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CONNECTING THE WOMEN'S WESTS

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PROLOGUE

FOR OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, I have written, taught, and thought about western women's history. Western women's histories force this question: What on earth do place and gender have to do with one another? Was it different being a woman in the West than in other places? Did women shape or define the West in particular ways? Transnational and comparative histories add the further complication of nationality. Were women's experiences similar throughout the North American Wests? What differences do national borders make?

This article explores some of the challenges of linking different women's histories in two North American Wests, a project that is embedded in a number of broad conceptual questions. What links the histories of western women of different races, classes, and nationalities? What links the histories of daily life and social relationships with the histories of nations? How has the border mattered, historically, in women's lives? How has gender operated in regional and national identities? These are

huge questions; they have no easy answers. I try here only to suggest their dimensions.

Historians approach national and social boundaries from our particular national and social perspectives. I write as an American social historian; I study women, class, and gender; I live and teach in Calgary. Soon after I accepted my job at the University of Calgary, I learned a joke that instructed me in the sensitivity required to work across national boundaries:

> Question: *What is the difference between a Canadian and an American?*
> Answer: *The Canadian knows there is a difference.*

I would not have understood this joke before I moved to Canada. I grew up on the Texas Gulf Coast, lived much of my adult life in Colorado and New Mexico, and understood how concepts of racialized difference operated in popular conceptions of the border between the United States and Mexico and in the social boundaries of race in the U.S. South and Southwest. Until I moved to Calgary in 1999, I did not recognize how significant the differences between Canada and the United States are for Canadian identity. I've begun to understand this, if not always to enjoy, as an American, representing those differences. And I have begun, I hope, to learn a bit of Canadian deference and courtesy. So I try to fulfill what is expected of me. Out of courtesy, I make a special point of trying every day to do something disgustingly American—to be a bit too loud, a bit too self-revealing a bit too soon, to do something rude or disorderly—just to reassure the people around me that the boundaries are still intact. So if I offend Canadian readers, please understand that I am doing so only out of courtesy.

My own experience tells me that nationality and citizenship are only one source of identity and community. My United States citizenship and Canadian residence are both important to me, but so are my sex, race, age, and religion, my profession, the fact that I am a mother, a sister, a daughter. My particular constellation of identities means that my experience and my history are somewhat different from the lives and

histories of other women who have lived in the Canadian and U.S. Wests, who built western communities and made their histories.

Even women whose backgrounds and lived experience might seem quite similar appear different through the lenses of national histories. In United States history, the West and western frontiers have been much more important than they have been in Canadian history. Westward movement, codified as "Manifest Destiny," provided both a narrative framework and an ideological justification for a history of U.S. expansion, colonialism, and conquest. The Canadian West has, in contrast, been written as a source of staple resources for economic development directed from the metropolitan centers of Central Canada and Europe, as a region apart from the wild and unruly folk to the south.[1] Because the West "explained" the United States but not Canada, western pioneers have figured more significantly in U.S. histories than they have in Canadian histories. In both countries, men of all regions have been more prominent than women in national and regional histories.

Borders, as well as regions, operate differently in our histories. U.S. historians have paid more attention to the border with Mexico than to the border with Canada. The Mexican border has been constructed in popular imagination and in U.S. immigration policy as a racialized boundary separating darker and poorer Mexicans from whiter, richer Americans. The United States secured that border with a war, whereas it civilly negotiated treaties with Britain and Canada to create, in popular imagination, the longest unpoliced border in the world.[2]

Both of these imagined borders are fictions, of course. The Mexican boundary went straight through Mexican territory, separating people of shared ethnicity and kinship into residents of the United States or Mexico. The Canadian border similarly bisected Native peoples' territories, and has been open only to some people at some times. Yet people cross those border lines, bringing with them personal amalgams of identities, dreams, and desires.

John Sayles explored these boundaries with creativity and insight in his film *Lone Star*, a film that is all about borders, both national and social. The film holds particularly powerful messages for anyone who, like me,

had to suffer through Texas history classes in 1950s elementary school classrooms.[3] At one point in *Lone Star*, Sheriff Sam Deeds, played by Chris Cooper, crosses the Texas border into Mexico in search of information. He approaches El Rey de las Siantas *[the King of the Tires]*.

"You're the sheriff of Rio County, right?" says El Rey. "Un jefe muy respectado." *["A very respected leader."]* El Rey leans over and draws a line in the dirt with a Coke bottle. "Step across this line," he says. "Ay, que milagro!" *["Ay, what a miracle!"]* "You're not the sheriff of nothing anymore. Just some Tejano with a lot of questions I don't have to answer. A bird flying south, you think he sees this line? Rattlesnake, javalina, whatever you got. You think halfway across that line they start thinking different? Why should a man?"

El Rey's perceptions notwithstanding, recent aerial images of the 49th parallel demonstrate that a bird flying *north* can in fact see the U.S.-Canadian border. Unlike the border between Texas and Mexico, which is marked by a river, the border that separates the U.S. and Canadian Wests is a line drawn arbitrarily straight across a continuous landscape. That line has been etched into the land itself through different patterns of land use and property division on either side of the border in only a bit over a century since a Boundary Commission drew the line across the continent. People, not nature, created the differences on either side of that line.

The people I study often cross international borders. I understand El Rey de las Siantas when he insists that the people who cross borders are as important as the states that police them. "I'm talking about people here," he tells the sheriff. "Men."

