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*The University of Montana*

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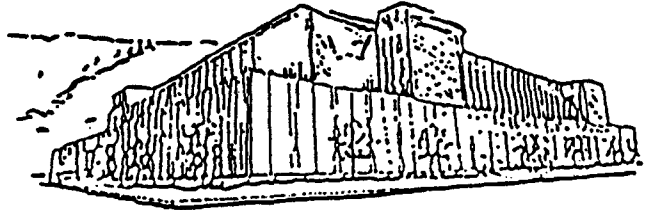
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**TEACHING WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE AMERICAN WEST:  
A GUIDE TO INCLUDING WOMEN IN THE  
HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY CURRICULUM**

by

Emily Leary

B.A. Ithaca College, 1995

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

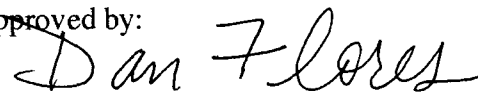
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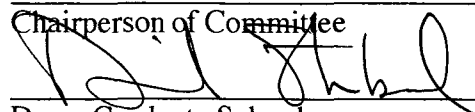
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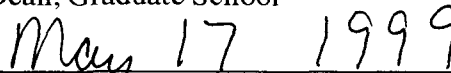
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History

"Teaching Women's Voices in the American West" (54 pp.)

Director: Dan Flores *DF*

The history of women on the American Frontier has been in revision since the late-1970s. Historians are working on overturning the myth that women were passive, non-important, non-industrious, unhappy participants in the settling of the West. Gender roles are being reinterpreted to include women as forces that shaped and guided the West. This scholarship has demonstrated that women took advantage of the opportunities afforded to them to step outside their traditionally prescribed spheres of influence. Women were active in business, mining, ranching, homesteading, law, medicine, and politics. Many women continued to perform their domestic duties but they added activities such as these to their resumes in an effort to direct their own lives.

Although the scholarship on women has greatly improved in the last 15 years, high school textbooks have not kept pace. An analysis of 13 high school textbooks indicated that women were largely non-existent in sections related to the American frontier. Occasionally women made cameo appearances in supplementary sections; however, these sections serve more to separate than to include women. Through the use of this paper on the revision of Western history, high school teachers will find the means to update their knowledge of women's roles on the frontier and incorporate women's lives into their curriculum.

The best way to make the history of the frontier more inclusive is through women's own voices. This professional paper includes new secondary lesson plans that take advantage of the new gender scholarship to direct teachers mainly to narrative history resources that make women's voices heard and outline methods for using them. Through a variety of cooperative learning activities, selected readings, directed questioning, photographs and videos, students can be exposed to women's lives on the frontier in a way that portrays them as lively, integral participants in the settling of the West. This paper makes an effort to place this new knowledge in the hands of history teachers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Section

1. Textbook Analysis: <i>Where Are All The Women?</i> .....	p. 1
2. <i>Redefining Women's Roles on the American Frontier</i> .....	p. 7
3. Lesson Plans: <i>Giving Western Women a Voice in the Classroom</i> .....	p. 39
4. Bibliography .....	p. 51

## *Where Are All The Women?*

Many teachers base their daily teaching activities around the basic textbook. The problem with this reliance on the textbook is the skeletal look at history students receive. With an impressionistic approach, I surveyed thirteen textbooks actually in use throughout the United States. I examined the books to determine the extent to which women were included in the section of the book that covered the history of the American West, a field undergoing much revision as a result of scholarly trends in social and environmental history. I found that by and large women were under-represented and in some cases non-existent. Because of this limited inclusion of women it is important for teachers to use the textbook as a reference, and to supplement it with primary and more up-to-date secondary sources. The limited inclusion of women need not be an insurmountable problem. Teachers can present a more complete history of the American West by including the voices of women in the West.

The primary and secondary sources outlined in the essay that follows this brief text review are narrative in nature. Narrative history helps teachers provide the human dimension of of the discipline. A good story can hook students' interest in a topic and help them remember the factual information because they have a context for that information. Stories ensure there will be something to think about and analyze. They help establish a sense of time and place and to make the historical connections among historical events. History is not a list of names, dates and events; rather, it is a series of stories that when collected and interpreted tell the story of real peoples real lives in the past.

Three of the 13 books (23%) left women out entirely. John A. Garraty's, A Short History of the American Nation, slips information on the frontier under the chapter heading "In the Wake of War" (p. 283). His sub-titles include: "Issues of the Gilded Age," "The West after the Civil War," "The Plains Indians," "The Destruction of Tribal



Life," "Exploiting Mineral Wealth in the West," "The Land Bonanza," "Western Railroad Building," "The Cattle Kingdom," "Open-Range Ranching," and "Barbed-Wire Warfare." Women could easily have been included under these topics. Not only was there no mention of women specifically, but there was no mention of families, which implies women's presence.

Irwin Unger's, These United States: The Questions of Our Past, also neglects women. His chapter heading is more specific to the West than Garraty's, "The Trans-Missouri West: Another Colony"(p.515). In this chapter, Unger breaks down the West into the following sub-titles: "Settlement In the Last West," "Indians in the Last West," "The Mining Frontier," "The Cattle Kingdom," "Western Land Policies," "Farming in the Last West," "Farm Discontent," and "Western Revolt." The mining section mentions communities, implying women, but it does not discuss women's roles directly. In "Farming in the Last West," a picture of a woman by Harvey Dunn is included. The picture is of a woman dragging an ox by a rope through a field. She looks haggard and sad as she looks off at something in the distance, perhaps a plow and a house. A hawk hovers overhead against a background of brown fields and gray skies. It is a desolate place. The caption indicates that this picture alone is enough to put women into the picture of Western settlement. There is no other reference to women.

A third book that neglects women is Matthew T. Downey, James R. Geise and Fay D. Metcalf's, United States History In the Course of Human Events. Downey, like Garraty, throws the frontier in with other issues that can obscure the uniqueness of the settlement of the American West. His chapter heading is "The Nation Transformed"(p. 428). Under this wide sweeping heading he discusses: "The Railroad Era," "The Growth of Industry," and "The Industrial Workforce," before getting to the "Frontiers of America," which includes the "Mining Frontier," the "Cattlemen's Frontier," "Farmers," and finally the "Closing of the Frontier." The only mention of women in the whole

chapter is under the "Industrial Workforce" as "women and children" in the work place, set in Eastern factories.

The other 10 books do a better job including women. However, only two or three deserve praise for doing a good job of integrating women into the history of the West. Most of these texts include at least one picture that depicts a woman in front of a sod house surrounded by her family. "Family" was the word used most often to imply that women were involved in the West. "Community" was the second most common indication of women's presence without actually directly acknowledging women.

Women were mentioned most under headings such as "Farm Life on the Plains" or the "Cattle Frontier." Women were essential to the success of a homestead not only for their household duties and child-rearing but also for their help in the fields. On the cattle frontier women were known for taking in boarders and opening restaurants. Women married to ranchers also did their share of fence-mending and herding in addition to the usual housework and cooking. One textbook did make a point of including a picture of three sisters branding cattle on their own ranch.

Women were most represented under the heading "prostitutes." Most books contained some information on women's roles as prostitutes in mining towns. These women often enjoyed a lucrative business but not a high social status. Whatever status they had diminished significantly when husbands brought their wives to the camps or booming towns.

One of the better texts, Pathways to the Present, by Andrew Cayton, Elisabeth Israels Perry and Allan M. Winkler, had a good section on myth versus reality. It discussed the allure of the West to the adventurous man but also pointed out that adventurous women were drawn there, too. It indicated that although many women went reluctantly and suffered from separation from family and friends, others thrived in the West.

The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society, by Gerald B. Nash, Julie Roy Jeffrey, John R. Howe, Peter J. Frederick, Allen F. Davis and Allan M. Winker, is another good text for women's history in the West. It includes women's diaries from the overland trail (Julie Roy Jeffrey's influence, to be sure) and notes that migration was mostly a family experience, in which the division of responsibility by gender broke down as the journey wore on. The inclusion of women and the depiction of life for both men and women is more realistic than in most other textbooks.

The best text I examined was, The Enduring Vision, by Paul S. Boyer, et. al.. This text discussed women from different class levels and ethnic backgrounds, particularly Hispanic women. There is nice balance between women who wanted to be in the West and those who went unwillingly. The only problem with this text is the language used to describe some women's experiences. It is biased toward women suggesting that all were uncomfortable on the frontier.

I noticed frequently an unbalanced description of life in the West. For women, life was "drudgery", "dreary", "lonely." They lived in fear of centipedes and scorpions and Indians. One book referred to quilting as a relaxing activity for women, but did not mention that often that it was a necessity. These terms are not used when describing men's experiences in the West. Even when women wrote about the toll the frontier took on their husbands it was not the same; men were too tough to find life as terrible as women supposedly did. Few of the texts recognized that, while women's diaries often described the trials and death they dealt with almost daily, many more spoke of the adventure and excitement their new life brought them.

Several texts had special supplementary sections on women. These sections usually included excerpts from women's diaries. This sort of "inclusion" has the potential of doing more harm than good. The "specialness" of the topics in these supplementary sections marginalizes women as if they were an afterthought or an "oh, by the way...."

They usually highlight individuals or events in a way that makes it hard for students to see them as an integral part of history.

Teachers of the history of the American West face a challenging task. Many teachers are working with textbooks that fail to do justice to women in the West. The books underestimate the importance of women, their survival and success. Recognizing the incomplete picture they are working with is half way to the solution; incorporating women into their teaching as integral active participants in the West is the other half. The following section will help to give women a voice on the frontier. The essay is an introduction to the revised scholarship on women's presence in the West. It is followed by lesson plans that will supplement teachers plans for exploring the story of the American West.

