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THE RHETORIC OF THE FRONTIER AND THE FRONTIER OF RHETORIC

By

Carly Kay Paul

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters

Department of English

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As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Carly Kay Paul in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements, (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

THE RHETORIC OF THE FRONTIER AND THE FRONTIER OF RHETORIC

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Department of English

Masters

The definition of rhetoric has recently been expanded to include elements of experience, particularly the experiences that landscape provides. One landscape that has rhetorical significance is the American frontier, both in Colonial times and in the nineteenth century. The frontier had a rhetorical impact on women, in particular, giving them freedom to change their roles and achieve economic, political, and social success. Because of the tremendous significance of the frontier in women's lives, a new definition of frontiers emphasizes conditions such as opportunity for change, a dangerous and uncertain atmosphere, a freedom of thought and action, and an ability to redefine roles. This new definition allows for both a literal and symbolic interpretation of frontiers. In studying American women's history, it becomes clear that women needed a frontier existence to flourish and create an independent (and decidedly American) identity.

Colonial women enjoyed an unprecedented freedom because they existed on a frontier. As the frontier moved westward, women living on the East Coast were deprived of freedoms and opportunities and were increasingly confined to the home. As a result, suffragists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony adapted a feminist rhetoric, the practice of which provided a symbolic frontier for eastern women. Though their female rights rhetoric empowered eastern women, society was too restrictive for complete change; consequently, it took over seventy years for women to obtain suffrage.

While women on the East Coast struggled to attain suffrage, Mormon women living in the West enjoyed political, social, and economic freedoms (including the vote). Mormon women enjoyed this freedom because they existed on geographical, rhetorical, and religious frontiers. They lived in the untamed West, practiced the feminist rhetoric of their eastern counterparts, and participated in a radical new religion that not only gave them a mandate from God to change their roles, but also gave them the opportunity to be part of polygamous marriages. These marriages, though seemingly enslaving, actually benefitted Mormon women. Mormon women provide a great example of empowering effect of frontiers. The frontier, as defined in this thesis, gave women freedom and opportunity.

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Introduction: The Rhetorical and The Frontier Defined

Rhetoric has traditionally been associated with language—either oral or written discourse. From Its inception, rhetoric has been "primarily, the art of persuasive speaking" (Bizzell and Herzberg, 2). This art has taken many different forms in history from constructing effective speeches, to defending one's right to speak, to understanding human psychology and behavior. In our modern world rhetoric has expanded to include the visual and has been redefined repeatedly according to culture, race, and gender, with an emphasis on how human beings relate to each other—how they influence and shape identity—through rhetorical exchange. Yet, generally, rhetoric has remained a tradition steeped in the use of language to persuade an audience. While rhetoric can of course be defined as the effective use of language to persuade an audience, such a limited definition is unrealistic. Rhetoric can and should also be defined as experience, as the events, sights, sounds, relationships that create identity and influence actions. Kenneth Burke's *Rhetoric* of Motives, in fact, defines the rhetorical as any interaction that has a "formative effect upon attitude" (50). Thus, rhetorical elements should not be limited just to certain verbal or written appeals, but must be expanded to include elements of experience, with landscape and geographical location as primary rhetorical factors, for these factors greatly shape attitudes and identities. In this thesis I will study rhetoric as both language and experience, focusing on the language of the women's rights movement of the nineteenth century and on the rhetorical influence of the frontier in the lives of colonial women and nineteenth century Mormon women.

As I define rhetoric in these terms, it becomes necessary to define the term frontier, for the frontier is an influential element of rhetorical experience for women. The actual dictionary definition of the word explains that a frontier is the edge of a geographical boundary. In this way, a frontier is an untamed and unsettled geographical location, the blurry line between total wilderness and civilization. This kind of frontier shapes the attitudes of its inhabitants. But the dictionary definition also describes a

frontier as an undeveloped sphere of knowledge, meaning that it can and does pertain to thoughts and arguments, particularly when those thoughts and arguments enact dramatic changes in society. For example, the relatively unexplored sphere of women's rights arguments was a kind of frontier for nineteenth century American suffragists because it provided them with a vehicle for social change, enabling them to move into a more public location than the home to which they had been confined. Thus, a frontier can be both geographical and intellectual, or ideological.

Frederick Jackson Turner, a nineteenth century historian and sociologist, defines the frontier as a geographical location which shapes identity and creates an "American Character." In his landmark essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Turner asserts that

the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. . . . In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. He must accept the conditions which it furnishes, or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails (33).

According to Turner, then, the American frontier is the definitive element of American society. As such, it has a rhetorical influence on the attitudes and identities of those who come in contact with it. It creates a new identity—an American one—and reshapes a person through rigorous contact. The term *frontier* has multiple definitions and implications, ranging from a literal, geographical space to a more symbolic undeveloped sphere of knowledge, and Turner provides a unique perspective as he claims that the frontier is a geographical location that

¹Examples of intellectual frontiers abound throughout history, particularly in the sciences and in philosophy. From such examples, it is clear that as an undeveloped sphere of knowledge was explored, great changes occurred in society.

transforms its inhabitants and creates a distinctive identity.

Yet Turner's assertions are slightly limited because he claims that a location can only be considered a frontier if it is an unsettled area. According to Turner, the moment a frontier becomes a community it ceases to be a frontier. In this thesis I will offer an expanded definition of the term frontier that accounts for the rhetorical significance of landscape. Landscape has meaning, according to Greg Clark, because it is never viewed unmediated. That is, when people look at a landscape, they do so through eyes that were trained to attach meaning to certain elements; for example, women coming to Colonial America were trained to view the land as an untamed wilderness full of danger, mystery, and opportunity. This view led to a development of ingenuity and independence. Thus, landscape is significant because it is part of a "full range of symbols that constitute a person's social and cultural experience" (3). Roxanne Mountford, another scholar of the rhetoric of landscape, asserts that "rhetorical space is the geography of a communicative event, and, like all landscapes, may include both the cultural and material arrangement, whether intended or fortuitous, of space. . . . Rhetorical spaces carry the residue of history upon them, but [they] also [carry] . . . a physical representation of relationships and ideas" (42). The frontiers of Colonial America and the Wild West provided a rhetorical space for women that was filled with opportunity and newness. The frontier signified and created a lifestyle that included several important elements: a sense of wilderness to be mastered, an atmosphere of danger and uncertainty, an allowance for individuals to grow in competence and ability, a sense of freedom of thought and action, an allowance for change in identity and roles, and a creation of social, political, and economic opportunities. These conditions define the frontier that American women responded to. This expanded definition of the frontier can be interpreted either literally or symbolically, and it accounts for the significance that frontiers have

played in American women's lives.

In this thesis I will study the American woman's relationship with the frontier on material and symbolic levels, reinforcing Turner's assertion that the frontier creates a new identity, and then expanding his assertion to account for the true rhetorical significance of the frontier. Whether it be in a direct or indirect way, a woman's surroundings affect her opportunities and her character, either creating for her more freedom or creating in her a need to find a frontier, even a symbolic one. I will explore the symbolic frontier that the practice of rhetoric created for women in the eastern United States. In the pursuit of understanding the frontier as rhetorical and rhetoric as a frontier, I will use the term "geographical frontier" to describe the untamed land of colonial America as well as the land of the nineteenth century American West. I will use the term "rhetorical frontier" to signify the undeveloped sphere of female rights arguments and to describe how the practice of rhetoric provided nineteenth century women with a symbolic frontier. I will also use the term "religious frontier" to indicate the undeveloped sphere of knowledge and belief that Mormonism (a new religion) brought to nineteenth century women.

Women's relationships with frontiers have always been complicated.

Some scholars claim that the frontiers of colonial America and the American

West in the nineteenth century were imposed upon women, and that they forced
them into roles and circumstances they were uncomfortable with. The frontier
was a man's world, as many accounts describe it. Frederick Jackson Turner
describes what type of frontier colonial America was, writing that it consisted of
"fisherman, fur-trader, miner, cattle-raiser, and farmer" (39). While men
industriously conquered the land, women faced what Mary White Rowlandson
called a "vast and desolate Wilderness" (qtd in Kolodny, 6). And the dark forests
created a symbolic captivity which was bolstered by the literal captivity narratives

of a few women (Kolodny, 6). This creates a bleak image of a lonely woman fighting the elements of a fearful wilderness.

Yet others explain that a frontier existence provided women with opportunities and freedoms that they could not have enjoyed in any other location during colonial times and the westward expansion. Indeed, Annette Kolodny, in her book *The Land Before Her*, explains the difficulties women faced in the new world of America, and then asserts that "to escape the psychology of captivity, women set about making their own mark on the landscape" (6-7). That mark began with the simple act of gardening, which Kolodny explains gave women a kind of benign mastery over the land, alleviating their anxiety and creating a new identity for colonial women (7). As societies developed, women's roles became more important to frontier life. Anne Frior Scott, editor of *The American Woman: Who Was She*?, describes this era:

In colonial times American women had a hard life, but considerable opportunity. Women's work was important (as the Virginia assembly recognized almost as soon as the first settlement began, when it agreed to give grants of land to women as well as men). As the colonial society took shape in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, women could be found doing all kinds of things: speaking for themselves in courts of law, running print shops and newspapers, inns and schools, practicing medicine, and supervising plantations (4).

Despite the harshness of a frontier location, and the resulting trials women faced, frontier life provided more opportunity for women than a life in settled land, and through close contact with the land, women became more self-sufficient and independent.

Logically it would seem that a woman living in these conditions would be able to successfully rally for suffrage and greater legal rights for herself and her sex. Yet it was not until the geographical frontier moved westward, disappearing from the East² and being replaced with an industrial society, that women began to speak out in large numbers about their rights. A new kind of frontier emerged for women: the frontier of rhetoric (rhetorical frontier). Though this was not a geographical frontier, it was an undeveloped sphere of knowledge for these particular women and it enabled them to occupy a more public location.

Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, when faced with an absence of a geographical frontier and a resultant narrowing of a woman's sphere, attempted to adapt a rhetoric for women that, in its boldness, was a frontier because it placed women outside of the home and it was a realm of knowledge in need of exploration and development. This frontier of rhetoric came in the form of the natural rights and expediency arguments, upon which most of the women's rights arguments were based. Most of the well-known nineteenth century women's rights activists were not living on the wild geographical frontier. Their location was the confined and stuffy home in the well-established, maledominated city. In such a restricted position, these women explored a fairly undeveloped sphere of knowledge—female rights rhetoric—and attempted to recreate their identity within that sphere.

And while Stanton and Anthony worked hard to maintain and develop this frontier, Mormon women living in the West, on a geographical frontier, had their own undeveloped sphere of knowledge to reinforce their freedom and opportunity: a new religion. Women like Eliza R. Snow and Emmeline B. Wells, though seemingly enslaved in polygamous marriages and a patriarchal society, had access to more freedom, more opportunity than their eastern counterparts

²The "East" refers, basically, to the original 13 colonies and the Atlantic Coast of the United States. During the nineteenth century this area was the most civilized and developed in the country.

because they not only lived on the frontier, but they were also part of the frontier of a new religion (a religious frontier), which allowed them to redefine their roles with what they believed to be a mandate from God. In addition to this frontier of a new religion, Mormon women also had access to the women's rights rhetoric of Stanton and Anthony, which broadened their spheres and their ideological freedom. Though there were other women in the West who also had voting rights, and other religious groups who gave women tremendous freedom (such as the Quakers, who encouraged women to get an education), Mormon women lived in unique circumstances because they had an incredibly distinct and new religion coupled with a geographical frontier, and their lives were influenced by the women's rights rhetoric of eastern women. Their story must be explored in depth because it reveals the complex and ultimately beneficial effect that a frontier—whether religious, rhetorical, or geographical—has on a woman's life. To study a Mormon woman's relationship with her material and symbolic frontiers is to understand the rhetoric of experience in many of its complexities.

By exploring the relationship that women have with geographical, rhetorical, and religious frontiers, I will argue that, despite a few exceptions, a frontier is necessary for a woman to have freedom and opportunity. I will also examine the idea that rhetoric is not merely language, but experience, and that location is one of the most important rhetorical creators of identity for American women.³ In chapter one, I will provide an overview of American women's lives from colonial times to the beginning of the nineteenth century, focusing on women's relationships with the geographical frontier of the eastern United States. The purpose of chapter one is to reveal how tightly connected American women's

³Because of the scope of the thesis, African American and Native American women will not be discussed, although their relationship with frontiers would be important to explore.

freedom and opportunity were to a frontier. I will also reveal how a geographical frontier created the self-sufficient and independent identity of the American woman, explaining how that identity became tragically swallowed up in that of her husband's, father's, and brother's, as the East became civilized and the frontier moved westward.

In chapter two, I will explore what happened to women in the East as the nineteenth century progressed, revealing that in the absence of a geographical frontier, women turned to rhetoric to establish a new location for themselves in the public sphere. Though these women were deprived of a geographical frontier, they could not suppress their identities as American women, as those whose progenitors were molded and transformed by their frontier surroundings. The purpose of this study is to reveal how necessary a frontier was to women's happiness, as well as to point out that frontiers are not always material, geographical locations for women, and that intellectual frontiers can provide a freedom similar to the liberty created by a geographical frontier. In addition, this chapter will illuminate the importance of location as an influencer of attitude, and therefore, as a rhetorical element.

At this time, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony developed a rhetorical frontier (a frontier of rhetoric) for women, rallying for legal rights, social rights, and, most importantly, for voting rights. Despite the fact that these women had access to an intellectual frontier, they were still limited and it still took 70 years for them to achieve the vote. One reason why Stanton and Anthony were limited is that they were surrounded by civilization, rather than an unsettled frontier. Thus, there was less opportunity for women because their roles, like the very buildings and cities surrounding them, were rigid and fixed. They also lived in such a civilized, established society that any sign of social deviation would weaken the power of their arguments. Because of these limitations, Stanton,

Anthony, and their followers had to make compromises, and even water-down their rhetoric for fear of being labeled social deviants.

Contrasting this fear of an identity of social deviation was the Mormons' complete departure from socially acceptable norms. In chapter three I will explore the lives of Mormon women living in the Salt Lake Valley in the nineteenth century, focusing on their relationship with a geographical, rhetorical, and religious frontier as a means of providing unprecedented and unequaled freedom and power. Though to the rest of the country Mormon women seemed to be enslaved, in reality they owned their own businesses, led powerful women's organizations, took part in all aspects of daily life, and even had the right to vote. The purpose of this third chapter is to not only provide a complete view of a woman's relationship with frontiers, but also to initiate a conversation about nineteenth century Mormon women compared with their eastern counterparts and their colonist predecessors. Scholars of women's studies, history, and rhetoric have overlooked Mormon women during this time period, dismissing their accomplishments as mere extensions of a pervading patriarchal order. More research must be done on Mormon women to uncover their remarkable lives and to possibly change the perception of these women as only the wives of polygamous men.

In the conclusion I will revisit the definitions of rhetoric and the frontier, and reemphasize their place in the lives of American women. Both the rhetorical influence of the frontier and the rhetoric that resulted from an absence of a frontier reveal that because their cultural status has been secondary to men, women need an uncharted area, whether material or symbolic, in order to thrive. Indeed, women need a frontier; they need an undeveloped sphere of knowledge to conquer, if not an untamed land to tackle, in order to create an identity that accounts for their own needs and desires.

Chapter One: The American Woman and the Frontier: 1550-1900

The American woman's identity was shaped by her frontier surroundings. From the earliest days of colonization to the rise of industrialism in the nineteenth century, American women have had a relationship with the landscape that was at first hostile, then freeing, and at last, as the frontier moved westward and industrialization took hold of the east, restricting. In studying the improvements and set-backs in women's history, it is clear that the role of women became increasingly insignificant as the nation moved from a rugged, frontier existence to a civilized, industrial existence. As industrialization swept men from the fields and out of the home, women's work in the home decreased in value, for the reward for work became cash, rather than self-sufficient survival. Barbara Welter describes the changing status of women in her article "The Cult of True Womanhood." She explains that the emergence of a larger middle class in the early nineteenth century saw the creation of the cult of domesticity, which enforced the image of the ideal "lady," whose function was almost entirely ornamental. A woman living in a civilized city was to be weak, fainting, dainty, beautiful, and above all, she was never to deviate from the cultural norm by speaking in public or pursuing a career outside of the home (152). Basically, a true "lady" never sought her own personal advancement.

A frontier woman, however, "was different from her sister living in the older and better-settled communities . . . in that she had greater freedom from the traditions and conventions that hampered and lessened the ambitions of women" (Groves, 38). As American women's locations became more "civilized" and limiting, they sought to create their own frontiers through the rhetoric of the women's rights movement in the mid to late nineteenth century.

In this chapter I will address the changes that have occurred in American women's status from the colonial period up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Focusing on the shift from the geographical frontiers of the colonial period to the more civilized east coast of the nineteenth century, I will explain that as the frontier moved farther west, it took many of the freedoms and privileges women enjoyed with it. In addressing women's early relationships with the frontier, I will establish the concept that the colonial frontier created the identity of the American woman. I will also set the stage for the study of nineteenth century feminism (addressed in chapter two) as a result of the repressive industrial landscape of the eastern United States. In addition to preparing for that study, I will also lay a foundation which will be built upon in a study of Mormon women in chapter three.

Colonial America

During the colonial period in American history (1550-1760), women fled to the New World for a variety of reasons: some sought to improve their financial status, some fled from religious persecution, some were even sentenced to come to America instead of going to prison. Catherine Clinton, who wrote The Other Civil War, explains that many women came to America as indentured servants, getting their passage money in exchange for a term of work (4). Indeed some women were sold as wives for the cost of their transportation. These women were described as "agreeable persons, young, and incorrupt. .. sold with their own consent to settlers as wives, the price to be the cost of their own transportation" (qtd in Flexner, 1). Whether uprooted by force or by choice, women coming to America from the European continent had an identity-altering experience in the wilderness of the New World. The New World was a frontier wherein women could start their lives over, make new rules, and even experience rags-to-riches success. In the New World, a woman could carve out her own existence relatively free from the fetters of the staunch and uncompromising Europe. Yet it was also fraught with difficulty, captivity, and a fear of the unknown. In any case, the first women coming to America experienced the rhetoric of the frontier in such a way that their lives were changed,

usually for the better.

The conditions that women faced in the New World were extremely harsh, however. Judith Giton, who lived in Carolina wrote, "I have been six months without tasting bread, working like a ground slave; and I have even passed three and four years without having food when I wanted it" (qtd in Clinton, 4). Perhaps such trying times shaped these European women the most, creating in them a necessity-driven independence and ingenuity, which transformed them into Turner's "American character" (32). The harsh trials early colonial women had to endure resulted in their own transformation as well as an eventual increase of their freedoms and opportunities. As physically and emotionally wrenching as it was to reside on the colonial frontier in the early days, most scholars agree that "colonial women enjoyed better living conditions, better health, and higher status than their European counterparts" (Lerner, xxviii). The newness of the land influenced these women to renew their own lives, and to make their own mark on their surroundings through hard work, suffering, and boldness.