At this point our perspectives may diverge, or at least our choice of words. I assume that "people" includes both women and men. We are only beginning to explore whether the differences people inscribed on either side of a national border included understandings of gender, whether our Wests and the border that separates them held different meanings for women and men, as they have for Canadians and Americans.

I was first drawn to think about what links and separates our Wests and their borders by the women I studied who inhabited their borderlands, who sometimes crossed those boundaries, and whose lives raised

these questions for me. Let me turn, then, to one such woman. I read her diaries in 1988, just over a century after she wrote them.

* * *

THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 27, 1885 blew cold and bleak on the eastern Dakota prairies. The thermometer read -28° Fahrenheit [-33° Celsius]. Mary Dodge Woodward, a fifty-eight-year-old widowed mother of five, stood at her kitchen window peering through the spyglass she used to view the outside world. Through it she could see the electric light of Fargo eight miles [13 km] distant, and wondrous mirages telescoped across the snowy prairies. This particular afternoon her son Walter and the hired man John Martin were hauling wheat to the stock yard, bringing loads of hay back to the farm. "They have to go without their dinner or eat frozen 'chuck,'" Woodward wrote, so she had "a good supper ready: boiled beef, vegetables, mince pie, doughnuts—such things as hungry men like." She timed dinner precisely: "I watch with the spyglass...and when they begin to load for the homeward trip, I begin to prepare supper."[4]

Mary Woodward's spyglass evokes the metaphor Susan Armitage used in the early 1980s to suggest the promise of western women's histories: the image of the stereopticon, found in many Victorian parlors. Viewed through the stereopticon, two virtually identical images on a card focused to form a three-dimensional picture. By viewing women's history as well as men's, Armitage suggested, a more-fully dimensional western history might emerge.[5]

Mary Dodge Woodward viewed *her* West from a domestic center. She added her private, interior world to the outdoor world of men's labor she viewed through her spyglass, and to the public events she gleaned from newspapers. Her viewpoint alone could not correct all the distortions of traditional western histories. But she did help me identify them, and to see, as well, the distortions and limits of particular women's Wests.

Woodward accompanied three of her children in 1882 to Dakota Territory, where Walter was to manage a commercial bonanza farm for her cousin, Daniel Dodge. Daniel had traded depreciated Northern

Pacific railroad stock for 1,500 acres of railroad land in the Red River Valley, a much larger spread than the typical 160-acre homestead, but only a minute slice of the twenty-nine million acres the United States government gave railroads to capitalize westward expansion. Woodward's youngest child, Fred, helped with the farm. Her daughter Kate helped with the considerable domestic labor required for the family, hired hands, and the crews of over thirty men who came to plow, seed, harvest, and thresh the "Number 1 hard" wheat bound for the St Paul market.[6]

From 1884 until her cousin sold out in 1888, Mary Woodward did not leave the farm. She recorded in her diaries her daily routine and her observations of an outside world she saw through her kitchen window and through her own assumptions about the proprieties of gender, ethnicity, race, and class. She was particularly concerned about one of her most frequent visitors, Elsie Lessing, and about the gendered division of labor on the neighboring Lessing farm. On October 25, 1885, she wrote, "Elsie is plowing for her father, a stingy old German who makes the women work out of doors. He thinks an hour long enough for them to prepare a meal."[7] In December 1886 she spied Elsie and her sister Lena hauling wood with a four-horse team. "They have done almost all the work on their farm this season: plowing, seeding, and harvesting," she wrote. "I cannot understand how any female can do such work."[8]

Woodward did not, apparently, find her own domestic labor remarkable, though her workload was particularly intensive because of the scale of her cousin's operation. One hot August day during the 1885 harvest season, she baked seventeen loaves of bread, "making seventy-four loaves since last Sunday, not to mention twenty-one pies, and puddings, cakes, and doughnuts."[9] She washed sheets and pillowcases for twelve beds, raised vegetables and chickens, and brought in some cash with eggs and butter. In 1888 she made fourteen pounds of butter a week—not to sell, but to put away to feed the harvest crews.[10]

Threshing season was intense. Serving supper took two to three hours, excluding preparation and clean up. The work got so heavy that other women were hired to help—a succession of Irish, Swedish, French, and Norwegian immigrants, many of whom, to her frustration, spoke little English. The $4 a week they earned was far less than men's wages,

but enough to attract a succession of women to the Woodwards' kitchen. Some were married women working to raise money for family homesteads.[11]

For men the heaviest work was over by September. "There is nothing much for the men to do in Dakota in winter," she wrote. For Mrs Woodward, the slack period meant she could sleep in to 6 A.M., rather than rising at 5 o'clock or earlier.[12] Women, she believed, ought naturally to care for the domestic needs of their households. Not until illness confined her to bed at age fifty-seven did Mary Woodward's sons ever get their own breakfast.[13] Her work seemed to her as normal as the Lessing girls' seemed strange.

Mr Lessing may have been every bit as nasty as Mrs Woodward suspected. But perhaps the Lessings simply allocated labor and funds differently than the Woodwards. The women did more field work, but the Lessings hired no farm laborers and did not cook for huge work crews. Mary Woodward's view of gender, like all else in her universe, was particular and rooted in her own sense of domestic propriety.

