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ABSTRACT

A teacher's guide for three junior high school units on women in United States history is presented. Designed to supplement what is customarily taught in United States history courses, the units focus on Native American women in Pre-Columbian America, Southern women from 1820 to 1860, and women as immigrants and workers from 1820 to 1940. The guide incorporates the student workbook and provides objectives, background material, teaching procedures, suggested activities, and bibliographies. Each unit also contains an oral history assignment. In the first unit, students examine matrilineal societies, write myths similar to ones in their readings, and report on the life of a creative woman. The oral history assignment is to interview an older woman about home remedies. The second unit focuses on the roles of the black slave woman and the Southern plantation woman. Through interviews, students determine expectations and realities of three generations of mothers and daughters to discover how ingrained the concept of ideal woman has become. The third unit depicts American working woman as channeled into the lowest paying, least skilled jobs and actively struggling to improve working conditions for all workers. Students interview a woman who either has emigrated from another country or who has been involved in a labor struggle, or interview a woman about her feelings toward work in her home and at her job. (KC)

# U.S. History Teacher Guide

# IN SEARCH OF OUR PAST
# Units in Women's History

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# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

## Rationale

IN SEARCH OF OUR PAST grew out of the need we saw for a supplemental curriculum about women of different ethnic backgrounds that could be incorporated into existing American History and World History courses at the junior high school level. For years we had all been involved with writing a curriculum about women for different grade levels and in a variety of disciplines. Based on our collective experience we knew that traditional history textbooks included little about the history of women, the different peoples of America, non-Western peoples, or the lives of ordinary people as an integral part of history.

It is in junior high school that students generally get their first real introduction to history—American and World. It is also in junior high school that students characteristically are extremely concerned with their sense of themselves as female or male. For these reasons we considered the development of supplementary women's history materials to be especially important for the junior high school courses.

## Priorities

We would have liked to incorporate multi-ethnic women's history materials into the entire junior high school American and World History curriculum. However, because of the limitations of time and resources, our materials were designed to be supplemental rather than comprehensive. Therefore, it became a top priority to create materials which were seen by teachers as being highly useful, and by students as having a high degree of interest. By focusing on these objectives, we could have realistic expectations that the materials would be integrated into the mainstream of the junior high school social studies program.

A number of criteria for curriculum development in women's history had been established very early among staff members as a condition to working on the project.

First, the staff committed itself to the development of a curriculum that is multi-ethnic. It was agreed that time periods selected in American History should be focal times not only in the history of white Americans but also in the history of African Americans, Chicanos, Asian and Native Americans. It was agreed as well that the concepts around which the World History materials were developed should be focal ones in the history of non-Western as well as Western peoples.

Second, the staff was committed to the development of a curriculum that is multi-leveled. It was our intent that the materials meet the needs of students reading at many different levels, and provide ample opportunity for high potential students to continue the study of that period.

Third, it was a priority that the materials be devised to interest students so that the units relate to them as part of their lives. Illustrations, as well as written content and activities, we felt, were essential in order to involve junior high school students in the materials.

Fourth, the staff determined that each unit include an oral history component in which students could experience themselves as historians, as participants, in the process of history. The oral history component is especially important to women's history since so much of it has had to be rescued through that technique.

Finally, since the American History curriculum would be designed for 8th graders, and the World History curriculum for 9th graders, and since American History courses are often one-semester courses and World History a two-semester course, we decided that the 8th grade curriculum should not be as conceptually complex as the 9th grade and that the American History units would be designed to prepare the students for World History. The effect for students would thus be a cumulative one.

**Design**

We selected three periods in American History and three worldwide phenomena in World History upon which to concentrate. We made our choices of unit topics after analyzing information obtained from interviewing and surveying history teachers in two school districts. From these sources we derived the necessary information about the topics teachers taught, those areas in which they would like additional information about women, and a description of their perspectives in teaching American History and World History.

Based on these considerations, we chose to design six units: 1) Native American Women in Pre-Columbian America, 2) Southern Women from 1820 to 1860, and 3) Women in Struggle, a unit on women as immigrants and workers from 1820 to 1940, in the American History course; in World History we chose to focus on 1) Women under Feudalism in Western Europe and China, 2) Women and the Industrial Revolution in England and Japan, and 3) Women in Change, a study of 20th century women in transition.

Each of these units is concerned with multi-ethnic women's history and builds progressively toward the following unit in terms of complexity of concepts and development of skills. For example, the first unit in the American History curriculum concentrates on one group of women, uses primarily short stories to communicate its concepts and focuses on a few major ideas. The first unit in the World History curriculum focuses on a societal world order in relation to women and includes student readings that are essays as well as activities that involve students' comparisons of different cultures. Though the entire curriculum is designed as a whole, each part of it can stand on its own. Teachers, then, may choose to do any one or all of the units depending on the needs of their classes.

It is important to note that each of the units is designed to supplement what is customarily taught in American and World History. The unit on Southern Women, 1820-1860, for example, is not a replacement for the study of slavery, but an attempt to incorporate into that study the pivotal relationship between slavery and the Antebellum Southern concept of the patriarchal plantation.

The materials are presented in the form of two teacher guides and two student manuals, with a guide and manual for each grade level. The two teacher guides are identical in format. Both are introduced with a table of contents enumerating the materials included, followed by the three units. Each of the units is accompanied by teacher background information and teaching instructions. The background information is designed to provide the teacher with a review of the topic being taught. The teaching instructions provide specific procedures for instruction, guidelines for class discussion, and suggestions for additional activities. A second section in the teacher guides for each unit contains the student materials. This format enables the teacher to review the background information and teaching instructions for a given unit, in the first section of the guide, and then turn to the second section to review the readings and/or activities designed for students. The outline at the beginning of each unit guide provides the necessary page information in linking the teaching instructions for a given lesson, designated by "T" and the page number, with the student materials, which are designated by "S" and the page number. The unit outline also provides the teacher with an overview of the course of instruction covered by the unit.

The student manuals are designed to be used by each student in the class. Each student will therefore have her/his own copy of reading assignments, worksheets, and homework activities. Students can write in the manuals, using them as workbooks, or teachers can assign the manuals to students along with copies of the worksheets, and collect the manuals at the end of the unit for use in following semesters.

The loose-leaf format enables teachers to use and/or reproduce any part or the entirety of the student materials.

Teachers can incorporate their own particular emphasis and focus into their use of the materials or they may choose to follow the suggestions for teaching the materials as we have designed them.

We believe the effect of the selected format is that teachers can be both creative and focused in their presentation of the curriculum.

Annotated bibliographies are also provided for teachers if they wish to extend the scope of our work in their classrooms.

**Student Focus**

Particular care was taken that the short stories, essays and activities are not only constructed to focus on particular historical processes but relate to the lives of students as they are now living them, and to their own perception of themselves as female or male.

The activities also attempt to demonstrate for students the relationship between events that happened in the past and the world as it is today. The curriculum is very much concerned with the students' perception of concepts in history, as well as the presentation of historical facts. The activities are varied so that students who have different interests can become involved in the curriculum. There are activities that are artistically oriented, activities that allow for analytical thinking, activities that concentrate on oral presentations, and activities that require written presentations.

The oral history component in each unit is especially oriented toward this end. Through the use of the interview technique, students participate in the recording of history and they also learn that history is related to their lives: that it has some influence on who they are becoming.

**Oral Histories**

In collecting oral histories, students learn that "history" is alive and in the making. In the process of interviewing everyday people, often members of their own families, students can develop a feeling of participation in history making which is difficult to do following traditional text-oriented classroom procedures. And as students compare the information they have obtained from the interviews and shared difficulties encountered in the interview process, they begin to understand the process of interpreting and writing history.

Oral history assignments provide an opportunity for teachers to explore with students some of the gaps, omissions and prejudices which exist in the history as written in our texts. A major function of oral history assignments is to create this awareness and to involve students in the process of filling the gaps—to recover "lost" histories. It is not unusual that students become involved in the everyday lives of excluded groups—women, minorities, and children. In many cases they "discover" they belong to one of these groups, and as a result their view of history is broadened.

An oral history assignment is included in each of the six units. The design at both grade levels is to move from a simple and straightforward interview assignment to a more sophisticated and complex assignment. In this way students build interview skills and the ability to analyze the information obtained through the interviews. Also, the skills learned in the 8th grade can be applied in the more difficult 9th grade interview tasks.

It has been our experience that there is a direct relationship between time spent preparing students for the interviews and interviews that are productive and exciting. Classroom preparation should cover the rationale for oral histories, the purpose of the interview, the protocol for interviewing, and a careful review of the interview questions and format. A mock interview in which students participate is an effective pre-interview activity. Students not engaged in the interview can act as observers, giving the interviewer feedback on the questions asked, how they could be more effectively phrased, and the manner in which the interview was conducted. Interview direction sheets are provided within the units, and it is imperative that the teacher discuss these with the students to give them the guidelines they need to approach a person for an interview, to explain the purpose of the interview, to be sensitive to the person being interviewed, and to develop listening as well as inquiry skills.

The use of tape recorders enables students to recall and analyze the interview in greater detail. Care must be taken to obtain the consent of the person being interviewed, if a tape recorder is used during the interview.

"Women's history" is a new idea for students and in order for the idea to be accepted, teaching of the subject must be accompanied by attitudinal change in students, both female and male. It has been our experience that an important strategy in assisting students to make this attitudinal change is to give them the tools and the tasks so they can learn about themselves as they learn about others. As interviewers collecting oral histories, students clearly assume this task. They learn by doing.

**Resistance**

The teacher should be prepared to deal with resistance to the study of women's history—from both female and male students. The traditional history is the history with which most students feel comfortable. It is the history of important people, clear power relationships, events like wars, economic disasters, presidencies and foreign policy. Inevitably there will be students who want a return to the familiar. The unfamiliar seems uncomfortable and threatening.

There can be no question that women's history is different. There can be no question that change is implied when detailed accounts of the economic catastrophes of the decade after the Civil War are forsaken for an analysis of the impact of Reconstruction on members of a black family, or when America's participation in World War II is dealt with in summary fashion, thereby allowing for an analysis of the effects of the relocation experience on Japanese American women.

It is our experience that every advantage lies in the teacher introducing the differences in historical interpretation at a very early stage. It is also a most effective strategy to involve the students in activities which enable them to develop their own rationale for departure from the traditional history. These activities can be centered on the historical materials used in class, such as texts, newspapers, and magazines. Students can make investigations of their texts to determine for themselves gaps, omissions, and biases.

These investigations can be expanded, if needed, to include all areas of society involved in socialization: television, popular music, athletics and physical education, and student enrollment in high school classes (for this, use the Title IX review required of every school district).

By involving students in an early needs assessment, the teacher can refer to this activity as the class proceeds with the women's history units. It is advisable to have a stockpile of activities and strategies available to draw upon. Some students will react positively, some negatively to the different emphasis they are hearing in history. Some will react immediately, others will react more slowly, some will react very late. Having introduced the subject, and having involved the students in the needs assessment and development of their own rationale for change in historical interpretation, there is a good base upon which to build, and to which to add. It is important, as well, to listen to student concerns and to allow students the room they need to change, however slowly or rapidly. Finally, the units themselves have been designed to deal with changing attitudes.

It is important that female students understand woman's role throughout history. This is information that has been too long denied. Males, as well, have much to gain from historical accuracy; from it they can better develop a sense of their own proportion.

# Introduction to American History Units

The American History curriculum consists of three units: Native American Women in Pre-Columbian America; Southern Women, 1820-1860; and Women in Struggle: Immigration and Labor, 1820-1940.

