



Landscapes of the New West: Gender and Geography in Contemporary Women's Writing (Cultural Studies of the United States)

Krista Comer

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In the early 1970s, empowered by the civil rights and women's movements, a new group of women writers began speaking to the American public. Their topic, broadly defined, was the postmodern American West. By the mid-1980s, their combined works made for a bona fide literary groundswell in both critical and commercial terms. However, as Krista Comer notes, despite the attentions of publishers, the media, and millions of readers, literary scholars have rarely addressed this movement or its writers.

Too many critics, Comer argues, still enamored of western images that are both masculine and antimodern, have been slow to reckon with the emergence of a new, far more "feminine," postmodern, multiracial, and urban west. Here, she calls for a redesign of the field of western cultural studies, one that engages issues of gender and race and is more self-conscious about space itself--especially that cherished symbol of western "authenticity," open landscape. Surveying works by Joan Didion, Wanda Coleman, Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, Barbara Kingsolver, Pam Houston, Louise Erdrich, Sandra Cisneros, and Mary Clearman Blew, Comer shows how these and other contemporary women writers have mapped new geographical imaginations upon the cultural and social spaces of today's American West.

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