Yet there were many women whose hard work and suffering did not pay off. In her book, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America*, Carol Berkin relates shocking statistics of women and children in the Chesapeake area. According to her research, the average life-expectancy of men in the early days of the Chesapeake was forty years, while women's life expectancy was thirty nine years. A life of hard labor coupled with diseases such as malaria made for a "near-century of demographic disaster." Nearly a quarter of babies born during this time did not live past their first birthday and forty to fifty-five percent of white children born in this area died before their twentieth birthday (7). In an area where death was a daily experience, women and men had to live their lives differently than their English counterparts. Perhaps the landscape of intricate, winding waterways and miles of unending forest was a reflection of the complicated and untamed lifestyle that colonists in the Chesapeake lived. Whatever hardships women had to endure, generally life in the colonies afforded women much more freedom and

opportunity than life in the Old World ever could have precisely because of the rhetorical impact of such harsh conditions—the change in attitude and identity which they created.

The rhetoric of the colonial frontier slowly began to alter women's attitudes and actions, molding them into Americans. At first immobilized by the wilderness, women began to garden, and to make their impression on the landscape. Women began to reconstruct their identity based on their relationship with the land, with their mere survival depending on how they interacted with their surroundings. Annette Kolodny provides examples of this relationship:

Many times widowed on the treacherous frontier, Ann Kennedy Wilson Poague Lindsay McGinty . . . took stock of the wilderness around her and devised a means of using fibers of "nettles and other weeds" that grew so abundantly there as a substitute for flax, thereby supplying her family with a usable cloth for the warm winter garments they so urgently needed (49).

Even the simple act of making clothes for the family was a somewhat transforming experience, because it gave women the power to create something new from their surroundings, and it created an intimate relationship with the frontier that infused women with confidence. Women's dependence on the land altered their constructions of themselves, even to the point of their food and clothing. Indeed, as women molded the landscape, the landscape molded women into Americans. Turner defines the social development of Americans as a process of "perennial rebirth, . . .fluidity of . . . life, expansion westward with . . . new opportunities, [and] continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society" (32). As women living in the colonies became "American" by Turner's definition, they enjoyed the opportunities and freedoms that the "American Dream" professed to offer.

One reason for women's participation in the American Dream was that in the New World the value of a woman was relatively high. Women coming to America from Europe experienced a major shift in their roles and worth within budding communities.

The rhetoric of the landscape dramatically altered these women's identity in society because it created an immediate need for women to take an active role in the community. Because instability was a rule on the American frontier, women became extremely valuable as a stabilizing force. Investors in the Virginia colony, upon realizing this fact, campaigned for more women to make the passage from Old World to New. As Eleanor Flexner, author of *Century of Struggle*, explains, the Virginia investors believed that without women this colony would "remain a loose, constantly shifting aggregation of adventurers" (1). This reveals how the frontier can alter one's attitude and break down social hierarchies. Catherine Clinton explains that "women were a desperately required commodity for the New World—to supply settlements with much needed labor, domestic influence, and the power of natural increase" (4). The idea of women as vital contributors to society directly contrasts the traditional European idea of a woman's role as ancillary to a man's. This reveals the rhetorical influence of the frontier, and the benefits that women enjoyed from living in an untamed land.

Another reason why women benefited from the landscape was that they were immensely outnumbered. The colonial frontier was a man's world: "men outnumbered women by six to one in the earliest decades, and three to one as late as the 1680's" (Berkin, 6). Men made up the majority of the colonial population, and because of this, a woman's gender, alone, placed her in a unique position as a precious commodity. Some called the colonies a "woman's paradise," and indeed a woman could find a husband easily, though marriage for women meant a life of hard labor and child birth almost every two years. The harsh environment gave value and meaning to a woman's difference from a man, changing her image of herself and impacting her status and freedom.

That freedom came in many forms, the most prominent of which was economic.

Gerda Lerner, in her introduction to *The Female Experience*, asserts that "in the American colonies a shortage of labor, a shortage of women, . . . and the economic demands of a pre-industrial society gave women relatively greater mobility, higher status,

and greater independence than what prevailed in other countries" (xxviii). Indeed women in colonial times had access to occupations that they could never have aspired to in the Old World. Catherine Clinton writes that "women played vital roles in the colonial economy. . . . Whenever a tavernkeeper or shopkeeper died, his wife often took over and ran the business. Widows maintained their late husbands' enterprises, relatively unhampered by colonial authorities" (7). Not only were wives able to take over their husbands' businesses, but there are many instances of women starting their own enterprises.

Catherine Clinton gives several examples of the employment opportunities for women on the colonial frontier, particularly during the revolutionary period in the 1760's. Clinton writes that, "New England's colonial records indicate that commerce was abustle with industrious and enterprising women. Jane Mecom, Benjamin Franklin's sister, ran a shop in Boston during the 1760's. Elizabeth Murray Smith ran a successful business in Boston, as did Margaret Hutchinsonin Philadelphia and Elizabeth Thompson in Charleston" (7). Frontier life made it possible for these women to start businesses and run them successfully. Because "a steady supply of goods and services was essential to a fragile colonial community" (Clinton, 7), women in business were able to enjoy a relative autonomy, transforming them into independent beings.

In fact, a woman with enough courage and know-how to start a business venture was rewarded with respect in the frontier setting. The idea of the self-made man (and woman) was an essential ingredient in frontier psychology. Because the colonists came to the New World with a desire to start over and remake themselves, the ability of anyone—man or woman—to succeed in becoming self-made was always admired. Ernest Groves, in his article "Frontier Women" explains that "in a less expansive way . . . the frontier woman also had opportunity to become self-made. She could not hope to reach the heights of power or distinction or influence that were open goals for men, but she could arrive at a reputation, at least locally, for knowing how to handle herself and her

circumstances and thus gain respect and even admiration" (37). Though a woman's place in the frontier economy was always below a man's place, she was still able to gain a foothold in society and be rewarded with respect and a good reputation.

A woman's foothold in society, nevertheless, was still often jeopardized by Old World laws and social regulations, especially in the case of a married woman. Eleanor Flexner points out that women were harshly discriminated against through English law: "married women could not sign contracts; they had no title to their own earnings, to property even when it was their own by inheritance or dower, or to their children in case of legal separation. Divorce, when granted at all by the courts or by legislative action, was given only for the most flagrant abuses: adultery, desertion and non-support, and extreme cruelty" (8). Clearly, colonial women still had much discrimination to contend with, particularly in the realm of their legal rights. Though a woman could have her own business, she could not be a member of any decision-making boards, nor had she much say in politics or religion.

A woman's freedom was limited to just those things that a frontier existence deemed necessary to survival, and yet this was no small gain, for women had significant legal rights in relationship to the land on which they lived. By the end of the seventeenth century, widows and single women could hold property in any of the colonies. By the end of the eighteenth century, Kolodny explains, it was not uncommon for a father to leave property and land to his daughters as well as to his sons, and "the same contingencies of colonial existence that were thus slowly altering centuries of English custom in land ownership did make available to women opportunities for land management that would have been unimaginable to their counterparts in Europe" (49). Thus, the rhetoric of the frontier altered the identity of women, and altered the manner in which women were treated. Though cultural norms and restrictions did indeed carry over from the Old World, in the New World, women were able to reinterpret some of the rules and make changes based on the needs their geographical frontier created.

Also, because the New World lacked the social structures and hierarchies that were a mainstay in the Old World, colonists were forced to create their own structures. A lack of human resources and comfortable class distinctions enabled men and women in the colonies to form their own close ties and community life. Carol Berkin reinforces this idea in her description of the colonists in the Chesapeake area. She writes, "in the absence of strong or adequately responsive social institutions . . . colonists sustained one another. Men witnessed each other's wills, appraised their neighbor's estates, raised barns ... and protected families from Indian attacks. Women linked their daily lives by visiting, attending at childbirth, nursing the sick, and exchanging household products" (10-11). In such a community-oriented environment, gender roles became fluid and less easily defined. For example, Berkin cites instances where women and men gathered to socialize. She writes that "women as well as men smoked, drank, and played cards and games of dice" (11). Thus, while many Old World ideas immigrated to the New World, the lack of social structures and institutions in the colonies enabled women to have a major role in building and maintaining communities, not to mention in bending gender rules. Building their own communities procured for women a respect and a more generally recognized voice in frontier society.

In the time just prior to the revolution, foreign observations of women reveal a freedom of manner and a growing self-reliance that made these women truly American. One French observer wrote that "the young women here enjoy a liberty, which to French manners would appear disorderly: they go out alone, walk with young men, and depart with them from the rest of the company in large assemblies" (qtd in Benson, 23). Another Frenchman praised American women for their honest modesty, and found them refreshingly different from "our affected bashfulness and false reserve" (qtd in Benson, 24). American women's temerity astounded foreigners and became somewhat of a symbol for the growing defiance of the whole country in the time leading up to the war for independence.

A particularly interesting group of American women during the pre-Revolutionary period were those living on the extreme frontiers of the south. Phillip Ludwell's journal in 1710 described such a woman:

It is said of this Mrs. Jones from whose house we came that she is a very civil woman and shews nothing of ruggedness or Immodesty in her carriage, yett she will carry a gunn in the woods and kill deer, turkey, &c., shot down wild cattle, catch and tye hoggs, knock down beeves with an ax, and perform the most manfull Exercises as well most men in those parts (qtd in Benson, 27).

Mrs. Jones provides an excellent example of a frontier woman carving out a life for herself and her family, performing "manfull" tasks as necessity dictates, and earning the respect and admiration of others in the process. Women like Mrs. Jones represent the core values of frontier society and illuminate the underlying ideals and beliefs that sparked the American Revolution. She is a definitive example of a woman transformed by her landscape.

Revolutionary America

The status of women in colonial America reached an all-time high as colonists began to vie for their independence from England. During this time, extreme political upheaval and the probability of war created an ultimate frontier existence for women. Not only were they on a geographical frontier, they were also on the brink of a political frontier, a new country, an independent America. Women took an active role in the Revolutionary War, for practical economic reasons, for the good of the country, and for the chance to break free from the discriminatory laws and customs of British rule. In the revolution, women saw a chance for more autonomy and opportunity.

The motivations and experiences of women during this time were as varied as were the women, themselves. Race, class, economic status, religion and geographical location were all key ingredients in the lives of women. But a single thread runs through each colonial woman's life during the Revolutionary period: whether they were Loyalists

or rebels; rich or poor; married or single, these women were placed in a situation that required much more self-sufficiency and political awareness than they had needed before.

This was a time for them to test their "American character."

During this period, whether they were ostracized for their conservative political views, or whether they were active participants in dangerous spying operations for General Washington, women were driven out of their stability and into a realm of selfsacrifice, self-sufficiency, and self-awareness. Women who were loyal to England, who had been prominent members of good society, who enjoyed wealth and status, were often forced out of their homes as traitors. One example of such a woman is Grace Galloway. Carol Berkin tells Grace Galloway's story, providing a glimpse into the lives of women Loyalists. Grace's husband, Joseph, a once highly respected member of the community, remained loyal to England and declared himself a traitor to the colonies. Leaving Grace behind, he took their only daughter and fled the area in order to avoid the backlash of revolutionary sentiment. Forced to live on her own, Grace fought obstinately to maintain her possessions and wealth. As a married woman, she had essentially become a legally non-existent person, and therefore had all of her possessions confiscated. She fought to the end, however, and in her journal expressed a satisfaction "in a newfound independence, in a discovered a capacity for autonomy" (Berkin, 168). No longer depending on a man for her place in society was somewhat freeing for Grace, despite the indignity of renting rooms, of going through unsuccessful court battles, and feeling a great amount of resentment and bitterness. Many colonial women who remained loyal to the crown during the Revolutionary war experienced an uprooting of everything which composed their identity. Status, home, family, and social customs were all affected and, in some cases, changed during this decisive time period in American history. And the result was an evolution American women's identities based on their surroundings.

Those women who did believe in the cause of the revolution were going through their own changes, and moved onto a decidedly new frontier. Women whose husbands and fathers had left to fight in the war experienced the extreme benefits and drawbacks of these changes. Catherine Clinton's study of women during this war reveals that the

Revolution was one of the most vital catalysts for women's changing roles. The political crisis provided women with new and essential tasks and paved the way for accelerated changes. During the war, women were left alone on the home front ... Documents demonstrate that scores of women underwent dramatic transformation during the prolonged separations from their husbands and fathers. Initially women shrank from the tremendous burdens men expected them to shoulder ... But slowly and surely women found the strength and capability not only to endure but to master these responsibilities (12).

Journals and letters from women on the home front reveal an ever-increasing independence and sense of capability. Carol Berkin cites a study of simple pronouns used throughout a series of letters from a Eliza Lucas to her soldier husband. She begins talking about "his" crop and "his" cows, gradually shifts into using "our" to describe these things, and eventually refers to the land and the farm as "mine" (182). During the revolutionary war, women surely went through a strengthening process, during which their relationships with the land reached a climax of intensity, and their identities as Americans solidified.

Yet these processes were not always beneficial, or strengthening. Women on the home front of the revolutionary war faced the inconvenience of British military occupation as well as the terror of being raped by soldiers. The number of rapes that took place in the colonies is staggering, not to mention the glib manner in which British officers responded to colonial women's complaints. Cavalry commander Lord Rawdon exemplifies this lighthearted attitude: "The fair nymphs of this isle [Staten Island] are in wonderful tribulation. A girl cannot step into the bushes to pluck a rose without running the most imminent risk of being ravished" (qtd in Berkin, 184). Those women who went to war with their husbands faced similar abuse, indignity, and mistreatment. The

Revolutionary War was not just a time of great progress and opportunity for women; it was also a time of great suffering as well.

Whatever the negative consequences of the revolution, it was still a time wherein women residing on the frontier of America gained a greater political consciousness and were able to make a direct impact on the outcome of the war. In fact, women were able to affect the status of the colonies merely by choosing to boycott imported British goods. Never before had a simple homemaking decision been such a political statement. Women had political power even in their own kitchens and parlors. There is a story of a nine year old girl who was offered a cup of British tea at the home of a wealthy loyalist. She curtsied, brought the cup to her lips, and tossed its contents out the window. Even a nine year old girl could make a political statement during the Revolution. Women were almost always involved in public demonstrations, especially when the demonstrations were spontaneous. Some ministers and political leaders encouraged women to participate in these political acts and to stimulate their husbands to the same action.

And while male leaders encouraged women to participate in the Revolution in their limited way, some women literally took part in the fight for independence by enlisting as soldiers. Deborah Sampson Gannett of Massachusetts enlisted under the name Robert Shurtleff. She fought bravely next to other male soldiers for three years, the men learning her sex only when she was wounded. She wrote a petition for a pension for her service, asking that "though a female," she "receive the pay and emoluments granted to other wounded and disabled soldiers" (395-6). No explanation was given for why Deborah was not granted her petition, but after several attempts, she was finally granted a recompense for her service. After telling her story, Deborah became a national hero, was given her own lecture circuit, and her own book. The revolution obscured gender roles to the point that a woman could assume a male identity, act in a completely unprecedented and socially improper manner, and be praised and awarded for doing so. This was surely a time when women, whether they suffered or whether they prospered, were extremely

politically influential, and were given extreme opportunities for recognition.

The Revolutionary War also helped to spark a small feminist movement. Ten years before Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, which is cited as the beginning of the modern women's rights movement, Judith Murray was writing her own essays about the disparity between male and female opportunities. Perhaps seeing the Revolution as her chance to discuss women's mistreatment, Murray argued for the equality of women and the need to educate girls in more than just household duties. In response to those who argued that educated women would neglect their domestic responsibilities, she wrote,

Should it still be vociferated "Your domestic employments are sufficient"—I would calmly ask, is it reasonable that a candidate for immortality, for the joys of heaven, an intelligent being, who is to spend an eternity in contemplating the works of Deity, should at present be so degraded, as to be allowed no other ideas, than those which are suggested by the mechanism of a pudding, or the sewing of the seams of a garment? (Qtd in Flexner, 16).

Clearly during this time there was a spirit of revolution not just among the patriots of the country, but also among the women of the country. Women saw this time as an opportunity to obtain more rights.

Post-Revolutionary America

The colonial and revolutionary periods in women's history reveal that a frontier existence, however physically taxing, ultimately provides women with greater opportunities to enter into politics, the economy, and to have relatively more freedom within society. Yet if the Revolutionary War was the climax of women's power and influence within the frontier community, then the post Revolutionary period was the disappointing fall in the status and opportunities of women. Those women who had fought for independence—some even going into battle disguised as men—believed that they might have some influence in organizing a new government. Unfortunately, the

decades following the war saw little political or economic relief for those women who had put so much energy into the campaign for freedom. Statesmen's rhetoric, which attempted to recognize women for their revolutionary efforts, did little to assuage women's growing dissatisfaction. Women wanted tangible compensation for their efforts, and the men returning from war wanted to put women back into a dependent role. Resenting this attempt to silence them, some outspoken women rallied for political and legal rights. Mary Willing Byrd of Virginia proclaimed: "as a female, as the parent of eight children, as a virtuous citizen, as a friend to my Country, and as a person who has never violated the laws of her country . . . I have paid my taxes and have not been Personally or Virtually represented. My property is taken from me and I have no redress" (qtd in Clinton, 14). Despite the fact that these women used the very same language that was used by the founding fathers against the British government, they found little sympathy for their cause among the men and political leaders of America.

While African American slaves and Native Americans were granted a special status in the constitution, women were excluded from definitions of citizenship altogether. The franchise was a right granted by individual states in the early days of the new nation; therefore, the records of states like New Jersey reveal that women did indeed vote. Yet by the turn of the century, women were viewed as "perpetrators of election fraud" (Clinton, 15) and were sternly discouraged from voting. Election troubles were almost always attributed to a large number of female and African American voters. Eventually New Jersey restricted women from voting, a restriction which William A. Whitehead sanctioned in a speech read before the New Jersey Historical Society on January 21, 1858. He declared, "by the Constitution adopted July 2, 1776, the elective franchise was conferred upon *all inhabitants* of this colony. . . . But I have not discovered any instance of the exercise of the right by females, under an interpretation which the full import of the words, 'all inhabitants' was subsequently thought to sanction" (324-5).

While slaves were given the concession of existing as "three-fifths a human being,"

women at this time in American history were not counted as inhabitants, occupants, residents, of the country at all. As the country recovered from the revolution and the nineteenth century was underway, a woman's sphere of influence shrank rapidly. Ironically, the creation of America as a free country coincided with the restriction and disappointment of the women who had become true "Americans."

Nineteenth Century America

Industrialization contributed to the restriction of a woman's influence as well. In a frontier setting, a woman's contributions to the home and to the family's survival were extremely valuable. She labored alongside her husband and the reward for her work was food on the table and well-fed children. Eleanor Flexner explains that the demands that frontier existence made on human beings "established a certain rough, egalitarianism which challenged . . . long-established concepts of propriety. Women were just as indispensable as men, since a household which lacked their homemaking skills, as well as nursing, sharpshooting and hunting when needed, was not to be envied" (9). Yet industrialization created more "civilized" cities, and families moved into these areas for work. As men left the home to seek a living, the value of women's work decreased and her equality with her husband diminished. The frontier moved westward, taking the egalitarian relationship between men and women with it, and the remaining eastern areas of the United States became an industrialized, civilized realm wherein women remained in the home, restricted to activities that did not interfere with their husbands' rights or privileges. The eastern United States became a man's world, with little room for outspoken women. Gerda Lerner explains the changes industrialization wrought on the American family in her introduction to *The Female Experience*. She writes,

as the focus of economic activity shifted from the home to the marketplace and the business world, woman, by her continuing association with and confinement to the "domestic sphere," became herself gradually devalued Woman became inferior in her own eyes and those of society, by not participating fully in the

work of the new society. By her unpaid labor in the home her inferior status was constantly reinforced (xxx).