In the unit on Native American Women we focused on one tribe, the Zunis, rather than on all Native tribes. In this unit, we stress the nature of the Native community within which the roles that women played were essential to the economic and cultural survival of the tribe. In contrast to the stereotype of the squaw, Native women and men were interdependent on each other, and Native women for the most part were highly respected by their tribal community.

In Southern Women, we discuss the lives of slave women and white women of the Antebellum South and show the relationship between the concept of patriarchy and the concept of slavery. The work done by both groups of women is seen as essential to the survival of the plantation system. Nevertheless, their work is devalued under the system.

In Women in Struggle: Immigration and Labor, we focus on the relationship between women as immigrants and women as workers in this country. American women have traditionally been portrayed as mothers and wives who are economically dependent on male wage earners. Without wishing to diminish women's work within the home, we believe it is equally important for students to learn the history of women as workers outside the home and within labor unions and to learn that women of all ethnic backgrounds, Chicana and Asian, black and white, have contributed to the economic development of America.

The units move from looking at one group of women in the Native American unit to many groups of women in the Women in Struggle unit. Each unit, structurally, becomes a little more complicated. We concentrated on creating a cumulative effect so that students would be able to develop reading, writing and conceptual skills as they moved from one unit to the next. The activities are also presented in this manner. For example, the oral history component in the Native American exercise is a one-step exercise; in Southern Women, more steps are added; and in Women in Struggle, students are presented with choices for their oral history assignment.

We also intended this rather focused view of American History to be enlarged by the World History teacher guide and student manual for the 9th grade, which is the other half of the project. The American History curriculum, then, has ideas in common with the World History component and builds naturally toward it.

# UNIT 1

## Native American Women in Pre-Columbian America

**NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN**
was developed by the following team of people:

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# OUTLINE

I. **INTRODUCTION:** Overview of Women's Lives
   - A. Map of Tribes (T-10, S-4)
     1. Teacher uses Overview of Women's Lives and Historical Rationale and Geographical Information (T-8—10) to introduce the unit and this activity
     2. Students respond to map questions
   - *B. Matrilineal Chart (T-11, S-16)
     1. Teacher uses background material and information (T-11) to introduce this activity
     2. Students complete matrilineal chart
   - *C. "Cycles of Nature—Cycles of Womanhood" (S-5)
     1. Teacher introduces this activity
     2. Students complete the "Cycles of Nature—Cycles of Womanhood" activity

II. **THE STORY OF A ZUNI GIRL—BLUE CORN**
   - A. Teacher uses background material to introduce this activity
   - B. Students read "The Story of a Zuni Girl—Blue Corn"
   - C. Class discussion on reading
   - D. Students complete activity page
   - E. Reading of "Native American Legends"
   - F. Written assignment on the legends

III. **NATIVE AMERICAN LEGENDS**
   - A. Illustration of "Roles of Native American Women"
     1. Teacher introduces this activity
     2. Class discussion of illustration
   - B. Women as Leaders
     1. Teacher uses background material to introduce this activity
     2. Students read "Women as Leaders"
   - C. Assign oral history project
   - D. Class discussion on "Women as Leaders"
   - E. Students complete activity on "Women as Leaders"

*Note: These two activities, the Matrilineal Chart and the Cycles of Nature—Cycles of Womanhood, work well with *either* activity preceding the other. We have chosen to place the Matrilineal Chart on the second day because the activity maximizes student involvement in the unit. Teachers may choose, on the other hand, to follow the map activity with an activity that introduces the important role nature played in Indian life, and hence use the Cycles of Nature activity on the second day, following with the Matrilineal Chart on the third day. Either order works well.

## IV. NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND ART

A. Teacher introduces "Native American Women and Art" using script and illustrations

B. Class discussion of "Native American Women and Art"

C. Students complete the activities and the chart

## V. COMPLETION OF UNIT

A. Class discussion of oral histories

## VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY

## GOALS

Students will learn the roles that women played in the social, political, cultural, economic, and spiritual life of Native Americans.

## OBJECTIVES

### Students will be able to:

1. Identify different women's roles within the tribal setting.
2. Recognize the importance of the interdependence of all members of the tribe.
3. Recognize the dual function that artistic activity served for Native American tribal society.
4. Recognize the relationship of the cycle of women's lives to the cycles of nature.
5. Choose a correct description of *matrilineal* from a list of choices.

# OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S LIVES: TEACHER INTRODUCTION TO UNIT

Oh, for a heart as pure as pollen on corn blossoms,
And for a life as sweet as honey gathered from the flowers.
May I do good, as Corn has done good for my people
Until my task is done and evening falls,
Oh, Mighty Spirit, hear my grinding song.[1]

The Native American woman saw herself as an integral part of the universe. She was not only of flesh and blood, but of all things in nature. Her own life cycle of birth, womanhood, motherhood and death coincided with nature's cycle of spring, summer, fall and winter. Many of her duties and tasks were associated with nature's cycles. Her spiritual beliefs gave direction and significance to her daily activities.

> *For her religion was not a thing apart from other aspects of her life. It permeated every act—in planting seeds, in conceiving, in bearing children, in teaching and training her sons and daughters, in molding and decorating a simple pottery bowl, even in preparing for death.*[2]

Survival not only of her own family, but of her clan and tribe was uppermost in her mind. Men and women depended upon and complemented each other in their struggle for survival. The entire social structure of the family, clan and tribe was organized around meeting the basic survival needs of the community.

The concept of *community* was the basis for Native American society. All individuals, regardless of age or sex, saw themselves as part of the whole. The major idea behind the communal structure was that the *survival* of the community depended upon each individual member's participation within the group. Each individual developed her/his identity through participation within the life of the community. Members of the tribe had a special relationship to one another due to the interdependence developed from growing up and living within a community of people. A good example of this interdependence was the way in which Native American children were raised. The rearing of children was not seen exclusively as the responsibility of the mother and father. Rather, grandparents, aunts and uncles participated in this process. Children learned their tribal traditions, their history and role expectations through this unique interaction with the entire community.

Due to the close interaction of female members of the community, warm and loving bonds developed between females. Among the Navajos of northern Arizona, mothers had favorite children. Most often they were not their own, but rather one of their sister's children. Comanche girls and their mothers' sisters also developed very close relationships. Comanche girls called their aunts "mother." Among the Hopi, ". . . children used the same word for

[1] From *Daughters of the Earth*
[2] From *Indian Women of the Western Morning*

their mother and their aunts, and the women called all the children by the same kinship term. The ties were so close that it was reportedly not at all uncommon in more traditional times to find middle-age persons who did not distinguish between their real mother and their maternal aunts."[1]

Many Native American societies were organized in clan systems that were primarily matrilineal. In matrilineal societies, lineal descent, inheritance of both personal and common property, and the right to public office were traced through the female line. "Because Navajos figured their descent through their mothers, Navajo women were always accorded a dignified role in the home, but after they gained some economic status through their ownership of livestock, they took control of the family purse strings and gained a little clout in the decision-making process. Each extended family, comprised of perhaps several sisters and their common husbands or separate husbands, their daughters and their husbands, and the daughter's children, was headed by a matriarch, whom all the other family members recognized as having the final word in all family affairs. There was no formal decision as to who would occupy this position—one of the mature women who displayed the wisdom, intelligence, experience, and necessary leadership qualities simply assumed the role upon the death or encroaching infirmity of her mother or aunt. Although the mother-in-law taboos prevented her from talking directly to her sons-in-law, the work of the young men was indirectly controlled by the matriarch, who made all the economic decisions."[1] While women were not considered to be the equals of men, they were *not* slaves or drudges. Women in these societies owned property, had the right to divorce, and were highly valued and respected. It was only in those less numerous tribes which did not have a clan system and which were organized in individual, self-sufficient family units that women had few rights and were exploited and abused by their husbands.

In most Native American tribes there was an established division of labor based on sex lines. In general, men's duties included hunting, protecting, and waging war. In some societies men were also involved in food cultivating, clothing making and house building.

Women were responsible for all of the household chores, the rearing and caring of the children, the caring for the old, ill and wounded, the dressing of skins, and the making of clothes and household items. In some societies such as the Pueblos and Navajos, women were responsible for building homes. They became skilled architects and home builders.

Native American women also were responsible for cultivating and irrigating fields, gathering food, fishing, and hunting for small game. Anthropologists have estimated that about 80% of the Native American family's food was obtained through the efforts of the women. It was through their relationship to food that the Native American women were able to influence and exercise their power. In most tribes women controlled the food supplies. Among the Zuni, Hopi, and other Pueblo tribes, women owned the fields that were used for farming. Although it was primarily men who did the actual farming, as soon as the crops were cultivated they were turned over to the female members. It was they who decided how the food would be distributed. Because women had control over the distribution of the food, they were able to influence the male family members and thereby have significant input into tribal affairs.

While women were excluded from the formal political activities, they nevertheless had considerable input into the decision-making process. Many tribes had "women's societies." These women's groups, such as the Women's Council among the Cherokee, had direct access to the political leaders. Influential women, such as the "Keeper of the Fire" among the Hopi, served as advisers to the male tribal leaders.

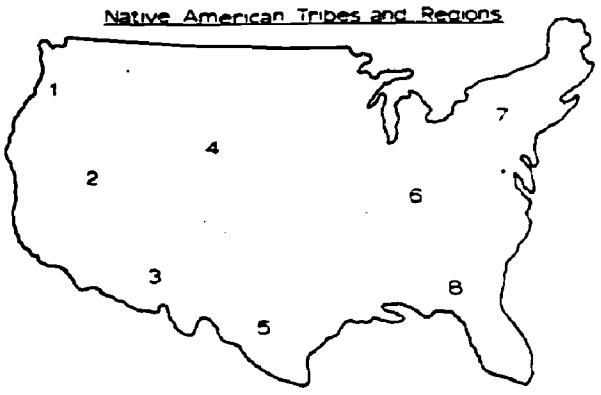
It is important to note that once women reached middle age and no longer had the heavy burden of child rearing, they were able to develop special skills. The practice of medicine provided women with an avenue for achievement, status, and influence within the community.

Strength, endurance and hard work were highly valued in a society that depended heavily upon women's economic roles. Because their work was so indispensable to the survival and welfare of the tribe, women were able to maintain a relatively high degree of control over their lives. Women who possessed these highly valued attributes attained respect and status within their communities.

# Historical Rationale and Geographical Information

We have concentrated on women's lives in the tribes who lived in the Southwest and California for important reasons. There are some theories that state that Native Americans first migrated from Russia, through Alaska, down to the Pacific Northwest region some 10,000 years ago. Therefore these tribes are said to be the first Americans. There has been generally less concentration on these tribes because white settlers first interacted with Native Americans in the New England states. Because of these first interactions, much of the information on Native Americans in United States History textbooks tends to focus on New England and the Plains Indians. We decided to concentrate on information from the Native American's own historical beginnings because of that void. The teacher should point out this reasoning to students so that they can begin to understand how history has been interpreted—from the first pioneers' significant contact with Native Americans, rather than from the beginning of the Native American's own history.

Since Native Americans lived off the land, it is important to briefly discuss with students the distinct qualities of each tribe's environment. Geographically, the Southwest is basically a desert region in which there are some rivers and lakes. Many Pueblo Indians, like the Zuni and Hopi, lived near water, but their lives were adversely affected by lack of rain. In contrast, Indians in most parts of California lived in areas that were plentiful in game, fish and plant life. They did not have to rely as much on storing food and farming since the land itself was so rich.