#### Textbooks Surveyed

Boyer, Paul S.; Clark, Clifford E., Jr.; Kett, Joseph F.; Salisbury, Neal; Sitkoff, Harvard; and Woloch, Nancy. The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1993.

Cayton, Andrew; Perry, Elisabeth Israels; and Winkler, Allan M. America: Pathways to the Present. Needham: Prentice Hall, 1998.

Downey, Matthew T.; Giese, James R.; and Metcalf, Fay D. United States History In the Course of Human Events. New York: West Publishing Company, 1997.

Garraty, John A. A Short History of the American Nation. 6th ed. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1993.

Nash, Gerald B.; Jeffrey, Julie Roy; Howe, John R.; Frederick, Peter J.; Davis, Allen F.; and Winkler, Allan M. The American People Creating a Nation and a Society. 2nd ed. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Unger, Irwin. These United States: The Questions of Our Past. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1995.

#### Textbooks examined but not mentioned

Brinkley, Alan. The Unfinished Nation, A Concise History of the American People. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.

Boorstin, Daniel J.; Kelly, Brooks Mather; and Boorstin, Ruth Frankel. A History of the United States. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1992.

Boyer, Paul. The American Nation. Orlando: Holt-Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1995.

Davidson, James West; Gienapp, William E.; Heyrman, Christie Leigh; Lytle, Mark; Stoff, Michael B. A Nation of Nations: A Narrative History of the American Republic. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.

Faragher, John Mack; Buhle, Mari Jo; Czitron, Daniel; Armitage, Susan H. Out of Many: A History of the American People. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1997.

Murrin, John M.; Johnson, Paul E.; McPherson, James M.; Gerstle, Gary; Rosenberg, Emily S.; and Rosenberg, Norman L. Liberty Equality Power A History of the American People. Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1996.

Norton, Mary Beth; Katzner, David M.; Descott, Paul; Chudacoff, Howard; Paulson Thomas G.; and Tuttle, William M., Jr. A People and a Nation: A History of the United States. 5th ed. New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998

### *Redefining Women's Roles in the American West*

The history of the American West is often construed through myths and misunderstandings. The heroes and legends of the wild West depicted in literature and on television or movie screens uphold the image of the "hisland" frontier. The West is largely represented as a male domain. It is a place that fails to acknowledge the presence of women.

Somewhere amongst all the falsities and semi-truths of the women's role in the West lies the truth. The cult of domesticity, easily upheld on the East Coast, placed women in the West in a position to be "gentle tamers" and "helpmates"--the bearers of civilization. Women on the frontier accepted the role prescribed for them by the cult of domesticity, but some wanted more and therefore sought to enter the man's sphere of influence. Women took advantage of the economic and social opportunities offered to them in the West in both rural and urban areas.

In the West there were fewer barriers to autonomy. Women were central to life in the West not just as "gentle tamers," as they were historically represented, but as influential players in daily life. Women ran businesses, schools, ranches, and established their own homesteads. Western women demonstrated a will to direct their own lives to an extent that was unusual for the majority of women of their time.

Prior to the mid-1970s women in the West were portrayed in three major images. The first image was the prostitute, better known as the "soiled dove" or "fallen" woman. The "gentle tamer" pioneer woman who lived out the cult of domesticity as a "carrier of civilization" was the second image. The third and final image was the tough, sometimes "beaten," pioneer woman who lived out the cult of domesticity but was unable to thrive.

Twentieth century historians reinforced these stereotypes by interpreting the West as a male domain in which women played a subordinate, nearly invisible role. Frederick

Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" conspicuously lacked women. His pioneers were male trappers, ranchers, miners, and farmers. There was no indication of women being even remotely involved in the process of advancing the frontier. The traits Americans attributed to the frontier experience were not used in reference to women: "coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive frame of mind....that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism....."<sup>1</sup> Successive generations of historians defined the West almost exclusively in masculine terms. Women were ignored, T.A. Larson suggests, because they "did not lead expeditions, command troops, build railroads, drive cattle, ride Pony Express, find gold, amass great wealth, get elected to high public office, rob stages, or lead lynch mobs."<sup>2</sup> These were the activities that built the West. Larson continues: "[i]f, occasionally a woman did such things, she was not a woman in the true sense of the word but an exception, an aberration, a masculine rather than a feminine participant."<sup>3</sup>

Twenty years of scholarship has begun to overturn the pervasive view of male dominance in the story of the frontier--westward migration, taming the land, and productive settlement. Gender roles of the Western experience are being reinterpreted to include women as forces that shaped and guided the settling of the West. Women took advantage of the opportunities afforded to them in the West to step outside their traditionally prescribed spheres of influence. They continued to perform their domestic duties; however, they added business activities, ranching, and homesteading to their resumes.

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History ed. George Rogers Taylor (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1972), p. 27. In recent years the significance of the word frontier has greatly diminished, due to the argument that it is anglo-centric. Richard White's textbook, "It's your misfortune and none of my own" is the major text now used in college course on the American West; in 700 pages the word frontier does not appear once.

<sup>2</sup>T.A. Larson, "Women's Role in the American West," Montana, The Magazine of Western History 24 (Summer 1974): 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

The study of women in the West helps to define the West as a *place* and not just a *process*. Women were vital to the settling of the West due to the fact that the region was not settled solely by "rugged individuals" but rather by families and communities. Without women the social constructs that hold people together would not have been created and the West would not be what it is today. An excellent starting point for study of this topic is the book, The Women's West, edited and with introductions by Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson. This book aims to correct the inaccurate interpretation of Western history formerly based on the myth that, men won the West, but women meekly followed behind. The essays in this compilation emphasize the inclusion of women as integral active participants in the settling of the West.<sup>4</sup>

The West offered economic opportunities for women in land ownership, politics, business management, and prostitution. Unlike the women who came to the mining towns to "civilize" the men and the community and to rejoin their husbands, who had gone before them to secure suitable housing, "fallen women" went with the intent to "profit from vice."<sup>5</sup> Mining camps were especially profitable for prostitutes, as the gender ratio of males to females was greatly lopsided in favor of the men. Prostitutes took full advantage of the ready market in the mining towns. Julie Roy Jeffrey in her book, Frontier Women, discusses the social acceptance of prostitutes in mining towns. She mentions their public behavior that brought them the respect and courtesy of men. However, she explains, this respectability declined as more women came to town as wives and mothers. As Susan Butruille points out in Women's Voices from the Western Frontier, although prostitution may have been a last resort for some women, others may have turned to prostitution to secure their freedom; they believed it to be a way of controlling their own lives. "I don't say that whoring is the best way of life," said a San Francisco courtesan, "but it's sure better than going blind in a sweatshop sewing, or 20

<sup>4</sup>Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, The Women's West, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup>Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1890, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 120.



hours work as a kitchen drudge or housemaid with the old man and the sons always laying for you in the hallways."<sup>6</sup> In Armitage and Jameson's, The Women's West, Mary Murphy's essay, "The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878-1917," goes beyond traditional stereotypes to show readers how and why women became prostitutes; she explains why prostitution was an economically viable option.<sup>7</sup>

In A Bride Goes West, by Nannie Alderson and Helena Smith. Nannie reminisces about her early life on the frontier. As a new wife and mother she illustrates the bad reputation prostitutes acquired. Nannie was staying at a hotel in Miles City, Montana for the summer while a new house was being built for her on the plains. She was tending to her baby in the parlor of the hotel one day when a young woman came into the room and began playing with the baby. Nannie was *delighted* to have another woman around and initiated a conversation. The woman told her she was waiting for her husband to return from a cattle drive from Texas and that she was very lonely. Nannie could empathize with her feelings of loneliness and invited the woman to accompany her on a future walk together. When the time came for the walk the woman had to decline due to another engagement. A short while later Nannie found out that the woman was one of the most notorious prostitutes in the West. She was being kept at the hotel by a wealthy cattle rancher. Everything in her outward appearance gave the illusion of piety and righteousness, when she was actually of "ill repute." Nannie was appalled by the fact that she almost went out in public with the woman. She exclaimed, "to think that I was only *saved* [emphasis added] from walking out on the public street with her by the fact that *she* had another engagement ---!"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Susan G. Butruille, Women's Voices from the Western Frontier, (Boise: Tamarack Books, Inc., 1995), p. 94.

<sup>7</sup>Mary Murphy, "The Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana, 1878-1917," in The Women's West, eds. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 193-205.

<sup>8</sup>Nannie Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, A Bride Goes West, (New York: Farrar & Reinhart, Inc., 1942), p. 116.

Nannie Alderson's account makes it clear that women who came to take part in the civilization of the West held the prostitutes in contempt. To the gentle tamers, prostitutes were amoral and a detriment to the frontier. Their presence meant a less stable social structure and moral atrophy. However, the "fallen" woman who could make a living and still appear in the public eye as a "respectable" woman was a phenomenon unheard of in the East.

Harriet Fish Backus gives a wonderful account of her life in a mining town high in the mountains above Telluride, Colorado (as well as in Britannia Beach, British Columbia; Elk City, Idaho; and Leadville, Colorado) in her reminiscence, Tomboy Bride. Her account does not mention any prostitutes in the town but does discuss the civilizing effect women had on the men. Harriet's friends were all relatively young wives; Harriet herself was freshly married when she first arrived. Together these women formed a community and tried to exert moral influence over the miners. For example they were instrumental in starting up the Y.M.C.A, and Sunday School for children. Tomboy Bride is a very readable account of life in the Rockies that offers detailed insight into life of the late 19th-early 20th centuries.<sup>9</sup>

Acceptable prostitutes may have been rather foreign to Eastern thinking, but the notion of women traveling West as carriers of civilization was not. The women came as teachers, missionaries, and wives. These women did their best to uphold the cult of domesticity. The "Cult of True Womanhood," as it was also called, was a set of ideals that accompanied women as they traveled West. The domestic world was the woman's sphere of influence in which she was to operate.