Woodward penned equally limited glimpses of what linked her world to the Canadian West during that frigid winter of 1885. The day after John and Walter hauled the wheat, she recorded that the family had "been alone all day with the exception of a call from Harry Green who is a Canadian and therefore does not mind the weather. Many Canadians live around here, and they seem to endure the cold much better than we do." Harry called less often when Kate left to visit family in Wisconsin, and Mary Woodward suspected that Harry had designs on her daughter.[14]

Another Canada flashed briefly through her diary. On April 19, 1885, Woodward heard "the melodious sound of the meadow lark." Her domestic peace made it hard to imagine, she wrote, "that there is an army so near us. Riel's half breeds, with the Indians, will give the Canadian soldiers a sorry chase, we think. The half-breeds have so much wild country to fall back into and they think they have right on their side. They have all been down from Winnipeg and bought all the arms and ammunition there are in Fargo."[15]

It is not clear whether Woodward was frightened. She did not fear American Indians. Sitting Bull and One Bull traveled through Fargo to St Paul to make cattle contracts for the Sioux Reservation, and a number of Sioux chiefs from the Standing Rock Agency passed on their way to "pose as attractions at the Minnesota Fair." Woodward assumed that this was progress. The railroad, she said, was "a great civilizer, for besides helping to subjugate the troublesome red man, it has helped build up and make habitable the great Northwest."[16] Her local newspaper viewed the 1885 Rebellion with equal optimism, reporting that "Canada's little war" was a boon for Dakota and Montana: "Horses, hay, oats, and other supplies for the Canadian troops in Saskatchewan are being bought in large quantities on this side of the border.... It's an ill wind that blows no good to somebody in this great Republic."[17]

On November 16, Woodward reported that Walter had been puttying the barn windows, she and Katie had done laundry, they were troubled with mice, Walter had a new suit, new reading material had arrived. She then commented abruptly, "I suppose Louis Riel was hanged today in Canada; but I am afraid that will not end the insurrection."[18]

Woodward's granddaughter, Mary Boynton Cowdrey, edited her grandmother's diaries for publication in 1937. Mary Cowdrey added an historical footnote to this last entry, based on John G. Bourinot's *Canada Under British Rule* and C. P. Mulvaney's *The History of the Northwest Rebellion*. "Riel was tried in Regina in July," Cowdrey wrote, "sentenced to death, and executed on November 16, 1885. For some time after his death other leaders attempted to rouse the half-breeds to further rebellion, but they, as well as the Indians, realized the power of the Canadian Government, and from that day to this, peace has prevailed in that western country."[19]

Woodward's 1885 diary suggests some of the missing connections in western women's histories. North Dakota, like the Prairie provinces, was one of the most ethnically diverse regions of North America, yet she recognized little of the diversity that existed outside her household and neighboring farms. Woodward's spyglass opened only onto her immediate world. Newspapers provided her view of the public world of news and history, a world that was entirely male. The women in between, in

the borderlands of her social universe, got lost. She did not mention single women homesteaders, though at various times from 5 to 20 percent of all homesteaders in North Dakota were single women. She did not mention any Canadian women, though 5 percent of all single women homesteaders in North Dakota were Canadians who came to claim homestead land in their own names, as they could not do in Canada.[20]

Her spyglass did not allow her to see into the future, or as far as Grant County, and so she could not see Edith L. Divet, the thirty-two-year-old daughter of an Irish mother and French Canadian father, who filed for land in Grant County in 1906. Edith homesteaded with her widowed sister, Eunice Divet Gilpin, and Eunice's daughter in their eight-room sod home.[21] Woodward's spyglass did not reach the Devils Lake Sioux Reservation, or Rachel Bella Calof who lived near it. Rachel Calof arrived from Russia in 1894 for an arranged marriage and homesteaded until 1917 with her husband, Abe, and their nine children near a North Dakota post office called Benzion. Nor did Woodward witness the departure of Rachel's cousins-in-law, Maier and Doba Calof, as they left to cross the border and settle in Winnipeg.[22]

Woodward assumed that American expansion brought progress and civilization, but she did not apparently ponder her own place in that history or the connection of her private world with the public world of railroad expansion and conquest that had secured her cousin's farm. She did not, evidently, know much about the history of Red River before two nations created Manitoba and Dakota Territory and drew a line between them. She did not consider that Louis Riel might be a husband or a father, or that women might participate in the Rebellion. Canadian troops, she knew, bought ammunition in Fargo, but she did not know that Métis women in Batoche made bullets from lead kettles and the linings of tea tins that they melted in their frying pans. She did not link women's personal concerns with war or know that several of the government employees that the Cree killed during the spring of 1885 were resented for their brutality toward Aboriginal women.[23] She never knew the Métis women who moved south after the Rebellion to the nearby Turtle Mountain Chippewa reservation, nor did she ponder the distinct

legal and racial systems that made them Métis in Canada, Chippewa in the United States.

She did not know these things, in part, because of her own class, her racist and nationalist assumptions, *and partly because of the assumptions that separated her firm domestic center from the public world of history.* Woodward's view of Canadian public affairs, like her granddaughter's view of Canadian history, was a "battles, dates, and kings" story, its plot projected from the U.S. history of battles, dates, and presidents that explained the Manifest Destiny of people like her to claim the continent. Mary Dodge Woodward's diary presents some of the challenges of connecting her life with national and western histories; of writing difference, domination, colonization, and conquest into history; of connecting the Canadian and U.S. Wests.