(S-4)

# THE STORY OF A ZUNI GIRL— BLUE CORN

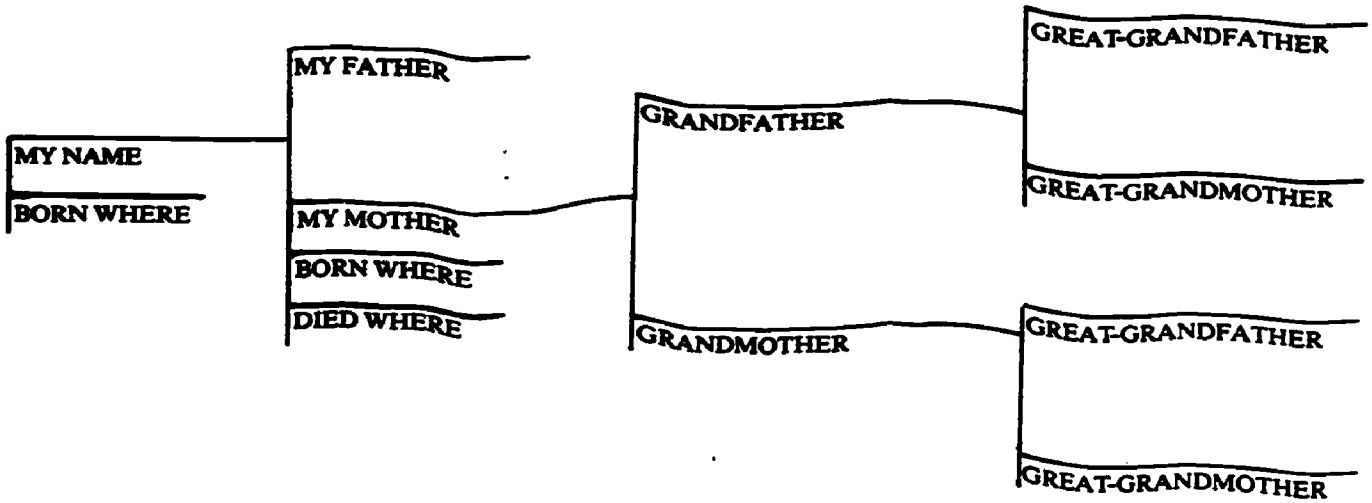
## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The Zunis are a *matrilineal* people. This means that they trace their lineage through their mothers, and that husbands come to live with their wives The teacher might want to discuss the difference in meaning between the word *matrilineal* and the word *matriarchal*. A matriarchy is government, rule or domination by women.

Zuni women own the land and the food in their society, for women are associated with the land, the cycles of nature, and nourishment. The men hunt, bu. since game is not plentiful in the Southwest, they also help to farm the land. The teacher might want to discuss the relationship of women's ownership of the land and food to the fact that the Zunis are a matrilineal people.

Before beginning the story, students may, as one of the student activities, complete a chart tracing their lineage from their mother's side in order to understand the term *matrilineal*.

## A. MATRILINEAL CHART



B. The story may be read aloud by the teacher to the class, or the students may read in teams of three, with one student reading aloud and the other two being responsible for explaining the meaning to the class. Another method is to have the students read to themselves and end with a class discussion.

C. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| matrilineal | spirituality | status |
| matriarchal | tradition | |

D. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. How does Blue Corn's upbringing stress her relationship as a woman to the cycles of nature?
2. What does this story tell us about the role of spirituality in the life of the Zuni?
3. How do Zuni women contribute to the Zuni economy?
4. What is a Zuni woman expected to do? What is her position in her society? How does it compare with the position of women in American society?
5. What is the relationship of the individual to the community?

E. **STUDENT ACTIVITY**

1. Why is a girl child particularly valued in Zuni society?
2. Blue Corn tells us about a lullaby her mother sang to her. What does the lullaby tell us about what Zuni women are expected to become?
3. How does Blue Corn get her education? Compare how she is getting her education with how you are getting yours. What is stressed in yours?
4. What are some traditions in Blue Corn's life? What are some traditions in your life?
5. Are Zuni women allowed to be artists? If they are, what forms of artistic expression do they use?
6. How does Blue Corn learn how to behave? What are some of the ways children are disciplined in your family?

# NATIVE AMERICAN LEGENDS

### TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Teachers might want to discuss the words *myth* and *legend*.

Have the class read the Creation myth, "The Beginning," and the legends of "The Turkey Maiden," "How the Women Learned to Grind," and "A Snake Comes Courting."

### STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Write a legend like the Zuni legend, "How the Women Learned to Grind." That is, tell your readers how an activity that is important in your life reveals something about your society's values.
2. Compare the Creation myth of the Zunis with the Judaeo-Christian myth of Adam and Eve. Are there differences in the status of males and females that the myths communicate?
3. Write a story like "The Turkey Maiden," in which you stress having a good time and forgetting responsibilities, and then tell what happens.
4. Write a story like "A Snake Comes Courting," in which you write about a tradition in your own life that you especially like.

# ILLUSTRATION OF ROLES OF NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What roles can you identify from reading about Blue Corn?
2. Discuss the meaning of the roles in the illustration that are not mentioned in Blue Corn.
3. Make a diagram similar to this one which illustrates the varying roles of Native American men.
4. Make a comparison of the roles played by Native American women and men as we have described them, with the roles played by women and men in contemporary American society. Be sure to select at least two ethnic groups, or classes, for the comparison.

# WOMEN AS LEADERS

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Teachers should refer to the background information in Overview of Women's Lives for perspective and context on the issue of women's roles and power in Native American societies.

Women were seen as responsible members of the tribe whose roles were crucial to the survival of the community. Women had a considerable amount of control in their home, had input into the decision-making process of the tribe, and could function in leadership capacities in the areas of politics and medicine.

A. Have students read "Women as Leaders" in class.

B. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. Discuss contemporary stereotypes about Native American women–for example, stereotypes portrayed in movies.
2. Discuss the fact that contrary to the stereotype of Native American women as people who lived as slaves without any rights, they in fact held a valued position in their societies and did have rights. For example,
   a. the right to divorce and remarry
   b. the right to hold and inherit property in matrilineal societies
3. Discuss Native American women's influence on tribal affairs.
4. How does this resemble or differ from the ways in which women in the U.S. today are involved in politics?

C. **STUDENT ACTIVITY**

1. Underline the phrases that best describe a matrilineal society.
   a. Women can own property
   b. Women have no rights
   c. Children belong to the mother's clan and tribe
   d. Daughters are important
   e. Women have no say in their home
2. Describe the qualities that were important for becoming an Apache "Woman Chief."
3. Describe the different ways in which women became medicine women.
4. In some tribes women had few or no rights. Can you construct a theory to explain this exception to the general rule?

D. **ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

Briefly go over the activity in class and ask students to do the assignment at home.

# NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND ART

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

A. The script "Native American Women and Art" should, ideally, be read aloud to the class by the teachers.

B. The class will have a chart to fill out in response to the artwork they see.

C. **IMPORTANT IDEAS** to emphasize in class discussion

1. Women contributed greatly to the tribe through their art.
2. Art was functional as well as beautiful.
3. There was a strong spiritual connection between the artist and her work.
4. Women expressed creativity through their artwork.
5. Women's art emphasized their strong connection to tribal values and ways of life.
6. Pre-Columbian art changed as a result of European influence.

D. The legend "Spider Woman Teaches Weaving" will need explanation by the teacher, both in terms of vocabulary and image.

E. **TERMS** to define

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| creativity | guardian spirit | twining |
| myth | basket making | legend |
| vision | coiling | |

F. **STUDENT ACTIVITIES**

1. Many Native American artists received ideas about their artwork through visions or dreams.

   Ask the students to draw a recent dream and, if they wish, to discuss the dream with the class.

2. Make a bulletin board display on Native American art, trying to use examples by women whenever possible.

3. Ask the students who are interested in further study to do a report on the life of a creative woman. She may be an artist, scientist, dancer, athlete, etc. Why do they like her work? Were the accomplishments difficult to achieve? Students could share their report with the class by bringing in examples of women's work or photographs of them in action (for example, Judith Jamison, Billie Jean King).

4. If there is time, students may want to do their own artwork. They can do their own pottery, weave, make baskets, or make sketches of different Native American art forms.

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# UNIT 1

## Native American Women in Pre-Columbian America

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# Native American Tribes and Regions


**MAP QUESTIONS**

1. How would geographic location affect the way Native Americans live?
2. What areas do you think would be more difficult to live in?

# CYCLES OF NATURE— CYCLES OF WOMANHOOD

Like the earth she is young in the spring. She matures as she is nourished by the sun and rain, bears fruit in the summer, begins to experience the inevitable effects of age in the fall, and dies in the winter, only to be reborn again each spring.

**STUDENT ACTIVITY**

1. Name the different stages of womanhood and the cycles of nature. Draw a line between the correct season and the correct cycle of a woman's life.
2. How do you think Native American women feel about nature?

*Like the earth she is young in the spring. She matures as she is nourished by the sun and rain, bears fruit in the summer, begins to experience the inevitable effects of age in the fall, and dies in the winter, only to be reborn again each spring.*

# THE STORY OF A ZUNI GIRL– BLUE CORN*

I was born five springs after my father, Desert Plant, wove a blanket for my mother, White Corn, and came to live in her house. My mother is a member of the Clown clan which is highly respected in our pueblo for their pottery making and medicinal skills. Father brought for my mother's family many robes, garments and ornaments to show his respect for his bride and her family. As is the custom with my people, when they married my father came to live with my mother in the house that she and her friends helped to build.

I am the third child, but the first daughter of my parents. My mother was particularly glad for a girl child, for it is through her daughters that her clan will continue. Before I was born, she and my father went to visit Mother Rock outside our pueblo and prayed for a daughter who would be good, beautiful and virtuous, and who would be a good weaver and potter. When I was born, my grandmother held me up to the sun, as her Zuni grandmother had done for her, and spoke the prayer:

May your road be fulfilled
Reaching to the road of your Sun Father,
When your road is fulfilled.
In your thoughts may we live,
May we be the ones whom your thoughts will
  embrace.
For this, on this day
to our Sun Father

*Written by *In Search of Our Past* staff. Based on accounts from this period as cited in the bibliography for this unit.

we offer prayer meal.
To this end:
May you help us all to finish our roads.

Even before I knew the beauty of the stars in the desert sky or the power of the wind, I beheld the sun, so that I might understand the meaning of the earth's cycles and the unity of my people. At that time my clan named me Blue Corn, for I am a daughter of Mother Corn.

As a baby I was cuddled, as every Zuni child is, by my parents and my aunts, uncles and grandparents. My father made me many baby toys which I played with as I traveled with my mother in my cradle. Later, my mother taught me a lullaby which she sang to me and which I will sing to my daughters:

Little maid child!
Little sweet one!
Little girl!
Though a baby,
Soon a-playing
With a baby

Will be going.
Little maid child
Little woman so delightful.

When I cried too much or was naughty, my parents did not hit me, for the Zuni believe that parents are for loving. Instead they would point out to me how unworthy my behavior was of my spirit, and they would warn me that Su'akye, a frightful old woman, would carry me off. Once when I persisted in my naughtiness, my parents allowed one of my aunts to punish me, but they themselves would not discipline me.