Not only was a woman's work in the home devalued, but her position as mother and wife became less a commodity than an expectation. As the ratio of men to women equalized, a woman became less valued for the virtue of her sex and a man became more admired for his role as father and husband, for his ability to support a family signified his success in the work force. Therefore, a woman's work in the home meant less to industrialized society than it did to a frontier, agricultural community.

In fact, even those single women, widows, or poor mothers who did enter the work force found that their work in the marketplace was less valued than a man's. Even though in many cases women employees outnumbered male employees, women received far less pay for the same work as men, for they were considered temporary labor.

Caroline Dall, who wrote "Limited Choices" in 1860, gave some startling statistics about the number of employed women versus the amount of money these women made. She writes,

In 1850 there were engaged in shoemaking, in the town of Lynn, 3,729 males and 6,412 females,--nearly twice as many women as men; yet in the monthly payment of wages, only half as much money was paid to women as to men. The three thousand men received seventy-five thousand dollars a month; and the six thousand women, thirty-seven thousand dollars: that is, the women's wages were, on the average, only one-quarter as much as those of the men (275).

The guilt which society placed upon employed women for being away from their children provided an excuse for their employers to pay less and give them only unskilled jobs with no opportunity for advancement. Thus, women's work outside the home "became characterized by poor pay, low status, no security" (Lerner, xxxi). Women were also frequently given the same menial jobs that they would carry out domestically. In her book, *Women in the United States: 1830-1945* S.J. Kleinberg explains that "domestic

service dominated the employment prospects for single women. . . . Domestic service and sewing required no capital but capitalized on women's previous domestic and household experiences" (16). Even if a woman took part in the marketplace, her job was either an extension of her labor in the home, or it was the lowest-paid, most menial occupation that a factory owner could give her. The landscape of the factory and the city had a far more violent and repressive effect on women than the harshest of frontiers.

In these economic and social conditions, the Cult of Domesticity flourished. In Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, Sandra L. Myers explains that the Cult of Domesticity "demanded that women be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. Women, the publicists of this doctrine suggested, were important, not as workers, but as the repository of true virtue and as the moral guardians of the family" (6). As women moved into the cities and economically valuable work moved outside the home, women were faced with a choice between their families and homes and their desire to be economically, and socially, productive. The difficulty women faced in blending economic activity with domestic responsibility resulted in an attempt to ennoble their domestic condition as a divine calling for women, and to define the work force as a man's exclusive sphere.

Consequently women created the rhetoric of the Cult of Domesticity, orTrue

Womanhood, preaching an ideology that women need not feel any discontent at their domestic location, for their position in the home was a divine one. Barbara Welter, in her article, "The Cult of True Womanhood" describes the true woman as the "hostage in the home" (151). Welter explains that

the ideology dispersed through magazines and preached in periodicals was an attempt to maintain stability in a world of changing fortunes and values. In this world of changes, one thing at least remained the same—a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the Republic. It was a

fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility, which the nineteenth-century

American woman had—to uphold the pillars of the temple with her frail white
hand (152).

Though women created this ideal to redeem themselves from a subservient position, in reality, the Cult of Domesticity merely strengthened the fetters that kept women in a degraded social position. Ironically, again, it was deemed as anti-American to restrict that which was most "American" in women: independence, self-sufficiency, and freedom.

Not only were women restricted by the rhetoric of True Womanhood, but they also felt a sense of failure to achieve the societal construction of a True Woman.

According to Catherine Clinton,

the refinement of middle-class ideology profoundly affected females during the antebellum era. The majority of women failed to realize the ideal represented by bourgeois values: the lady on a pedestal exalted by the cult of domesticity. The model woman was a cultural myth, bearing little resemblance to any woman's daily experience. Although few could embody her, most women were judged by this unattainable standard and thousands of women were socialized to this ideal through the widespread dissemination of periodical literature (40).

These periodicals urged women to remain in the home, declaring the home to be a woman's holy sphere. In fact, "urged" is too moderate a word to describe how these periodicals communicated with their audience. One author wrote that "whenever [a woman] goes out of [the home] to mingle in any of the greater public movements of the day, she is deserting the station which God and nature have assigned to her . . . Home is her appropriate and appointed sphere of action" (qtd in Clinton 41). As cities grew and women moved from the frontier and into civilization, a set of new and seemingly impossible expectations was heaped upon them.

Some scholars fail to recognize the relationship between the disappearance of the frontier and the emergence of the Cult of True Womanhood, viewing women's move into

the city as a beneficial thing and believing that a frontier existence gave women few opportunities to prosper. David Potter wrote an article called "American Women and the American Character" which seeks to refute the idea that the frontier was a place of tremendous growth for women. Citing the frontier aphorism that "this country is all right for men and dogs, but it's hell on women and horses" (qtd in Potter, 120), he explains that the harsh work of plowing and hunting and fighting off Indians was not accessible to women and therefore the frontier was strictly a man's world, where women did not belong. Potter asserts that more economic, political and educational opportunity was available to women in cities. He writes,

where the work of the frontier called for the strong back and the powerful muscles of a primeval man, the work of the city—clerical work, secretarial work, and the tending of machines—has called for the supple fingers and the ready adaptability of a young woman, and it was in this environment, for the first time in America, that women found on any scale worth mentioning, access to independent earning power. . . . The wilderness may have been the frontier for American men . . . But the city was the frontier for American women and the business office was what gave them economic independence and an opportunity to follow a course of their own (121).

While Potter makes an interesting point, and surely there are cases in which his theory is accurate, his idea seems a bit short-sighted. Potter fails to recognize the blatant discrimination which women faced in the work place and he also does not mention the debilitating rules and regulations of the Cult of Domesticity, which occurred because women needed a reason for their newly restricted sphere. Potter also perpetuates the very stereotype that he attempts to discredit in his article: that women are more frail and are truly the weaker sex.

Some others view the frontier women through Potter's stereotypical gaze: frontier women were either worked and birthed to death, or they were driven mad by their solitary

existence. Sandra L. Myers talks of these two extreme views of the frontier woman, quoting one historian who wrote, "these solitary women, longing to catch a glimpse of one of their own sex, swept their eyes over the boundless prairie and thought of the old home in the East. . . . Hollow-eyed, tired, and discouraged, . . . Some begged their husbands to hitch up the team, turn the wagon tongue eastward, and leave the accursed plains" (2). It is true that the harsh frontier conditions took their toll on women, yet Potter and Myers neglect to mention the numerous instances in which women rose to the occasion of the bleak frontier, and conquered the wilderness right along with the men. They also fail to recognize Turner's definition of the American character, and the resultant need for a frontier to create a distinct identity in women.

An example of a woman who defies David Potter's assertion is Mrs. Davies, of Kentucky. William Fowler's 1879 book, *Women on the American Frontier* reveals the kind of respect, admiration, and freedom courageous women enjoyed in the frontier. Fowler tells of Mrs. Davies' numerous intrepid acts, explaining that she "was accustomed to handle a gun and was a good shot, like many other women on the frontier" (201). When a robber came to her home, Mrs. Davies "picked up [his gun] and placing herself in the doorway had the weapon cocked and leveled upon him by the time he turned around, and in a preemptory manner ordered him to take a seat or she would shoot him" (202). Fowler's praise and admiration of Mrs. Davies (and countless women like her) illustrates that frontier women could not only handle themselves in their wild environment, but also that these women could gain a great deal of community fame and respect for doing so. A woman working in a factory in the city had much more anonymity and much less potential for social recognition and freedom than a woman living in a log cabin in the wilderness.

"Civilized" women not only battled discrimination in the marketplace and the cult of domesticity, but with the rise of the middle class, they also battled idleness. As middle class families became more wealthy and more numerous, they were able to hire maids and cooks to do the domestic work that was traditionally allotted to wives and mothers. In obvious ways this was positive, for it freed a mother and wife from the fetters of mundane household labors, bringing about an intellectual awakening for some women. On the other hand, it decreased the value of a woman in the family and, in some cases, forced a woman into a life of idleness. The constrictive corsets worn by women during this time period are a symbol of the ever-decreasing sphere they occupied, and the painful social, economic, and physical restrictions under which they struggled. A true "lady's" value was in her physical appearance, and her efforts were concentrated in maintaining a certain pallor to make herself a finer decoration for the home. Under such conditions, she lost her true identity, and became merely an ornamental item in the house

Girls were educated in the manners and skills that were required of a true Victorian "lady." In his article, "Ladies, not Women," Andrew Sinclair explains that a young lady was taught that "By self-control and corsets, she must keep her nature back. If she showed any signs of solitary vice, she had to be supervised night and day. For, if her depravity were not arrested, she would reach 'the grave, the madhouse, or worse yet, the brothel" (68). These girls were trained for the sole purpose of becoming the wives of gentlemen, and their training was often cruel and demeaning. For example, some girls were forced to take cold baths and to wear chilly clothes. Others could not lie on a soft bed or sit on a soft chair or couch, all in the name of propriety and purity. Unlike a frontier in which women had a chance to leave their mark on their surroundings, the landscape of the city and the home only left both physical and emotional scars on the women who lived in them.

The education that young women received in the home was as unimpressive as the education they received outside of it. Institutionalized female education held a secondary importance to male education, and while men went to government-supported schools with academic rigor, women went to private schools with little to no purpose, funding, or organization. Emma Willard wrote "A Plan for Improving Female Education"

in 1819. In this piece, she outlines the major problems of female education in the early nineteenth century. Of the private schools girls attended, she writes,

They are temporary institutions, formed by individuals . . . But they cannot expect to be greatly lucrative; therefore the individuals who establish them, cannot afford to provide suitable accommodations as to room, . . .so neither can they afford libraries, and other apparatus necessary to teach properly the various branches in which they pretend to instruct. . . . Neither can the individuals . . . afford to provide suitable instruction. . . . As these schools are private establishments, their preceptresses are not accountable to any particular persons. Any woman has a right to open any school in any place; and no one, either from law or custom can prevent her (219).

Thus, a woman's education was a random sampling of knowledge, with no real order or discipline. A woman was trained to know a few facts, a little French, and to know how to be a submissive wife to her husband. The education of experience with land and with survival had disappeared when the frontier moved west.

Women's education was constantly attacked by men, as well. Men went as far as providing medical reasons for women to refrain from learning. Even as late as 1874 Dr. Edward Clarke wrote a famous book deriding female education. He cited education as the main cause of female ailments in middle-class families. Dr. Clarke believed that educating women caused "symptoms of nervousness, hysteria, hypochondriasis, and insanity . . . emaciation, and other diseases, the offspring of an exhausted constitution" (qtd in Sinclair, 69). Rather than looking to constrictive corsets, lack of fresh air and exercise, and boredom as reasons for middle-class women's ailments, many physicians chose to view education as the major cause of these problems. Fortunately, on the western frontier, these misconceptions about educating women did not exist, and women were encouraged to grow and learn according to their natures.

Conclusion

Women's opportunities for work, for self-sufficiency, for education, and for public participation clearly diminished as they moved into industrialized society. From the earliest days of colonial America to the latest days of the nineteenth century, it appears as though women moved into a more constricted realm. As the frontier disappeared into the West, and many women moved into the cities, civilized ideals took over necessary practices. Work outside the home became the exclusive right of the husband and women were lauded as queens of the hearth, convinced that they must remain in the home in order to fill the impossible shoes of the Victorian "lady." This became the new norm as the meaning of the American frontier was lost, and industrialization took hold. Of this shift in cultural ideas, Gerda Lerner asserts that "for all women, industrialization and its accompanying ideology brought a lowering of status and a shrinking of opportunities" (xxxii). Yet the next chapter will reveal that while the geographical frontier was rapidly moving west, a feminist consciousness⁴ was rapidly coming to the forefront of societal thought and a rhetorical frontier was emerging. Chapter two will be a study of nineteenth century feminist rhetoric as a reaction to the disappearing frontier. The study will focus on the rhetoric of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for these women were the mothers of the suffrage movement and they provided a blueprint for their feminist progeny. These women reveal that in the absence of a geographical frontier, rhetoric can create a symbolic frontier.

⁴I will use the terms "feminist rhetoric" and "women's rights rhetoric" interchangeably throughout this thesis. The women practicing this rhetoric did not use the term "feminism," but looking at their lives, it is apparent that they were the creators of a feminist consciousness even though they did not articulate it in those terms.

Chapter Two: Rhetorical Frontiers of the Suffrage Movement

From the earliest dawn of reason I pined for that freedom of thought and action that was then denied to all women. I revolted in spirit against the customs of society and the laws of the state that crushed my aspirations and debarred me from the pursuit of almost every object worthy of a rational, intelligent mind. But not until that meeting at Seneca Falls in 1848, of the pioneers in the cause, gave this feeling of unrest form and voice, did I take action.

---Emily Collins

Emily Collins describes a feeling that many American women shared during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, this desire for "freedom of thought and action" is a common characteristic of the American woman—a characteristic that became inherent in her identity as she communed with the frontier of colonial America. When those colonies became industrious cities, and that frontier moved west, women like Emily Collins were left with drastically reduced freedoms. ⁵ As a result of this missing frontier and the inability to achieve independence of thought and action, women living in the East during the nineteenth century sought another kind of frontier: women's rights rhetoric.

Nineteenth century women's rights rhetoric emerged from a variety of sources in America. Many scholars, including Catherine Clinton, argue that the French Revolution and its accompanying spirit of reform gave birth to the women's rights movement.⁶

Others, such as S.J. Kleinberg, link feminism directly to abolitionism, saying that women's rights advocates began their political careers as followers of Garrisonian antislavery ideology. Still others connect women's rights arguments with industrialization

⁵ The rhetorical influence of the frontier shaped colonial women into decidedly independent beings. I believe that this independence became a part of the identity of American women as the nation grew and became distinct from England. As a result, an independence of thought and action was part of what comprised the character of the American woman. In the nineteenth century, this character was challenged as women were forced into restrictive roles.

Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women provides an example of the influence of the democratic principles of the French Revolution. She wrote the book after A Vindication of the Rights of Man, extending the principles of self-government and freedom to women.

and the subsequent changes that occurred within the family. In 1914 Walter Lippman explained this phenomenon: "the mere withdrawal of industries from the home has drawn millions of women out of the home and left millions idle within it" (qtd. in O'Neill 3-4). William O'Neill, in *Feminism in America: A History* asserts that none of these proposed causes truly defines the catalyst for the feminist movement in nineteenth century America. O'Neill believes that the ideal of a conjugal family initiated a rebellion among women. He writes,

in completing the transformation of the family from a loosely organized, if indispensable, adjunct of Western society into a strictly defined, nuclear unit at the very center of social life, the Victorians laid a burden on women which many of them could or would not bear. The Victorians had attempted, moreover, to compensate women for their increased domestic and pedagogic responsibilities by enveloping them in a mystique which asserted their higher status while at the same time guaranteeing their actual inferiority (4-5).

While O'Neill, Lippman, and other historians and scholars make truthful claims, there is one catalyst for feminism that has been largely ignored: the absence of a frontier.

The absence of a frontier in the East, some might argue, is a small factor that led to the women's rights movement. But in reality, as the frontiers of America moved westward, women living on the East Coast were affected in complex rhetorical and psychological ways. From Emily Collins' statement at the beginning of this chapter, it seems obvious that when the frontier moved, it took part of the American woman's identity with it, leaving an emptiness and a restrictiveness behind. Thus, the women's rights movement was not only a result of reform movements, of abolitionism, or the strictures of an increased emphasis on the nuclear family. In addition to these factors, the absence of a geographical frontier—a location which fostered independence, ingenuity, and the ability to pursue intellectual, physical, and emotional dreams—was a major catalyst in the development of a feminist consciousness.

In chapter one I established the rhetorical influence of the frontier in creating the identity of the American woman. In the following chapter I will explore the practice of rhetoric as a means for women living in the civilized East to again obtain that "freedom of thought and action" that a geographical frontier cultivated. I will explore rhetoric as a frontier for women.

Without a geographical frontier, women living in the industrialized United States explored the frontier of rhetoric. ⁷ Though they were inundated with the rhetoric of domesticity in the form of numerous conduct manuals and periodicals, these women created an empowering, rather than a restrictive, rhetoric for themselves which was intended to produce social change. At the core of this rhetorical frontier were the natural rights and expediency arguments, which gave women a new and rightful location in the public realm. Women's rights advocates Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony provide examples of how feminist rhetoric freed many women from the fetters of a frontier-less life. By examining the extremely oppressive conditions northeastern American women faced in the nineteenth century, and studying the writings and speeches of Stanton and Anthony, as well as other activists, the following chapter will prove that an absence of a geographical frontier led to a feminist consciousness and the creation of rhetorical frontiers for women.

Women's Oppressive Conditions

Women living without a geographical frontier faced highly limiting emotional, social, and political conditions. A vanishing frontier caused a woman's sphere to become solely a domestic one. Ellen DuBois in her book, *Feminism and Suffrage*, explains that before the industrial boom, the source of production was the home, with men and women working together for their survival. "With the growth of industrial capitalism," says

⁷Nineteenth century American women were not the first to use rhetoric to argue for their rights, but these women were the first to organize a mass movement, and to take their arguments to the courts and to the government to enact real change.

DuBois, "production began to move outside the home." "Yet a woman's place, her 'sphere' remained within the family" (16). Because money became the means of measuring the value of work, domestic chores, originally vital to the subsistence of the family and the entire community, became less socially important. Women's work inside the home gradually was considered inferior to men's work outside the home, for men were the ones actually making money. This division of labor contributed to the overall degradation of women in the nineteenth century. A geographical frontier created a necessity for women to expand themselves and be a part of the community; with that frontier rapidly moving westward, the need for women to participate in the community decreased, and the economic and social value of women dwindled. Edward A. Ross, a pioneering American sociologist, explained the dwindling of a woman's economic and social value, highlighting the shift not only in the economics of the home, but also in the relationships between men and women and the subsequent psychological damage that occurred as a result of men "supporting" their wives. In 1922, he wrote of his first-hand experience with the disappearance of a frontier, explaining the time he spent living with an aunt and uncle in a log cabin. He observed the respect and the economic importance that his aunt enjoyed:

In those days nothing was heard as to the "economic dependence" of the wife, of her being "supported." My aunt, busy in and about the house, was as strong a prop of the family's prosperity as my uncle afield with his team. Uncle knew it, and, what is more, [Aunt] knew he knew it. Gradually, however, a silent revolution has taken place in the lot of the home-staying woman. . . . In the well-to-do home . . . the wife has lost her economic footing. Apart from motherhood, her role is chiefly ornamental [and] . . . it is more and more often the case that the husband "supports" his wife (130-131).

The disappearance of a frontier was not merely an economic change, but it was a change in the dynamics of the home and the family. Women were no longer equal partners in the processes of life. As Ross observed, the absence of a frontier took away women's dignity and independence, restricting their sphere and creating a need for change—if not a change in geographical location, then a change in ideology.

Not only were women's domestic lives restricted and devalued, but their legal lives were grossly limited, as well. Because a lack of frontier conditions caused a decrease in women's value, women were often treated as property rather than as human beings. For example, a nineteenth century American married woman living in the East, for all intents and purposes, did not legally exist as a human being. In 1860 David Dudley Field, a well-respected jurist, summarized a woman's legal rights: "a married woman cannot sue for her services, as all she earns legally belongs to the husband, whereas his earnings belong to himself, and the wife legally has no interest in them. Where children have property and both parents are living, the father is the guardian" (qtd. in Tyler 77). These legal restrictions were just a small part of the degradations women in the industrialized United States faced.