Since the early 1980s, histories of women in the Canadian and U.S. Wests have developed along parallel but critically unconnected lines. Many U.S. historians date the field of western women's history from the Women's West conference in 1983, which generated a book, *The Women's West*; an organization, the Coalition for Western Women's History; and, most importantly, professional networks and collegial exchanges.[24] Like the "Unsettled Pasts" conference, it was an exciting opportunity to share work and insights with other historians and with women who had lived and made western history. Sylvia Van Kirk, the Canadian historian who pioneered the topic of women and gender in the fur trade, spoke at the opening plenary. Her article was published in *The Women's West*, as was Norma Milton's essay on Canadian immigrant domestic workers, based on her University of Calgary M.A. thesis.[25] Canadians Jean Barman, Catherine Cavanaugh and Sarah Carter have won the Jensen-Miller Prize, awarded annually by the Coalition for Western Women's History for the best article in western women's history.[26]

I eagerly devoured these scholars' work, and other histories that introduced me to the women of the Canadian West: *A Harvest Yet to Reap*, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, and Eliane Silverman's collective portrait of Alberta women, *The Last Best West*.[27] But Canadian women's histories did not immediately prompt me to think critically about similarities and

differences between the women's Wests of Canada and the United States. In my essay in *The Women's West,* I included material on western suffrage victories in the three Prairie provinces, on women's labor on Canadian farms, and ended with a quote from Nellie McClung, about whom, in truth, I knew very little. But I liked her challenge: "I grew indignant as I read the history and saw how little the people ever counted....When I wrote I would write of the people who do the work of the world and I would write it from their side of the fence." I "included Canadian materials," I wrote, "because western women in the United States and Canada did similar work, received similar messages about domestic roles, and were granted the vote before eastern women."[28] That said, I plowed merrily ahead without taking seriously McClung's challenge to look at her West from her side of the border.

To take that challenge seriously requires collaboration among colleagues whose work illuminates gender on both sides of the border. A generation of historians of women of color have illuminated the complexities of racial and ethnic diversity. Their work has reconceived the women's Wests from more inclusive perspectives, with a more inclusive cast.[29] That scholarly achievement, too, was a collaborative effort.

The beginning points for many of us were the histories we inherited, in which a stock cast of characters—mostly white, mostly young, mostly men—trapped, mined, rode, roped, drank, and shot their way across the West. The mythic American westerners were prospectors, cowboys, desperadoes, vigilantes, lawmen, and soldiers; the mythic Canadian West held more fur traders, stalwart immigrants in sheepskin coats, and Mounties. Both mythic histories erased and marginalized daily acts, private lives, people of color, and women of all races.

That common ground of marginality sometimes obscured significant differences between our western histories and mythic Wests. In the United States, it has been very hard to imagine alternatives to frontier frameworks in western histories, despite the important ways that the new western women's history has reconceptualized frontiers for women. For Native women, frontiers were places where they acted as bridges—economically, diplomatically, socially, sexually, intimately—between

colonizers and their own people. For European American women, frontiers were often isolating; their lives improved after the frontier period, when they had neighbors, communities, and the support of other women. The frontier organization of western history texts glorifies a period that was anything but glorious for most women, and it ends the story before some of their most significant community-building activity began. An alternative economic emphasis on the West as a source of staples in Canada, or on extractive industries in the United States, has marginalized women in both nations in histories of national development.

To add women to history will require us to separate the mythic Wests of both countries from history and to analyze how gender has functioned in them. I want to suggest a little of how this might work, which will require me to simplify a bit.

In the mythic American West, defined with frustrating durability by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, a succession of trappers, miners, ranchers, and farmers became Americans on a succession of westward-moving frontiers, where European immigrants allegedly merged into a composite nationality. For Turner, the frontier marked the dividing line between "savagery and civilization."[30] As these frontiers became even more mythologized in literature and film, the arrival of women—or at least "good" white women—signaled the arrival of civilization and, with civilization, the end of the frontier.[31] To remain a real guy, the rugged western hero had to ride off alone into the sunset in search of a new frontier.

In Canada, neither frontiers nor the West explained the nation in the same way as in U.S. histories. Harold Innis's West, which furnished staple resources to the metropolitan center, also required miners, ranchers, and farmers, as well as timbermen and fishermen. But these men did not function as mythic heroes to forge the wellspring of Canadian national character.[32] Canadian character, in the mythic Mild West, sprang from English roots and was transported west from central Canada by white men—in this case by Mounties, who brought civilization and order. Because the Canadian western guy *was* a civilizer, he did not have to keep moving in search of new frontiers or escape the stifling influence

of white women. To be a western hero, he had only to be more civilized than the U.S. whiskey traders trying to invade Canada from the south.[33]

Comparing our equally distorted myths can help us dissect them. The distinction between the wild and violent U.S. West and the orderly and civilized Canadian West emphasizes that warfare was more commonly used to colonize Native peoples in the United States than in Canada. That is undeniable, but it happened in part because the people of Canada's First Nations sought to avoid the carnage they knew had already happened in the United States. My favorite response comes from Canadian historian Martin Robbins, who quipped that "one cannot excuse a robbery by describing it as orderly."[34]

Women's histories raise the further question of whether Canadian men were less violent toward women than were American men, of whether Mounties were more civilized than the cavalry in their dealings with wives, sex workers, and Native women. For many women, rape and domestic violence mapped a terrain of western masculinity that respected few borders. That frontier awaits comparative analysis.