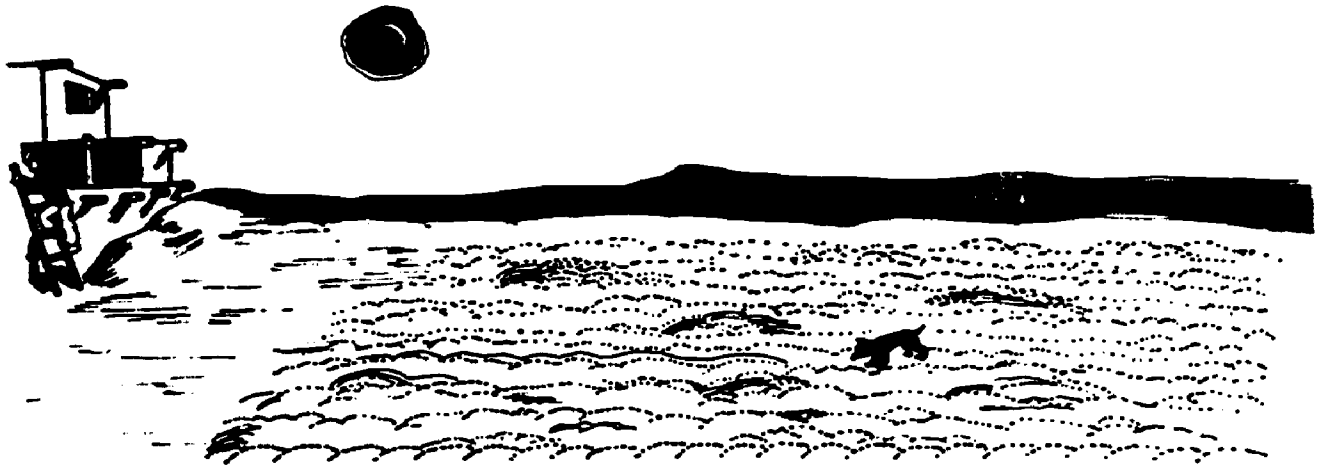
As I grew older, my favorite game was playing house with my younger sister and girl friends. My mother made a doll for me out of corn stalks and hair and helped me to build a little pueblo. Sometimes, however, I used my baby sister as my own baby and would try to carry her around in a cradle as I had seen my mother do. My aunt also helped me make little pots for my house. I admired her skill as she molded the clay into strong but egg-thin shapes. She explained to me that the pot must not be too thick, for then it would be very heavy when we used it to carry water from the river to the pueblo. But it must also be strong or it would break. I watched her as she painted a beautiful design of the sun on my little pots and secretly decided that when I grew up I would become as good a potter as she. Aunt Corn Stalk also told me about the spirit that inhabits each pot and how it helps to give goodness to the food the pot contains. Only a pot that was perfectly shaped would have a good spirit.

As I grew stronger I started cultivating a little patch of land, like my mother's garden. I tried to do as I had seen my mother and father do. I made little mounds of dirt in which I sowed the corn, squash and bean seeds. Some of my friends tried to sing the songs that are always sung when the garden is planted each year. Too, I accompanied my mother and her friends as they went to

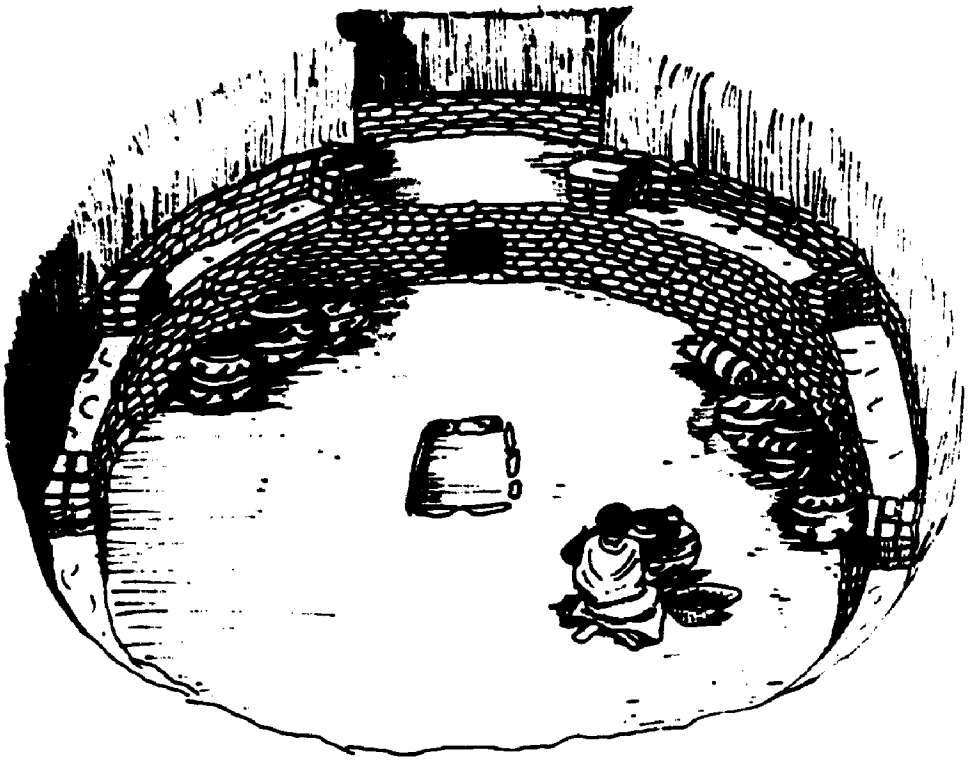
gather berries and greens and bring water from the river. My mother always pointed out wild herbs to me and told me what they were useful for. I learned to love the wild sage that would soothe my grandmother's head.

On warm afternoons I played stickball with my friends, but my favorite sport was swimming. I learned to swim when I was very young and enjoyed racing with other children in the river which was so important to our crops.

Though we children had to go to bed early, my grandfather would gather us together and tell us the stories of our people. He told us many stories about the men's hunting trips, and about the earth mother who gave us what we needed to live, and he would often recite to us the story of how the world came into being. From my grandfather's stories, I learned about the rhythm of the Earth Mother, her fertility and sacredness, and the power of the Sun Father to give her new energy.



In my seventh and eighth winter, there was drought among the Zunis. The rains did not fall; the crops dried up; the river got lower, and the men could not find much game. My mother dug into the year's supply of corn that she had stored in the kiva and brought up the meat that she had dried into jerky. But soon her provisions and the provisions of the other Zuni women were almost exhausted. We children felt hungry much of the time. The elders of the pueblo came together and decided that if rain did not



come soon, we would have to abandon our pueblo and go wandering for food. But before that day, the members of my mother's society, headed by the grandmothers, danced for many nights appealing to the Great Spirit to send us rain. My grandmother sang a song to the Earth Mother:

The clay-lined hollows of our Earth Mother
Will overflow with water,
From all the lakes
Will rise the cries of the children of the rainmakers,
In all the lakes
There will be joyous dancing . . . . . .

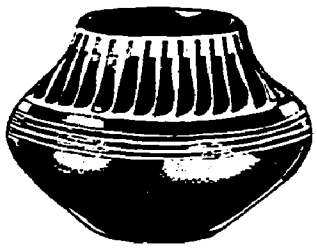
The female rains came nourishing the corn and filling up the river so that we did not have to leave our pueblo. I saw then how important the earth and its rhythm was to us and how we were all a part of that rhythm.

The harvest was so plentiful that year that we had a crooning feast. Never will I forget it. Everyone in the village participated. Young women dressed in their best clothes. The young men played musical instruments as the young girls ground the corn. The grandmothers sang a song to the corn goddess as the older men drummed and chanted. Soon the girls were grinding in beat to the drumming and singing, and many little girls like myself danced in the middle of the floor. We ground and sang and danced late into the night celebrating the goodness of the earth. I remember walking home with my closest friend, Cactus Flower, and marvelling at the brilliance of the desert night.

I became a woman three springs after the great harvest. Then my mother and aunts began in earnest to teach me the things that I would need to know in order to be a good woman. I learned to select a good sandstone for a grindstone so that my corn meal would be finely ground. As I learned to grind correctly I sang a grinding song that my mother and her mother before her had sung:

Oh, for a heart as pure as pollen on corn blossoms,
And for a life as sweet as honey gathered from the flowers,
May I do good, as Corn has done good for my people,
Through all the days that were.
Until my task is done and evening falls,
Oh, Mighty Spirit, hear my grinding song.

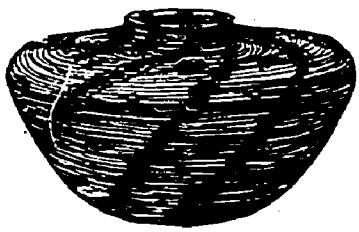
I was also instructed in farming, gathering food, and drying meat into jerky, for a Zuni woman is responsible for keeping her family fed, while her husband must provide her with game and do much of the farming. Zuni wives must also clothe their families so I learned to spin and weave and sew. In addition, my mother instructed me in childbirth, told me how to take care of my children when I became a mother, and what herbs were best for what illness. She and my grandmother also took care to show me the dances of my mother's society, of which I would become a part when I married.

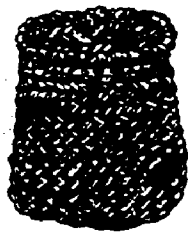


My aunt taught me much about pottery. She and I became very close in the year of my womanhood. She had just divorced her husband, who had gone back to his mother's people, and she spent many hours with me showing me how to create beautiful designs. I enjoyed making designs for pots, and even now I sometimes stay up nights developing the designs in my head. Because of my aunt's teachings, my pots are perfectly shaped and beautifully designed so that their spirit will give great goodness to my food.

Since I have become a woman, my days are full as I grind corn, cook, weave and make pots every day. In addition to teaching me these skills, my mother and aunt also have taught me how to beautify my hair and paint my face with designs.

Sometimes I went to dances for young maidens and young men. At one of these dances I first saw Young Eagle. He had been secretly courting me for many months and had played the flute for me. His parents approached my parents and asked them if I could be his wife. He has sent, as my father did before him, many fine garments and ornaments for me and my family. And he has helped my friends and me to build a house. I, in turn, have found a fine piece of sandstone for my grinding stone and have made many pots and baskets for my new home.



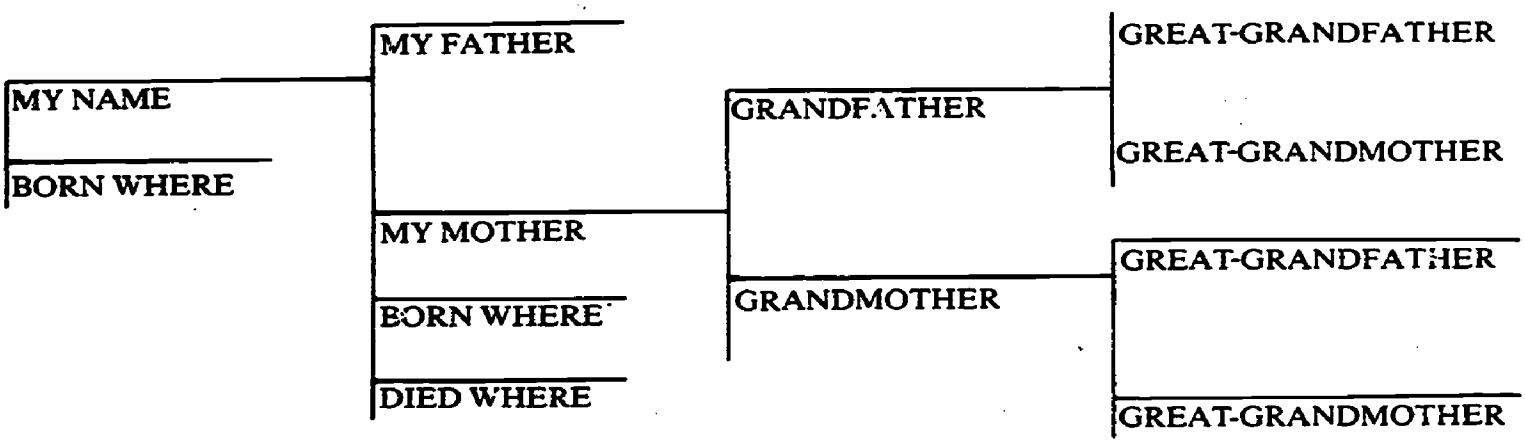


Tomorrow he will bring me a robe and I shall present him with the corn bread I have made from my harvest. My parents say that Young Eagle is a good hunter and farmer. I pray to the Earth Mother that I will have many healthy children and that our life will be filled with good harvests. I pray that in the next harvest he will welcome the new corn. That my husband will bring the first ripened corn home, calling, "We come." That I and my sisters will ask, as my mother and aunts before me, "Ah, how come ye?" and that he will say, "Together, happily." For that occasion I will make a beautifully decorated tray in which to place the new corn, and we will sprinkle sacred prayer meal over it and thank our Mother Earth for her blessings.