Not only was a married woman's property denied her, but ownership and protection of her own body were denied her as well. As late as 1850, wife-beating "with a reasonable instrument" was legal in almost every state (qtd. in Tyler 77). Alice Felt Tyler, author of "The Rights of Women," explains that "for more than fifty years women were legally considered perpetual minors: if unmarried, the wards of male relatives; if married, part of their husband's chattels" (77). These violations of a woman's basic rights became increasingly unbearable for women.

In addition to limited legal rights, women also enjoyed few political and public rights. Gone was the need for a woman to take over the family business, or to start her own venture; gone was her freedom to shoot a gun, to work in the field beside her husband, and to make a name for herself within her community; gone was the chance for a diversity of activities, both inside and outside of the home. Gone was that "equality between the sexes, as men and women

had faced together the hardships and loneliness of the wilderness, where there had been no pedestal upon which women could be placed and few circumstances in which masculine superiority could be demonstrated" (Tyler 76). Because these crucial elements of a geographical frontier were absent, women rebelled and attempted to change society through rhetoric—in other words, to create a symbolic frontier where change could be called for and brought about. These women sought after what Frederick Jackson Turner explained as "a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons" (59). Though they could not transform their civilized landscape, women could transcend it through rhetoric.

Rhetorical Frontiers

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1851 statement in favor of equality of the sexes reveals the transcendent ability of rhetoric: "Many people consider . . . [the status of a woman] a very small matter; but it is the symbol of the most cursed monopoly on this footstool; a monopoly by man of all rights, the life, liberty, and happiness of one-half of the human family—all womankind" (qtd. in Campbell 74). Stanton's voice provided the spark which set America on fire with a new feminist rhetoric. Her voice is a clear cry for a redefined space for women in politics, the work force, and the home. Stanton had witnessed women's political, economic, and social oppression first hand, for she lived in New York. Interestingly, most of the women who led the suffrage movement were from eastern states, where industrialization and civilization had replaced an agricultural frontier environment. In his article titled "Patterns of Nineteenth CenturyFeminism," Robert E. Riegel studies the characteristics that early feminist activists had in common, and among those characteristics are their geographic location in the northeastern states; their urban, rather than rural, orientation; their prosperous, middle-class roots; and their families' attitudes toward sex and marriage. Of this attitude, Riegel writes that "in each case excessively rapid child-bearing by [their] mother[s] left an indelible impression on

[them]" (97). It is no coincidence that the pioneering feminists were almost exclusively in a civilized setting, and in that setting, they witnessed the oppression of women first-hand. In such a setting, women had to first, conquer to frontier of public speaking; second, use a natural rights argument to assert themselves as human beings, and third, use an expediency argument to claim their unique authority in the public sphere.

Public Speaking: The First Frontier

In addition to the lack of legal, political, and basic human rights, one of the most vicious restrictions that Stanton and Anthony witnessed was the rule against women's public speaking, which had deep roots in history, philosophy, and religion. Indeed, public speaking was seen as a man's venture, not a woman's, and early women's rights advocates had to overcome the societal notion that women were intended for silence. In her book, Man Cannot Speak for Her, Karlyn Campbell explains that those women who dared to venture into the public realm were said to have lost their purity and their piety, and speaking in front of an audience was thought to masculinize women. Campbell points out that "[nineteenth century feminists] were a group virtually unique in rhetorical history because a central element in woman's oppression was the denial of her right to speak" (9), citing a few examples of a woman's silent role throughout history: "in the Odyssey, for example, Telemachus scolds his mother Penelope and tells her, 'Public speech shall be men's concern'. In the *Politics*, Aristotle approvingly quotes the words, 'silence is a woman's glory' and the epistles of Paul enjoin women to keep silent" (1). These examples justified the silencing of women because they infused women's subservient roles with intellectual, historical, and biblical merit.

Not only were women fighting against historical and biblical prejudice, but they were also fighting against an ignorance based on biology. Campbell explains that because women were smaller than men, most people believed that their brains were smaller, and they were therefore less intelligent than their male counterparts. As small, delicate creatures, women were also seen as having fragile nerves and an inability to tolerate the

tension of politics or the marketplace (11). Thus, a misunderstanding of biology led to a discrimination against women. A new emphasis on science and Darwinian theories of natural selection and "survival of the fittest" contributed to this view of women as biologically inferior to men. Men were considered more "fit" for public environments, women more "fit" for the home. Biological, historical, and biblical stumbling blocks presented women with an almost impossible rhetorical task.

Simultaneously complicating and enabling that task was the image of a woman as the angel in the home. In the mid-nineteenth century the theory that women were morally superior to men began to flourish in American society. Because a woman's sphere was restricted to the home, many believed that she remained unsoiled by the corruption of the outside world. Women became the moral compass of society, yet they were ironically restricted from public activity. They existed in the space between inferiority to men and closeness to the angels. In order to help women navigate this strange and contradiction-laden location, a strictly defined image of the "Lady" was disseminated to women through magazines, handbooks, and what can be called "Parlor Rhetorics," according to Nan Johnson, which clearly restricted women's rhetorical activity to the home. These rhetorics taught women the niceties of letter writing, entertaining, and child-rearing.

One example of such a publication was Mrs. L.G. Abell's Woman in Her Various Relations: Containing Practical Rules for American Females. In her introduction, Abell explains her purpose:

The present volume is offered to the public, dedicated to American Females. We are living when the allotments and responsibilities of Woman, in her own appropriate sphere, should be brought before the mind in their true weight and importance. We need this, that the education shall be better adapted to her wants and conditions, and that she may be satisfied there need nothing be added to magnify, elevate, or extend her duties (qtd in Johnson 89).

This introduction reveals the common nineteenth century desire to limit a woman's

sphere to the home. Providing women with conduct manuals was merely an attempt to placate their needs for education and a distinctive rhetoric.

Nan Johnson, author of *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life*, which interprets dozens of such conduct manuals, says, "the Mrs. Abells who produced volumes and volumes of conduct literature throughout the century made this promise to American women again and again: Keep to your place and you will be great there" (89).Indeed, when women called for a rhetorical frontier and an extended location for their work, they were answered with that promise. And somewhere between the chapters on "The Mouth, The Nails, The Hair, The Eyes, The Skin" (qtd in Johnson, 89) fell a reinforcement of the idea that a true "Lady" shows "the consciousness of her dependence" on man (qtd. in Sinclair 67) and never strays from her place as his inferior. With dozens of parlor rhetorics manipulating women into a complacency about their limited domestic sphere, feminists faced a seemingly insurmountable rhetorical obstacle.

These examples of the silencing and the rhetorical oppression of women reveal that the rhetoric of the women's rights movement truly was a frontier. Nineteenth century feminist rhetoric was a frontier because it provided women with a location to occupy that was outside of the home, because it placed them in front of a crowd, at the forefront in the courts, and even on the floor of the congress. It was the antithesis of the rhetoric of domesticity in that it justified women's participation in public ventures.

In order to participate in public ventures, however, women had to take on causes that were somewhat remote from their own circumstances and rights. Abolitionism, though controversial, was a somewhat safe political arena for women. Women were able to get involved in such public activism on the premise that, as the great moral compasses of their families, they had a mandate to improve society and thus protect their families from corruption. Historian Daniel Scott Smith tells us that women's "larger arena of activity was not so much an alternative to the woman-as-wife-and-mother as an extension of the progress made within the family, itself" (qtd. in Kleinberg 92). A woman could get

involved in abolitionism only if it was for the purpose of improving society, and in turn, improving her family's condition. By joining abolitionist movements, women were able to acquaint themselves with the inner workings of politics and public speaking. Many women were employed by William Lloyd Garrison as lecturers for abolitionism, and thus were able to secure a place before a crowd.

Women did not stop at abolition, however, and their next step was to appropriate the language and issues of anti-slavery and use these appeals to argue for their own freedom. Though not every woman who involved herself with abolitionism became a feminist, among those women to join the anti-slavery movement, asserts Eleanor Flexner, "were the first conscious feminists, who would go to school in the struggle to free the slaves and, in the process, launch their own fight for equality" (41). In fact, it was the abolitionist movement that first attracted Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the political arena. The documentary "Not for Ourselves Alone," explains that Stanton's attendance at an international abolitionist convention in London provided the spark for the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls. At the abolitionist meeting the women were asked to keep silent and sit separately from the men. A debate ensued and Stanton promised her friend, Lucretia Mott, that they would hold a women's rights convention in response to the oppression they experienced in London. Abolitionism, then, was not the cause of the women's rights movement, but rather it was an entrance into public and political life for women. Upon entering this new life, women could expand their arguments to rally for their own rights. Though there are exceptions to this rule, S.J. Kleinberg, author of Women in the United States: 1830-1945, asserts that "numerous women became politically aware as a result of their participation in this great movement" (93). Political awareness enabled women to justify their public speaking and create a frontier of rhetoric for themselves.

Feminism was truly a dramatically new frontier for women in the nineteenth century. Abolitionism gave women a chance to fight in a political and social battle. When

the battle turned to women's rights, however, female activists hit a national nerve, and even their allies were skeptical. Women themselves were full of trepidation, and many of them believed they were not capable of leading such a movement. At the ground-breaking Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, neither Elizabeth Cady Stanton nor Lucretia Mott felt qualified to conduct the meeting. They finally agreed to have Mott's husband take charge of the proceedings. Abigail Bush, when speaking at a convention in Rochester in 1848, was asked to speak louder. She responded, "Friends, we present ourselves here before you as an oppressed class, with trembling frames and faltering tongues, and we do not expect to be able to speak to be heard by all at first, but we trust we shall have the sympathy of the audience, and that you will bear with our weakness now in the infancy of our movement" (qtd. in DuBois 25). Women themselves had to overcome the cultural preconceptions that they were attempting to overthrow. Despite their firm convictions that their cause was just, these rhetorical pioneers had to overcome their fear of societal deviation.

Natural Rights Argument: A Public Foothold

Slowly these women did overcome their timidity. A crucial foundation for their growing strength was the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, at which Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented a Declaration of Sentiments and twelve resolutions for the improvement of women's conditions. Her presentation stands as a powerful assertion of women's natural rights as human beings and marks the official beginning of women's argument for their equality with men.

Definitely feeling the pressure to adhere to general public opinions and beliefs, Elizabeth Cady Stanton couched her Declaration of Sentiments in the language of the country's Declaration of Independence. Because Stanton appropriated the terminology of the nation's most honored document, her argument was infused with authority. She knew that her audience would respond to the familiar language and ideals of the Declaration, and that her arguments would be more palatable in that familiar format. Alice Felt Tyler

explains that Stanton replaced "King George" with "Man" in her Declaration, and quotes Stanton's assertion that man

"has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy [woman's] confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life." In view of all these injustices, "those aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights" asked immediate admission to all the rights and privileges pertaining to citizens of United States and called upon women everywhere to organize, to petition, to employ agents, to circulate tracts, and to hold conventions (80).

Hearing the language of the nation's Declaration of Independence reinterpreted on behalf of women awakened the audience to the injustice of excluding half the population from the rights of citizenship. Karlyn Campbell explains the genius of using the Declaration of Independence as a model, writing that "no document provides a better formal blueprint for articulating an ideological manifesto to Americans, because it links social change to patriotism and to the ideas underlying the Constitution of the United States" (52).

Through this Declaration of Sentiments Elizabeth Cady Stanton seized the natural rights argument as used by the founding fathers and applied it to women's circumstances, thus creating a rhetorical frontier by taking an old argument and reinterpreting it in a new light.

After securing the sympathy of her audience with her Declaration, and making the natural rights argument a woman's claim, Stanton presented twelve resolutions for a vote. The first eleven resolutions passed rather easily, for they dealt with a woman's rights as a mother and the ideals of common decency and human rights, but the last resolution—the demand for suffrage—was difficult for the audience to accept. "Not for Ourselves Alone," describes just how outrageous it was considered to be to demand suffrage for women: After standing up and nervously demanding that a married woman be allowed to own property and be granted some custody of her children, Stanton demanded the right to

vote for all women. This demand for suffrage caused a great hush to come over the crowd. Shock and awe filled the room. People did not think women were smart enough or competent enough to vote. They believed that a woman's right to vote came through her husband, and that it was sufficient that he, alone, have suffrage. William Lloyd Garrison, a great reformer and ally of Stanton's, thought the demand was almost comical. Lucretia Mott worried that the demand for suffrage would make the convention into a circus. Stanton's own husband was skeptical of her bold request. But Elizabeth remained true to her conviction, and after Frederick Douglas stood and supported her, the resolution for female suffrage passed by a small majority. The Declaration of Sentiments was laid before the audience and many men and women signed their names.

However, many of those who signed the Declaration at the Seneca Falls convention, "withdrew their names when the storm of ridicule broke" (Tyler 81). One reason for their inability to remain committed to the female rights cause was their fear of deviation from social customs. In nineteenth century America, women in general had become indoctrinated with a fear of deviating from the norm. Beginning with Anne Hutchinson in early American history, stereotypical images of deviant women increased in abundance, and they came in many forms: "the witch, the bitch, the de-sexed female, the castrating woman" the heretic and the "Whore of Babylon" (Lerner xxxv). The threat of being perceived as a woman who did not align herself with the traditional roles of wife and mother kept many women chained to misogynist ideology. American women in longestablished states were horrified at the thought of societal deviation because a geographical frontier whereon women had a chance to deviate from society and create a good reputation through their uniqueness did not exist. In the civilized East, women's place was well defined, and it was thought a sacrilege for her to remove herself from the role of wife and mother. Thus, eastern women were limited as to what causes they took on, and how they argued for those causes.

Decades before the suffrage movement, Frances Wright provided women with an

example of what might happen to a socially deviant female. Not only did she pave the way, she also set many stumbling blocks on the paths of these women, for her radicalism (which included controversial views on marriage and divorce as well as her risque uniform of bloomers) created a lasting social suspicion of a powerful and free-thinking woman. A "radical" woman who battled for free education, political rights for workers, and women's rights, Fanny was dubbed "the Whore of Babylon" (Clinton 66). Fanny Wright's speaking career was cut short in 1830, as she realized that her social deviation had made her ineffective. Women attempting to gain any kind of public footing had to face these same kind of obstacles. Women's rights activists were stigmatized as morally corrupt social deviants unless they could couch their rhetoric in terms that were pleasing to society.

Despite the pleasing terms of the Declaration of Sentiments, the success of the Seneca Falls Convention, and Stanton's brilliant use of a natural rights claim, women suffragists faced bitter opposition. To match the small organizations of women rallying for the vote, anti-suffrage groups emerged. Men and women alike fought female suffrage vehemently. Interestingly, these groups of anti-suffragists were often sponsored by breweries and southern slave-holders, who feared that with women's increased public influence would come their own economic ruin. Eleanor Flexner explains that the sources of anti-suffragist sentiments varied geographically: "in the South the source of sentiment lay in fear of the Negro vote. . . . In the Middle West much of the opposition stemmed from the brewing interests; in the East from industrial and business sources" (295). In any case, the groups of men and women who opposed women's rights took advantage of society's suspicion of a strong woman in order to ridicule and frighten the suffragists into relenting. No matter how convincing their arguments were, the early suffragists still faced the tremendous challenge of overcoming social prejudices.

Yet they faced the challenge from a solid rhetorical foundation, for the natural rights argument introduced at the Seneca Falls Convention gave women the basis for

their suffrage campaign. The natural rights argument asserted that because of their shared humanity, women should have the same rights as men. Karlyn Campbell provides an apt description of the natural rights philosophy, saying that it "affirmed the personhood of women and their right to all the civil and political privileges of citizenship. It was a demand for rights affirming that, at least in law and politics, there were no differences between the sexes" (14). Natural rights may have sprung from some of the abolitionist arguments which professed that slaves are human beings and therefore should have the rights guaranteed to American citizens in the Constitution. Women's appropriation of this rhetoric provided a frontier for them because it helped them argue for their rights in a public setting.

Susan B. Anthony occupied a frontier of rhetoric when she used a natural rights argument to justify her attempt to vote in 1872. Knowing that if she could get her cause in the courts she might be able to overthrow the laws preventing women from voting, Anthony boldly placed herself in the courtroom frontier. On November fifth she attempted to register to vote; thirteen days later she was arrested and pled not guilty. She immediately began a lecture tour of the area where her trial was to be held, rallying for sympathy for the woman's plight. When the day of her trial came, the judge, after telling the jury to find Anthony guilty no matter what she said, asked her if she had anything to say for herself. Anthony had not been allowed to represent herself or testify in her trial, for women were deemed incompetent to engage in such activities, but she was still able to give what Karlyn Campbell calls a "persuasive masterpiece" (108):

Friends and fellow citizens: I stand before you to-night, under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my *citizen's right*, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any State to deny (qtd in Campbell 108-9).

Calling upon her right as a citizen and human being living in America, Anthony argued that it was her constitutional right to vote and that she had violated no law. In fact, she argued that it was the law against women's suffrage that was incorrect and in direct opposition to the constitution. Campbell explains that Anthony's plea for justice was a three-fold natural rights argument, the three principles being that "persons have rights as persons, rights are not conferred upon them by governments; that government is a compact to protect citizen's rights; and that all government rests on the consent of the governed, expressed through the franchise" (109). Although these concepts of natural rights were not new, ⁸ they still provided women with a rhetorical frontier because they allowed Anthony to argue in the courts. This was one of the first moments that a woman used natural rights arguments to change the law.

Though Anthony was found guilty of voting illegally and was fined one hundred dollars, the rhetorical victory was hers, for she had been able to highlight the legal side of the women's suffrage movement and attack the interpretation of the Fifteenth Amendment in a courtroom. She also sparked a series of other women's attempts to register all over the country. For the first time a woman was able to stand trial for attempting to vote and speak about the illegality of denying a citizen of the country the right to exercise the franchise.

At the time Anthony gave this speech, the Fifteenth Amendment to the constitution, which enfranchised former slaves but also was the first instance that the word "male" was specifically used in the Constitution, had been ratified. Female suffragists had been outraged and had petitioned for the word "male" to be taken out of the amendment, but they were told that this was the "Negro's Hour" and that their own enfranchisement was not as important as the black man's. Anthony, standing before a

Mary Wollstonecraft used similar arguments in her A Vindication of the Rights of Women. And these are the principles upon which the government of the United States were founded. They can be traced back to Rousseau's idea of the noble savage.

jury in 1872, discussed the Fifteenth Amendment and made an argument that the language of this amendment actually gave the vote to women. In one of her most famous quotes, Anthony said,

But if you will insist that the fifteenth amendment's emphatic interdiction against robbing United States citizens of the right to vote "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," is a recognition of the right, either of the United States, or any State, to rob citizens of that right, for any or all other reasons, I will prove to you that the class of citizens for which I now plead, and to which I belong, may be, and are, by all the principles of our government, and many laws of the States, included under the term "previous condition of servitude" (qtd. in Campbell 112).

The daring claim that women had the same national identity as slaves led the opposition to declare Anthony a heretic. Yet she was attempting to create a new rhetorical frontier for women by overthrowing a law which made women non-existent in politics. Anthony may have frightened the judge and jury a little that day, as she defiantly refused to pay the fine, for no attempt was ever made to collect the hundred dollars she was charged. Anthony's use of the natural rights argument laid the foundation for other women to take their voices to the courts. Anthony's courtroom battle brought the suffrage issue onto new ground, in front of a national audience.