Multicultural feminist histories stretched our historical vision further yet, and helped us redefine another key category of the U.S. West: the frontier itself. A multi-racial framework reconceived frontiers not as the western edges of white settlement but as places where people of different cultures met, and where women of color were central actors at the cultural crossroads.[35] We then had to look past frontiers to the separate racial and ethnic communities where racial ethnic women maintained families, communities, and cultural identities, as they did at Batoche, Benzion, and Devils Lake.

Sylvia Van Kirk led the way for many of us with *Many Tender Ties*, as she demonstrated how central aboriginal and Métis women were to fur trade society and showed that even filtered sources produced by white men could be used to glean Native women's histories.[36] The old excuse that there were no sources for women's history bit the dust. In 1980 Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller's important article "The Gentle Tamers Revisited" reviewed a huge array of sources for women in the U.S. West and set the agenda for an inclusive, multicultural western women's

history, a goal toward which we continue to strive.[37] Multicultural histories have begun to map the ways that race and gender jointly constructed, in Sarah Carter's wonderful phrase, the "categories and terrains of exclusion" in our respective Wests.[38]

Transnational histories can further illuminate that complex terrain as we chart the migrations that brought different people to the Canadian and U.S. Wests—that brought Harry Green and Edith Divet to Dakota, for example, or Kansas farmers disillusioned by the failure of American Populism to Saskatchewan and Alberta. Mining booms and busts drew miners and their families in worldwide migrations, including one of my favorite people, May Wing, whose journeys took her from Leadville to the Cripple Creek District in Colorado; to Rossland, British Columbia; back to Cripple Creek, then Leadville, then Cripple Creek again.[39] Business opportunities and religious communities drew Russian Jews like Maier and Doba Calof from North Dakota to Winnipeg, just as they drew other religious minorities to the Canadian prairies and to larger urban ethnic enclaves on both sides of the border. Colonial and national agendas impelled Native peoples back and forth across the "Medicine Line" long after both nations tried to push them back behind national boundaries that bisected tribal territories.[40]

Cross-border migrations, carefully charted and analyzed, can further illuminate our categories and terrains of exclusion. Canadians are often the most invisible immigrants in the United States, if their native language is English. They "pass," in contrast to Mexicans, who are marked by a different language, who are perceived as poorer and darker, whose border and presence in the United States have historically been more rigorously policed than has the 49th parallel. Harry Green successfully courted Kate Woodward. Mary Dodge Woodward would not have welcomed, with equal equanimity, the attentions of Elsie Lessing's brother, or a thresher, or one of the Sioux Chiefs who passed through on their way to the Minnesota Fair. She grudgingly allowed Irish, Norwegian, and French women into her kitchen, but would not, I suspect, have welcomed the Chinese and Japanese women barred from immigrating to the American and Canadian Wests.[41]

It is a challenging prospect to try to link the histories of women who are thus far still marginal to our respective regional and national histories. Despite the rich harvest of western women's histories on both sides of the border, fur traders' frontiers still dominate hide tanners'; we still have histories of the cattle frontier, but not of the egg or butter frontiers.[42] There are more women in western history texts than there were a quarter century ago, but they are usually slotted into existing plots of frontier and expansion without engaging the challenges to these frameworks that western women's histories have posed.[43] White women are more commonly included than racial ethnic women. Even Mary Dodge Woodward was badly distorted when she appeared in Jon Gjerde's *The Minds of the West* as "a young American woman living in Dakota in the 1880s," in which Woodward functioned as a contrast to Elsie Lessing to demonstrate the different attitudes toward child labor of German immigrants and native-born Americans.[44]

There is a caution in Woodward's tale: to widen the lenses of our own historical spyglasses—to try to approach women as historical actors on their own terms, and to let them help us imagine different plots from their multiple, messy perspectives. It is important to do this for historical accuracy. Mary Dodge Woodward probably saw herself as quite ordinary, but we can recognize that her unpaid labor, and Elsie Lessing's, was as essential a part of the western infrastructure as the railroads, land, and capital that brought her to Dakota. Her daily acts were as much a part of cultural creation as the battles, dates, and soldiers she saw as "history."

Yet if individual lives and daily experience push the nation and public politics out of the centers of history, they do not obliterate the importance of public politics in individual lives, or the significance of national identities. Histories of daily life and private experience lie at the centers of women's histories. Nonetheless, we cannot compare and connect western women's histories without knowing the national and regional histories on both sides of the border in which women's experiences have been located. We cannot, for instance, understand Edith Divet without knowing the differences in Canadian and U.S. homestead

laws. And when I equated the suffrage victories in western states and the Prairie provinces, I did not consider the impact of World War I on the Canadian suffrage victories of 1916, though I knew women's wartime contributions had offered many U.S. politicians an acceptable excuse to adopt woman suffrage nationally when they supported the 19th amendment that enfranchised all women in the United States in 1920. It didn't occur to me that World War I was an important context for the first Canadian suffrage victories because, in 1983, I didn't think about the fact that Canada had entered the war in 1914 while the United States did not declare war until 1917, nor did I understand the resonance of that fact for Canadians. A wider historical perspective includes the histories of both nations divided by a common border.