# THE STORY OF A ZUNI GIRL– BLUE CORN

The Zunis are a *matrilineal* people. That is, they trace their roots and inheritance through the female line. That means that husbands come to live with their wives' families, and that personal and common property and the right to public office are traced through the mother.

## A. MATRILINEAL CHART




## B. VOCABULARY

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| matrilineal | virtuous | myth | clan |
| matriarchal | tradition | status | inhabit |
| spirituality | unworthy | persist | |

## C. QUESTIONS

1. Why is a girl child particularly valued in Zuni society?

2. Blue Corn tells about a lullaby her mother sang to her. What does the lullaby tell us about what Zuni women are expected to become?

3. How does Blue Corn get her education? Compare how she is getting her education with how you are getting yours. What is stressed in yours?

4. What are some traditions in Blue Corn's life? What are some traditions in your life?

5. Are Zuni women allowed to be artists? If they are, what forms of artistic expression do they use?

6. How does Blue Corn learn how to behave? What are some of the ways children are disciplined in your family?

# Native American Legends

## *The Beginning**

The time arrived that the stars were told by the Great Spirit to come down into the fourth womb where the people lived, giving offerings of corn pollen to their fathers.

There were always many people upon the face of the earth, but few of them were desirable. The people of the fourth womb would be brought up to stabilize what life was to be like on the surface.

Down into the darkness of the fourth womb, the stars entered, where they were greeted by some hunter.

Asked who they were and what they were doing, they claimed to be the Ahauda. They came into the Gyaatdoweh's house and exclaimed that the sun wished their presence upon the earth. But first the Gyaatdoweh asked each different society to give their opinions on the question put forth to them. The Gyaatdoweh and Chuatdonneh discussed the subject and decided on the certain plants with which they were to come to the surface. As each different plant was grown for them to ascend upon, each plant failed. From the yucca roots to the thin willows were planted as each of the fourth levels of the wombs came up. Finally they penetrated onto the surface of the earth.

The Shewanaquelo and Clown clans were the first of any medicinal societies taken into the light of the sun. When they were upon the surface, they stood facing the East, from which the sun rose.

Instructed to keep their eyes opened and looking at the sun, they stood squinting at the brightness of the light surrounding them, their eyes watering. They stood until their eyes got accustomed to the light.

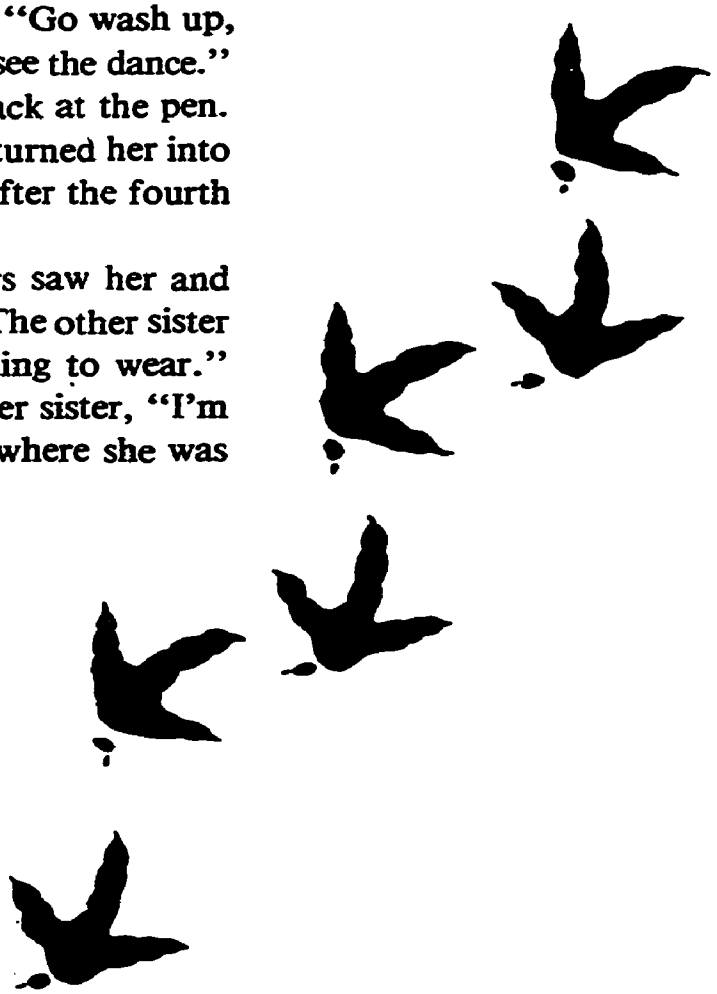
When these people emerged onto the surface, the strong sacred scent of the wombs that penetrated onto the surface killed the living on the face of the earth. A new group of beings began the start of a new people.

*From *The Zunis*

# *The Turkey Maiden**

Long ago there lived a maiden in a village called Matsakya, where she had a flock of turkeys to tend. One day while tending her flock she heard of a Yah Yah Dance which was to be held at the village plaza. The next day she was fixing a meal for her sisters when one of them asked her if she wanted to go and see the dance. She replied, "I don't know. I have nothing nice to wear." So the other two sisters left for the dance. Shortly after, she went down to get her flock out to feed. When she got there, to her surprise one of the turkeys spoke to her and asked if she was going to the dance. She told the turkey that she didn't have nice things to wear. "Have no fear, my child," said the turkey, "Go wash up, come back, and we will get you ready in time to go see the dance." So she ran to the house with joy. Soon she was back at the pen. With three magical songs of the flock, the turkeys turned her into a beautiful maiden. They told her to hurry back after the fourth dance and let them out to be fed.

When she got to the dance, one of her sisters saw her and asked the other sister. "Could this be our sister?" The other sister replied, "How could it be? She didn't have a thing to wear." "But it is she who is standing there," said the other sister, "I'm going to see for sure." So she went to the place where she was



*From *Daughters of the Earth*

standing. Sure enough, it was her sister. They greeted each other and the other sister asked her if she had locked the pen where the turkeys were. She replied, "Yes, I did, and I was told to be back after the fourth dance." While they were still talking, the dance had already started. So they danced the first dance. After it was over they went to the place where the other sisters were. They danced the second dance, then the third and the fourth. She got so interested that she forgot all about the warning from the flock. While dancing the fifth dance, she remembered and told her sisters that she had to leave.

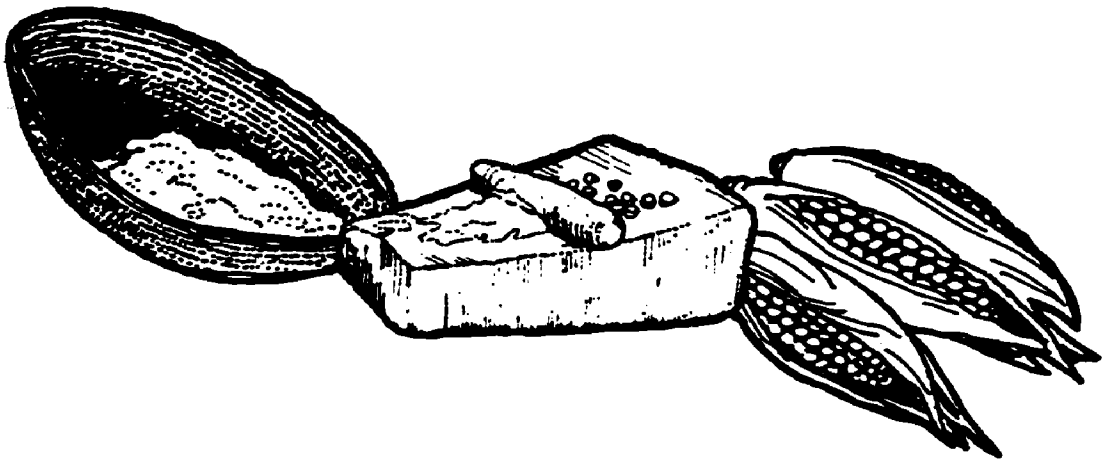
Meanwhile, the flock flew out of the pen and fed around the pen, then wandered off to the hills. The maiden returned to the pen only to find it empty. She started to look and a few hours later she found the turkeys at the top of the hill. They told her that she had disobeyed them and for that reason they were flying away. They flew to the other hilltop, and again the maiden went after them. When she reached them, they flew off and landed on the field. By this time the maiden was very tired, but still she went after them. They flew away and landed to drink in a spring flowing out of the rocks. The maiden was so tired that she gave up and went home. The turkeys were full of joy because they were free and could go anywhere they wished. To this day you see the tracks of the flock where it drank at the spring.*

*History tells us that long ago the world was young and soft. But as the years went on, it hardened, so that's why we have lots of fossils in this world of ours.

# *How Women Learned to Grind**

Once, many generations ago, there lived a beautiful goddess of the ocean—the "Woman of the White Shells," younger sister of the Moon. This goddess was the special patronness of beauty and grace and she imparted an attractiveness almost equaling her own to those into whose hearts she designed to breathe. So that she would not be defiled, she lived in a cave.

One day when some maidens were passing near the mountain, suddenly the beautiful goddess appeared to them, sitting high up in the rocks, dressed in sparkling white cotton garments. She beckoned to the maidens to approach her, reassuring them with her friendly smile.



"Sit ye down by my side," she said to them, "and I will teach you the arts of women." Then with a sharp-edged fragment of jasper, she chipped out a mealing stone of lava. Next she fashioned another stone of finer rock, long enough to reach entirely across the mealing stone. Taking white shells and white kernels of corn, the goddess ground them together between the

*From *Daughters of the Earth*

stones, demonstrating to her pupils a grace of movement before [then] unknown to women. Now, leaning ever so lightly on her grinding stone and glancing slyly under her waving side-locks, she talked to the watching maidens, teaching them how to tease their lovers; then dashing the hair from her eyes, she turned back to the mealing trough and began to grind, singing meanwhile, in time with her labors, the songs that ever since young women have loved to sing, [and] young men [have] loved yet more to listen to.

She stopped then and picked some long stems of grass which she made into a brush and used to sweep together the flour she had been grinding. Of this she gave to each of the maidens an equal measure.

"Take it," she said, "and remember how I have made it that ye may be blessed with children and make more for them and they for theirs. With it men and women shall cast their prayers to the Beloved and maidens shall beautify their persons." Then she took a little of the flour between her palms and applied it lightly to her face and bosom until her countenance appeared almost as white as her mantle and as smooth as dressed doeskin. And ever since that time women have won the most lingering of lovers with the wiles of the meal stone.