Separate spheres of influence developed in the East as economic changes took place in society that established men in politics and the workplace and women in the home and community. The system of production involving the family changed to one in

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<sup>9</sup>Harriet Fish Backus, Tomboy Bride: A woman's personal account of life in mining camps of the West. (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1969).

which men predominately worked outside the home. "Home" became separate from the male workplace. As nineteenth century capitalism matured, women's activities became less important to their families' financial situation. Women were becoming marginal in society.<sup>10</sup> To make up for their shrinking economic importance they turned their energies to upholding morality and indoctrinating all females to accept this as their responsibility because of their gentle nature, piety, and purity.

The home was central to the cult of domesticity. The role prescribed for women in the West focused mainly on the woman's duty to make the homestead livable and enjoyable. The home was to be a separate entity from the world of work. It was to be a haven for a the husband to relax in after a hard day. A wife's destiny was to care for her husband and children. Women were thought to be of superior moral character, which gave them the duty of instilling family values in the children and men. Women's piety, purity, righteousness, and high moral standards were preserved by the total separation of the male and female spheres. Although women were almost totally excluded from public life, it was believed that their mere presence on the prairie and mountains would transform the "Wild West" into the genteel East left behind.

Most of the women who traveled West carrying out the Cult of domesticity went strictly as wives and mothers. As they traveled across the plains the women tried to bring the comforts of home to the wagon train. Many books on women in the West include stories about the overland journey. Kenneth L. Holmes' edited series, Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1880, is a good compilation of diaries and letters that is easy to read and access.<sup>11</sup> Students will find a wealth of information about life on the trail. One example of an excerpt from Holmes' series is from the diary of Lucy Clark Allen. Lucy apparently enjoyed traveling from Minnesota to

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<sup>10</sup>Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1880, 10 vols. (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1991).

Montana in 1881. In her diary she reported how adept she was becoming at cooking on the trail. Describing her ability to bake bread, she wrote:

Then leaving a few small coals at the bottom of the pit, set the kettle of bread on them, put the pan snugly in the top of the kettle, fill it with coals [and] hot ashes, then pile the rest of the hot ashes around the kettle in the pit and in an hour I can bake a large loaf. I have baked 7 or 8 such loaves [sic] in a day, besides doing considerable else. I begin to enjoy this kind of life very much.<sup>12</sup>

For many women learning how to cook and keep food on the journey was one of the most difficult things they had to do.

Examples of women adapting to the changes in their lifestyles can be found everywhere. With access to archival materials, diaries and letters of early female settlers are a good source for bringing history to life. It was interesting to find numerous accounts of women expressing pleasure in their journeys despite the difficulties. For example, Thula Hardenbrook's diary, which documents her journey from California to Montana in 1887 (found in the Mansfield Library archives on the University of Montana Campus) is sprinkled with phrases such as "started in fine spirits," had a "fine time", a "fine ride today," and "most picturesque place to camp and so comfortable!"<sup>13</sup>

However, the journey was not always depicted through such a rose colored lens. Julie Roy Jeffrey in Frontier Women also shows the reluctance with which women headed West and how the trip was marked by repetitive losses. Through letters, diaries and reminiscences, Jeffrey illustrates the hardships that demonstrate the survivalist nature of the women who went West. These women continued to cling to Victorian domesticity as they endured the harsh nature of the frontier environment. Sandra Myres contrasts with Jeffrey in her book, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915. She

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<sup>12</sup>Lucy Clark Allen, in Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1880, vol. 10, ed. Kenneth L. Holmes (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1991), p. 145.

<sup>13</sup>Thula Hardenbrook, Thula Hardenbrook Diary, SC 60, K. Ross Toole Archives, The University of Montana.

found that there was an overall predominant spirit of adventure, nonconformity and adaptation in the women she studied.<sup>14</sup>

Many books seem to support both Myres' and Jeffrey's conclusions. Elizabeth Stevenson's book, Figures in a Western Landscape, does a good job of showing how men and women not only shaped the landscape but were shaped by it. These stories are easily accessible and readable.<sup>15</sup> Pioneer Women, by Joanna Stratton, is another good book for stories about trail life, prairie life, daily chores, childbirth and childhood, school and church. If one reads these stories keeping in mind the glossiness that usually covers a reminiscence they are a valuable resource.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to imagine how the trip was ever made without the women. The overland journey required the pioneers to take all of the necessary provisions with them, as food stuffs were difficult to come by on the trail. Women were essential in cooking the right amount of food in order to avoid shortages at the end of the trip. The women were also available to perform jobs that were necessary but outside of the man's sphere. The additional time this provided the men for other tasks within their sphere was helpful in making the trip run smoothly. Not only were women helpful in domestic tasks, they also could be relied upon to drive the wagon at times.

Driving a wagon or assuming other male roles was what some women were searching for or desired as they spent more time in the West. These women were not trying to break out of the cult of domesticity; they just wished to expand it. Contrary to the images seen in Western art, women were not always reluctantly dragged across the prairie by their husbands. They had a sense of adventure too. A short but very informative essay by Corlann Gee Bush, "The Way We Weren't: Images of Women and Men in Cowboy Art," in The Women's West, analyzes images of women in art to

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<sup>14</sup>Sandra Myres, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup>Elizabeth Stevenson, Figures in a Western Landscape, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup>Joanna L. Stratton, Pioneer Women: Voices From the Kansas Frontier, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1981).

demonstrate how art has helped to perpetuate stereotypes of women and myths of the Western frontier.<sup>17</sup> The initial isolation of their lives may have shaped their earliest responses to settlement but many found life exciting and fulfilling despite the hardships. Harriet Fish Backus, in Tomboy Bride, is again a good example of a woman finding life exciting and fulfilling, regardless of the hardships of living in a remote mining town.

New wives were often the most willing to migrate. They had fewer worries such as caring for children and weaker ties to an established home with their husband. They were adventurous and found the West exciting. Nannie Alderson expressed no regrets in giving up the comforts and luxuries she had when growing up in West Virginia. She looked romantically upon her first year as a pioneer wife. Initially she lacked any of the necessary skills for a woman on a homestead. As she departed for her new home in Montana she was given a guidebook that contained helpful hints for housekeeping. After her first try at using the book she found it to be impractical and threw it under the bed. For the first time in her life she had to wash the family's clothes, because it was too great an expense to have someone else do it. The trip West was an eye opening experience for her. As a new wife Nannie quickly learned that she had to make do with what was available. The nearest town or city was Miles City 100 miles away; they made the trip to town once a year for supplies of sugar, flour, coffee, bacon and many canned fruits and vegetables.<sup>18</sup> Nannie indicated she was not lonely because she had so much to do and learn, she was happy with her marriage, and had no children to look after.

Miriam A. Thompson Tuller, married at the age of eighteen, recalled as she left Illinois for Oregon with her new husband that, "her husband was fired with patriotism, and I was possessed with a spirit of adventure and a desire to see what was new and

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<sup>17</sup>Corlann Gee Bush, "The Way We Weren't: Images of Women and Men in Cowboy Art," in The Women's West, eds. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 19-33.

<sup>18</sup>Nannie Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, A Bride Goes West, p. 24.

strange."<sup>19</sup> Other similar accounts can be found in Lillian Schlissel's book, Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey. Schlissel researched the lives of 103 women. In this book she quotes at length from their diaries, letters, and reminiscences to recreate for the reader a sense of the life these women endured. Included at the end is a selection of diaries and reminiscences that teachers will find helpful.

Women had the primary job of making the family dwelling a home. On the prairie the house was often a dug out structure called a "soddie." Women were able to make these houses remarkably livable. The relative darkness and dampness of them was not a deterrent to the women, who did their best to furnish them and make them comfortable. Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell include numerous pictures of soddies and the wonders women worked on these dug-out dwellings in their book, Women of the West. This book has numerous photographs that accurately display life during this time period. Donna M. Lucey's book, Photographing Montana 1894-1928, The Life and Work of Evelyn Cameron, with over 170 photos, is also an excellent source for pictures of everyday life. Photographs showing women cleaning, helping in the fields, painting, enjoying a book, and roping cattle give us insight as to how Evelyn Cameron and her neighbors lived in Montana.<sup>20</sup> Settling the West, by the editors of Time-Life Books, is filled with photos that give a good depiction of women's roles in the West; a number of the photos also deal with the myths and the "male" West. However, this does not diminish the value of the photographs of women.<sup>21</sup>

Women faced a number of hardships in establishing a new homestead. Significant difficulties included the lack of firewood, insufficient income and severe loneliness. They were able to overcome these adversities through frugality and resourcefulness. For example, meager incomes limited the amount of food stuffs that

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<sup>19</sup>Lillian Schlissel, Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey, (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 42.

<sup>20</sup>Donna M. Lucey, Photographing Montana 1894-1928, The Life and Work of Evelyn Cameron, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991).

<sup>21</sup>Time-Life Books, eds., Settling The West, (Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life, Inc., 1996).

could be bought in town, therefore women planted gardens. A lack of firewood resulted in women collecting cow chips for cooking fuel. Unfortunately, ingenuity alone was not enough for women to overcome the isolation of frontier life.

Not all of the women civilizers were of the genteel type. Those who lived in relative isolation and kept the family going with their cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children were tough women. Hardened by their experiences they could handle nearly any situation they faced. John Mack Faragher offered the following comparison of Eastern and Western women: "When Eastern ladies were fainting at a coarse word or vulgar sight, their Western sisters fought off Indians, ran cattle, made homes and raised children in the wilderness."<sup>22</sup> Despite the regional stereotyping of this statement, Faragher contends in, Men and Women on the Overland Trail, that because of these feats it was in the West that women achieved their highest status in society. However, the status afforded a pioneering woman did not alter her prescribed role as the civilizer, her status was still dependent upon her husband's. She had do these "courageous" things in order to tame the country.<sup>23</sup>

Although cooking, cleaning, and especially washing clothes and watching the children were the woman's main work, many also assumed the role of "helpmates" to their husbands. Women helped with milking, feeding the animals, and plowing. Even allowing for the possibility that accounts given in diaries or reminiscences are often skewed to make things seem better than they were, there is ample evidence of women performing their duties cheerfully at best and without complaint at worst. Through day-in and day-out performance of back-breaking chores these women demonstrated their resilience and courage.