Another arena in which natural rights flourished was philosophy. In her famous speech, "The Solitude of Self," Elizabeth Cady Stanton brought the natural rights argument into a philosophical realm, creating another rhetorical frontier for women. Stanton read her speech in a congressional committee meeting on January 18, 1890, and also in front of the National American Woman Suffrage Association as a farewell speech before her retirement. In this address, which Aileen Kraditor explains "may be considered the epitome of the natural right argument for woman suffrage," (*Ideology* 85), Stanton addressed the challenges women faced in standing up for themselves, and argued that

women must be granted equal rights because of their position as human beings, solely responsible for their own lives. In the speech, Stanton illustrated the degraded position of women by referring to the king's daughter in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and calling the play a "terrible satire on women's position in the 19th century" for in the play

rude men . . . seized the king's daughter, cut out her tongue, cut off her hands, and then bade her to go call for water and wash her hands. What a picture of woman's position! Robbed of her natural rights, handicapped by law and custom at every turn, yet compelled to fight her own battles, and in the emergency of life to fall back on herself for protection (qtd in Campbell 138).

Stanton's allusion to *Titus Andronicus* created a vivid image of women's inability to enjoy freedom of thought and action. Stanton also highlighted the importance of a woman's independence, explaining that laws and customs have kept women from true autonomy despite the fact that they are still, in the end, responsible for their own lives. The autonomy Stanton asked for is reminiscent of the autonomy created by a geographical frontier, for in such a wild setting, independence means survival.

Reinforcing her belief in independence and the individuality of human beings,

Stanton challenged the societal misconception that women are entirely dependent upon
men, explaining that

Whatever the theories may be of woman's dependence on man, in the supreme moments of her life, he cannot bear her burdens. Alone she goes to the gates of death to give life to every man that is born into the world; no one can share her fears, no one can mitigate her pangs; and if her sorrow is greater than she can bear, alone she passes beyond the gates into the vast unknown (qtd. in Campbell 138).

Stanton's claim that individuals are singly responsible for their own happiness and their own existence refuted the misconception that women were inferior to men. As human beings, women had the same responsibilities and needs as men. By making this claim,

Stanton points out the irony and the injustice in refusing rights to women. If women had the same basic needs and the same responsibilities as men, then why should they not have access to the same resources for fulfilling them? A frontier existence provided women with the same resources as men, but because that frontier was missing, Stanton attempted to create a rhetorical frontier through her plea for an almost sacred autonomy. The rhetoric of domesticity had women revering their dependence on men as sacred, but Stanton's rhetoric of the solitude of self reverses this idea, explaining that a woman is ultimately the only one who can determine her own destiny. To impede her ability to control her own destiny is to tamper with a woman's most sacred right.

In fact, Stanton actually used a geographical frontier as a symbol for where women should stand in American society. After making the argument for women's individuality, Stanton then describes the outrage of denying women the chance to navigate and survive her own life:

In discussing the rights of woman, we are to consider, first, what belongs to her as an individual, in a world of her own, the arbiter of her own destiny, and imaginary Robinson Crusoe, with her woman Friday on a solitary island. Her rights under such circumstances are to use all of her faculties for her own safety and happiness. . . . To throw obstacles in the way of a complete education is like putting out the eyes; to deny the rights of property, like cutting off the hands (qtd in Kraditor *Ideology* 85).

The image of a geographical frontier—the solitary island whereon a woman must depend upon her own eyes and hands for her survival, and where she is the sole keeper of her own destiny—transforms a woman in the minds of the audience. Stanton redefined women's roles and responsibilities as primarily concerned with their own happiness and survival. This was an entirely new argument for a woman to make because it made women's roles as wives and mothers secondary in the construction of their identities. By redefining women in this way, Stanton provided them with a rhetorical frontier, a new

understanding of themselves, and a new language with which to argue for their rights. Stanton enabled women to develop faculties for their own survival, not just for the education or moral persuasion of their children.

These faculties, Stanton argued, had been grossly underdeveloped in the civilized "lady." In describing the kinds of faculties that women should be allowed to develop, Stanton seemed to ask for a geographical frontier. She asked that society allow women to be

guided by their own conscience and judgment, trained to self-protection, by a healthy development of the muscular system, and skill in the use of weapons of defense; and stimulated to self-support by a knowledge of the business world and the pleasure that pecuniary independence must ever give. When women are trained in this way, they will in a measure be fitted for those hours of solitude that come alike to all, whether prepared or otherwise (qtd in Campbell 140).

The circumstances that Stanton asked for parallel those circumstances that a geographical frontier created. An ability to shoot a gun, to start a business, to be self-guided in order to carve out an existence are requirements that frontier life demands. Take away that frontier existence and a woman is powerless to face the trials of life that she must endure alone. Throughout this speech, Stanton used a natural rights argument to give a philosophical foundation to the women's suffrage movement and to create a rhetorical frontier for women. This frontier gave women the freedom to ask for their own rights because they needed them as individuals, not as mothers and wives. It provided them with a new interpretation of a woman's identity and responsibility as separate and distinct from her husband and children. The speech acts as a capstone for Stanton's career as a women's rights activist as well as for the natural rights argument, itself. With her retirement came a withdrawal of the more radical women's rights arguments, and the natural rights claim became secondary to the expediency claim.

Expediency Argument: Complicating the Rhetoric

The expediency argument had become increasingly popular among female suffragists since the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which marked the end of male leadership and assistance with the women's rights movement. With the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, former allies like William Garrison and Frederick Douglass set aside the cause of female suffrage because they felt that their task had been completed: the black man had the vote. Anthony and Stanton's vehement fight against the word "male" in the amendment increased the rift between themselves and their male abolitionist friends and eventually these former supporters abandoned the female suffrage cause. This abandonment encouraged Stanton and Anthony to adopt an argument that reinforced the idea of woman as a moral being, as a creature with a greater capacity for goodness than her male counterparts. Most importantly, this rift created an independent spirit among suffragists that empowered their arguments. Women ran the suffrage movement entirely on their own from that time on. In her *History of the Woman Suffrage*, Stanton explains the eventual empowering effect that the break from male leadership had on women:

Our liberal men counseled us to silence . . . and threatened if we were not, we might fight the battle alone. We chose the latter, and were defeated. But standing alone we learned our power; . . . we would point for [the young women of the coming generation] the moral of our experiences: that woman must lead the way to her own enfranchisement, and work out her own salvation with a hopeful courage and determination that knows no fear nor trembling (qtd. in DuBois 103).

This new-found independence and courage took the form of a female-centered expediency argument which gave women a greater mandate to vote and participate in public for the benefit of society.

The expediency argument claimed that women had a greater capacity for good than men and thus women should be given the vote to improve society. Rather than

attempting to argue for their sameness, suffragists instead highlighted the difference of women from men. Lucy Lind Hogan explains that the women who used this appeal "relied frequently on discussions about womanhood, the importance of women in the care and nurturing of children, and supported the cultural construction of men's and women's separate spheres" (215) Not only did the expediency argument spring from an independence from male leadership, but it also was a rhetorical attempt to assuage the accusations that women who argued for their rights were de-feminizing themselves. Karlyn Campbell explains that "women who claimed their rights were seen as selfish, as wanting to abandon their traditional womanly roles to enter the sphere of men" (15). Expediency gave women a chance to argue for their rights from a decidedly feminine standpoint, taking advantage of societal conceptions that women were close to angels. And a woman who voted, according to the expediency argument, was performing a selfless task and attempting to help others. This argument was yet another rhetorical frontier for women, and was advantageous to their cause, for it appealed to the more conservative audiences who could not believe that men and women were the same and who operated under the societal assumptions that women who asked for their own rights were unfeminine. It also empowered the women who participated in the suffrage movement, convincing them that they did not need male sanction for their fight.

One outward expression of the expediency argument was the suffragist periodical, the *Revolution*. Founded with financial backing from George Francis Train, a Democrat financier, the *Revolution* became a means of discovering and celebrating a rich feminist history. The periodical was edited and controlled entirely by women, and this control allowed women to applaud their differences from men, to glory in them, to reinforce them. Stanton exclaimed that in the *Revolution* "not only the ballot, but bread and babies will be discussed" (qtd. in DuBois 104). As the title illustrates, the *Revolution* promised to discuss and change every aspect of women's lives.

One woman who exemplifies the expediency argument is Ernestine Potowski

Rose, who spoke at an 1851 convention. Paulina Wright Davis, a member of Potowski Rose's audience, declared that her speech "has never been surpassed" (qtd. in Campbell 64). In her speech, Potowski Rose coupled a natural rights argument with an argument from expediency: "yes, in addition to the principle of right, this is one of the reasons, drawn from expediency, why woman should participate in all the important duties of life; for, with all due respect to the other sex, she is the truer civilizer of man" (qtd. in Campbell 64). This claim empowers women because of their difference, not because of their sameness with men. Her audience reacted positively because she did not attempt to deny the difference between the sexes, but instead celebrated those differences, explaining that women are superior.

Potowski Rose continued with her expediency claim, explaining that any weaknesses women had resulted from their oppressive relationships with men. This claim reinforces the image of a woman as a morally superior being, and places blame on men for any fault in woman:

Do you not yet understand what has made woman what she is? Then see what the sickly taste and perverted judgment of man now admires in woman. Not physical and mental vigor, but a pale, delicate face; hands too small to grasp a broom, . . . a voice so sentimental and depressed, that what she says can be learned only by the moving of her half-parted lips and above all, that nervous sensibility which sees a ghost in every passing shadow, that beautiful diffidence which dares not take a step without the protecting arm of man to support her tender frame, and that shrinking mock-modesty that faints at the mention of a leg of a table (qtd. in Campbell 65).

Potowski Rose highlights the most negative characteristics of the nineteenth century "lady" in order to reveal men as fickle tyrants who have turned women into the most wretched of creatures. She exclaims that women must be allowed to be *women*, not the fainting, pale objects that men have constructed, and that women must be allowed to

participate in the public forum as the morally superior beings that they naturally are. This argument provided women with a new kind of rhetorical frontier because it enabled them to claim that true womanhood had been perverted by men, and that women were only viewed as inferior because men had kept them in a degraded state through rules and restrictions. Though this was not the first time such a claim had been made, ⁹ it was the first time that the claim was reinforced with legal action and attempts to dramatically change society. It was also strategically wise, because it recognized the differences between men and women.

Although the expediency argument provided a rhetorical frontier for a greater number of women, it was laden with contradictions and complexities because it often followed a natural rights appeal in suffragist speeches. Expediency attempted to define the members of the group, while the natural rights appeal attempted to define the goals of the group, but each argument was based on an entirely different philosophy. Though these appeals contradict each other, they were often used in the same discourse. Campbell explains that "on the one hand, they argued from natural rights, demanded personhood, and claimed irrelevance of gender-based roles to laws and social structures. On the other hand, they also affirmed, to greater or lesser degrees, the natural differences between men and women and the superiority of 'womanly traits'" (qtd. in Hogan 215). Thus, expediency was not the best answer to anti-suffrage attacks, though it did make feminist arguments more palatable to a conservative audience, and it did bring more women to the cause of suffrage because it adhered to traditional views of women's roles. But, as more women joined the cause of suffrage, tension grew in the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and tension arose within the rhetoric of the women's rights movement.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton exemplified this tension in a speech she gave on divorce

⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft made a similar argument for women in A Vindication of the Rights of Women.

laws at the 1860 women's rights convention. In her speech she rejected the religious ideals of marriage as being sacred and God-ordained, and argued that marriage laws and customs take away the dignity of women, robbing them of their natural rights. But Stanton softened her extremely controversial claim with an expediency argument that celebrated woman's role as a mother. And she argued the most vehemently for women's moral superiority over men, concluding her speech with the declaration, "if in marriage either party claims the right to stand supreme, to woman, the mother of the race, belongs the scepter and the crown. Her life is one long sacrifice for man. . . . For you we gladly pour out our heart's blood and die . . . Knowing that from our suffering comes forth a new and more glorious resurrection of thought and life" (qtd. in Campbell 75). While she argues for a more liberal approach to marriage, Stanton still adheres to the societal rules about the roles of men and women. In fact, she uses those rules to make an emotional appeal in favor of the superiority of women, creating an image of woman as a sacrificing Christ-figure, whose own suffering brings life to others. Women often used natural rights as an appeal to reason or logic, but their most impassioned pleas came in the form of expediency claims, which interpreted their rhetorical location in public life on an emotional level. The expediency argument, then, enabled women to claim their motherhood and assert authority over men because of that role. In this way, it provided women with a rhetoric that both redefined and empowered women as wives and mothers.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's most obvious attempt to redefine and empower mothers and wives was her controversial book, *Woman's Bible*, in which she attempted to rewrite the bible from a feminist point of view. Her claims in the book reveal the tension between the natural rights and expediency arguments, as well as the impossibility of winning antisuffragists' favor. In her *Woman's Bible* Stanton explained that women must nurture themselves first so that they can be better nurturers. She wrote, "woman's first duty is to herself, to develop all her own power and possibilities, that she may better guide and serve the next generation" (qtd. in Camhi 67). Though Stanton recognized the

conservative role of women as mothers, her call for a woman to first nurture herself garnered much criticism from anti-suffragists.

Anti-suffragists, the strongest of whom were women, accused feminism, and particularly Cady Stanton, of being concerned with the good of the individual, rather than the entire good of the race. For them, neither the natural rights, nor the expediency arguments could prove that women needed a place in the public sphere. These women reacted to the expediency appeal with accusations of selfishness and dreaded individualism. In fact, most anti-suffragists viewed selfishness as the motto of the feminist movement, using Cady Stanton's declaration that a woman must put herself first as proof. The *Anti-Suffragist*, Volume Two, responded directly to Stanton's *Woman's Bible*, asking "what sort of 'next generation' would evolve if all women considered their 'first duty' to be to themselves and overlooked the fact that their strongest power and highest possibility is that of unselfish—and often unnoticed—service" (qtd. in Camhi 67). In her adherence to the sanctity and importance of mothers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was accused of selfishness and glory-lust. A coupling of natural rights and expediency often resulted in this kind of fierce opposition.

Often misconstrued as presumptuous and arrogant, the argument from expediency sometimes alienated audiences and muddled the goals of the feminist movement. In some cases, those who based their anti-suffrage arguments on women's higher calling as mothers felt that their own argument had been twisted and used against them when they listened to an expediency plea. Anti-suffrage leader Ida Tarbell believed that women had a moral obligation to improve society. Yet, unlike Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Ernestine Potowski Rose, Tarbell believed that "anything that leads [woman] away from this mission, that leads her to aspire to intellectual, professional, or industrial equality with man is to obscure her real and higher calling—to weaken her powers and to debase rather than elevate her" (qtd. in Camhi 167). For Tarbell, the very act of making women's rights an issue was contradictory to the nature of women's moral superiority. She did not

believe that women needed a public frontier, but instead believed that they should make the best of their location in the home.

Just as the expediency argument enraged anti-suffragists, it also caused turmoil and contradiction within the women's rights movement. Because women's rights activists used the natural rights and expediency arguments together, their reasoning was often slightly weak. Members of this movement found it difficult to be unified in purpose, and were often unable to agree on what issues were most important. Some were busy defining women while others were busy defining the goals of their organization. This tension eventually led to Elizabeth Cady Stanton's expulsion from the leadership of the NAWSA, causing a rift that would never fully heal.

As seemingly contradictory as the natural rights and expediency claims were, Aileen S. Kraditor, asserts when they were used together, they enabled women to fight for their cause. She explains that the former built upon the latter, and that the two forms of appeal worked in unison for whatever cause women desired. Women even used the same argument for a different purpose: "some suffragists used the expediency argument because social reform was their principle goal and suffrage the means. Other suffragists used the same expediency argument because the link of woman suffrage to reform seemed to be the best way to secure support for their principal goal: the vote" (Ideas, 45-6). The fact that even the same argument was used in different ways for different purposes reveals how truly empowering women's rights rhetoric was. The rhetorical frontiers created by Stanton and Anthony provided women with a cache of arguments that they could draw on to enact change in politics, in law, and even in marriage. The differences between the natural rights and expediency arguments have much to do with the changing nation and the individual goals of the women's rights activists. Yet they both attempt to place women on a rhetorical frontier, a location in public life wherein they can enact social change.

Carrie Chapman Catt explained women's deep and even unconscious desire for

such a frontier existence when she said "that she did not know what it was, a right, a duty, or a privilege, but 'whatever it is, the women want it'" (qtd. in Kraditor *Ideas* 45). Indeed the natural rights and expediency arguments answered that desire by providing a rhetorical frontier for women. Natural rights arguments helped women to justify their place in public life, particularly in the courts, and it allowed them to redefine their roles and priorities in a way that had not been possible before. The expediency argument empowered women in their roles and also helped them to redefine those roles as superior to those of men. The rhetoric that influenced nineteenth century women in the industrialized United States prior to the Seneca Falls Convention was limiting, controlling, even demeaning. It was the rhetoric of domesticity, of inferiority to men. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony gave women access to rhetoric that was freeing, uplifting, empowering. In this way, the rhetoric of the women's rights movement was a new frontier for these women.

Conclusion: The Limitations of Rhetorical Frontiers

Though women like Stanton and Anthony were remarkably successful at creating a rhetorical frontier for women in the nineteenth century, their dreams of suffrage were not fully realized until 1920, 72 years after the first convention for women's rights. Why did this enfranchisement come so late? And when it did come, why was it somewhat of a shallow victory? Scholars offer many answers to these questions. Most of them agree that after Elizabeth Cady Stanton died, women's rights advocates adopted a much more conservative philosophy. Because of this conservative attitude, the women's rights campaign became intellectually hollow, and these women, who stood on a rhetorical frontier forged by predecessors Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, removed themselves from their frontier, attempting to integrate themselves into civilized society again.

Indeed, suffragists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rejected the rhetorical frontiers proposed and created by the earlier leaders. William O'Neill explains

that at the turn of the century, "hard-core feminists, having fully rejected their own radical origins, were . . . too respectable and too certain that women's rights was a simple political matter" (47). Essentially, the women's rights campaign became too narrowly focused on suffrage as the only means of achieving its goals. By the time women were granted the vote, the movement, itself, was nearly void of intellectual interest. Women avoided difficult questions about marriage, religion, and family roles (so often brought up by Elizabeth Cady Stanton). This oversimplification of the woman question placed women back in their subordinate position, and though they were granted the vote, they remained in that social position, the women's rights issues still largely unsolved. Women had the right to vote, but the issues of women's rights would continue to perplex the nation.

The nation's East Coast women struggled to find a frontier. Though they found their rhetorical location through the natural rights and expediency arguments, they were still limited because they did not have the opportunities that a geographical frontier could provide. In chapter three, I will discuss a group of women who had the best of both worlds: access to feminist rhetoric with a geographical frontier as a backdrop for their arguments. These women had much in common with the early colonists, and yet their freedom went beyond that of their colonial counterparts. They were the Mormon settlers of Utah. Though the rest of the nation believed that Mormon women were nothing more than sex slaves to their polygamous husbands, their religious, rhetorical, and geographical locations actually gave Mormons more freedom than even the most radical eastern feminists.

