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Karen Ward Mahar. *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood.* Studies in Industry and Society Series. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. 304 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8436-8.

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Fron Girls on/behind Film to the Big Business Film Boys

In April 1896, the audience at Koster and Bial's Music Hall in New York City witnessed the first projected motion pictures in the United States. By the mid-1910s, this technological novelty had evolved into one of the nation's most lucrative industries. The rise of the film industry is a story oft told. Yet historians typically have omitted the part women played during this transitional period both on screen and off. Karen Ward Mahar fills in this gap in the historiography by examining the significant role of women in the U.S. film industry between 1908 and 1916, and the subsequent marginalization of women in the post-WWI period within the larger context of early twentieth-century American business history.

Mahar, an associate professor of history at Siena College, New York, divides the book into two broad chronological sections. Following a prologue that considers the birth of motion pictures as a scientific invention (read masculine) at the turn of the twentieth century, part 1 covers the period of Progressive-Era uplift when women became active in the film industry. During the nickelodeon boom (1905-7), storefront theaters that showed a continuous rotation of short films, Progressive-Era reformers alleged that the nickel theaters, along with the films they screened, engendered a corruptive influence on working-class audiences, particularly women and children, and, therefore, clamored for censorship and regulation. In response to its critics, the film industry strove to elevate its craft by moving to longer films and establishing legitimate exhibition venues. As Shelley Stamp shows in *Movie-Struck Girls* (2000), women, who were widely seen as a positive moral influence, played an important role in the attempt to achieve middle-class respectability as spectators and fans.

Mahar adds to this argument by further demonstrating that in the years following the demise of the nickelodeon, women were not only avid consumers of films but also a creative force within the industry. Though women had worked in various capacities during the nickelodeon period, as box office cashiers, theater manager/owners, and actors, the evolving film industry of the 1910s offered women novel opportunities both in front of the camera, due to the emergence of the star system, and behind the scenes as directors, producers, scenarists, and editors. In addition to discussing the more familiar women filmmakers of the period, including Mary Pickford, Nell Shipman, and Mabel Normand, Mahar restores to historical memory such forgotten women as Lois Weber, Alice Guy Blaché, Gene Gauntier, Grace Cunard, and Clara Kimball Young. According to Mahar, the public profile of these New Women smashed the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, while the commercial success of athletic, plucky, and comedic serial queens challenged conventional notions of proper feminine behavior. The author, however, is careful not to position this period as one free of sexism and discrimination. She maintains that it was easier for men to find work as directors and producers than it was for women. Moreover, women star-producers often worked in partnerships with men. When these relationships ended, the tendency was for the woman's career to fail while the man transitioned to other projects.

By the mid-1920s, it had become increasingly difficult for women to find work in creative and managerial capacities in the film industry. In part 2, covering 1916-28, Mahar discusses the rise of the studio system, a vertically integrated oligopoly of five major and three minor studios, which resulted in the marginalization of women and the concomitant remasculinization of filmmaking. This novel business model contrasted the earlier collaborative structure of the film industry. Due to the influence of Progressive-Era professionalization and scientific management techniques, filmmaking had become not only regimented, hierarchical, and departmentalized, but also characterized by sex-segregated work roles; with only

a few exceptions, the tasks of directing, producing, and editing were relegated to men. Mahar, thus, connects the disappearance of opportunities for women in the film industry to preexisting patterns in modern American business. She writes, "the industry shifted away from the goal of cultural legitimacy … toward a model that prized business legitimacy. This shift ultimately marginalized the woman filmmaker" (p. 133).

Overall, Mahar's case is convincing, though I found the first part stronger than the second. Regardless, throughout the text, Mahar's argument is buoyed by careful research and a sound methodology, which is a combination of feminist theories on the gendering of work and historical analysis on the culture of American business in general and the film industry in particular. As such, the monograph nicely fits within the Studies in Industry and Society series, edited by Philip B. Scranton and published with the assistance of the Hagley Museum and Library. Her prose is clear and absent of jargon. Moreover, she provides enough context for those who may be unfamiliar with film history, which makes *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* accessible to undergraduates or nonspecialists in the field. This title will undoubtedly appeal to H-SHGAPE readers interested in learning about filmmaking during the Progressive Era and the role of women amid changing business ideologies in the early twentieth century. My only regret is that Mahar did not include a filmography!

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