Women played a vital role in the survival of the family, which led to the domestication of the West and the growth of communities. Women kept gardens and

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<sup>22</sup>John Faragher, Men and Women on the Overland Trail, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 184.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 185.



sheep both for their meat and their wool. Their resourcefulness in cooking was essential to keeping a family fed. Some women made all of the clothing their family wore. They spun the wool, dyed it using natural berries and bark, wove the cloth and sewed the garments. Some took in laundry or did other small jobs to bring in additional funds. In these ways women contributed monetarily to the family. Myres's Westering Women and Ruth B. Moynihan's So Much to be Done have numerous entries that portray the resourcefulness of pioneering women and their economic contributions. These entries are examples of the glaring discrepancy between notions of female passivity and helplessness and the reality of women managing their own lives and the lives of their families.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, some women settled homesteads by themselves. In Letters of a Woman Homesteader, Elinore Pruitt Stewart, wrote of her experiences as a woman who struck out on her own. She wrote in her letters to a former employer and friend about her daily work that demonstrates the quantity of work required of women. She wrote: "I have done most of my cooking at night, have milked seven cows every day, and have done all the hay-cutting, so you see I have been working. But I have found time to put up thirty pints of jelly and the same amount of jam for myself."<sup>25</sup> Letters of a Woman Homesteader is full of interesting anecdotes, it is very readable and could be used for any grade level.

In some cases the hard work of the female pioneer can be attributed to her desire to restore "civilization" as quickly as possible to the land around her. Sandra L. Myres in, Westering Women, studied pioneer women through 400 diaries, letters and reminiscences. She discovered that the helpmate was often depicted as a determined woman "clad in gingham or linsey-woolsey, her face wreathed in a sunbonnet, baby at breast, rifle at the ready, bravely await[ing] unknown dangers and dedicat[ing] herself to

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<sup>24</sup>Ruth B. Moynihan, Susan Armitage and Christiane Dichamp, eds., So Much to be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

<sup>25</sup>Elinore Pruitt Stewart, Letters of a Woman Homesteader, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), p. 17.

removing wilderness from both man and land and restoring civilization as rapidly as possible."<sup>26</sup>

In many places the mere presence of women brought "civilization." They forced men to remember their manners and act accordingly. On the plains of Montana, Nannie Alderson had a man to protect her at all times. She was never left alone: "So complete was the faith of Western men in the chivalry of their fellows, that one time they all had to be away at once, they thought nothing of letting a perfect stranger, who had ridden in to look for a job, stay and look after me and my small baby."<sup>27</sup> Despite the possibility that Nannie exaggerates chivalry on the plains, the point is made that things are different in the West. Back East leaving a woman and child with a complete stranger would have been unheard of; however, in the West a woman's presence was rare enough, apparently, to provoke the chivalrous response Nannie wrote about in her diary.

If the ultimate goal of women was to tame the West, offering a bit of civilization to a visitor was the least she could do. The vastness of the land left settlers, especially the women, so isolated that any new person was interesting. Women were expected to feed anyone who showed up even if it meant extra work. The women reported in their diaries that they did this extra work cheerfully. They also used this opportunity to preach to male visitors about the evils they should avoid. The women preached to "become *creators* [emphasis added] rather than just guardians of culture and morality."<sup>28</sup>

Not all of the women who went West with the notion of civilizing it were able to achieve this goal. Some of these women went with high hopes or were dragged reluctantly along as their husbands chose to venture out West. They tried to make it under the cult of domesticity but were unsuccessful. The back-breaking work women engaged

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<sup>26</sup>Sandra L. Myers, Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup>Nannie Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, A Bride Goes West, p. 76.

<sup>28</sup>Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women, p. 12.

in out of necessity and the isolation they worked in, pushed some of them to an early grave and it hardened others so much that they finally gave up and went back East.

While the trip across the plains fulfilled the men's dreams of camaraderie, action, and achievement, some women perceived the experience much differently. They found no relief from the daily travail of women's work. The labor on the trail was the same as they were accustomed to at home, only more difficult and frustrating.<sup>29</sup> For women who had never had to cook and clean at home, these tasks were even more difficult. The taxing burden of this work compounded their feelings of loss for family and friends left behind.

Pioneering did not necessarily equate itself with adventure for the many women who headed West with reservations. Loneliness, isolation, and the dread of loss of life, possessions, and a connection to the place they left behind contributed to the disillusionment of the women that were unable to find their niche. Many women expressed regret about leaving their friends behind and about their inability to establish lasting and deep attachments out on the isolated farms and ranches.

Despite her isolation, Mary Ronan, in Frontier Woman: The Story of Mary Ronan, recounts her life as a pioneer wife in Montana as the happy "pastoral" times. Although living thirty miles outside of Helena in Blackfoot City, she found her home to be pleasant despite a lack of female companionship. Mary wrote: "[f]riends discovered the delights of our mountain retreat and drove out from Helena to visit us. Except for these visitors I seldom saw a woman."<sup>30</sup> This description and her recollection of spending the winter in complete seclusion, in which she reported that she "was conscious of no hardship, no monotony"<sup>31</sup> makes her an anomaly. Most women reported winters to be the hardest time of the year, during which they longed for female companionship.

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<sup>29</sup>John Faragher, Men and Women on the Overland Trail, p. 144.

<sup>30</sup>Mary Ronan, Frontier Woman: The Story of Mary Ronan, (Missoula: University of Montana, 1973), p. 81.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

Women feared losing not only friendships but also their children. The trip overland in a wagon was not kind to young children. Women found themselves burying their children along the trail and having to continue the journey. Elizabeth Elliot endured the death of her child along the trail as a part of life. Writing home to her parents she described the dead child: "Oh he was such a pretty corpse, he looked very natural[.] Some of our co [company] said they never saw such a pretty corpse[.] Oh how I wanted his likeness taken and sent it to you he did look so sweet with his summer suit on and his hat in his hands...."<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Holmes' edited volumes of women's diaries and letters, and Lillian Schlissel's, Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey, are good sources for information on the death of children and other losses.

Mortality seemed to be expected and accepted as part of the pioneers' journey. Death was dealt with and life went on. When a husband died, the survival of the family as a viable unit was left up to the widow. It was then that many women "picked up their children and continued on. There was no turning back. The widows filed their claims and held onto the land."<sup>33</sup> More common than the deaths of men were those of children or women in childbirth.

Many women counted grave sights in their diaries. Cecelia McMillen traced her family's journey by wagon train from Illinois to Oregon in 1852 as follows:

Child's grave...small pox...child's grave...[We] passed 7 new-made graves. One had 4 bodies in it...cholera. A man died this morning with the cholera in the company ahead of us...Another man died...Passed 6 new graves...We have passed 21 new-made graves...made 18 miles...Passed 13 graves today. Passed graves...

June 25	Passed 7 graves...made 14 miles
June 26	Passed 8 graves
June 29	Passed 10 graves
June 30	Passed 10 graves...made 22 miles
July 1	Passed 8 graves...made 21 miles
July 2	One man of [our] company died. Passed 8 graves made 16 miles
July 4	Passed 2 graves...made 16 miles

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<sup>32</sup>Elizabeth Elliot, in Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1880, Vol. 8, ed. Kenneth L. Holmes (Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1991), p. 112.

<sup>33</sup>Lillian Schlissel, Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey, p. 158.

July 5	Passed 9 graves...made 18 miles
July 6	Passed 6 graves...made 9 miles
July 11	Passed 15 graves... made 13 miles..... <sup>34</sup>

Another woman wrote home to her family telling them of her anxieties:

Passed where they were burying a man; scarce a day but some one is left on these plains....The heart has a thousand misgivings, and the mind is tortured by anxiety, and often as I passed the fresh made graves. I have glanced at the side boards of the wagons, not knowing how soon it would serve as a coffin for some one of us.<sup>35</sup>

In the mining camps death was also a common occurrence. Unsanitary living conditions contributed to the early fatality of many children. One Colorado mother lost two children in two months to scarlet fever and meningitis; her third and last was sick with fever at the time she spoke with the reporter. Another couple lost their three children in a span of four days.<sup>36</sup>

The difficulty of trail life may have contributed to women's desire to restore civility to their lives as quickly as possible. A woman not only worked hard to establish a comfortable existence for herself and her family but also to create a community. A prime example of the importance of community to women and their families is Laurie Mercier's "'We are Women Irish': Gender, Class, Religious, and Ethnic Identity in Anaconda, Montana" in Writing the Range, edited by Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage. A more established community such as Anaconda was created only through great efforts of the women. In contrast to this, in the same book an article by Jeronima Echeverria, "*Euskaldun Andreak: Basque Women As Hard Workers, Hoteleras, and Matriarchs*", depicts relatively isolated Basque women who lacked a larger community. (The nature of their livelihood, shepherding probably contributed to their isolation.)<sup>37</sup> Writing the Range is a collection of 29 essays about women of varied racial, ethnic, and social class

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>36</sup>Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, The Women's West, p. 186.

<sup>37</sup>Laurie Mercier, "'We are Women Irish': Gender, Class, Religious, and Ethnic Identity in Anaconda, Montana", and Jeronima Echeverria, "*Euskaldun Andreak: Basque Women As Hard Workers, Hoteleras, and Matriarchs*", in Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), p. 298-333.

backgrounds who lived in the American West. Many of the articles will serve to balance the predominant view of a white, anglo women's frontier. The bibliographies at the end of the book are themselves an indispensable resource.