Chapter Three: Mormon Women's Relationship with Frontiers

Mormon women living in Utah in the nineteenth century had many things in common with their eastern counterparts, yet their lives were more closely related to their colonial predecessors. As occupants of a geographical frontier, Mormon women enjoyed a freedom that eastern women did not. Jill Mulvay Derr explains that "in 1872, while Susan B. Anthony was being arrested in Rochester, New York, for her attempt to register and vote, Eliza R. Snow encouraged Mormon women to cast their more easily secured ballots" (77). Not only did they enjoy suffrage, but Mormon women also had their own publications, charitable organizations, businesses, and even owned property valued at \$95,000. "Do you know," Eliza R. Snow asked some five or six thousand Mormon women in January of 1870, "of any place on the face of the earth, where woman has more liberty, and where she enjoys such high and glorious privileges as she does here, as a Latter-day Saint?" (qtd in Derr, 76). The privilege brought about by a geographical frontier was reminiscent of colonial days, and yet Mormon women enjoyed a political, economic, and social freedom that surpassed even their colonial predecessors because they practiced the feminist rhetoric of their eastern counterparts, and they also participated in a radical religion which allowed for polygamous marriages.

Yet despite their political, economic, and social freedom, Mormon women's stories still occupy only a tiny fraction of nineteenth century feminist rhetorical scholarship. In her book, *Women in the United States: 1830-1945*, S.J. Kleinberg briefly mentions Mormon women's participation in social welfare, but she reduces their societal impact, dismissing relief societies because they "were part of the church structure rather than challenges to the patriarchal hierarchy" (85). Many other scholars either spend no time discussing Mormon women as part of feminist history, or they provide only fragmented, inconclusive slices of these women's lives. The slices of Mormon women's history are almost exclusively centered on plural marriage. In the midst of new scholarship on nineteenth century feminism, the need to study Mormon women more

fully in their rhetorical and geographical context becomes apparent. The following chapter fulfills this need by studying Mormon women as occupants of a geographical, a rhetorical, and a religious frontier, ultimately proving that although most scholars dismiss Mormon women as nothing more than slaves of polygamous marriages, these women had greater political, social, and economic freedom than their eastern counterparts. And with such freedom and frontier relationships, Mormon women (considered foreigners by the rest of the country) were more truly "American" than their sisters in New York.

A Geographical Frontier

A geographical frontier provided Mormon women with an important separation from the East, both physically and symbolically. Because of the necessity a frontier existence created, it fostered a social, economic, and political independence in Mormon women, allowing them the freedom to develop their own rhetoric and a separateness from their eastern counterparts.

Though many factors separated Mormon women from eastern suffragists, one of the most important factors was their location on a geographical frontier because the frontier provided a complex situation in which Mormon women experienced both more freedom and more danger. A geographical frontier was, of course, a problematic and complicated locale for women. It was certainly not easy, nor even desirable for most of the Mormon women arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. Yet there was something about a geographical frontier that gave women a sense of independence. An excerpt from Eliza Marie Partridge Lyman's journal describes the tension between the frontier's freeing aspects and its harshness: "We are now at our journey's end for the present. The weather is beautiful. The country barren and desolate. I do not think our enemies need envy us this locality or ever come here to disturb us" (qtd in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 248). Indeed, their location in such a barren land gave Mormon women a sense of relief that their religious persecution had come to an end. And yet the sight of the Salt Lake Valley,

so void of civilization, must also have filled these women's hearts with trepidation. Like their colonial progenitors, Mormon women took that trepidation and turned it into a determination to carve out an existence on the frontier, creating in them a new identity.

The frontier gave Mormon women an opportunity to build a new society, which sharply contrasted the task that eastern women faced. Indeed, as Mormon women fought to build a new community, eastern women fought to break down the established society. This difference empowered Mormon women and made their experience more free and full of opportunity than that of eastern women. Though the frontier frightened Mormon women, it also relieved them and protected them from the persecution that had driven these women to Utah. It also provided a buffer from a nation which viewed Mormons as heretics. Indeed the frontier separated Mormon women from the East not only because of its distance, but also because of its harshness. And ironically, the frontier imbued Mormon women with a distinct Americanness that many women living within the Cult of Domesticity lacked.

Not only did the frontier provide a physical distance, but it also symbolized the ideological distance between Mormon women and their eastern counterparts. As Claudia Bushman points out, "the long trek west and the establishment of Zion in the mountain deserts cut [Mormon women] off from their former lives forever" (Mormon Sisters, xv). These women had been raised in the East, either in the United States, or in Europe. They were used to refined society, they followed civilized rules, and they lived in relative prosperity. When they came across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley, they left everything but their religious convictions behind. They made an official break from society, embarking on a new life under completely different circumstances. Unlike their eastern counterparts, who attempted to change society while simultaneously trying to avoid too much deviation, Mormon women renounced their civilized lives, unafraid to deviate from the norm. Frontier circumstances reinforced the break that Mormon women had made from society, and gave these women a chance to develop an identity that set them apart

from the rest of the country. Because of their frontier location, Mormon women could rejoice in their ideological differences with the East, despite the often trying circumstances they faced.

Yet in the face of such trials Mormon women flourished, especially in the social realm. In contrast to the common belief that Mormons were a strictly patriarchal society, Mormon women actually took charge of most community endeavors. They had their own newspapers, their own organizations, they became doctors, gave each other spiritual blessings, and shared housework and child-rearing responsibilities. Indeed their sphere of influence was large because it *had* to be, because Mormon women had a responsibility to build communities in a new land. Eliza R. Snow wrote of the necessity which forced Mormon women to take action in their community in her poem, "My Own—My Country's Flag," exclaiming that "No spade nor plow had stirred the sleeping sod--/No whiteman's foot, the turf had ever trod:/Twas all a waste, lone, desolate, and drear--/The savage roamed—the cricket chirruped here./Exiled from home, a long and weary tread,/With meagre outfits—scanty was our bread:/grim-faced necessity enforced a strife—We battled with the elements for life" (qtd in Randall, 78). They were free from societal constraints and rules. While eastern women struggled to obtain a public position in society, Mormon women enjoyed a prominence in their community. Under these new circumstances, Mormon women bucked the trends of nineteenth century domesticity. They played a key role in building communities through their participation in the work force, through the Relief Society, and through publications such as the Woman's Exponent. Perhaps the wild, barren, and desolate land necessitated the social changes which allowed women to be somewhat wild, themselves, and to fill the vast, empty spaces with their own strong voices.

Mormon women's voices were the heart and soul of their communities. In fact, talents that might otherwise have been silenced for being improper or presumptuous in the east were encouraged and cultivated in the West. Indeed, as Bushman illustrates, "All

[of Mormon women's] native gifts were encouraged for the benefit of the community, and imagination and initiative brought them social recognition. The loneliness of isolation and the false limitations of polite society were both missing" (*Mormon Sisters*, xviii). Mormon women were not in the same circumstances as "gentile" women on the frontier, for their goal was to be together, to be a community of God's saints. They were also in very different circumstances from their eastern counterparts, for

while Mormon women in the salt valley were coping together with sagebrush and crickets, back in America's eastern cities women occupied an ever more restricted 'sphere' in society. Education, for those who could afford it, stressed the polite accomplishments of music, fancy needlework, and French. Fashionable ladies were prepared to be decorative rather than practical members of society (Bushman, *Mormon Sisters*, xviii).

Women were needed on the frontier, valued for their social usefulness, and they blossomed in their tight-knit communities. They educated themselves in bookkeeping, medicine, farming, newspaper writing, and were skilled in their housework, as well. They did this because it was necessary to the community, because life on the western frontier required it of them.

The frontier also required that Mormon women use their talents and skills to contribute to the economy, and in Utah a woman was highly valued for her ability to strengthen the community financially. Claudia Bushman explains that 'the economic value of a wife was greater in a frontier community than in an eastern town where someone could be hired to do part of the household work" (*Mormon Sisters*, xvii). Because Mormon women not only managed the home but also helped manage the community, they were a powerful force on the frontier, valued for their initiative, their labor, and their role as women. Women were empowered by their role as mothers, for each time they had a child they increased the population and economic growth of Zion. Women were the primary community builders on the frontier, and therefore, they were

economically valued.

Contrasting the opposition that eastern women faced from government and church leaders, Mormon women were sanctioned to be economically prosperous and independent. In fact, Mormon church leaders were among the most vocal admirers of women for their economic value. President of the church Brigham Young encouraged women to be a part of the economy, often giving them special callings to raise grain or sew clothes, and to get an education. In an address to the Relief Society of Ogden, Eliza R. Snow revealed how important it was to Brigham Young that women get an education. She said, "President Young is requiring the sisters to get . . . a classical education, and then get a degree for Medicine" (qtd in Hanks, 73). At the time, women and men with medical training were a necessity in the budding communities.

In order for a budding community to grow on the frontier, every member of the community had to have an economic function. In *Women's Voices*, Brigham Young is said to have "stressed the importance of home industries and home manufactured goods, even attempting to establish a United Order" (Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 7). This United Order diminished the Mormons' dependence on outside, "gentile" goods, but more importantly, it encouraged community interdependence, and it created a unique Mormon identity. Women were vital to this interdependence and identity. In an effort to maintain Mormon independence from outside goods, Mormon women raised silk worms to sew their own modest and fashionable apparel. Indeed, Brigham Young's "emphasis on economic cooperation pushed Mormon women into some unique ventures, such as forming women's cooperatives, and buying, selling, and storing grain" (Godfrey, et al, 7). Whatever their role, women were encouraged to be part of economic life by the upper levels of church leadership. President Brigham Young entrusted women with economic responsibilities, and encouraged them to learn new skills that might help in times of need.

Times of need came often and required that women learn and take on many new skills and responsibilities. For example, While the men of the church were away on missions or performing other church work, such as construction, women took over their role in providing for families. It was a common case to have a husband missing for three years or more on a mission. Left behind, the wife had to support her family economically as well as domestically. Indeed "settling new frontiers often involved women in activities beyond housekeeping" (Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 5-6). And these activities contrasted sharply with the activities of eastern women, who were instructed in being frail, dependent wives.

With this involvement in the economy came an independence for women that was unprecedented. Eliza R. Snow is a perfect example of this phenomenon. Though the church was technically run by men, "neither Snow, nor the women she influenced were inhibited by that priesthood, which . . . at times threatened their autonomy" (Beecher, 32). Snow had much autonomy in her life. A plural wife first of the prophet Joseph Smith and later of the prophet Brigham Young, Snow essentially led the life of a wealthy single woman. She had the benefit of financial and emotional support from a husband, but also the freedom to travel and write and head up countless organizations. Having no children further freed Eliza from domestic fetters and allowed her to be independent and mobile. In an article on Snow, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher explains that "her position was ideal: the fact of her sex never prevented Eliza from achieving anything which was important to her. On the contrary, the fact of her sex, multiplied by her determination, her ambition, and her drive, had placed her in a position more prominent than any but Brigham Young"

(31). Snow's situation sharply contrasts the situation of Susan B. Anthony, who, despite her relative freedom, still found herself making compromises in an attempt to compensate for her sex. The frontier empowered women because of their sex and their value in the community. Eliza R. Snow is the embodiment of such a circumstance. The frontier truly molded her into the most influential woman in Utah.

Eliza was especially independent when it came to economic ventures. By no means would she allow a man to take over her position. In "Eliza R. Snow," Beecher explains that Eliza was in charge of the Women's Commission House, which "handled home manufactures in competition with other shops, including those 'Babylonish establishments' which sold imported goods" (33). The shop did well with the cooperation of other merchants and the support of Mormon women. Snow was insistent on maintaining a female leadership of the Commission, writing to President Brigham Young that "it is always disgusting to me to see a big fellow handing out calicoes and measuring ribbon. I would rather see the ladies do it. Let them do this business and let the men go to raising sheep, wheat, or cattle" (qtd in Beecher, 32-3). She even hotly protested one Brother Haslem, who had disagreed with her over a contract, writing to President Young: "although we are novices in the mercantile business, we are not green enough for that kind of management" (qtd in Beecher, 33). Autonomy was a priority for Snow, even to the point of taking her "president-husband to task" (Beecher, 33). Her extraordinary life was a sort of blueprint for the women of the church. She encouraged economic independence in the face of the monumental task of building the kingdom of God in the desert.

While Mormon women's unique position on the frontier gave them quite a bit of economic independence, the majority of their time was nevertheless spent inside the home. They were still very much involved with domestic chores. One woman's account of her day to day life reveals that "one day comes and goes, and the next follows; the same routine of work is gone through, and the same remains to be done" (Godfrey,

Godfrey, and Derr, 10). Though the frontier of Utah was liberating, it did require more labor—sometimes mundane—than a life in the East did. Women's journals either completely ignored their domestic responsibilities or they focused on them in great detail, and with either great pride or great resentment. In *Women's Voices*, it points out that

such careful accounting of domestic work reflected where women spent their time, but it may also have reflected their consciousness of the standard of 'feminine domesticity' evident throughout nineteenth century America. Popular journals idealized happy homemakers, but Mormon women's personal writings show they responded variously to woman's work—some, like Bathsheba Smith, with obvious pleasure, others with ambivalence or nonchalance, and some with outright disdain (Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr,11).

Like their eastern suffragist counterparts, Mormon women were aware of the standards of domesticity, and they criticized those standards. At times they lashed out against them. In the 1874 *Exponent*, a woman complains that she is treated as little more than a convenience for her husband. She writes that man views woman as one to "manage his house, cook his dinner, attend to his wardrobe, always on hand if . . . wanted and always out of sight if not needed. . . . She is a subject, not a joint-partner in the domestic firm" (qtd in Hanks, 59). Thus, Mormon women endured the same domestic struggles that other women of their time went through, and they complained against the social norm, just as the eastern feminists did.

Yet, in contrast to eastern feminists, Mormon women had a relationship with the frontier that provided them with a legitimate reason to get out of their homes and influence their communities. Women were needed for the good of the community, and thus, Mormon women had more freedom than a woman trapped in the fetters of civilization. They had opportunities, if they chose to take them, to participate in many activities outside of the home. These opportunities were also mandated by their belief that they were children of God and that God needed them to be more than mere

housewives if they were to build Zion. An 1875 essay in the Woman's Exponent explains that

Women have not only a work to do at home but abroad for all mankind. . . . Woman's work in this day and age is not only an individual work, but a universal work; a work for all her suffering sisterhood; and it will want all the courage and heroism it is possible to arouse in the rising generation to stem the current tide of vice and evil, and so purify the earth that the Millennium can be ushered in (qtd in Hanks, 81-2).

Their participation in the economy, Mormon women believed, had great spiritual significance. Told in a scripture from the Doctrine and Covenants, (29:34) "that 'all things unto [God] are spiritual,' women often invested their midwifery, school-teaching, weaving, storekeeping, farming, cooking, sewing, or nurturing with spiritual significance even though they acknowledged such activities as temporal necessities" (Godfrey,Godfrey, and Derr, 7). This shows the significance of a religious frontier as a means of strengthening women and supplementing their geographical frontier existence.

One of the best ways for a Mormon woman to get involved not only in economic affairs, but also in all aspects of the community was through the Relief Society. The Relief Society, a prominent women's organization that still exists in the Mormon church today, provided women with a spiritual impetus to participate in community-building activities outside of the home. Emphasizing the role that women had to serve the less fortunate and to gather together to receive spiritual instruction, Eliza R. Snow reorganized the Relief Society at the request of Brigham Young shortly after the Saints arrived in Utah. The Society was originally founded in Nauvoo by Joseph Smith, but it did not flourish until the Utah period, wherein its goal of helping those in need "was translated into well-defined, institutional forms" (May, 228). Eliza envisioned the Relief Society as a means whereby women could best build their communities, where they could learn and protect themselves from ignorance. In the Relief Society women could be

organized, could support each other in the hardships of frontier life. In an address to members of the Ogden branch of the Relief Society, which was later published in the *Woman's Exponent*, Eliza said

the works and duties of the women of Zion are constantly increasing. Nowhere on the earth has woman so broad a sphere of labor and duty, of responsibility and action, as in Utah. . . To be sure we have many of the crosses of life, but what do we meet them for? Are they for our own good and benefit or do we meet them all as for Zion's sake? We are here to perform duties, and to do our part towards establishing God's Kingdom (qtd in Hanks, 71-2).

Instead of having to rely only on either a natural rights argument or an expediency argument, Snow is able to use the spiritual concept of building the kingdom of God to infuse her fellow sisters with power and influence that extended beyond their own religious practices. Rather than basing the social actions of women on a selfish need to be out of the house, she describes a woman's participation in community service as a selfless action. Under this premise, women were God's instruments, necessary to the well-being of Zion. Their work outside the home was ultimately a contribution to Zion, and not a fulfillment of an inner need to be free from domesticity. Because of this spiritual foundation, Mormon women could argue for their right to organize and participate in community affairs. Indeed life on the frontier necessitated the organization of the Relief Society as a means for women to interact and to find a way to put their spiritual arguments into action, for the purpose of building Zion.

No other organization built up communities and made charitable contributions like the Relief Society. In an article entitled "Charitable Sisters," Cheryll Lyn May explains that "nineteenth century accounts agree that Mormon women possessed a degree of vigor, initiative, and outspoken advocacy of various causes unparalleled anywhere in the American West, and seldom matched by their eastern sisters" (225). As a women's organization, the Relief Society established a school to train nurses. Later a one-year

program to train nurses became the model for the one-year courses in practical nursing offered today in every community in the country. Not only did the Relief Society train nurses, but they also improved hospital conditions and quality of maternal and child care. The Deseret Hospital was established by the Society in 1882 with a woman as the resident surgeon. "Other Society activities in this field," explains May, "included operating milk depots for children during the summer, sponsoring summer trips for malnourished children, conducting clinics for preschoolers; supplying layette kits to new mothers; providing payment, when necessary, for general medical and dental care, and organizing an extensive program of health and child care education" (228-9). Not only were these women involved with medical care and practices, but they also raised grain and sold wheat, upon the request of President Brigham Young, for the Saints to save against a time of need. They also raised silk and ran primitive silk factories. In addition to these activities, the Society took on the responsibility of educational and cultural activities for their communities.

On top of this, the Society was the most independent church auxiliary organization at the time. They had their own buildings, and they even became their own legal entity, separate from the church. "In 1892," May tells us, "the Society was incorporated as a separate legal entity under the name of the 'National Women's Relief Society' so that . . . 'It could be independent and transact its own business in its own name with trustees and all the rights and privileges belonging to a corporate body" (232). While in Nauvoo the Society performed many acts of kindness, it was not until they were faced with the demands of an uncivilized frontier life, and under the direction of Eliza R. Snow, that Mormon women were able to put their talents to use in an organized and independent fashion. In Utah, the Relief Society was absolutely necessary to the well-being of the community because of the tremendous contributions of its members. Because of this indispensability, the Relief Society was left to run itself without much interference from the brethren. Thus, the frontier shapes the woman into an

independent and relatively liberated being, persuading her to change her attitude and her outlook on life.

A Rhetorical Frontier

The Relief Society also encouraged women to participate in feminist rhetoric, which brought them into a new sphere of knowledge, or a frontier of rhetoric. May reveals that "another area of activity in which the Relief Society became increasingly independent was the Society's program of publications" (233). The *Woman's Exponent*, which, with one "fly-by-night exception . . .was the first magazine published by and for women west of the Mississippi" (Beecher, *Mormon Sisters*, 26), was also considered the major mouthpiece of the Relief Society. Mormon women's ability to own publications recalls the colonial women's access to printing presses and newspapers, but because of their relative unity, and their smaller geographical area, not to mention their distinct and radical religion, Mormon women had even more power and freedom to write what they pleased, when they pleased. In addition, Mormon women used the *Exponent* as a political platform upon which to preach their version of feminism. It provided them with a rhetorical frontier and a place to practice the natural rights and expediency arguments of their eastern counterparts.

