose efforts included creating "an

empowering space for Native American work within American culture.” These highly engaging chapters offer us a “fuller sense of the social and material situations that shaped women’s work in an imperial era.” *Making Home Work* is a stunning example of making “new” western studies work.

SUSAN BERNARDIN  
Department of English  
State University of New York Oneonta