Emily: The Diary of a Hardworked Woman, by Emily French, is the story of a woman who never grew accustomed to the hard work required of a homesteader. Despite being an old hand, Emily considered herself a “hard-worked woman.”<sup>38</sup> She began her life in the West as a married woman, but after 31 years of marriage, she divorced. Now Emily had to find a way to support her younger sister, who was somewhat handicapped, and two children.

Emily put in long hours and hard days to provide for herself and her family. She worked as a laundress, a cleaning woman, and a nurse. She was extremely poor and often in debt; because there was no welfare she relied on the help of friends and employers. Emily worked even when she was sick. A typical day for her might mean rising at 4:30 -5:00 a.m., making a fire to have breakfast, if she had any food to cook, then rushing off to an employer's home. Laundry was an arduous task, but one that she did frequently. With the washing done she then might clean, cook, or care for the young children. Sometimes she would spend a whole day scrubbing the kitchen. Emily oversaw the construction of her own house, doing much of the work with her own hands. She took care of all monetary business that related to her sister's homestead and the business required to survive in a Western town.

Emily was loyal to the cult of true womanhood in her desire to form lasting friendships with other women. She leaned on these friends for monetary as well as moral support after her divorce. It is interesting that she faithfully wrote to a former employer who treated her unfairly. She did this because women were supposed to form deep friendships and she probably wanted to avoid loneliness.

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<sup>38</sup>Emily French, Diary of a Hardworked Woman, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), p. 96.

The divorce was an extremely significant moment in her life. She could no longer live out the cult of domesticity. The duty of providing a home was no longer required of her. She did however pour a lot of her energies into the church, another central part of the cult, which helped her deal with the loss of her home. “‘Home’ probably meant to Emily all that she had lost, not only love, marriage, and family, but also security, reputation, and self-esteem.”<sup>39</sup>

Though Emily was forced to compromise domesticity due to her experiences on the frontier, other women went one step further and abandoned domesticity altogether. Pauline Lyons Williamson was such a woman. Pauline went to California in the hopes of gaining independence for herself and her son. She was from a middle-class, black family and had a good educational background. She planned to study nursing.

Pauline expressed a strong desire to work but had a hard time finding employment. She wrote home to her sister: “I made up my mind when I came to ... write only pleasant things home. I shall never leave the field until I am thoroughly convinced that I cant [sic] get a living here.”<sup>40</sup> She wrote this at a particularly difficult time while she was trying, unsuccessfully, to get into the hospital nursing program. She worked at odd jobs, but was reluctant to become a domestic servant, a common occupation among black women. She earned very little money in a span of five months, and found it impossible to support herself and her son. Pauline Williamson was discouraged after several financially unfulfilling years and decided to return home. Pauline, though unsuccessful, was unusual in her desire to be independent, despite many obstacles.<sup>41</sup> Her attitude of optimism toward achieving independence echoed that of many women who lived a compromised version of the cult of domesticity, but also yearned for more and eventually abandoned domesticity by stepping into the man’s sphere.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>40</sup>Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell, *Women of the West*, (New York: Orion Books, 1982), p. 117.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

Other information about black women in the West can be found in the Negro History Bulletin article, "African-American women on the Western frontier", by Roger D. Hardaway. This article provides an overview of the lives of seven black pioneer women, all of whom had been born into slavery and rose above it as they lived out their lives in the West.<sup>42</sup> In a chapter of A Place to Grow, Glenda Riley also looks into African-American women's experience in the West. She concludes that there is much left to be studied about this group.<sup>43</sup> Not only are African-American women excluded from the story, so too are many women of Hispanic, Korean, Japanese, and Native American backgrounds. However, they were present and lived significant lives. Writing The Range, is the best collection of essays that deals extensively with women of all races, classes, and cultures. (It should be noted that the characteristics of frontier women discussed in this paper can be attributed to all early women in the American West.)

The nature of the Western environment often created situations in which the spheres of influence were blurred. Tasks presented for women were not for the soft and genteel type. Women had to be ingenious, healthy and strong and at the same time they were expected to resist the disintegrating forces of frontier life.<sup>44</sup> In writings on women in the West the inclusion of "courage" and "adaptability" as desirable traits for women suggest that traditional sex roles were challenged by migration. Domestic stereotypes were defied by women assuming responsibilities and undertaking men's work. John Faragher points out that "[t]he women's farm roles had little to do with the fetishized domesticity that was part of the flowery cult of domesticity in the East. In many ways the pioneer wives and mothers were the antithesis of that antiseptic and anesthetized version of femininity."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Roger D. Hardaway, "African-American women on the western frontier," Negro History Bulletin 60 (Jan.-March 1997): 8-14.

<sup>43</sup>Glenda Riley, A Place to Grow: Women in the American West, (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1992).

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>45</sup>John Faragher, Men and Women on the Overland Trail, p. 71.



The isolation of each homestead required men and women to depend on each other if the venture was to be successful. Men were seen cooking meals, lest they go hungry, and at times they helped with other "womanly" chores such as washing. Nannie Alderson wrote of the men on the Alderson ranch who were friendly and helpful. She had no other women around to turn to for advice so she turned to men. For women to have men as their closest companions was unheard of in the East. The helpfulness between men and women was characteristic of the region.

The disruption of social norms was also evident in women's dress. For many women the first sign of disregard of the old standards of appearance was in shedding the sunbonnet that protected them from sunburn. In the West women found their dresses to be very impractical. They were cumbersome to clean and dirtied very quickly. Long dresses were not conducive to carrying children, tending fires, chasing animals, riding horses, or climbing over fences. Gradually things began to change. "When the first cattle woman in the area near Durango, Colorado dared to wear divided skirts and ride her horse astride, someone took a shot at her."<sup>46</sup> The introduction of divided skirts or bloomers was met with disapproval but in time they were accepted as being practical. Some women gave up on dresses altogether and dressed in men's pants.

The journey West offered women the opportunity to question, modify and challenge established stereotypes.<sup>47</sup> To many Americans it seemed impossible for women to adapt to life on the frontier without compromising their image of purity and their role as civilizers. It was a fear that as women adapted their lifestyle they were becoming tainted by ruggedness and consequently, immodesty.<sup>48</sup> To the women challenging the stereotypes they were not tainted. They merely wanted a more fulfilling life. Annette Koldony's, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American

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<sup>46</sup>Susan G. Burtrille, Women's Voices from the Western Frontier, p. 95.

<sup>47</sup>Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women, p. 106.

<sup>48</sup>Annette Koldony, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 56.

Frontiers, has several good illustrations of women who challenged stereotypes from the very beginning of their existence in the West.

Outside of the woman's sphere women assumed masculine roles in the areas of education, politics, ranching and mining life, and business. Although the education of children was well within the women's sphere of influence, higher education for women in the field of medicine was not. Bethenia Owens-Adair is an example of a woman who was extraordinary in her success by receiving a degree of medicine and becoming a successful physician.

Bethenia was married at the age of fourteen but after four years she divorced her abusive husband. She supported herself and her son by washing, teaching, and running a dressmaking and millinery shop. Through her success as a milliner she earned enough money to send her son to medical school. Upon sending her son to medical school she then traveled to Philadelphia and enrolled in the Eclectic School of Medicine and in due time received her degree.<sup>49</sup> She enjoyed success but wanted more and once again traveled to Philadelphia, this time to enroll at the renowned Jefferson Medical College. At that time the school was not open to women and remained closed to her as well. On the advice of one of the top professors of the college she headed for the University of Michigan and in two years time she received her medical degree. Her determination to be a success was evident in her description of her life as a student. She wrote: "It was my custom to rise at four a.m., take a cold bath, followed by vigorous exercise; then study till breakfast, at seven. (I allowed myself half an hour for each meal.) After supper came "Quizzes," and then study till nine p.m., when I retired, to sleep soundly. Between lectures, clinics, laboratory work, Quizzes, examinations, two good sermons on Sunday, and a church social now and then, the time was fully and pleasantly occupied."<sup>50</sup> Despite the many

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<sup>49</sup>Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell, Women of the West, p. 181.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 183.

obstacles she faced in obtaining a medical degree and establishing herself as a physician she eventually enjoyed great success and prosperity.

Women also entered the world of politics with regularity. Similar to their Eastern sisters, women took political stances usually in an effort to protect the moral fiber of society. However, they also assumed a greater civic purpose in Western towns. Women enjoyed voting rights and held office in the West well before they did in the East. In 1869 Wyoming became the first state to give women the right to vote; Utah followed suit in 1870. By 1918, Colorado, Washington, California, Kansas, Arizona, Oregon, Alaska, Nevada, South Dakota, Oklahoma, and Missouri had women's suffrage. In contrast, by this date, New York was the only Eastern state where women had the right to vote.<sup>51</sup> Even before granting full suffrage status to women, Syracuse, Kansas, in 1887, elected an all female town council; in the same year the country's first female mayor was elected in Argonia, Kansas.<sup>52</sup>

Lizzie: the Letters of Elizabeth Chester Fisk, 1864-1893, edited by Rex C. Myers, is a good example of a woman who was active politically. She was well aware of political issues in Helena, Montana where she lived with her husband, the editor of the *Helena Herald*, and her family. In a letter to her sister in Connecticut she advised her on the political affairs of the day as they affected her husband's newspaper:

Radicalism in Montana is not the wisest course. Only by dropping this part of political faith and [Negro suffrage] and striking broader ground can a paper be sustained or a party formed which shall win ascendancy over the Missouri-rebel Price-army faction of the territory. I am free to confess that I do not like to appear to go back on one principle enunciated in last autumn's campaign. Such a proceeding was equally distasteful to Rob, and nothing save the belief that only in this way could the desired end be attained could have induced him to drop radicalism. People in Montana were forced to adopt the same conclusion which was borne home to their

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<sup>51</sup> Paul S. Boyer; Clifford E. Clarke Jr., Joseph F. Kett; Neal Salisbury; Harvard Sitkoff; and Nancy Woloch, The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People, (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1993), p. 745.