# *A Snake Comes Courting**

Long ago among the Tunica [who lived on the banks of the Mississippi River in what is now northeast Louisiana] there was a maiden who was visited by a handsome youth who came every night and left before daybreak. Finally the young man appeared to the girl's parents, asking for her hand in marriage; but the parents refused to give him their daughter because they did not know who the man was. The maiden was foolishly in love with the young man and so one night the youth, having been once again refused by the girl's parents, convinced his sweetheart to run away with him. After the old people were in bed the girl went off with her lover to his house. The house was very nice and his relatives were very good looking. The couple chatted for awhile with the other people in the house and then went off to bed. The girl awoke at daybreak and discovered that instead of lying in the nice house she had seen the previous evening, she was now in the middle of the ugliest kind of briar bush. It was a rattlesnake nest and the young man she had married was a rattlesnake. She tried to move but every time she did, all the snakes rattled their tails and she had to lie still all day long. She was so frightened that she held her hands over her eyes so she wouldn't have to look at the snakes. When night came the briar bush turned into a lovely house once more. She quickly walked out and returned to her parents, glad to escape from that place. When she told what had happened, all of her relatives gathered together to go out and kill the bad snakes.

*From *Daughters of the Earth*

# NATIVE AMERICAN LEGENDS

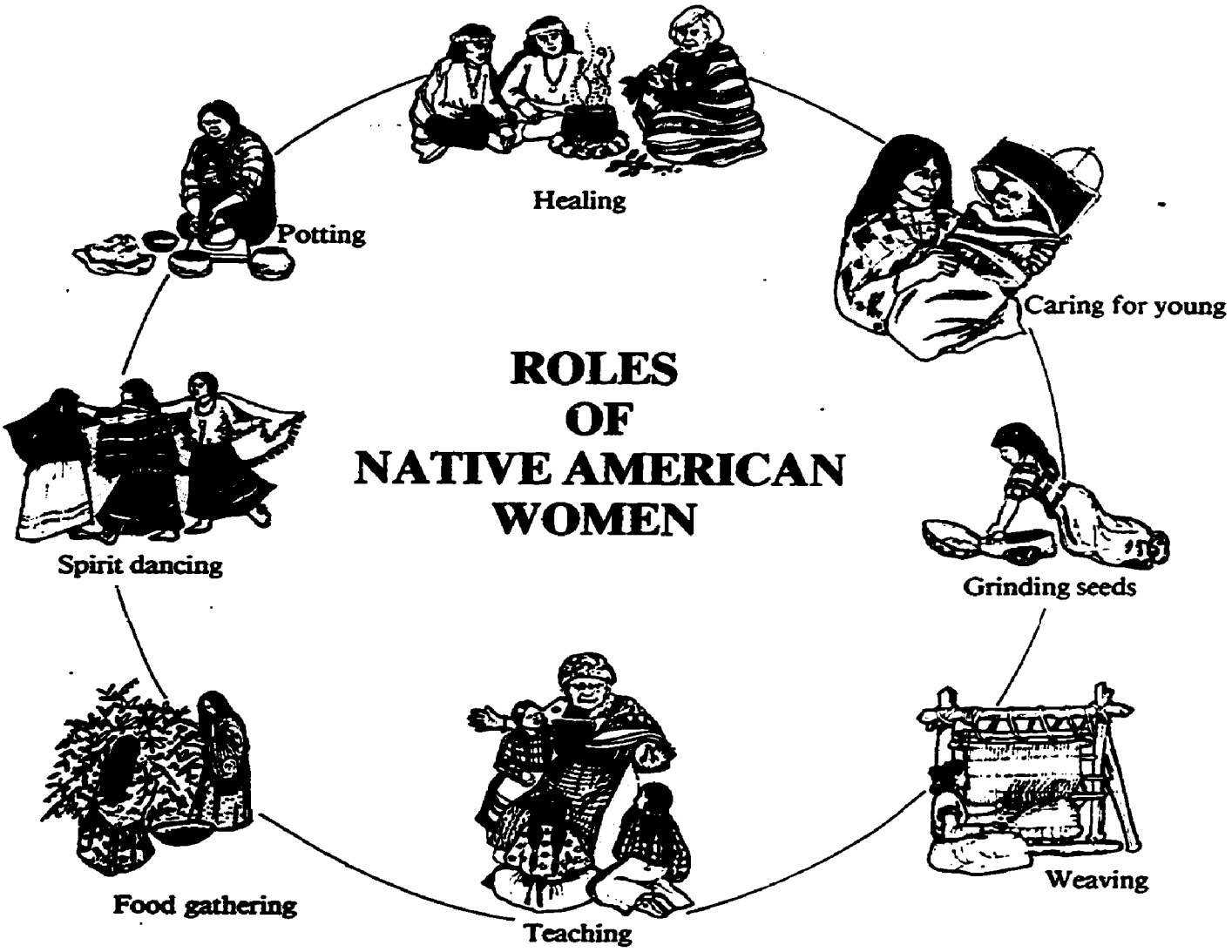
## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Write a legend like the Zuni legend, "How the Women Learned to Grind." That is, tell your readers how an activity that is important in your life reveals something about your society's values.

2. Compare the Creation myth of the Zunis with the Judaeo-Christian myth of Adam and Eve. Are there differences in the status of males and females that the myths communicate?

3. Write a story like "The Turkey Maiden," in which you stress having a good time and forgetting responsibilities, and then tell what happens.

4. Write a story like "A Snake Comes Courting," in which you write about a tradition in your own life that you especially like.


ROLES
OF
NATIVE AMERICAN
WOMEN
Healing
Caring for young
Grinding seeds
Weaving
Teaching
Food gathering
Spirit dancing
Potting

Pity the poor squaw
Beast of burden, slave,
Chained under female law
From puberty to grave

# WOMEN AS LEADERS

Contrary to the stereotypes of Native American women as "squaw, beasts of burden, slaves," Native American women in most cases were highly regarded and respected. *Both* women and men were equally important to the survival and welfare of the tribe. While it is true that Native American women did not have equal status with men, they had many rights and many responsibilities. For example, in most tribes a woman had the right to divorce and remarry without any loss to her honor or status.

Many Native American tribes were *matrilineal societies. Matrilineal* means that people trace their bloodline through their mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, etc. Membership within the clan and citizenship in the tribe were traced through the female line. For example, all children belonged to the mother's clan and tribe and not to the father's. In these societies daughters were important because it was through them that the family line was able to continue. Inheritance of property was also carried out through the female line. In some matrilineal societies where women owned the land used for farming, it was the daughters who inherited the land, rather than the sons.

In matrilineal societies women had control of all food, including the food obtained by the men through hunting and farming. This control of the food supply provided women with a source of power and influence in both domestic and tribal affairs.

## WOMEN IN POLITICS

While there were few known women chiefs, Native American women were able to have input into political and religious matters.

Among the Pueblo people, men generally ran the government and controlled the religious ceremonies. Women, however, were able to influence men's decisions.

> *The leader of a Hopi town was usually assisted in his duties by a female relative, who was called "Keeper of the Fire." She was chosen for this honor on the basis of her wisdom, intelligence and interest in religious ceremony. The male head chief or priest kept his office in this woman's home and consulted her on many decisions, drawing on her experience and knowledge of precedents.**

*From *Daughters of the Earth*

Among the Western Apaches, strong and influential women were known as "Women Chiefs." These women did not inherit their title; and they were not elected, as the men chiefs were. They obtained their positions by displaying wisdom and strength and by being a good example of Apache womanhood.

Cherokee women elected delegates to the Women's Council. The head of the council was called "Beloved Woman." She had the power to speak on behalf of the women in the tribe. If the Women's Council felt the chiefs were incorrect in an important decision, Beloved Woman would voice her objections to the chiefs. Cherokee women also participated in voting for the leaders.

## MEDICINE WOMEN

In most Native American societies it was possible for women to practice medicine. Among the Yurok of northern California, all doctors were women. The ways in which women attained this much-respected and highly influential position differed with each society. However, in almost all tribes there was one prerequisite for becoming a medicine woman: The woman had to receive a sign from the spirits, usually through a vision or a dream.

Among the Cheyenne, all medicine men required the services of a female assistant. Usually the wife or a female relative was chosen. A woman that worked as an assistant could learn the secrets used by medicine men. After she learned all the necessary skills she could practice medicine herself. Wives of Comanche medicine men could assist their husbands and learn the skills. However, they were allowed to become medicine women only after their husbands died.

The Niseman women of northern California entered a training program that lasted six to seven months. Medicine men trained and initiated women into all the secrets of the practice of medicine. However, women were not allowed to learn about poisons, because the people believed that if women obtained this knowledge and then became mentally unbalanced, they would have the power to kill everyone.

In many tribes women learned the art of healing from their mothers, grandmothers or aunts. The women then had to wait for an aging medicine woman to choose them and teach them the special songs and formulas for preparing cures.

Good medicine women were respected and valued for their knowledge and talent. Although they did not charge for their services, they often became wealthy from gifts they received from the families of the patients they cured.

Since most Native American women were familiar with herbal medicine, it was possible for just about any woman who showed an interest and talent in healing to become an accomplished medicine woman. Most women who dedicated themselves to the practice of healing did so in middle age, after their children had grown and married.

Medicine women spent many days, weeks and even months gathering herbs. Oftentimes they would travel to nearby towns to obtain herbs. They also traded herbs with medicine men and women from other regions to obtain the largest variety of medicines. Many of these medicines used by Native American medicine men and women have been found by modern science to be very effective. Many of them are used today as a part of the chemical composition of modern drugs.

Native American women were important, contributing members in all aspects of their society. They were valued and respected in their many, varied roles, and their opinions were taken seriously by the tribal leaders. Women who possessed wisdom, strength and other qualities that were respected by the tribe were able to become political leaders and medicine women.

# WOMEN AS LEADERS

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

A. Underline the phrases that best describe a matrilineal society.

1. Women are the leaders.
2. Women can own property.
3. Women have no rights.
4. Children belong to the mother's clan and tribe.
5. Daughters are important.
6. Women have no say in their home.

B. Describe the qualities that were important for becoming an Apache "Woman Chief."

C. Describe the different ways in which women became medicine women.

D. In some tribes women had few or no rights. Can you construct a theory to explain this exception to the general rule?

E. **ORAL HISTORY ACTIVITY**

Ask students to complete the following oral history project as a homework assignment.

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview your mother, grandmother or another older woman relative. Explain to her that you want her to tell you about any home remedies she knows about, and ask if she still uses them today.

Person's Name _____

Relation _____

| | ILLNESS | CURE | STILL USE | DON'T USE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Example: | cold/congestion | strong oregano tea with honey | ✓ | |
| | | | | |

# NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND ART

There are two distinct periods of Native American art, pre-Columbian and the period after European influence. The following are examples of pre-Columbian art:

1) *Jar:* Arkansas tribe

This head-shaped stone jar was made by an Arkansas tribe over five hundred years ago.

2) *Stone figure:* Arkansas tribe

This stone figure of a kneeling woman is believed to be at least eight hundred years old.

The Europeans brought to the Native Americans many new raw materials with which to work, and in many cases these additions altered or changed the original art styles. Despite the changes in style, Native American women continued to display their talents and creativity and through their art expressed tribal values, customs and ways of life. Their art helped to connect them to their tribal community.

Religious art usually was produced by men, while the women created most of the secular art. Among the Southwest tribes, women were the potters in the Pueblo societies, the weavers in the Navahos, and the basket makers in the California tribes.