As we widen our historical gaze, we will, I hope, continue to stretch the boundaries and timelines of the pasts we record. Many western historians argue accurately that neither the West nor the Prairies existed as regions before Canada and the United States existed as nations. However, the consequence of making the West or the nation the subject of our histories is that we erase Native peoples, whose histories become a brief prologue to European settlement and fade from the story just as Mary Dodge Woodward expected Sitting Bull and Louis Riel to disappear after she arrived.

It is very hard to bring into common focus the histories of a place and all the people who have called it home. Perhaps no single plot can hold all the women of all our Wests, but that does not mean we should erase some of them. There may be other histories as important as those of states and nations.

This brings me to an important caveat. I have deliberately evaded the question of where we draw the boundaries of our Wests, an issue that seems to obsess historians of the U.S. West, while Canadians have generally followed provincial boundaries to separate the Prairie provinces and British Columbia.[45] The historical constructions of state and region have not yet been mapped from gendered perspectives. For some women, the important geography may not have been the international, state, or provincial boundary lines, but the distance from fuel and water, from

letters from kin, from a midwife or another woman's company. Until we map the Wests from women's centers, we cannot know what place meant for western women.

Comparative, transnational, and borderlands histories hold enormous promise to both muddy and clarify the categories of the histories we inherit. I think of Joan Jensen's observation that "change takes place in various ways, often growing from the margins outward."[46] The best of our histories may grow from the lives of people who have been marginal in traditional histories, from the margins of exclusion and inclusion, from the borders between cultures and between nations.

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POSTSCRIPT

I BEGAN WITH A PROLOGUE. I end with a personal postscript about how history shapes borderlands and the significance of borders. I assumed in 1983 that western women were similar in the United States and Canada, that the Canadian and U.S. Wests shared more with one another than they did with Central Canada or the eastern United States. That still seemed true as I drove north in 1999 from Albuquerque to Calgary. The high plains and mountains formed a continuous landscape for the journey, interrupted for only a few hours at the border crossing in Coutts, Alberta, to deal with Immigration Canada. It was only after some time in Canada that the significance of the border and cultural distinctions became clearer. Canada taught me, among much else, how American I am.

Several events immediately before the "Unsettled Pasts" conference brought home the significance of the border and the complexities of identity. The first occurred September 11, 2001. I was madly trying to edit an essay about women in the nineteenth-century West when my American colleague Jewel Spangler called to tell me to turn on my television set. As I watched the World Trade Center crumble, I forgot the article and followed my most urgent instinct—to call my son's school. I babbled something like, "I know this makes no sense, but I'm American, and I

just need to know my son is all right." A woman's voice replied, "I am Canadian, I have children and grandchildren, and all I want to do right now is hug them. So if you need to see your son, come on over." As I drove to the school, I noticed an unusual number of airplanes headed for the Calgary airport. And it suddenly dawned on me why they were landing there, and why crossing that line at the border did in fact matter that crisp September morning.

The next day, September 12, I was supposed to lecture on Frederick Jackson Turner and Harold Innis and the ways that the United States racialized and patrolled the border with Mexico but perceived the Canadian border in less racialized and more benign terms. As I reviewed my lecture notes, CNN was already speculating that the terrorist attacks originated in New England because dark-skinned people could sneak across the border from Canada. I winged the lecture, knowing that whatever I thought I knew about borders and national identities was shifting around me as I spoke. I left the classroom more drained than at any time in almost thirty years of teaching, and then I cried.

But I also cried a few months later, this time with excitement and pride, when the Canadian women's hockey team beat the U.S. women's hockey team in the Salt Lake City Olympics. I didn't cry when the Canadian men again beat the U.S. hockey team, but I instinctively rooted for Canada and was taken aback when a colleague offered me condolences at the U.S. loss.

Identity is a slippery business. We all have multiple identities, only some of which are rooted in where we live or the passports we carry. Historical borders mark complex webs of territory, privilege, exclusion, and identity. We all cross some borders; we all police some. Most of us also inhabit *some* borderlands where social territories are redefined and identities are constantly renegotiated. History can be one such borderland, crossing state and social boundaries to re-chart the lines that separate and connect people, to re-map the borders that divide and link our histories.

NOTES

1. The importance of the frontier in U.S. history dates from Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," first delivered as a paper at the American Historical Association meeting in Chicago, July 12, 1893, coinciding with the World's Columbian Exposition in that city. Reprinted multiple times, references in this article are to the version in Martin Ridge, ed., *History, Frontier, and Section: Three Essays by Frederick Jackson Turner* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 62–71. The staples thesis regarding the significance of western natural resources was authored by Harold A. Innis in *The Fur-trade of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1927). Innis, too, has been reprinted many times; this work is probably best known in Canada through the edition, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956). The interpretation of the Canadian West as milder, less violent, and more orderly than the U.S. West was most famously authored by George F.G. Stanley, "Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis," Canadian Historical Association, *Report of the Annual Meeting*, 1940, 105–14. All of these interpretations generated scholarly debate, elaboration, and revision. The dimensions of these historiographies and of the ways that frontiers and the West have functioned in the two national histories is beyond the scope of this essay, but most historians would recognize the formative influence of these theses. For a comparative review of the historiography of frontiers and the West in Canadian and U.S. history, see Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, "Telling Differences: The Forty-Ninth Parallel and Historiographies of the West and Nation," *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (May 2006): 183–230.
2. The Spanish-Mexican borderlands school of history was founded by Turner's student, Herbert Eugene Bolton, whose borderlands scholarship included *Guide to Materials for the History of the United States in the Principal Archives of Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1913); *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century: Studies in Spanish Colonial History and Administration* (Berkeley: Research Services Corp., 1915); and especially *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921). For examples of more recent scholarship on the Canada-U.S. borderlands, see Randy William Widdis, *With Scarcely a Ripple: Anglo-Canadian Migration into the United States and Western Canada, 1880–1920* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); Paul W. Hirt, ed., *Terra Pacifica: People and Place in the Northwest States and Western Canada* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1998); Sheila McManus, "Mapping the Alberta-Montana Borderlands: Race, Ethnicity and Gender in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 20, no. 3 (2001): 71–87; "'Their Own Country': Race, Gender, Landscape, and Colonization Around the 49th Parallel, 1862–1900," *Agricultural History* 73, no. 2 (1999): 168–82; and Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Sterling Evans, ed., *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Beth LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Carol Higham and Robert Thacker, eds., *One West, Two Myths: Essays on Comparisons* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Jameson and Mouat,

