

and it is recommended to those interested in the challenges facing those working with Aboriginal pasts. It is not recommended to those unfamiliar with existing histories nor those seeking an introduction to the subject of the Mikmaq past.

Notes

- 1 For an extensive review of existing literature on Native history in the Atlantic region see Ralph Pastore, "Native History in the Atlantic Region During the Colonial Period," *Acadiensis* 20, no. 1 (fall 1990): 200-225.
- 2 Calvin Martin, "The Metaphysics of Writing Indian-White History," in *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, edited by Calvin Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 27-34.

Sarah Carter. *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997.

review by Dorinda M. Stahl

While many historians continue to grapple with what approach to take regarding the culmination of gender and race, others seem to be making significant strides forward in their attempts at understanding Canada's social and cultural past.¹ Such is the case with Sarah Carter's most recent publication, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*. The work, which primarily focuses on the images of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in the early settlement period, examines the necessity of appreciating these "orchestrated" images of women as inextricably linked binary pairs.

Carter's thesis works well on many levels. First, there is her discussion of white femininity as a racialized category. She suggests that the notion of the "virtuous woman settler" and the "vulnerable, frail and meek woman" is a label constructed to meet the needs of the dominant culture, and that this construction gives credence to the place of women in the prairie west. However, her discussion of white femininity does not end here. Carter maintains that in order to fully comprehend the image of the "Victorian-like" woman on the plains, it is crucial to appreciate the image with which this was, and continues to be, juxtaposed. That is the image of the Aboriginal woman. Carter reiterates the three images that have dominated literature: "the Princess," "the drudge" and "the whore." She suggests that it was these images that not only degraded the position of women in

Aboriginal society, but also, and evidently most importantly, inflated the image of non-Aboriginal women in their own society. The University of Calgary historian adds that, in fact, it was the image of the Aboriginal woman that provided the foundation for the image of "other." Aboriginal women simply reinforced the "colonial ideal."

Carter also relates this discussion to Catherine Hall's work with respect to community. She suggests that comparing the images of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women not only creates icons and reference points, but also aids in establishing the ideology of "the community." She quotes Hall as stating that "the process of representing symbolically the sense of belonging which draws people together into an 'imagined community' and at the same time defines who does not belong or is excluded from it."

However, *Capturing Women* is not without shortcomings. While the thesis and argument of the book seem to be groundbreaking in relation to studying the link between the images of non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal women, the book covers all the seemingly important issues in the first chapter, "Defining and Redefining Women." Although chapter five, "In Sharp Relief – Representations of Aboriginal Women in the Colonial Imagination," offers some insight into the development and contribution of Aboriginal Women and the social construction of colonialism, the rest of the book is lacking in similar revelations. Carter states in her introduction that "This study focuses on the representations of women more than on what women actually did"; however, she does not seem to follow through with that promise. The majority of the book focuses on stories of women, in particular Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, and their role in the Frog Lake incident. This sort of detail takes away from the emphasis on image.

Carter also misses an opportunity to examine visual images of the period. Although her work does include some photographs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women, Carter does not weave them into her discussion of imagery. It seems obvious that in order to fully understand the constructed image of women, it would be only natural to engage not only in literary imagery but in visual imagery as well. A diversity of perspectives is also absent. Although Carter does state that her work is intended to shed light on the perception of women held by dominant society, it would have been instructive to have at least peeked at images of women held by "non-dominant" society. What were Aboriginal communities' images of Aboriginal women and what were their views with respect to non-Aboriginal women? This sort of examination would have provided further balance to her work.

Finally, the book avoids a specific link between the construction of images and the reification into stereotypes. How were these images adopted

into the dominant society's conscience? At what point were the images, as it were, "made real"? This sort of exploration would have provided much needed insight into the area of historical imagery and the link to present-day popular culture and addressed the ever-pressing question: have the images really changed?

Nevertheless, *Capturing Women* is well worth the read. As we enter the next millennium, it will be works such as Carter's that will provide a springboard from which increasingly complicated interpretations of the past can be launched.

Note

- 1 I would like to thank Dr. Steven Hewitt and Moira Harris for their suggestions on an earlier draft of this review.