Some of the artists were professionals who served an apprenticeship with and were trained by a master craftsperson. But in other tribes, people believed that artists received their skills from a guardian spirit, and that there was a spiritual connection between the artists and their work. These artists were called upon by the spirits to make their visions clear to the other members of the tribe through their art. This connection is expressed by a Hopi potter in the following quote:

> *Did I pray when I was forming pots? Absolutely. The clay is a living being when you put it in your hand, you know. Look at it. A lump . . . a lump that says to me, "Make me as I am . . . make me beautiful." So we converse every step of the way, the clay and I.*
>
> *If I can see the beauty in my hand . . . if it touches my own inner heartstrings and I can mold it into visual, harmonious beauty, then I have met the challenge.*
>
> *Oh, yes, I pray. One must be alone with the Creator—the Supreme Being—to capture his feeling of oneness. One with the clay. One with the Creator. One with every living thing, including the grains of sand.**

In everything they did, Native American women saw the beauty of nature. But the purpose of art was not only to display beauty; it was also functional. Native American women loved beautiful household equipment.

*From *Daughters of the Earth*

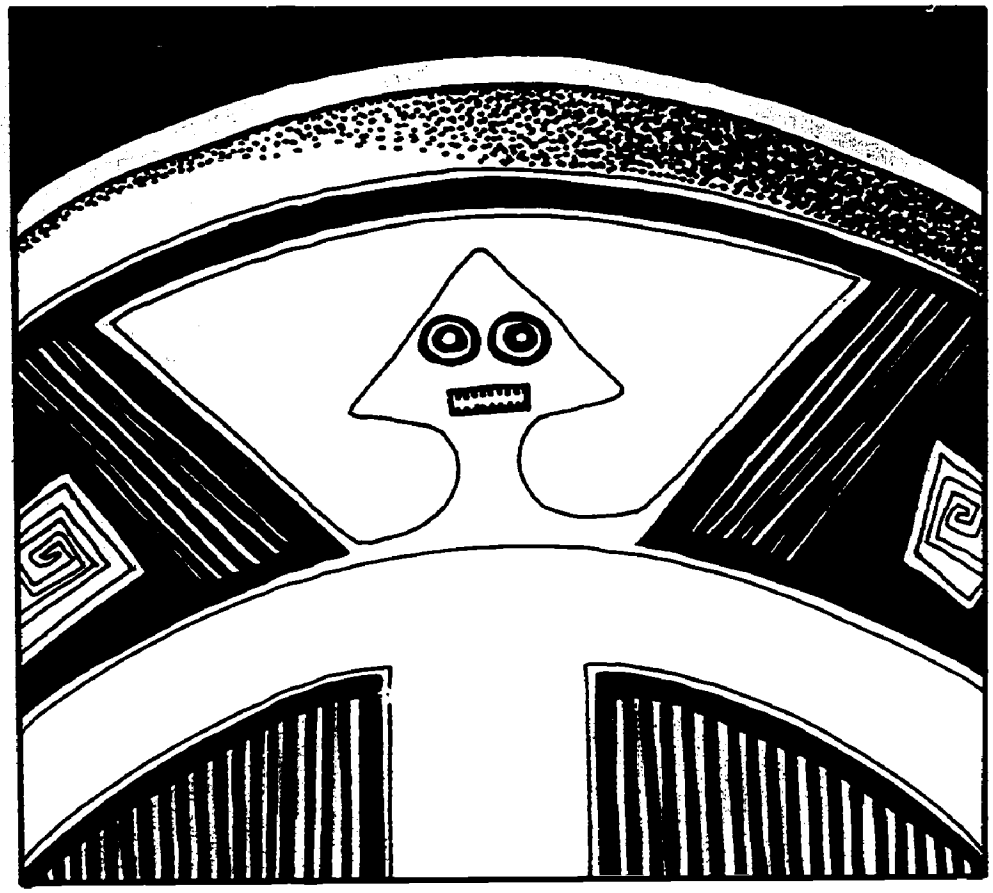
## POTTERY

Ceramics or pottery was considered to be a woman's art. All of the work was done by hand and required great technical skill. The large clay pots designed for everyday use needed to be strong yet delicate enough to carry.

The Pueblo styles were based mainly upon the use of geometric designs on a black background. European influence added the use of floral, bird, and animal patterns in black and red on a white background.

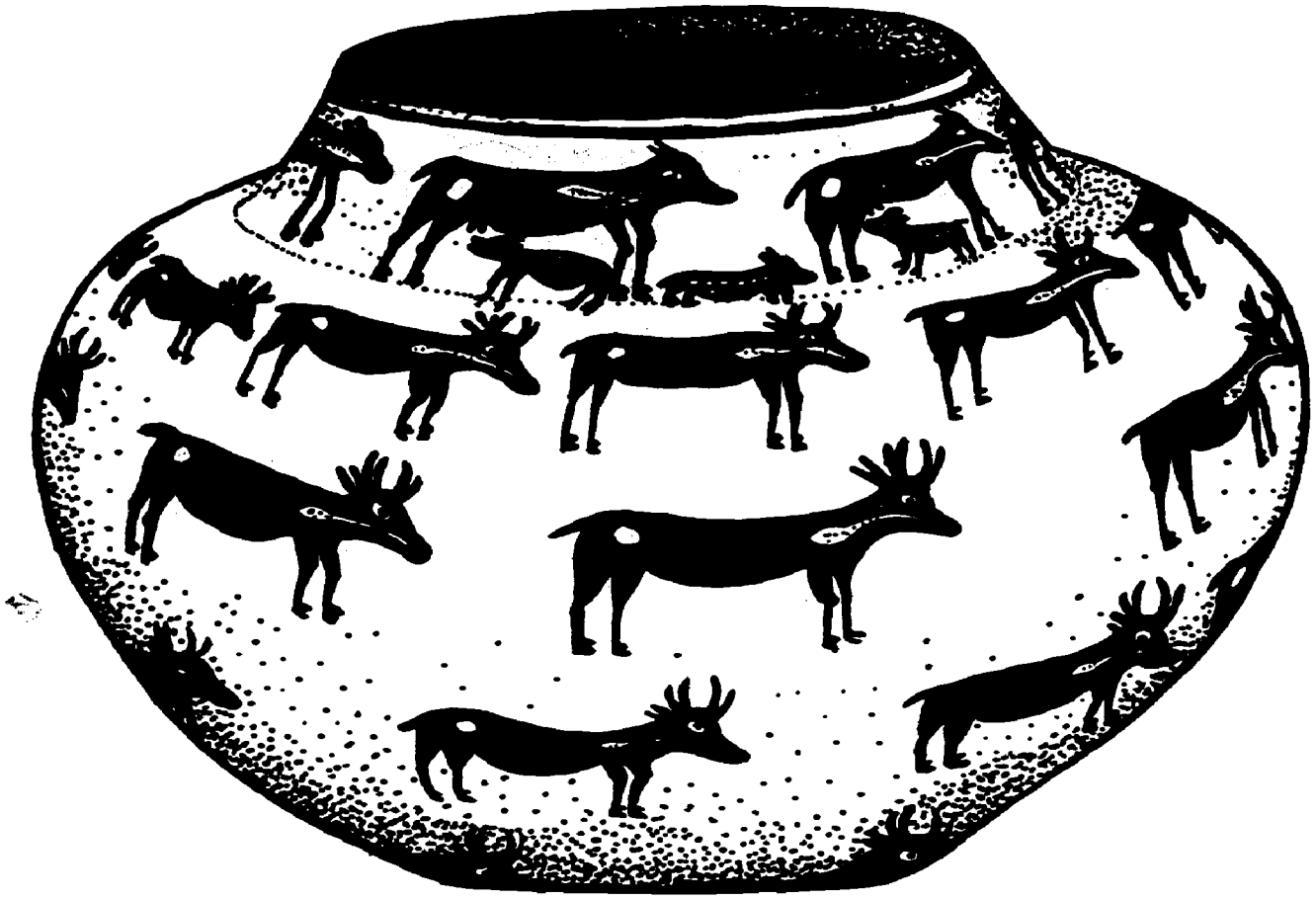
3) *Plate:* New Mexican tribe

This plate was made by an extinct tribe in New Mexico. This piece of pottery displays the typical use of geometric designs done in black on a white background.

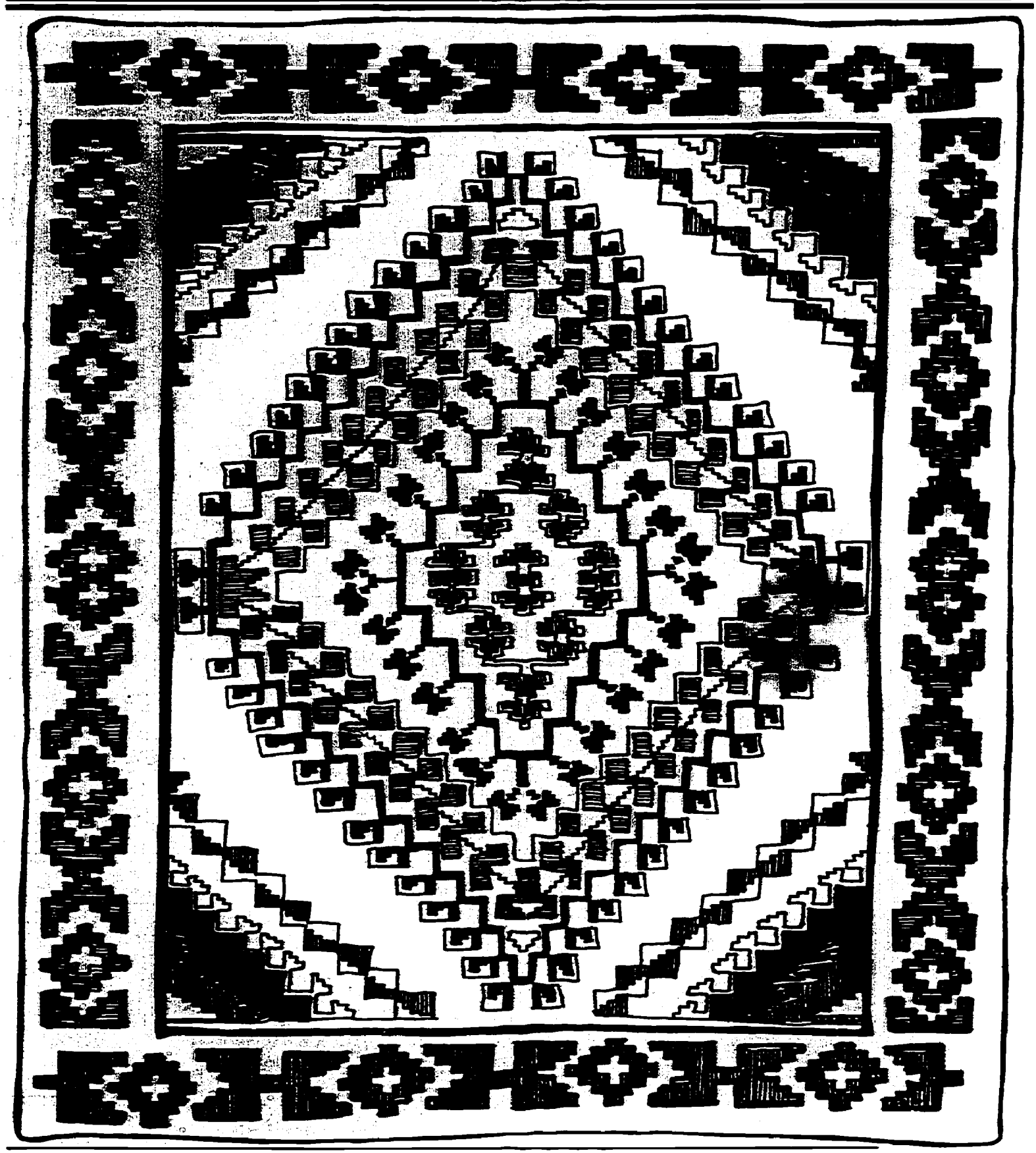


4) *Water vessel:* Zuni tribe

The black design using animals on a white background shows the European and Native American influence working together. Using animals to show the heartline is a distinct characteristic of the Zuni tribe.