"Telling Differences," and Elizabeth Jameson, "Dancing on the Rim, Tiptoeing through the Minefields: Challenges and Promises of the Borderlands," *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (February 2006): 1–24.

3. *Lone Star*, directed by John Sayles (Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 1996). See Dennis West and Joan M. West, "Borders and Boundaries: An Interview with John Sayles," *Cineaste* 22, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 14–17.
4. Mary Dodge Woodward, *The Checkered Years: A Bonanza Farm Diary, 1884–88*, ed. Mary Boynton Cowdrey (1937; repr., St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 66–67.
5. Susan Armitage, "Through Women's Eyes: A New View of the West," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 11.
6. For the Woodward family history and the processes of land allocation, see Elizabeth Jameson, "Introduction to the Reprint Edition," Woodward, *Checkered Years*, ix–xxxvii, and Mary Boynton Cowdrey, "Introduction," 11–17.
7. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 100.
8. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 151.
9. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 90.
10. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 238.
11. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 41–42, 84–87, 147, 183, 233, 239.
12. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 151, 169.
13. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 27.
14. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 67, 185–86.
15. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 75–76.
16. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 34, 71.
17. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 77.
18. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 102–03.
19. Woodward, *Checkered Years*, 103. The references Cowdrey used were Sir John George Bourinot, *Canada under British Rule, 1760–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900) and Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of the North-west Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: A.H. Hovey, 1885).
20. H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name: Single Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota* (1991; repr., Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 22, 52, 73–74; Sheryll Patterson-Black, "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," *Frontiers* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1976): 67–88; Paula Nelson, "No Place for Clinging Vines: Women Homesteaders on the South Dakota Frontier," (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1978).
21. Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 106, 186, 246.
22. Rachel Bella Calof, *Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*, ed. J. Sanford Rikoon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Maier Calof, *Miracles in the Lives of Maier and Doba Calof* (privately printed, 1941).
23. Diane P. Payment, "La vie en rose? Métis Women at Batoche, 1870 to 1920," in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength,* ed. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchnyk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 19–38, esp. 26–30.
24. The Women's West conference was held in Sun Valley, Idaho, August 10–13, 1983, sponsored by the Center for the American West. A second conference, "Western Women:

Their Land, Their Lives," met in Tucson, Arizona, January 12–15, 1984, sponsored by the Southwest Institute for Research on Women. Anthologies published from these conferences are Armitage and Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* and Lillian Schlissel, Vicki Ruiz, and Janice Monk, eds., *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988). The Coalition for Western Women's History was founded at the 1983 Women's West conference, and has sponsored four subsequent conferences.

25. Sylvia Van Kirk, "The Role of Native Women in the Creation of Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670–1830," in *The Women's West*, ed. Armitage and Jameson, 53–62; Norma J. Milton, "Essential Servants: Immigrant Domestics on the Canadian Prairies, 1885–1930," in *The Women's West*, ed. Armitage and Jameson, 207–18.

26. Catherine Cavanaugh won the prize in 1997 for her article "'No Place for a Woman': Engendering Western Canadian Settlement," *Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 493–518. Jean Barman won in 1998 for "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850–1900," *BC Studies* 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98): 237–66; Sarah Carter won in 2006 for "Britishness, Foreignness, Women, and Land in Western Canada, 1880s–1920s," *Humanities Research: The Journal of the Humanities Research Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006): 43–60.

27. Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976); Susan A. Jackel, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: English Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880–1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1982); Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880–1930* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984).

28. Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the Canadian West," in *The Women's West*, ed. Armitage and Jameson, 157–58, 161, 148.