The magazine was started when Eliza R. Snow urged her great niece, Louisa Lula Greene to start a magazine for ladies to foster literary growth. In its pages, women wrote about their spirituality in political, social, and economic contexts. The *Exponent* was extremely successful because it allowed women to participate in something important, something much larger than themselves. The *Exponent* was a means of awakening a woman's faculties and giving her a strong voice. Emmeline B. Wells, who took over the magazine after Louisa, wrote the following editorial in the September 1874 issue of the *Exponent*:

I believe in women, especially thinking women. Are we human beings, rational and accountable, and yet permit to lie dormant the highest faculty of our nature--

thought? Alas we see it every day! But there is a day dawning when we will be better understood, if not appreciated; and every woman in Utah, who has the interest of her sex at heart, should exert her utmost influence to extend the circulation of the Exponent' for wherever it finds its way, into whatever home, village, or town it penetrates, there will thought be awakened, there will woman begin to feel and understand that there is something elevating and inspiring, worth living for, worthy of attainment (qtd in Hanks, 74-5).

The rhetorical question, "are we human beings?" reveals that Mormon women had access to the natural rights argument and that they believed in its power. Frontier life allowed and encouraged women to publish such rhetoric and persuaded them to a strong conviction in the importance of women's literacy and autonomy. The *Exponent* was the means whereby women built a community of their own kind, whereby thought was stimulated, and whereby female voices were heard.

In fact, the first Mormon feminist writings came out of the *Woman's Exponent*. In its pages, women complained against their limited rights, defended their plural marriages, and utilized the natural rights and expediency arguments that their feminist counterparts used. But Mormon women added a spiritual dimension to feminist rhetoric, and argued from a frontier landscape. Politics, independence, and the pervasive "woman question," which plagued nineteenth century thought, were common topics of the *Exponent*. And all of these topics were answered with religious conviction, with a call for women to liberate themselves from ignorance and dependence.

Mormon women's attitude toward the woman question, the vote, and independence became perfectly clear in the pages of the *Exponent*. In an article entitled "Mormon Women's Publications," Vella Neil Evans points out that "for many years the *Exponent's* masthead carried the political slogan, 'The Rights of the Women of Zion and the Rights of the Women of All Nations'" (54). Though women in Utah were given the right to vote in 1870, they still rallied for the women of America to receive the franchise.

Mormon women were aware of the fact that they were privileged above their eastern counterparts in their ability to vote, and in the *Exponent*, they encouraged women to exercise their privilege and to appreciate it. In March of 1874, in response to a woman saying she is not strong minded enough to vote, Laura M. Miner wrote the following, "Ten thousand times better to be strong minded, the true companion of your husband and brothers, the guide and promoter of your children's welfare . . . So should we consider and guard the elective franchise, using it conscientiously, as a God-given privilege. . ." (qtd in Hanks, 74). Such an attitude of a God-mandated equality reveals the convergence of rhetorical, religious, and geographical frontiers in the identity of Mormon women.

The frontier atmosphere also led the *Exponent* editor, Emmeline B. Wells, to organize the Utah Women's Press Club in 1891. Far removed from the East, Mormons in Utah were able to start their own branches of national clubs and societies that might otherwise have been inaccessible to them because of their different religious views. The UWPC joined the International Woman's Press Association in 1892 and became a corporation in 1898. Activities included reading original compositions, throwing Halloween costume parties, hearing prominent guest—speakers, and attending meetings of other women's organizations in London and Berlin. In fact, club historian Lydia Alder wrote that "perhaps no club in the state or nation has been represented like the U.W. Press Club in the congresses of the world" (qtd in Baker, 219). The club supported women's rights as well as local and national civic causes. In cooperation with the Exponent, The UWPC encouraged women to write, to take part in their communities, and to empower themselves. This club provides an example of how Mormon women were able to extend themselves beyond the home, and even the church, into more global realms. Their affiliation with the rhetorical frontier of feminism enabled Mormons to expand their roles.

Women's suffrage was not the only issue of importance in the *Woman's*Exponent. Many editorials and essays also asked for more than just the right to vote. In an

1880 Exponent, a Mormon woman complains, "it is true we have the right to vote, but is this all, this shadow without the substance, that our brethren can afford to give us?" (qtd in Hanks, 54-5). While eastern feminists had to tone-down their arguments for female equality, limiting themselves to suffrage as a panacea for the disease of misogyny, Mormon women writing in the *Exponent* were unafraid to seek equal rights on a grander scale. The equal rights arguments in the nineteenth century *Exponent* are a foreshadowing of the equal rights issues that have taken center stage in the twentieth century. Emmeline B. Wells provides a summary of the equal rights matter in the June of 1872 issue: "There are many rights which woman should possess yet of which she is denied by custom or by statute law, but more especially by the former. . . She should have access to every avenue of employment for which she has physical and mental capacity. . . if a woman does as much work as a man, and does it as well, she must . . . receive equal pay for it" (qtd in Hanks, 70-1). Clearly Mormon women were fully aware that it was social custom, not natural law, which placed a woman in a subordinate position. The articles in the Woman's Exponent reveal how truly progressive Mormon women were for their time. Their progressive beliefs were seldom censured, which provides a sharp contrast to eastern women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who, upon writing the Woman's Bible and declaring equality as more than just the right to vote, was asked to resign as president of the NAWSA.

The *Exponent* also encouraged women's independence from men and their dependence on each other, invoking an expediency argument to explain why women must stick together. In 1874, the *Exponent* encouraged women to show men their independence, explaining that "when men see that woman can exist without them being constantly at hand, that they can learn to be self-reliant or depend upon each other for more or less happiness, it will perhaps take a little conceit out of some of them" (qtd in Hanks, 59). This is in no way a cautious or subtle attack. The *Exponent* gave women a chance to rally together, to depend on each other, and to do so openly and boldly. In a

vast new land, in a wild land, these women had a connection with each other through words that no man could break. The connection was based on their shared religious beliefs, but it flourished as women used those beliefs in an effort to discuss their total rights through rhetoric.

Another aspect of the *Exponent* which was progressive and which united women was its treatment of the "woman question." The "woman question" essentially asked what a woman's place in society was. How much freedom should a woman have? Is her role solely restricted to the home? In this case, the traditional rhetoric of natural rights and expediency is used with a religious twist. On the one hand, Mrs. A.M. Diaz in August of 1879, asks,

As to the woman question, why not let it be a woman question? Why make a man question of it? Women are competent to decide on their own course of action. Why does man step in to decide for her? That's what puzzles me. I am not particular at our voting, but what I am particular about is to know why I do not know as well as a man does, whether or not it is right for me to vote, or to 'speak' (qtd in Hanks, 84).

This view places the fate of women securely in their own hands and uses a natural rights idea that women are as capable as men to make their own choices. Religion comes into play as an authority-giving source. This woman writes under the assumption that she is a child of God, perfectly capable to make her own choices. Such an attitude is established from contact with frontiers geographical, rhetorical, and religious.

On the other hand, some believed that the woman question was an important issue for everyone: "The 'woman question' is the question of both man and woman; and 'woman's rights' should as deeply interest men as women. Woman is the mother of the world, and her interests can no more be separated from those of man, than could the world exist with only one sex. It is to be hoped that this fact will have full weight in the future agitation of the 'Woman Question'" (qtd in Hanks, 71). This view relies on an

expediency argument, which gives woman a higher role as mother of the world, and reveals the necessity of women's rights as a cause for everyone to adopt for the benefit of society. A religious view of a woman's true role as mother infuses women with an importance and a divine mission that should not be hindered by oppressive societal rules and regulations.

In either case, the woman question was at the forefront of *Exponent* articles, as were the common feminist rhetorical devices of the era. Yet the thing that made the *Exponent* different from other feminist publications in the East was its spiritual equality arguments and its religious context. A woman spoke of her rights as those which "her Creator has designed for her" (qtd in Hanks, 71). And her position was that of a child of God, building his kingdom, and making the best of an "eternal progression" (qtd in Hanks, 71). Religion permeated every aspect of the *Exponent* and because of their religious convictions, the magazine's writers were justified in their declarations of their rights. A frontier atmosphere further justified the *Exponent* as a means for women to stay in contact and support each other while fostering literary talent, which they did boldly.

A Religious Frontier

Mormon women's boldness is unusual considering that an extremely patriarchal religion was the foundation for the *Exponent*. Yet caution was not as necessary for these women because of their position on the frontier of religious belief. A religious frontier, in conjunction with a rhetorical and geographical frontier, imbued Mormon women with independence and confidence. Their unique religious belief that they would some day be queens in heaven allowed Mormons to live, to act, and to write more freely. In the July 1875 *Exponent*, an article signed E.N.B. reveals the attitude that a religious frontier gave to Mormon women:

If [man] sprang from the Deity, did not woman also? If he is made of mettle like that the Gods are made of, is not woman made of the same? If he came from his Father's loins, and was nurtured on his Mother's lap, what other place did his sister come from that she should be accounted so inferior to him. If the Lord had a purpose in creating the male part of humanity, had he not equally as good a purpose in creating the female part also? Or did he make her simply to bear the fault of man? I know we are taught that Eve was the first to sin. Well, she was simply more progressive than Adam. She did not want to live in the beautiful garden forever, and be nobody—not able even to make her own aprons (qtd in Hanks, 76-7).

Though E.N.B. did not sign her full name to this article, there is still a sense of fearlessness in her bold arguments for women's spiritual equality and superiority. Mormon women filled their communities with this boldness of spirit, which was nurtured by their wild, frontier environment and the feminist rhetoric coming from the East. Mormon women had greater freedoms than their sisters in the East, and their colonial progenitors because of their religious, as well as geographical and rhetorical, frontiers.

The concept of Zion provided these women with a truly unique religious frontier. As members of a new church, with new beliefs and doctrines, Mormon women could appropriate old feminist rhetorical strategies and combine them with new spiritual arguments. In *Mormon Sisters* Claudia Bushman asserts that "Mormon women were much like other American women of their day, but their allegiance to the faith led them in some new directions" and "the gospel of Jesus Christ, newly interpreted by this dynamic sect, brought religious rebirth to many young girls who faced dull futures and tomany older women who thought their lives were over. In addition to enriching their lives, the gospel undoubtedly made them more adventurous as a group than their sisters who stayed at home (*Mormon Sisters*, xvi). A new religion provided Mormon women with the ability to use spiritual power and even to usurp the patriarchal priesthood in order to justify themselves in their spiritual arguments.

A new religion meant new spiritual power, and in its early stages, each member of

the church—male or female—had access to that spiritual power. Because Mormon women were trying to build Zion, they were able to use their spiritual gifts openly, without needing to rationalize their spiritual authority. Jill Mulvay Derr, in her article, "Eliza R. Snow and the Woman Question" explains that in the midst of feminists' attempts to break down the established patriarchal order, "women converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. . . were not concerned with breaking down an existing order, but rather with establishing a new order—the Kingdom of God. As that Kingdom grew, the sphere of Mormon women was enlarged" (75-6). The impetus to build a new society gave Mormon women spiritual power as well as social power. Derr tells us that "sisters were early encouraged to exercise spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues; later they participated in baptisms for the dead and temple ordinances; and they administered to the sick by the laying on of hands" (76). These women were free from the constraints that a "civilized" and established society would have imposed. They could pray and preach publicly. They could exercise a spiritual authority and bless each other. Mormon women were neither silenced in the religious realm nor in the secular realm because they were vital to the kingdom of God. They existed on a religious frontier which enabled them to make new rules for themselves, which shaped their identities.

One interesting manifestation of the religious frontier was the act of speaking in tongues. In her article, "Mystics and Healers" Claudia Bushman explains that "the women of the early church were as involved in spiritual experiences as men" (2). Mormon women often spoke in tongues and prophesied at various meetings. This was a controversial issue among the more conservative members of the church, and Joseph Smith, then the Mormon president, publicly condemned speaking in tongues. Yet, in the earliest days of the Relief Society, when the Mormons were in Nauvoo, women were completely comfortable with exercising their pentecostal gifts. In fact, as Maureen Beecher tells us in *The Personal Writings of Eliza R. Snow*, "Eliza Snow herself pronounced a blessing in tongues at the [Relief Society's] second meeting, and a Sister

Durfee was healed by the administration of the female presidency. . . . Joseph Smith commended the women's actions . . . and from then on the sisters felt themselves at least justified if not encouraged in their spiritual exercises" (112). That speaking in tongues was a natural component of many of the sisters' meetings reveals the spiritual authority Mormon women had. This spiritual power justified them and widened their sphere of influence in a new religion. Speaking in tongues quite literally gave Mormon women a voice and a chance to be heard. Had these women been exercising the gift of tongues in the Methodist or Catholic churches, particularly in the civilized East, surely they would have been punished as heretics. But the budding Mormon church was not under the same rules and constraints as other religious entities at that time. With Mormonism came a new spirituality and that spirituality thrived on the frontier of the West.

This new spirituality was, as Linda King Newell explains, "the latter-day restoration of all things" which "encompassed the restoration of [the] signs of the Holy Spirit according to the faith of the members. These gifts came ungendered. They were gifts to the household of faith, given to 'the children of God' male and female" (112). Mormons believed that Joseph Smith had restored the true church to the earth, and with this restoration came a reinstatement of male as well as female spiritual authority. The ancient priesthood of prophets like Abraham and Paul, according to Mormon belief, had returned to the earth, and it was practiced and utilized by both sexes. In March of 1830, Joseph Smith instructed the Relief Society to "move according to the ancient Priesthood, hence there should be a select Society...choice, virtuous, and holy--[Joseph] Said he was going to make of this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day—as in Paul's day" (qtd in Newell, 115). Not only were women viewed as equal participants in spiritual authority, they were also often viewed as greater recipients of spiritual gifts.

In the spirit of frontier self-sufficiency, Mormon women were regularly called on to complete tasks that official priesthood holders had not accomplished successfully. Eliza R. Snow once confided to the Relief Society that "Sometimes I think we can do

more than the brethren" (qtd in Derr, 80). This is especially true in the case of healing the sick. In one instance, a sick woman was blessed by the elders of the priesthood, but to no avail. Abigail Leonard recalls, "I told the husband of the sick woman that but one thing was left to be done, which was to send for the sisters. The sisters came, washed, anointed, and administered to her . . . every indication [of] death was upon her. But before the sisters had ceased to administer, the blood went coursing through her system, and to her extremities, and she was sensibly better" (qtd in Bushman, 14). Their ability to wash and anoint the sick both inside and outside of the temple gave women a spiritual authority which placed them on an equal footing with the men of the church, and even in some cases on a higher spiritual plane. With the restoration of the gospel came an empowering call to Mormon women to "cast out devils . . . speak with new tongues, [and] . . .lay hands on the sick" (Mark 16:17-18). A religious frontier combined with a geographical and a rhetorical frontier provided a clearly defined role for Mormon women.

This clearly defined role enabled them to expand their arguments for rights beyond just the natural rights and expediency arguments. The seemingly incongruent expediency and natural rights arguments found common ground through the Mormon use of spiritual equality. Mormon women grounded their rhetoric in spiritual matters, which provided justification in itself. These women needed no other justification, for their language and their authority came from God. Though it seems that the priesthood excludes Mormon women from certain rights and powers, during these times it actually empowered women. Eliza R. Snow appropriates the male-dominated priesthood in a poem addressed to American women suffragists:

And all their efforts to remove the curse

Are only making matters worse and worse;

They can as well unlock with a key,

As change the tide of man's degen'racy.

Without the holy priesthood—'tis at most

Like reck'ning bills in absence of the host (qtd in Bushman, 32).

Eliza R Snow believed that the priesthood elevated men as well as women. She believed that suffrage was nothing if it was not accompanied by the empowering restored priesthood. Consequently, Mormon women stood in a very different place than their eastern counterparts, for although they fought for women's rights, their feminism was grounded in a spiritual authority.

That spiritual authority would not have been possible without such a radical religious frontier. In an 1871 twenty-fourth of July celebration address, Eliza R. Snow makes it clear that she is aware of the contrast between eastern feminists and Mormon feminists:

How very different our position from that of our sisters in the world at large, and how widely different our feelings and prospects from that class known as "strong-minded," who are strenuously and unflinchingly advocating "woman's rights," and some of them at least proclaiming "woman's sovereignty" and vainly flattering themselves with the idea that with ingress to the ballot box and access to financial offices, they shall accomplish the elevation of woman-kind (qtd in Bushman, 32).

Unlike the most prominent suffragists, Snow and other Mormon women believed that there was more to women's rights than just suffrage and equal social footing. And they were able to exclaim their convictions without censure because of their relationship with frontiers, because their religious and geographical frontier had developed in them independence and confidence. Unlike Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a more radical feminist in the East, Mormon women saw religion as a necessary component of women's liberation. This was possible because their religion was new, and it did not encourage the belief in women's baseness and inability to think independently.

Yet this religion openly acknowledged the idea that women were subservient to men. George Q. Cannon, a member of the first presidency in 1869, explained that as a result of the fall of Eve, a woman's "desire shall be to [her] husband, and he shall rule over [her]" (qtd in Rockwood, 10-11). A seeming inconsistency exists among the women of the early Mormon church: they had more power and more rights than many other women, yet they often advocated submission and obedience to men. Eliza R. Snow, despite her great influence and authority in the church, still made it clear that she operated under the priesthood and obeyed the wishes of her husband. Mormon women believed that the fall in the Garden of Eden brought a curse upon Adam and Eve. Under this curse Eve was to be subordinate to Adam, and thus women were to be subordinate to men. Eliza Snow explained that "we have no occasion to clamor about equality, or to battle for supremacy. We understand our true position—God has defined the sphere of woman wherever His Priesthood is acknowledged" (qtd in Derr, 82). Women's subservience was a fact for Mormon women. Their gentile counterparts sought to break the bonds of slavery which Eve's curse created, but Mormons took a different path: "We stand in a different position from the ladies of the world; we have made a covenant with God, we know his order, and we know that that order requires submission on the part of women" (qtd in Derr, 82). Mormon women viewed their submission to men as a result of their role as nurturers and mothers. In this way, Mormon women had much in common with some eastern suffragists, particularly those who would not attempt to challenge women's role as nurturers and mothers.

Yet, despite their belief in the subordination of women, their religious frontier still gave Mormon women an ideological edge over their eastern counterparts because these women believed that their position would someday change, and that it would be enriched because of their subservience. Eliza R. Snow's famous hymn, "O My Father" asserts that women can someday be goddesses, just as men can be gods, explaining with conviction that there is a heavenly mother: "In the heavens are parents single? No, the thought makes reason stare! Truth is reason; truth eternal tells me I've a mother there" (292). This assertion would have been labeled heretical in the eastern United States, and Snow

would have faced tremendous opposition. In fact, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's suggestion of a heavenly mother in the *Woman's Bible* resulted in her forced resignation from the presidency of the NAWSA, because her controversial statement alienated other women and greatly discredited her in the eyes of the nation. This reveals how a religious frontier gave women the power to assert themselves as equal inheritors of God's glory with men. Snow's hymn, which would have been thrown out of any other religion's hymnal, was published and has remained a mainstay of the Mormon hymn collection for over one hundred years.

