

the humanist perspective, would better understand the context within which booster literature was written and consumed. It would also grant pioneer memoirists some humanity. Their reminiscences are more than pinched, narrow didacticism designed to preach musty truths to the young in order to enhance and preserve their own power and status. The pioneers were actors in a tremendous human drama. They have stories to tell us—stories that can educate, inspire, or warn. Memoirists stand as witnesses to what went before; over time they use their human faculties to assess, analyze, and understand their own experiences as well as the larger picture of which they are a part. To understand them this way does not preclude harsh judgments of their actions and justifications when such judgments are warranted. It does, however, require some sense of identification with them as fellow human beings, and some acknowledgment that all human beings, in all times and places, are a complex mixture of good and bad.

Many scholars will like Wrobel's book, and everyone interested in questions of identity and myth in the West should read it. The author does try to be fair, in ways that other social science-oriented scholars sometimes do not, by pointing out "a diversity of opinion" (180) on race among the pioneers and by cautioning against one-dimensional thinking about the past. May his efforts start a trend.

*Kansas and the West: New Perspectives*, edited by Rita Napier. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003. viii, 424 pages. Illustrations, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

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*Kansas and the West* is a collection of essays on Kansas history drawing on topics that fall outside the "traditional" history of the West. Through the collection and editorial introductions, the editor intends to demonstrate the complexity of human life and relations in a frontier that is traditionally simplified into the "Wild West" of popular lore.

Napier introduces the collection with an overview, published first as an essay in *Kansas History*, of the themes that recent scholarship has elevated in reassessing the contours of Kansas history. The book then conveniently packages the full text of significant articles used to construct her thesis that traditional histories (those published before 1970) left out a lot of marginalized people. These essays are grouped into three roughly chronological periods that suggest some unifying themes.

Part one focuses on the convergence of diverse Euro-American people with Native Americans. The most distinctive piece here is Elliott

West's "The Story of Three Families," deftly comparing the experiences of families across a seven-century span in resettling the central plains. Part two attempts to capture the complexity of development from the forging of the Kansas Territory in racism and blood to the stresses of modern technology. Napier struggles to find a common topic here, but the essays do maintain a conceptual theme of complexity and conflict. The third section of the book deals with twentieth-century Kansas. Again, conflict stemming from race, class, gender, and use of resources continues to reveal the theme.

The book's greatest merit is its breadth, covering topics from plains tribal life dating back seven centuries to beef packing in the 1980s. Here then is an excellent example of "frontier" history, broadly defined, offering a view of Kansas history as wide as the state's horizon while driving yet another stake in the heart of the still lumbering mythology of the Old Western frontier that persists in popular history—one that continues to oversimplify the sources of conflict in the West. Napier does, however, oversell the notion that this is a "new" history. Given that some of the articles here were written almost three decades ago, they hardly raise eyebrows as startling discoveries. Certainly many of the pieces are of far more recent scholarship and do expose niches of history that bear more scrutiny. "New" or not, the collection draws together an excellent set of pieces on Kansas history that, along with much of the substantial catalog of the University Press of Kansas, builds a more complete history.

In doing so *Kansas and the West* reveals the dilemma raised by the plea of Alvin Gouldner and Gene Wise over two decades ago for scholarship that, rather than accumulating new bits of information, seeks to synthesize the information into a new analysis that will help us understand American culture more fully. A thesis that includes the claim that too much has been left out as it is makes synthesis even more problematic. Although the scattered studies represented by the essays in this collection are perhaps not new in their suggestion that people have been left out of our history, our attempts to synthesize them all into something meaningful is still in its youth and growing more difficult all the time. For historians, the challenge, then, is to find in the complexity of human experience unifying themes. Alone, each of the articles printed in this collection would fail to do this. Fortunately, *Kansas and the West* provides an excellent model, applicable to other areas of the Midwest, for how they can collectively make sense. Unfortunately, Napier's collection reveals that even in what might appear to be the simplest of geographic and cultural environments, the only constant in the complexity seems to be conflict.

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