

Images and realities of women's lives on the Western Frontier

Jana Capova

Thesis questions from J. Kelly Robison, PhD

1 – Was the life of a woman on the Western Frontier very much different than the life of her great grandmother on the eastern Seaboard in the 1750s? Perhaps women on the Western Frontier experienced life and adapted to circumstances based on the frontier nature of the setting rather than the process of moving west into the West. Can you discuss this?

2 – While the thesis examines white (primarily middle class) women in the West, and you have provided a short section on non-white women, can your discussion also include black women who moved West during the period under consideration? In other words, did, for example, Exoduster women identify with the Cult of Domesticity and did they find themselves in the same situations as their white counterparts?

Evaluation

Jana Capova has written a well thought-out and researched Masters thesis on women in the American West and the stereotypes and realities of their situation during the late nineteenth century. Using secondary sources, she has highlighted the experience of women heading west, what their lives were like once reaching their destinations and, finally, how women in the West gained a political voice. This work stands on its own feet as a Masters thesis. I hope that she will take this thesis and use it as the basis for a more in-depth study for a PhD. Therefore, my comments are directed towards Ms. Capova's future work.

1. The bibliography of the thesis contains the best of the secondary literature regarding women in the American West in the nineteenth century. However, it also includes two references to tertiary works, namely two online encyclopedias. These sources should be deleted as there exist much better sources of information. (I was indeed distressed to see Wikipedia in the bibliography). Secondly, there are no primary sources listed. Doing a doctoral dissertation requires the examination of primary material. In the case of this study, these materials should include women's (and men's) diaries and journals, as well as perhaps minutes and other material from organizations in which women participated. The minutes of territorial legislature sessions in which women's suffrage was debated might prove very illuminating.
2. Historians use Chicago style to cite their sources. All information, regardless of whether this information is in quote form, needs to be cited. Ms. Capova should familiarize herself with The Chicago Manual of Style to learn how to footnote properly from an American historian's point of view.

3. Ms. Capova does a very good job of bringing the lives of westering women to the reader's mind and does an equally good job of connecting the dots, so to speak, in the history of the process and foundation of the western homestead. However, for the dissertation, she needs to provide even more documentation. The connections between events, institutions and themes need to be clearer and documented with as many sources as feasible.

My recommendation is that Jana Capova pass the thesis portion of her Masters work at Charles University at Prague.

~~J. Kelly Robison, PhD~~
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