<sup>52</sup> Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, The Women's West, p. 253

sister states in the east with regard to Negro Suffrage: -- the time for its successful promulgation has not yet arrived.<sup>53</sup>

In 1881 Helena legislators inadvertently gave women the right to vote when voting rights were extended to all *adult* citizens, rather than only male citizens.<sup>54</sup> Mrs. C.E. Stanford of Montana not only took advantage of her right to vote she also gave political speeches against Democratic candidates for office.<sup>55</sup>

Information on Mrs. Stanford was found in the Conrad/Campbell family papers in the K. Ross Toole Archives at the University of Montana. This is an example of how local archival materials may be used to supplement lessons. It takes some "digging" to determine what is genuinely useful to your purpose, but it is well worth it. Students' early experience in archival work not only enriches their current education, it also better prepares them for college research work.

Kate Warthen was another woman who made significant intrusions into the man's sphere. She became the first woman to be admitted to the bar in Kearny County, Kansas. Prior to her position in society as a lawyer she served as superintendent of the school for two terms. She was also a small time journalist and a commissioned notary public. Kate's occupations were unusual for a woman. Women in the West had opportunities to serve in the public light much more so than women in the East.<sup>56</sup>

Women were also able to excel in the area of business. Businesswoman was not an uncommon term in the West. Women such as Bethenia Owens-Adair, Nannie Alderson, Lizzie Johnson Williams, Maria S. Conrad, and Emily French were all businesswomen. Emily French was the exception to the others. Despite her hard work she never achieved great success. She struggled to claim a homestead and build a house and

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<sup>53</sup>Rex C. Myers, ed., Lizzie: The Letters of Elizabeth Chester Fisk, 1846-1893, (Mountain Press Publishing Company, 1989), p. 44.

<sup>54</sup>Rex C. Myers, ed., Lizzie, p. 84.

<sup>55</sup>Mrs. C.E. Stanford, Conrad/Campbell Family Papers, 1821-1963. Collection 185, Box 8, Folder 1, K. Ross Toole Archives, The University of Montana.

<sup>56</sup>Rosalinda Urbach Moss, "The 'Girls' from Syracuse: Sex Role Negotiations of Kansas Women in Politics, 1887-1890," in The Women's West, eds. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 253-264.

spent most of her time working for other people. However, she did conduct all of her own business as she was not married. Maria S. Conrad, of Kalispell, Montana, rented land, paid taxes and loaned money. From the records kept on her business activities it is evident she was a successful businesswoman. Receipts indicate Maria Conrad was paid rent on two lots by H.E. King & Co.. The canceled checks contained in the records were all made payable to Maria Conrad. In addition Ms. Conrad loaned money to several men. One note from the Conrad National Bank indicated the interest she received on a loan:

Mrs. M.S. Conrad Kalispell MT

Dear Madam:

We credit your account with the semi-annual interest, \$180, on the \$3000 loan to James Ford.

Respectfully,  
W.A. Conrad  
Cashier<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, Maria S. Conrad was a woman who aptly managed her money and conducted her own affairs in the business world.

Other women were also very successful. Bethenia Owens-Adair worked as a milliner and her shrewd business skills made her very prosperous. Lizzie Johnson Williams had her own brand of cattle registered in Travis County in 1871. After the death of her husband, Nannie Alderson became a cattle queen with the help of her daughter and son . Her daughter did most of the man's work. She rode and roped, fixed fences and pitched hay.<sup>58</sup> These women had not thrown the cult of domesticity out the window; they merely wished to live a full and prosperous life and their business pursuits enabled them to do so.

The business opportunities women embarked upon in the cities were unmatched in the East. The degree to which women met with success in the business world was due to the nature of the Western city. Cities became communities largely in part because

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<sup>57</sup>Maria S. Conrad, Conrad/Campbell Family Papers, 1821-1963, Collection 185, Box 137, Folder 13, K. Ross Toole Archives, The University of Montana.

<sup>58</sup>Nannie Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, A Bride Goes West, p. 271.

women were there both alone and with their families. Without the presence of women the cities would not have grown as they did; it takes families to create a place people want to remain in for an extended period of time. Cities were vital centers that opened doors to women due to the needs of a variety of people.

Women, however, found it easiest to step into the man's sphere of influence in ranching and mining. It was almost a necessity for women to be a part of daily activities if any venture was to be successful. Some began with helping their husbands and gradually became more knowledgeable and skilled, and often picked up where their husbands left off in the event of their death. Other women had no intention of being a helpmate and struck out on their own.

The opportunities for economic independence appeared to be greater for unmarried women. Some women acted out of necessity and others were independently inclined from the beginning. Lizzie Johnson Williams was a prime example of this. She was the embodiment of an idea whose time had not yet come. She was educated and served as a teacher of French, arithmetic, bookkeeping, music, and spelling. She wrote for a popular magazine under a pseudonym and invested the money she received in cattle. She was emancipated in every sense of the word striking out on her own with a herd of cattle to drive them up the Chisholm trail. When she was finally married at the age of thirty-six she made her husband sign a prenuptial agreement saying all her property and future profits would remain hers and hers alone.<sup>59</sup> Along these same lines, Helen Wiser Stewart took over her husband's ranch after his murder and managed it so effectively over the next twenty years that she became the largest landowner in Lincoln County, Nevada. She managed over 2000 acres. She had legal sense enough to even have her second husband agree to a prenuptial agreement to forego any wealth she had already accumulated.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Joyce Gibson Roach, *The Cowgirls*, (North Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1990), p. 9.

<sup>60</sup>Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell, *Women of the West*, p. 151.

Although married women most often asserted themselves on the ranches and in politics the unmarried women enjoyed greater freedom and expansion of their spheres of influence. Without a man around to rely upon the women did what they needed and wanted. The blurred gender distinctions in the world of work allowed a departure from the prescribed roles.

Women who went West in search of their own adventures had the luxury of not being pressured into marriage. The ratio of males to females favored women. This allowed the single women to be selective in their choice of a marriage partner. Married couples often saw themselves as “co-partners in the frontier adventure.”<sup>61</sup> Elinore Pruitt Stewart asserted she would not have married her second husband if he did not allow her to homestead her own land:

I should not have married if Clyde had not promised I should meet all my land difficulties unaided. I wanted the fun and experience. For that reason I want to earn every cent that goes into my own land and improvements myself....I know I shall succeed; other women have succeeded.<sup>62</sup>

Stewart is an example of the women who took responsibility for the direction of their lives.

Even single women who traveled West under the guise of the cult of domesticity, with the intention of engaging in missionary work or teaching, were directing their lives in ways women in the East could not. Missionary work was well within the confines of the woman’s sphere. The importance of religion was consistent with the idea that women were to cultivate a society that upheld the high standards instituted in the East. Women had a natural place in society to warrant their participation in allaying people's fears. They went West to bring religion to all and to tame the wild men, all the while living a life they created for themselves.

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<sup>61</sup>Julie Roy Jeffrey, Frontier Women, p. 66.

<sup>62</sup>Elinore Pruitt Stewart, p.134.

Women were also natural candidates for teachers. Their supposed gentle dispositions and moral superiority made it necessary for them to aid in the education of children. It was one more way the moral fiber of the nation could be strengthened. Although a job outside of the home was not ordinarily within the woman's sphere, teaching was acceptable, because education was important to the building of a successful republic. Schools could be influential in producing virtuous citizens of good moral character.<sup>63</sup>

In Montana, "despite low pay, average \$83/month for school teachers versus \$125/month for cooks, \$75-\$100/month for housekeepers...", teaching was a more respectable position that enabled educated women to use their skills.<sup>64</sup> It offered the women financial opportunities and it afforded a means for independence. As Kathleen Underwood pointed out in her essay, "The Pace of Their Own Lives: Teacher Training and the Life Course of Western Women," in the *Pacific Historical Review*, teaching sanctioned women to "adjust the pace of their lives in terms of where they might teach and when they might marry."<sup>65</sup> Although teaching and missionary work did not revolutionize women's lives, the economic independence and social status these occupations provided in the West licensed young women with the ability to direct their lives to an extent far beyond that of their Eastern peers.

Thus far in this discussion groups of women in the West compromised or abandoned the cult of domesticity for a host of reasons but did not outright reject it. However, there were those who did, and they were not the politically active women, the single homesteaders, the businesswomen or, to some extent, the ranching cattle queens; they were the cowgirls. The stories about these women dispel the myth that the only

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<sup>63</sup>Suzanne H. Schrems, "Teaching School on the Western Frontier: Acceptable Occupation for Nineteenth Century Women," *Montana*, 37 Summer 1987, p. 56.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>Kathleen Underwood, "The Pace of Their Own Lives: Teacher Training and the life Course of Western Women," *Pacific Historical Review*, 55 November 1986, p. 514.



women in the West were pure genteel women who longed for the comfortable life of the East. They directed their own lives more than any other group of women on the frontier.

The cowgirls were skilled in every aspect of ranching and driving cattle. They could handle a gun as well, if not better, than most men. Sally Skull was one of the most memorable gun women "skilled in the code of deciding who needed killing. She was described as 'a merciless killer when aroused,' and there were several who could testify that it did not take much to arouse her."<sup>66</sup> Sally was a horse trader by occupation. She was divorced with two children to support and decided if she was to take a man's role as provider for the family then she might as well have a man's job. Sally left a memorable impression such that a marker stands a few miles from her hometown which reads:

#### SALLY SCULL

Woman rancher, horse trader, champion "Cusser." Rached NW of here. In civil war Texas, Sally Scull (or Skull) freight-wagons took cotton to Mexico to swap for guns, ammunition, medicines, coffee, shoes, clothing and other goods vital to the Confederacy.