Another distinction in Mormon women's religious beliefs is that they believed their role as mothers to be a divine one, even more important than the roles of men in the world. Though suffragists and anti-suffragists also argued that motherhood was a divine calling, Mormon women argued that motherhood was actually a blessing disguised as a curse for a very distinct purpose. An essay in the *Exponent* dated February first, 1889, uses an underlying argument of spiritual equality to explain that because of the great sacredness of motherhood, women were placed in a subservient position to avoid distractions from their true calling. As the essay illustrates, the curse of Eve is actually a blessing in disguise:

Since the days of Eve her daughters have lived under the curse of social inferiority to her brother man. In this generation the irksomeness of this condition has been displayed by the woman's movement for equal rights, This movement has met with slurs and opposition at every step, just as every truth has always been opposed by its adversary . . . God, who made us all, and who is no respecter of persons, intended that woman should in every way be equal to man in dignity; but He also knew the station in which she would be placed while on earth, that her child-bearing and child-rearing sphere would curtail other aspirations, which man would have the opportunity to follow. He knew that the former would be of the greater importance to the world, and therefore in the guise of a curse, bestowed

upon her the *blessing* to be subject to man, that she might better fulfil her mission (qtd in Rockwood, 12).

According to this theory, women and men were both created by God, and therefore women deserve their natural rights. Yet women have a more sacred and important responsibility than men, that of motherhood, so they are in reality a greater force for good in the world. Though women recognized and even accepted their subservient role, and their role as mothers, they saw that position as an empowering one, and as one that would someday receive the glory that it deserved.

This contrasts Elizabeth Cady Stanton's view of the fall in the Garden of Eden. According to Stanton, the fall has been misinterpreted in favor of man. In reality, it was Eve who was more valiant in the garden. Stanton believes that "the conduct of Eve from the beginning to the end is . . . superior to that of Adam . . . the woman [is] fearless of death if she can gain wisdom [and] takes of the fruit; and all this time Adam standing beside her interposes no word of objection. . . Having had the command from God himself he interposes no word of warning or remonstrance, but takes the fruit from the hand of his wife without protest" (qtd in Rockwood, 10). Rather than accepting the curse of Eve, Stanton fights against it as a mere result of misinterpretation on the part of men. The curse of Eve, according to Stanton, is a cultural invention, not a scriptural fact. In many ways, this view is more freeing for women. Stanton refuses to accept that God would place women in subservient roles. Rather, men have distorted scripture to rationalize their brutality towards women.

However freeing this idea was for women, the Mormon view reveals the subtlety and effectiveness of an acceptance of Eve's curse. Mormon feminist rhetoric was built on a foundation of new spirituality, and because of this, it was decidedly a rhetoric that did not rely on the breaking down of old traditions. Mormons sought to build a new kingdom, not to tear down an old one. A frontier existence—on every level—created a new identity for these women, and part of that identity was a construction of their roles as mothers in a

newly sacred light. They found power in the curse of Eve, and were unashamed to accept it. In fact, one essay in the *Woman's Exponent* praises Eve for what she did. Rather than trying to show how the story of the fall of man has been distorted, this essay applauds Eve's transgression, saying that "ever since Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, which certainly showed her pluck, women have been blamed for all the ills that flesh is heir to" but that "in the future there will be a woman at the bottom of everything good" (qtd in Rockwood, 11). Indeed Mormon women accepted Eve's curse yet they did not believe that it revealed an inherent inferiority. Someday, they believed, their state of subservience would be over.

Many believed that the millennium would be the end of the submission of women. The February first, 1889 *Exponent* essay continues, explaining that with the millennium would come a restoration of women's equality:

To me it seems like one of the latter-day signs, that women are becoming restless beneath their oppressed situation. The world's record will soon be finished . . . And when the millennium shall set in, . . . the curse [shall] be removed . . . I write with confidence, for I firmly believe that our Heavenly Father loves His daughters just as well as he loves His sons, and that he does not desire the glorification of one at the sacrifice of the happiness of the other (qtd in Rockwood, 12).

Thus Mormon women viewed their degradation as a temporary situation which Christ would remedy when he returned to rule the earth. This reveals how the rhetoric of Mormon women was infused with spirituality and an assurance that God was truly on their side. They believed that some day their condition would change, and rather than fighting against it like their feminist sisters in the East, these women accepted their state with the hope of better things to come. This acceptance, however limiting it may seem, actually enabled Mormon women to make bold statements about their rights and to enjoy opportunities and freedoms that those feminists who struggled against the curse could not have dreamed of having.

Eliza Snow made it clear that obedience would bring about much better things for faithful Mormon women: "Inasmuch as we continue faithful, we shall be those that will be crowned in the presence of God and the Lamb. You, my sisters, if you are faithful, will become Queens of Queens" (qtd in Derr, 87). In her attempt to encourage Mormon women to be content in their domestic position, Snow utilized the concept of the parable of the talents in Matthew, wherein this promise was given to those who fulfilled their duties: "thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things" (25:23). In Eliza's words,

What we experience here, is but a school

Wherein the ruled will be prepared to rule

And thro' obedience, Woman will obtain

The power of reigning, and the right to reign (qtd in Derr, 87).

Their position on the earth, according to Mormon women, was not only temporary, but a test. In Mormon doctrine this earth life is viewed as a trial in which human beings prove their faithfulness to God. Submission on the part of women was merely one aspect of the great test of life. If women could pass this test, their trials would be lifted and their rights and equality restored.

Truly, the greater the trials, the greater the reward, if a woman remained faithful.

The *Utah Woman Suffrage Songbook* reinforces this idea, declaring

Woman, 'rise, thy penance o'er,

Sit thou in the dust no more;'

Seize the scepter, hold the van,

Equal with thy brother, man (qtd. in Rockwood, 11).

Mormon women firmly believed that through their particular trials and hardships they would be blessed and redeemed. Harder trials resulted in a more glorious reward.

Ironically, these Mormon women, in accepting their subservience to men, had more

freedom and autonomy than their eastern counterparts, who fought against a woman's inferiority. The frontiers of location, rhetoric, and religion made it possible for Mormon women to enjoy such freedom and accept their roles.

This concept is especially true in the case of plural marriage, for plural marriage was inherently full of contradictions for Mormon women. On the one hand, it was the most obvious manifestation of a woman's status as subservient to man. One the other hand, Mormon women viewed it as such a trial that it was a redemption from Eve's curse. Polygamy at once subdued and elevated women. George Q. Cannon stated that polygamy's "correct practice" would "redeem woman from the effects of [Eve's] curse" (qtd in Rockwood, 10). George Cannon believed that polygamy would rid women of their "'jealousy' and thus make them able to overcome Eve's curse" (Rockwood, 11). Though this point of view seems unfair to women, and attributes to them stereotypical characteristics—such as jealousy—it brought comfort to the women who found themselves participants in plural marriage. They believed that the ultimate trial—living harmoniously in a plural marriage—brought about the greatest redemption for women: relief from the curse of Eve. For some, this trial was an impossible one to overcome. For others it became a true state of celestial bliss on earth. Though the religious frontier of Mormonism was ultimately freeing, it was still full of contradictions and difficulties for women.

However redemptive it was viewed to be, the issue of plural marriage was not without controversy in the church. It was very difficult for Mormon women to accept. In her personal writings, Eliza R. Snow explains that polygamy was "very repugnant to my feelings" (Beecher, *Personal Writings* 16). Plural marriage seemed to go against everything that Mormon women held as true and good. Yet, after wrestling with the idea, Eliza R. Snow explains that

when I reflected that I was living in the Dispensation of the fullness of times, embracing all other Dispensations, surely Plural Marriage must necessarily be included. . . . As I increased in knowledge concerning the principle and design of [it], I grew in love with it, and today esteem [plural marriage] a precious, sacred principle—necessary in the elevation and salvation of the human family—in redeeming woman from the curse, and [the] world from corruptions (Beecher, *Personal Writings*, 17).

Despite its defense as a redemption from the curse of Eve, not all Mormon women found peace in the doctrine of polygamy.

Dozens of personal accounts reveal the strained marital conditions under which the women of polygamy suffered. One account reveals the jealousy that these wives dealt with: "I feel bad again," wrote Patty Sessions in her journal of September 8, 1847, "[my husband] has been and talked to Rosilla and she [filled] his ears full and when he came to my bed I was quite [chilled]. He was gone so long and I was so cold I had been crying" (qtd in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 15). This is just one example of the problems plural marriage. Fanny Stenhouse, in her autobiography Tell It All explains that "there is nothing in hell so hateful, so vile, so detestable [than polygamy]. It is blight and ruin to everything that is fair and good. I never pass a day but I curse with the bitterest hatred those men who devised it" (263). Indeed under the practice of polygamy many women lost their testimony of the gospel in addition to losing their love of their husbands. Even the great Mormon icon, Emmeline B. Wells, who ardently defended polygamy in issues of the *Exponent*, privately revealed that she felt "no protection or comfort in my husband" She yearned for him to "love me even a little and not seem so perfectly indifferent to any sensation of that kind" (qtd in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 6). Clearly, polygamy was complicated and difficult for the women who practiced it.

Polygamy was difficult for the small percentage of the population who practiced it, yet, in many instances, it was beneficial. Plural marriage was practical in frontier life, and it provided a "sister-wife" support system that was surprisingly congenial. In an article titled "Plural Wives," Stephanie Smith Goodson explains the functionality of

polygamy. She writes, "frontier people sensed the practical advantages of polygamy. Samuel Taylor thought polygamy was 'only feasible in a frontier environment' . . . The strong practical applications of polygamy, coupled with the even stronger religious feelings about it, made the Principle . . . Surprisingly successful" (Bushman,105). Plural marriage enabled women to have financial support as well as a spiritual pass into heaven. Though eastern suffragists believed that Mormon women were in a degraded and slave-like state, ironically, Mormon women had more freedom partially as a result of their polygamous marriages. While Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton struggled to pass divorce laws and provide women with the kind of economic independence that they desperately needed, Mormon women enjoyed polygamous marriages that encouraged independence and freedom.

That independence and freedom was supplemented by a tremendous support system from what Mormons called "sister-wives." Bathsheba W. And Lucy Meserve Smith were both wives of George A. Smith. Each woman rejoiced in her husband's affection and neither one seemed to measure it. They corresponded and often lived with George's other wives. Martha Cragun Cox wrote that she and her two other "sister-wives loved each other more than sisters. . . . We enjoyed many privileges that single wifery never knew" (qtd in Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 15). Those privileges included the sharing of household duties and child care. Under the practice of plural marriage, women could help each other with domestic chores and thus have more time for pursuits outside of the home. They were more independent, stronger, and had a more clear sense of their own identity, in part because they could not rely on their husbands to always be there to bolster them. As Goodson explains, "polygamy forced women to be resourceful" (105). My own great, great grandfather, John Kenney, had two wives: Phoebe and Elizabeth. The two women were close friends, sharing child-rearing and housekeeping responsibilities and when John left them to make his fortune (never to return) they took on the financial responsibilities of the home, as well. Sharing different homes, the women

visited each other daily and would walk each other halfway home every night. Their friendship enabled them to support themselves in the absence of a husband. In the eastern United States, a woman would have had far fewer options if her husband abandoned her. She certainly would not have flourished as Elizabeth and Phoebe did.

At its best plural marriage gave women a strong bond in addition to a chance for independence and self-sufficiency, even redemption. Certainly, as Bushman relates, "a plural wife could not be the helpless, fainting, protected female or she would most likely faint alone" and "in one of the neatest ironic contradictions of the period, the 'enslaved harems' of Utah produced some of America's most efficient early feminists" (xix). Despite the difficulty polygamy created in some households, it contributed to the independent identity of Mormon women, placing them at an advantage over the eastern American woman, who basically gave up all of her rights on her wedding day and became swallowed up in the identity of her husband.

A religious frontier gave Mormon women much more freedom than their eastern counterparts, and it infused Mormon feminist rhetoric with a spirituality that transcended the traditional natural rights and expediency arguments of national suffragists. Access to these traditional feminist arguments merely strengthened Mormon women's own approach to women's rights. Without such frontiers—rhetorical, religious, and geographical—Mormon women probably could not have obtained the level of freedom and autonomy that they had.

Conclusion

Though many people believed that Mormon women lived a life of slavery, in reality, they had much more freedom than many of their eastern counterparts. They had more freedom because they were residing on the great geographical frontier of America as well as the great religious frontier of Mormonism. They also had access to the feminism of the East, which was truly a frontier for all American women. These frontiers infused Mormon feminist rhetoric with a spiritual authority and a boldness that exceeded

even the powerful speeches of Susan B. Anthony and the writings of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Mormon women sought to build rather than to destroy. They saw more to women's rights than many of the other nineteenth century suffragists saw. Their's was a story of "conversion, persecution, migration and settlement, and efforts at building a community-kingdom" (Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, 9). On a physical frontier, Mormon women enjoyed a greater economic and social value. They were needed to build communities and they were free from the constraints of established society. On a rhetorical frontier, Mormon women were able to use the natural rights and expediency arguments in the *Exponent* and develop a feminist consciousness among themselves that justified their freedom and power in the community. On a religious frontier, Mormon women had a new spiritual impetus to build the kingdom of God. They had access to supernatural powers as well as the male-dominated priesthood. They also believed in doctrines that would empower and redeem them from their subservient state. Truly the frontier brought out the best in these women. In the lives of Mormon women, the rhetoric of the frontier and the frontier of rhetoric and religion combined to create a distinct identity.

Were Mormon women more liberated than feminists such as Elizabeth Cady
Stanton and Susan B. Anthony? Claudia Bushman answers in *Mormon Sisters* that "they
probably were. . . . Looking back it appears that nineteenth century Mormon women were
remarkably free to act in the world and that they were independent of their husbands"
(xxi). Indeed, because of their frontier existence, Mormon women were at an advantage
over eastern women. Geographical, religious, and rhetorical frontiers infused Mormon
women with a truly American identity. Frederick Jackson Turner asserts that "the true
point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West,"
explaining that "the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (323). Ironically, Mormon women, who embodied the "American Character" as Turner
defines it, were considered total outsiders by Americans on the East Coast.

Conclusion: The Dualities of the Frontier

As I have shown in this thesis, frontiers are rhetorical. They shape attitude and identity in such a way that mere language cannot. Dr. Greg Clark explains that "the rhetorical symbols we encounter and exchange are not limited to language" (3). Instead, those symbols and experiences which people encounter that are influential in changing attitude or in shaping identity are rhetorical. These symbols include elements of language, of course, but they are more complex than just rhetorical appeals and rational arguments. Indeed, they are "relational encounter[s] rather than . . . rational argument[s]" (Clark, 3). This definition of rhetoric is especially true concerning landscape, and particularly the frontier of America. Kenneth Burke writes of the importance of surroundings in shaping identity in his article, "The American Way." He explains that surroundings are important to identity because they help to "place a person in his own eyes, as he surrounds himself with a scene which, he is assured, attests to his moral quality. For he can feel that he participates in the quality which the scene itself is thought to possess" (qtd in Clark, 4). As people commune with the frontier, they take on the characteristics of the land. This argument reinforces Frederick Jackson Turner's assertion that the frontier is the essence of America, that it is the most decisive element in the shaping of the "American Character." Women living first on the colonial frontier and then on the frontier of the Great West were indeed rhetorically influenced by their surroundings in that they experienced a shift in identity, in attitude, as they were forced to adapt to their environment and become assertive and independent.

And just as the frontier has a rhetorical influence on its inhabitants, so rhetorical appeals can be considered a symbolic frontier for those who invent and adapt them. This is manifested in the feminist rhetoric that was an "undeveloped sphere of knowledge" ¹⁰

¹⁰Though many of their arguments were not entirely new, they can be considered part of an undeveloped sphere of knowledge for East Coast women because they were in such sharp contrast to the rhetoric of conduct manuals and domesticity that these women were faced with. The natural rights and expediency arguments also enabled women to occupy different locations, such as the court, the public lecture circuit,

for women on the East Coast. These women, influenced by the repressive nature of their "civilized" surroundings, stepped onto a symbolic frontier as they developed a rhetoric to argue for their rights and their rightful place in public life. This frontier was quite freeing for women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and it succeeded in creating the identity of the American suffragist. Unfortunately this rhetorical frontier did not have as potent an effect on the country as did the geographical frontier, and it took over seventy years for women to obtain the right to vote. Even though the frontier of feminist rhetoric provided women with a new kind of language and a new aspect of identity, because of their surroundings and the seemingly insurmountable task of changing established society, suffragists in the East could not enjoy the full benefits that a geographical frontier provided.

Mormon women were a group that did enjoy the full benefits of the frontier. As I discussed in chapter three, Mormon women were in contact with several frontiers: geographical, rhetorical, and religious. Because of their unique and intimate connection with both tangible and intangible frontiers, Mormon women should be viewed as the definitive Americans of the late nineteenth century. They had the right to vote, to own property, to publish newspapers, to become educated in the same way as men. This freedom is a result of the refining fire of frontiers persuading and changing Mormon women into independent, plucky, autonomous beings who in taming the land, became themselves wild and free.

One description of women's distinct relationship with the frontier is in Annette Kolodny's *The Land Before Her*. Kolodny quotes the journals and writings of women who moved west, explaining their psychological reactions to the loneliness of the frontier, particularly to the vastness of the prairie. Some women objected to leaving their families and friends, and others found surrogate relatives in the landscape. Eliza

Farnham, in describing the Illinois territory explains that it called to her as "a strong and generous parent" and that even the "tree[s] and shrub[s] which we planted [became] companions" during their early years at the settlement (qtd in Kolodny, 97). This metaphor of the land as a parent is a manifestation of the dramatic effect that the frontier had on women. Despite the difficult circumstances women faced on the frontier, they were still able to adapt to the land and change their attitude towards it, resulting in a rhetorical experience that made frontier women different than their eastern counterparts. Mormon women experienced this same kind of kinship with the land, but unlike most other women who went west, Mormon women infused their relationship with the land with a new-found spirituality. The hymn, "Our Mountain Home So Dear," written by Emmeline B. Wells, manifests the spirituality that Mormons saw in the landscape. She writes, "Where e'er we pass, Where e'er we pass The hand of God we see in leaf and bud and tree, Or bird of humming bee, or blade of grass. The streamlet, flow'r, and sod Bespeak the works of God; and all combine, And all combine, with most transporting grace, His handiwork to trace, Thru nature's smiling face, In art divine" (33). For Wells and for other women like her, the landscape and God were combined. A relationship with the land, a rejoicing in the land, became a relationship with and a rejoicing in God, also.

Though the frontier is a complex and contradiction-laden location for women, these very characteristics are what make frontiers so beneficial for women. On the settled Atlantic coast, wherein they had strict roles, women's functions in society were of a single dimension: that is, to be the unassuming, soft-spoken "angel in the home." And as one nineteenth century male author explained "man may make himself a brute, and does so very often, but can woman brutify herself to this level . . . without exerting special wonder?" (qtd in Welter, 154). Indeed, man was allowed to be both good and evil, to be both civilized and brutish, but if a woman were to exhibit any duality, any manifestation of complexity, she was condemned as "no woman, mother though she be" (qtd in Welter, 154). Indeed, when a woman was married, she "bestowed her greatest treasure upon her

husband, and from that time on was completely dependent upon him, an empty vessel, without legal or emotional existence of her own" (Welter 154-5). This chilling account of women's roles in the East contrasts Frederick Jackson Turner's declaration that "in the crucible of the frontier, the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race" (47). Indeed, the frontier created a mixed identity for women. The frontier as the essence of America celebrates duality and diversity, both among its inhabitants and within the souls of each individual experiencing frontier life. So, a frontier allowed women to break free from their dependence on men, to be more than just the appendage of their husbands. The frontier gave women the chance for duality, for multidimensional roles and identities. And because of this allowance for duality, women needed a frontier, even if it was only the symbolic frontier of feminist rhetoric, to thrive and to find their true identity.

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