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## Review of *Land of Many Hands: Women in the American West* By Harriet Sigerman

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*Land of Many Hands: Women in the American West.* By Harriet Sigerman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Introduction, illustrations, further reading, index. 188 pp. \$24.95.

Harriet Sigerman attempts to synthesize recent scholarship on women in the American West into a narrative history. The product of her efforts is a visually attractive book that will undoubtedly appeal to general readers. For scholars, however, it falls short of offering a new interpretation of women's history in the American West.

In her opening chapter Sigerman discusses Native American women's traditional roles, the arrival of the Spanish into the West and their effect on the Native population, and the impact of Anglo-American settlement on Native American and Spanish/Mexican women. With so much to cover in one chapter, she tends to generalize about Native American women's roles and presents surprisingly little information about Spanish/Mexican women.

The subsequent six chapters are organized thematically: the mosaic of westward migra-

tion, life on the Overland Trail, homemaking on the frontier, making a life on the frontier, western women at work, and building new communities. Although Sigerman does stitch non-white women's experiences throughout these chapters, they appear as little more than token figures patchworked into her larger narrative. White women remain the central actors throughout the book, which opens with a vignette regarding a white woman's journey to the West in 1848. Of the more than sixty illustrations, depictions of white women and westward migration predominate. Thus Sigerman's narrative takes on the character of what one colleague and I call "wagonwheels-and-sunbonnets" western women's history.

Sigerman also seems to accept Frederick Jackson Turner's view that the history of the West is the story of "western expansion" and its role in building the nation's destiny and character, merely adding women to the script: "the dramatic story of westward expansion is also the story of the women—Indian, Hispanic, white, African-American, European, and Asian—who helped to settle the West and shape the course of American history." Such a narrative does not work well in explaining the lives of women in the West, particularly non-white women.

Perhaps these shortcomings are simply a result of the book's timing, published as it was the same year or just before several path-breaking studies of western women's history that could have provided Sigerman with more source material on non-white women. Whatever the case, it still remains for a historian to write a history of women in the American West that shuns tokenizing non-white women and creates a narrative more meaningful and encompassing than "wagonwheels and sunbonnets."

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