Dressed in trousers, Mrs. Scull bossed armed employees. Was sure shot with the rifle carried on her saddle or the two pistols strapped to her waist.

Of good family, she had children cared for in New Orleans School. Often visited them. Loved dancing. Yet during the war, did extremely hazardous "man's work."<sup>67</sup>

This marker for Sally Skull embodies the women's experience in the West outside of the woman's sphere. Joyce Gibson Roach's The Cowgirls, is a good source of stories about these extraordinary women.

Another interesting woman was Mrs. Victor Daniels. Ordinarily her job was riding herd on the cattle with her husband, but a sick baby kept her home one day. Looking up from her work she saw two men driving off the herd. She sprang into the saddle, lassoed one man, killed him by strangulation, and then at gun point asked the

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<sup>66</sup>Joyce Gibson Roach, The Cowgirls, p. 44.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

other man to drive the cattle home.<sup>68</sup> Mrs. Daniels, like so many other women, was not afraid to kill when necessary.

In addition the group of women who held honest roles as cowgirls there was another group that gained notoriety as cattle rustlers. Anne Richey was a woman who had grown up on a ranch. She was educated and married to a school teacher, she knew how to ride, rope, brand and she was a cattle rustler: “Anne had the distinction of being the only woman ever convicted of cattle rustling in Wyoming. . . . In the true spirit of honor among thieves, [she] never named any names not even when, as she was on the way to her preliminary hearing, a masked rider shot at her and shattered her arm.”<sup>69</sup>

The women who assumed this trade ranged from married women with children to teenage rebels. The married women like Mrs. Grace Newton taught her son how to rustle other people’s cattle. Once, when her son was caught stealing, she feigned ignorance. Another woman, Mrs. Gatlin of Menar, Texas, was a partner in her husband’s rustling business. They traveled as preachers and helped relieve people of their sins: “[a]fter services Mrs. Gatlin changed her white evangelist’s robes for men’s overalls and relieved her congregation of their cattle.”<sup>70</sup> On the other end of the age spectrum two teenage girls named Annie McDoulet and Jennie Stevens, better known as Cattle Annie and Little Britches, rode with the Doolin gang in Oklahoma Territory, stealing cattle and horses and selling whiskey.

These women cattle rustlers were anything but the carriers of civilization. They were in the West for adventure and to further their own financial situation. They joined the ranks of women who found the nature of frontier life allowed them to step out of the prescribed sphere of influence dictated by the cult of domesticity.

The social and economic conditions in the East were conducive to the prescribed spheres. Women in the East were clamoring for the right to vote while women in the

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

West were voting, holding office, and becoming lawyers. The well established social organization of the East did not work in the West. If everyone had adhered to the strict confines of their sphere the venture would have been a failure. Men needed women to assume new roles, and women took advantage of the more liberal social order.

Although the major focus of this paper is on women who traveled West from Eastern origins, it is important to note women of Hispanic backgrounds lived in the West for hundreds of years. With the influx of Anglo settlers the lives of these women changed significantly. A good example of this change is in marriage customs of Hispanic women. Ramon Gutierrez, in When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away, examines the marriage patterns of women from different classes and finds that marriage becomes based more on love than traditional arrangements. Notions of honor and social inequality between men and women in the Hispanic society shifted during this time, which changed women's roles significantly. Gutierrez includes numerous anecdotes that tell women's stories through their own words.<sup>71</sup>

Native American women, of course, lived in the West long before Eastern women began their journey West. Native American women were instrumental in forging alliances with the early white trappers and traders. These alliances via marriage *à la facon du pays* ("after the custom of the country") cemented economic ties between whites and Native Americans. Indian women contributed to the survival and success of the fur trade. Trappers were dependent on women for their wilderness skills, their knowledge of the land, language and customs, and their ability to catch small game and preserve food. Native American men expected free access to trading posts because of the social ties created through the marriage of women to European men.

The high status of Native American women in the fur trade society diminished as mixed-blood offspring from early marriages came of age and men returned from the East

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<sup>71</sup>Ramon A. Gutierrez, When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away. Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500-1846, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

with young white brides. These women were considered more acceptable to traditional Anglo society. The influx of white women and the decreased dependency on the skills of native women, made marriage to Indian or mixed-bloods less desirable. With the development of an agrarian economy in the later half of the nineteenth century, Native American women lost all status in Anglo-society. Sylvia Van Kirk's, Many Tender Ties, traces the evolution of women's roles in the fur-trade society, highlighting their relations with "American" trappers and the benefits these men derived through these alliances.<sup>72</sup>

If the West liberated white women it sometimes oppressed Native American and Hispanic women. To some degree, with the loss of land and their independence, Native American women lost their positions of importance in their communities. As social roles changed for Hispanic women they became more entwined with the Anglo world. These new roles also left them in less important, less respected positions than they once held. Sarah Deutsch's No Separate Refuge, looks at culture, class, and gender of Anglo and Hispanic women. In her study she finds that women became marginalized due to the "disappearance" of their village communities.<sup>73</sup> Their traditional economic roles were no longer vital to the perpetuation of their community. Essays in The Women's West, and Writing the Range, take a good look at the variety of women's experiences based on ethnicity.

"The Western experience did not permit many women the luxury of being lazy. Life demanded of them conduct that fell little short of heroism."<sup>74</sup> Women had to accept the job of plowing a field, running a mower, and building a house. They had to find ways to make do with limited provisions and ways to save the family money. They were supposed to travel West to promote the ideals embodied in the cult of domesticity. Their presence was supposed to civilize the men. Nannie Alderson initially followed the

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<sup>72</sup>Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties" Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870, (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd. 1980).

<sup>73</sup>Sarah Deutsch, No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>74</sup>Nancy Wilson Ross, Westward The Women, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1944), p. 182.

principles of etiquette as she took up a life on the plains. She was full of optimism and willing to fulfill her role as civilizer. She wrote in her diary: " We could still stand on ceremony, even though our floors were dirt."<sup>75</sup> As the first year passed Nannie found herself standing less on ceremony and more on everyday necessities.

The myths and legends of the West we know today continue to be put to rest by further study of this fascinating period of history in which women played an integral role. Women were able to step into the man's sphere out of necessity and the more relaxed social order in the West. Opportunities not available in the East were wide open in the West; it was the nature of the land. Women went both willingly and cheerfully in search of adventure and prosperity. They went by themselves and as married women. Women had the opportunity to be successful in every aspect of life. They were businesswomen, ranchers, homesteaders, doctors, lawyers, cowgirls and even rustlers. This was a West inhabited by women of all colors, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Each group has its story to tell which makes for a more complete picture of the story of the West. "Her" story is just as important as "his" story.

The image of the Western, rugged, independent individuals that led sometimes violent, but always courageous, lives, looms large in the popular imagery of the West today. However that popular imagery is largely male focused. It leaves women in the position, as artists of Western history so often painted her, as "looking at being looked at."<sup>76</sup> Which is to say they were delicate beings unable to play a significant role in the Western experience. This statement can be further simplified by saying, "*men act and women appear.*"<sup>77</sup> Women were so much more than that and they knew it. It was the wide open expanses of the West that offered women wide open opportunities to expand their role in society outside of their traditional sphere of influence.

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<sup>75</sup>Nannie Alderson and Helena Huntington Smith, A Bride Goes West, p. 58.

<sup>76</sup>Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, The Women's West, p. 29.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

## **"Giving Women a Voice in the Classroom"**

### **Outline of Lessons**

Lesson One: Introduction to Unit on Women in the American West .....	p. 40
Lesson Two: Women's Perceptions of Freedom in the West.....	p. 42
Lesson Three: Women Directing Their Own Lives in the West.....	p. 45
Lesson Four: The Importance of Women to the Survival of the Pioneer Settlements in the American West.....	p. 47
Lesson Five: Women's History in the West Through Images of Art and Photography.....	p. 49

## Lesson One - Introduction to Unit on Women in the American West

**"Women's Voices"**

*Introduction:* Women were integral active participants in the settling of the West. This overview lesson prepares students for a more in-depth look at women's roles in the West. It is important to grab students' attention with the stories told by the women who were there.

*Materials:* Women's diaries and reminiscences (see sources listed below)

*Activity:* **First** -- Have students write down responses to the following questions: Were women important to life in the West?  
Can we tell the story of the history of the American West without mentioning women?

**Second** -- Give students an opportunity to read diary entries or excerpts from reminiscences for 4-5 different women. \*\*As they read **ask** students to begin to imagine life on the frontier.

**Third** -- Have students write down the similarities or glaring differences among their selections. (Remember reminiscences often paint a rosier picture than diary entries.)

**Fourth** -- In small groups have students share the stories they read and compare the commonalties and differences.

*Conclusion:* **Ask students:**

Were women important to life in the West?

Can we tell the story of the history of the American West without mentioning women?

Did their(students) perceptions of the West change after reading the stories? If so how? What were the basis of their perceptions?

*A homework activity could be to have students write a diary entry as a woman in the West between 1840-1910..*

*Resources:* These resources are good starting points. Peruse your local or school library for other sources. If you have access to archives that include women's diaries from this time and place it would be great to expose students to that information. Also, helping students make connections between some of their own experiences or family histories and life in the West will influence what they take away from these lessons. (Making these connections is important when teaching any topic of history.)

Alderson, Nannie, and Smith, Helena Huntington. A Bride Goes West. New York: Farrar & Reinhart, Inc., 1942.

Holmes, Kenneth L., ed. Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1840-1880. 10 vols. Spokane: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1991.

Moynihan, Ruth B.; Armitage, Susan; Dichamp, Christiane; eds. So Much to be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

Schlissel, Lillian. Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey. New York: Schocken Books, 1982.