29. For reviews of U.S. scholarship, see Elizabeth Jameson, "Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs* 13, no. 4 (1988): 761–91; Catherine Loeb, "La Chicana: A Bibliographic Survey," *Frontiers* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 59–74; Antonia Castañeda, "Gender, Race, and Culture: Spanish-Mexican Women in the Historiography of Frontier California," *Frontiers* 11, no. 1 (1990): 8–20; and Marian Perales, "Empowering 'The Welder': A Historical Survey of Women of Color in the West," in *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West,* ed. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 21–41. A small sample of this rich and extensive scholarship includes Rosalinda Méndez González, "Distinctions in Western Women's Experience: Ethnicity, Class, and Social Change," in *The Women's West*, ed. Armitage and Jameson, 253–64; Rayna Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture," *Massachusetts Review* 16, no. 4 (1976): 698–714; Cordelia Candelaria, "La Malinche, Feminist Prototype," *Frontiers* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 1–6; Adelaida R. Del Castillo, "Malíntzin Tenépal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective," in *Essays on La Mujer,* ed. Rosaura Sanchez and Rosa Martínez Cruz (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977), 124–49; Peggy Pascoe, "Western Women at the Cultural Crossroads," in *Trails: Toward a New Western History,* ed. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 40–58; Judy Yung, *Unbound Feet: A Social History of*

Chinese Women in San Francisco (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 16–24; Antonia I. Castañeda, "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History," *Pacific Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (November 1992): 501–33; Deena J. González, *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820–1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Deena J. González, "La Tules of Image and Reality: Euro-American Attitudes and Legend Formation on a Spanish-Mexican Frontier," in *Building with Our Hands: Directions in Chicana Scholarship*, ed. Adela de la Torre and Beatríz M. Mesquera (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), reprinted in Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 57–69; Vicki L. Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987) and *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Useful anthologies include Rosaura Sanchez and Rosa Martínez Cruz, eds., *Essays on La Mujer* (Los Angeles: UCLA Chicano Studies Center Publications, 1977); Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1981); Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, eds., *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Latham, MD.: University Press of America, 1983); Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *African American Women Confront the West: 1600–2000* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Ruiz and DuBois, *Unequal Sisters*; and Jameson and Armitage, *Writing the Range*. The latter two volumes contain bibliographies of scholarship about women of color.

30. Turner, "Significance of the Frontier," 62–71.
31. See Beverly Stoeltje, "A Helpmate for Man Indeed: The Image of the Frontier Woman," *Journal of American Folklore* 88, no. 347 (January–March 1975): 27–31; Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers."
32. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*.
33. Stanley, "Western Canada and the Frontier Thesis."
34. Martin Robbins, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871–1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 44.
35. Peggy Pascoe, "Western Women at the Cultural Crossroads." See also Sarah Deutsch, *No Separate Refuge: Culture, Class, and Gender on an Anglo-Hispanic Frontier in the American Southwest, 1880–1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinster/Aunt Lute, 1987); "Editors' Introduction," in *Writing the Range,* ed. Jameson and Armitage (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 3–16; Elizabeth Jameson, "Bringing It All Back Home: Rethinking Women and the 19th Century West," in *Blackwell Companion to the American West*, ed. William Deverell (Malden, MA, and Oxford, UK: Blackwell Press, 2004), 10:179–99.
36. Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670–1870* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980).

37. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (May 1980): 173–213.
38. Sarah Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," *Great Plains Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 147–61.
39. Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 27, 33–34.
40. Maier Calof, *Miracles in the Lives*; LaDow, *The Medicine Line*; Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001); Michel Hogue, "Disputing the Medicine Line: The Plains Crees and the Canadian-American Border, 1876–1885," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 52, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 2–17.
41. Both countries recruited European women to help establish western families and communities, but they discouraged stable families that might encourage Chinese and Japanese workers to settle and stay by means of legislation that severely limited the numbers of Chinese and Japanese women who could legally emigrate. For the United States' restrictive immigration policies see Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), esp. chapter 4, Sucheng Chan, "The Exclusion of Chinese Women, 1870–1943," pp. 94–146; and Yuji Ichioka, "*Amerika Nadeshiko*: Japanese Immigrant Women In the United States, 1900–1924," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (1980): 339–57. For Canada, see Erica Lee, "Enforcing the Borders: Chinese Exclusion Along the U.S. Borders with Canada and Mexico, 1882–1924," *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 54–86; Midge Ayukawa, "Good Wives and Wise Mothers: Japanese Picture Brides in Early Twentieth Century British Columbia," in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 238–52.
42. William Cronon, Howard R. Lamar, Katherine G. Morrissey, and Jay Gitlin called attention to the ways that male work roles defined American frontiers. Women's work never became the basis for a frontier classification, so we do not speak of a "chicken frontier" as we do of a "cattle frontier," though there is no logical reason not to. See Cronon, et al., "Women and the West: Rethinking the Western History Survey Course," *Western Historical Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (July 1986): 269–90, 272–73.
43. In some recent texts, though the cast of characters is more inclusive, and the definitions of frontiers more nuanced, the frontier narrative itself still provides the basic organizing principle. See for instance Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Richard White's important revisionist synthesis, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), includes some women actors, but neither women nor gender is central to the narrative. Patricia Nelson Limerick's *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987) challenged triumphalist interpretations of expansion but included few women; the only women featured were western prostitutes and missionary Narcissa

Whitman. Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 48–54. The New Western History is often defined by its focus on conquest, power, race, and environment. Western women's histories are rarely identified as central texts in the New Western History, nor are new histories of race in the West.

44. Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830–1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 179–80.
45. See, for instance, Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1966); Walter Nugent, "Where Is the American West?: Report on a Survey," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 2–23; Donald Worster, "New West, True West: Interpreting the Region's History," *Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (April 1987): 141–56; David M. Emmons, "Constructed Province: History and the Making of the Last American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 437–59, and "A Roundtable of Responses," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 461–86.
46. Joan M. Jensen, *One Foot on the Rockies: Women and Creativity in the Modern American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 151.