Stewart, Elinore Pruitt. Letters of a Woman Homesteader. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961.

Stratton, Joanna L. Pioneer Women: Voices From the Kansas Frontier. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1981.



## Lesson Two - Women's perceptions of freedom in the West

### "Voices of Freedom"

*Introduction:* Women spoke of feeling freer in the West than their Eastern sisters, yet there is a contradiction to freedom in the West. Many women were bound to the Cult of Domesticity and by breaking out they risked a great deal, but the rewards were greater. Freedom for one woman may also have equaled "bondage" for another. Regardless of the contradictions, the opportunities for women were far greater in the West than in the East. All of the readings for this section should get students to think about the extent of women's freedom in the West. They should question what made women seek their freedom and how "free" women define their freedom. (This lesson may require 2 days)

*Materials:* \*Chapter 5 from Susan G. Butruille's Women' Voices from the Western Frontier, entitled "Women who were free." Pages 89-109

\*Chapter 2 from Sarah Deutsch's No Separate Refuge, entitled "At the Center: Hispanic Village Women, 1900-1914. Pages 51-62.

Emily, The Diary of a Hardworked Woman (excerpt: "Elbert: The Plains in Winter" pp. 14 - 20)

Tomboy Bride (excerpt: Ch. 3 pp. 19-28)

So Much to be Done,  
 Chapter 12 "I resolved to try and be cheerful." p. 148  
 Chapter 17 "My people will never believe me again." p.227

*Activity:* **The readings from Butruille and Deutsch need to be assigned as outside reading prior to the day this lesson takes place.**

**First** -- Ask students to define the word Freedom. Are there symbols, objects, songs, pictures, they associate with freedom? To what degree do they feel free in their lives? When do they feel free? What do they think their mother or father would say?

**Second** -- Discuss Butruille and Deutsch readings - *Questions to ask:*

In what ways were women free? How did women define their freedom?

Could women have achieved the same degree of freedom in the East?

Why did women come West? Did all women come West looking for freedom or did the environment have an effect on their life choices?

What role did Hispanic women play in their communities?

Traditionally were Hispanic women more or less important in the family than Anglo women? Why?

Was the value of women's work recognized in Hispanic communities?

Were Hispanic women more or less free than Anglo women?

**Third** -- Have students think about and write a paragraph response to the following questions:

\*Are there differences in perceptions of freedom based on one's ethnic background?

\*Could one woman's freedom be another's bondage?

(Save student's responses to these questions for the end of the lesson)

**Fourth** -- look at excerpts from Emily, Tomboy Bride, and So Much to be Done.

**Ask students:**

Would Emily French consider herself free?

Is Harriet Backus free or because she operates within a traditional sphere of influence does that negate her rugged and exciting experiences? Are women who engage in domestic activities free?

In regards to Mrs. A.M. Green: if one is unhappy can she be free?

What happened to Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins' freedom?

*Conclusion:*

Ask students (as a whole class) to share their responses to the questions in the third section.

Do any students wish to add or change anything they wrote before reading the excerpts?

Does the definition of freedom discussed at the beginning of the class work for the women in the West?

*Resources:*

- Backus, Harriet Fish. Tomboy Bride: A woman's personal account of life in the mining camps of the West. Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1969.
- Butruille, Susan G. Women's Voices from the Western Frontier. Boise: Tamarack Books, Inc., 1995.
- Deutsch, Sarah. No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880-1940. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- French, Emily. Emily The Diary of a Hard-Worked Woman. Edited by Janet Lecompte. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.
- Moynihan, Ruth B.; Armitage, Susan; and Dichamp, Christiane Fischer, eds. So Much to be Done: Women settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier. 2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

(If time is a concern this lesson could be done by omitting part 2. The students will still get some sense of women's freedom, or lack there of, in the West.)

## Lesson Three - Women directing their own lives in the West

**"Taking Charge"**

**Introduction:** The nature of the Western environment allowed women to direct their own lives to a much greater extent than Eastern women. Opportunities were available to them outside the traditional women's sphere of influence. They were active in business, ranching, homesteading, politics, medicine, and law. (Depending on length of class period this lesson may take 2-2 1/2 days.)

**Materials:** Film Heartland

Women of the West, Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell. Pages 173-187. Journals of Bethenia Owens-Adair.

So Much to be Done, Ruth B. Moynihan. Ch. 15, pages 193-211. Story of Malinda Jenkins.

**Activity:** **Have students read *either* Moynihan or Luchetti prior to this lesson.**

Watch the film Heartland. This film is based on Elinore Pruitt Stewart's life, as told in her book Letters of a Woman Homesteader. It depicts pioneer life at the turn of the century. It does a good job showing the type of work women had to do, the isolation they dealt with, the hardships endured and the opportunities open to them. It is a beautiful film shot entirely in Montana, although the story takes place in Wyoming. This is a great film that students will be able to respond to easily. (95min.)

**Conclusion:** Ask students to describe what they found in their reading and what they saw in the film that answers the question: *How did women take charge of their lives?*

What choices did these women make?

How did society perceive these choices?

What sort of opportunities did they take advantage of?

What circumstances contributed to their life choices?

How do these women differ from the women we have studied thus far?

*For an assignment: Have students write a letter "back East" from the perspective of a pioneer woman. Have them tie in aspects of what has been covered in the three lessons to date.*

*Resources:*

Heartland Directed by: Richard Pearce, Executive Producer: Annick Smith, Written by: Beth Ferris with William Kittredge. 1979 Wilderness Women Productions, Inc. May be available at your local video store, but more likely at the local library.

Luchetti, Cathy.; Olwell, Carol. Women of the West. New York: Orion Books, 1981.

Moynihan, Ruth B.; Armitage, Susan; and Dichamp, Christiane Fischer, eds. So Much to be Done: Women settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier. 2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998.

Lesson Four - The importance of women to the survival of the  
pioneer settlements in the American West

**"Community"**

*Introduction:* Contrary to popular belief it was not rugged individualism that ensured the survival of settlement in the West, rather it was community and cooperation. Women were central to the formation of lasting communities. Many communities formed around ethnic identity.

*Materials:* Writing the Range, Jameson and Armitage, eds.  
Ch. 7 "The [Hispanic] Women of Lincoln County, 1860-1900  
(pp. 147-166)  
Ch.14 "*Euskaldun Andreak*: Basque Women as Hard Workers"  
(pp. 298-308)  
Ch.15 "'We are Women Irish': Gender, Class, Religious, and  
Ethnic Identity in Anaconda, Montana" (pp. 311-328)

*Activity:* **First** -- Ask students: What is a community?

**Second** -- In small groups have students read one of the essays outlined above. Students should read looking for indications of community and how important cooperation was to survival on the frontier.

**Third** -- Have students in their groups list all the community indicators. And identify how important women's roles were in establishing this community.

**Fourth** -- Students present to their classmates their findings from essay they were responsible for along with a brief synopsis.

*Conclusion:* **Ask students:**

How was community achieved?

What variations in community can be attributed to different ethnic identities?

Would communities have been formed without women? Were their roles important? If so how?

*Resources:*

Jameson, Elizabeth; Armitage, Susan. Writing the Range: Race Class, and Culture in the Women's West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997.

Lesson Five - Women's history in the West through images of  
Art and Photography

**"Images"**

*Introduction:* Many works of Art depicting the American West often emphasize the "rugged," "individual," male experience. Women are either absent, sullen, reluctant, brave civilizer types, or genteel women/girls "looking at being looked at." Photographs can help to differentiate between myth and reality. Photos have a wealth of information about real life.

*Materials:* The Women's West, Armitage and Jameson. Corlann Gee Bush essay "The Way We Weren't" p. 19-32.

The Women of the West, Luchetti and Olwell.

Pioneer Women, Stratton

Westering Women, Myres

Photographing Montana, Lucey

Remington and Russell, Dippie

Charles M. Russell Paintings of the Old American West, Russell

Frederic Remington's Own West, Remington

*Activity:* **Have students read Bush essay prior to class.**

**First** -- Have students summarize Bush's essay. What is her main argument? What information does she present that you can apply when looking at paintings today?

**Second** -- Have students study art books containing Russell and Remington's work and the art work in Myres book. Also have students look at photographs. If you have access to archival materials have students look through those too!

**Third** -- Have students write down their observations: subject of paintings, women's expressions, placement of women in a scene,



details of photos that were surprising. How did the photos differ from the paintings.

*(Prior to reading Bush's essay have students brainstorm pictures of the West. Have them sketch their own vision of the West)*

**Conclusion:**      **Ask students:**

What myths about the West were advanced by the paintings?

What realities about the West were portrayed through the photos?  
What do we learn about women's lives in the West?

How might some of the photos try to show life better than it was?

How do these images match up with written or oral history?

**Resources:**

Dippie, Brian W. Remington & Russell. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.

Jameson, Elizabeth, and Armitage, Susan, eds. The Women's West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

Lucey, Donna M. Photographing Montana 1894-1928: The Life and Work of Evelyn Cameron. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1990.

Luchetti, Cathy, and Olwell, Carol. Women of the West. New York: Orion Books, 1982.

Myres, Sandra L. Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982.

Remington, Frederic. Frederic Remington's Own West. Edited with introduction by Harold McCracken. New York: The Dial Press, 1960.

Russell, Charles M. Charles M. Russell Paintings of the Old American West. Introduction and commentaries by Louis Chapin. New York: Cross River Press, Ltd., 1978.

Stratton, Joanna L. Pioneer Women: Voices From the Kansas Frontier. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1981.

These are just some suggestions; if you do not have access to these art books exactly it shouldn't be a problem locating other books with works by both Remington and Russell. For another visual approach use some old John Wayne westerns. Take notice of women's placement in scenes. Women are often looking out from a small window or door frame, showing the limits of their world, while men are off in the big wide open world.

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