A Pueblo woman felt that each of her pots had "a life of its own."



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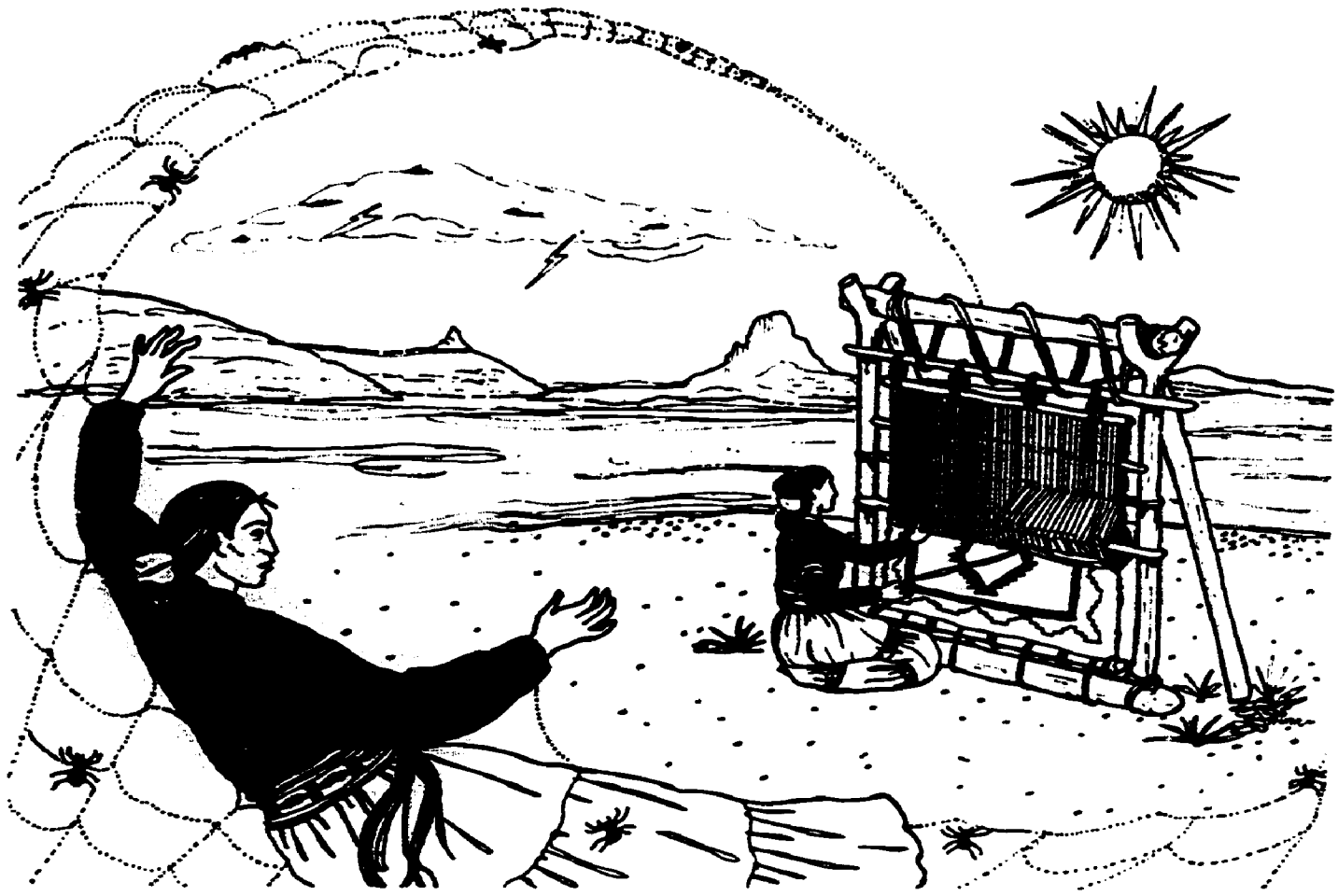
## WEAVING

Navaho women believed that they received their gift of weaving from some guardian spirit. The weavers believed that they were taught by Spider Woman. The following legend describes this myth.



*Spider Woman Teaches Weaving*

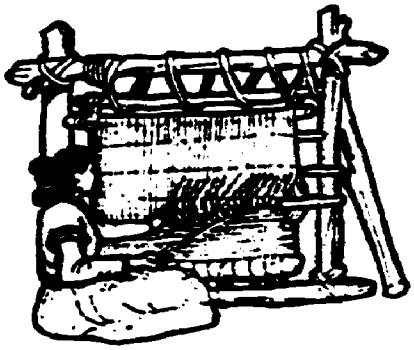
***Spider Woman instructed the Navaho women how to weave on a loom, which Spider Men told them how to make. The cross-poles were made of sky and earth cords; the warp, sticks of sun ray; the***

> ***heddles of rock crystal and sheet lightning. The batten was a sun halo, while shell made the comb. There were four spindles: one a stick of zigzag lightning with a whorl of cannel coal; one a stick of flash lightning with a whorl of turquoise; a third had a stick of sheet lightning with a whorl of abalone; a rain steamer formed the stick of the fourth and its whorl was white shell.***[1]

Early Navaho textiles reflect the simple decoration of banded stripes colored with natural wools, plant dyes, or wool from unravelled trade cloth. These early blankets were used as clothing for the tribe. After 1900, however, the blankets were primarily made for the tourist trade. The influence of this tourist trade profoundly affected the weaver's style. Blankets were made heavier for use as rugs and wall hangings. They began to use commercial dyes and yarn. The following, is an example of these influences:

5) *Wool blanket—a wall hanging:* Navaho tribe

This weaver used brightly dyed European cloth and displayed stronger colors and more complex designs than the pre-Columbian styles.



[1]From *Daughters of the Earth*

## BASKET MAKING

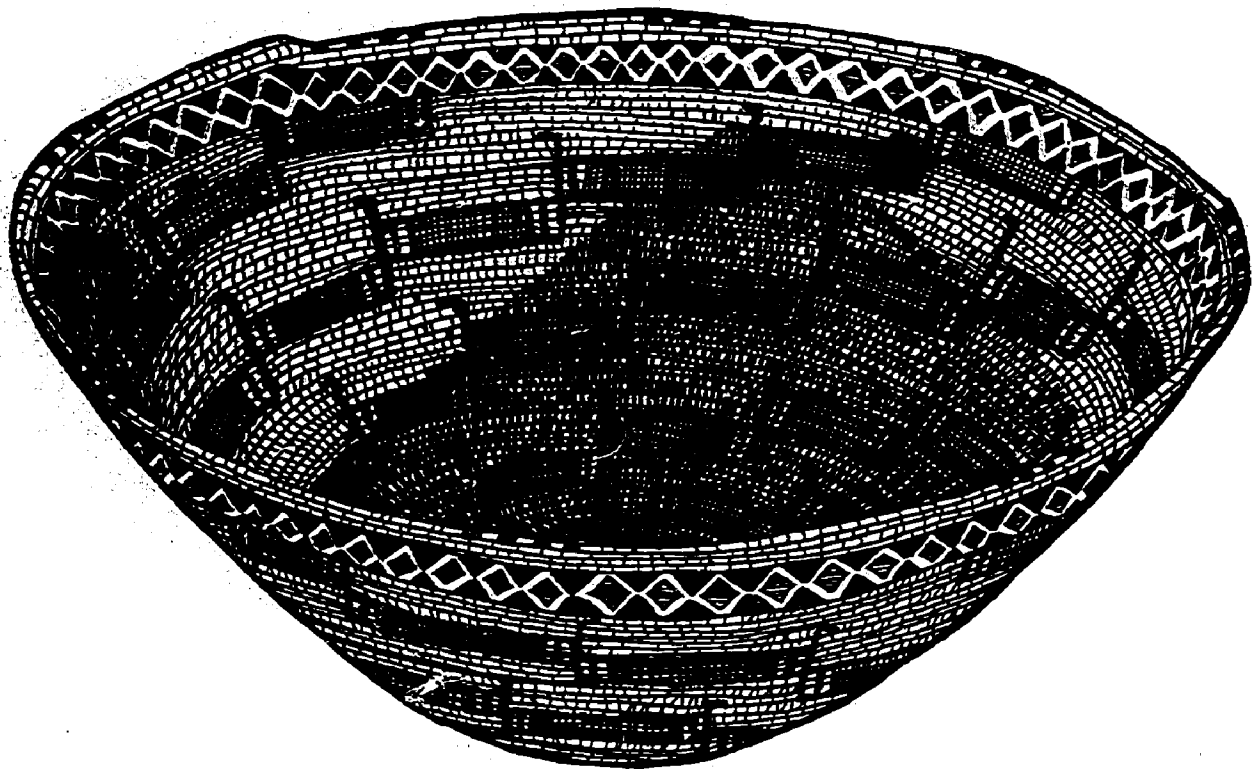
California Native American children learned basket making from their mothers. The tribes used the baskets for everything, including carrying water, cooking, and storing. The baskets were also used as ceremonial gifts. Some of the tribes felt the skills of basket making were given to them by spirits.

Each tribe had their own basket making techniques, but the two most common methods were coiling and twining. Decoration of the baskets also varied from tribe to tribe. The decorations included embroidery, mosaics of feathers, beads, and shells, and bright colors combined with different textures. Some baskets were even made in miniature sizes and given as gifts for marriages, or they were used in rituals in honor of the dead. The following examples represent the variation in basket making:

*6) Two storage baskets: California tribe*

These baskets are 4-4½ inches in diameter.

7) *Classic basket:* Yakut tribe, California



The artwork of women truly expressed their participation in and connection to their tribal values and customs. Women's artwork brought beauty to their daily lives.

# NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND ART

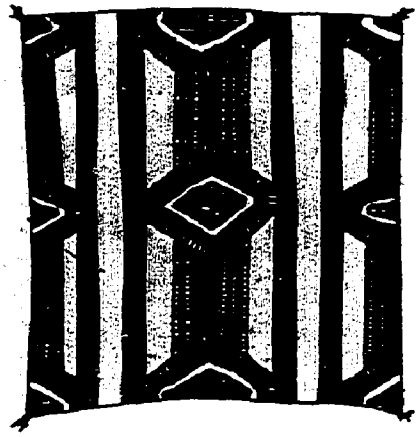
## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Many Native American artists received ideas about their artwork through visions or dreams. Make a drawing of one of your dreams.

2. Make a bulletin board display on Native American art, trying to use whenever possible examples by women.

3. Write a report on the life of a contemporary woman. She may be an artist, scientist, dancer, athlete, etc. Explain why you like her work. Were her accomplishments difficult to achieve? Try to find photographs to accompany your report. The photographs could show the person your report is about, show her working, or show the work she has created.

4. Demonstrate your own artwork. Examples might be pottery, photography, weaving, baskets, or sketches.

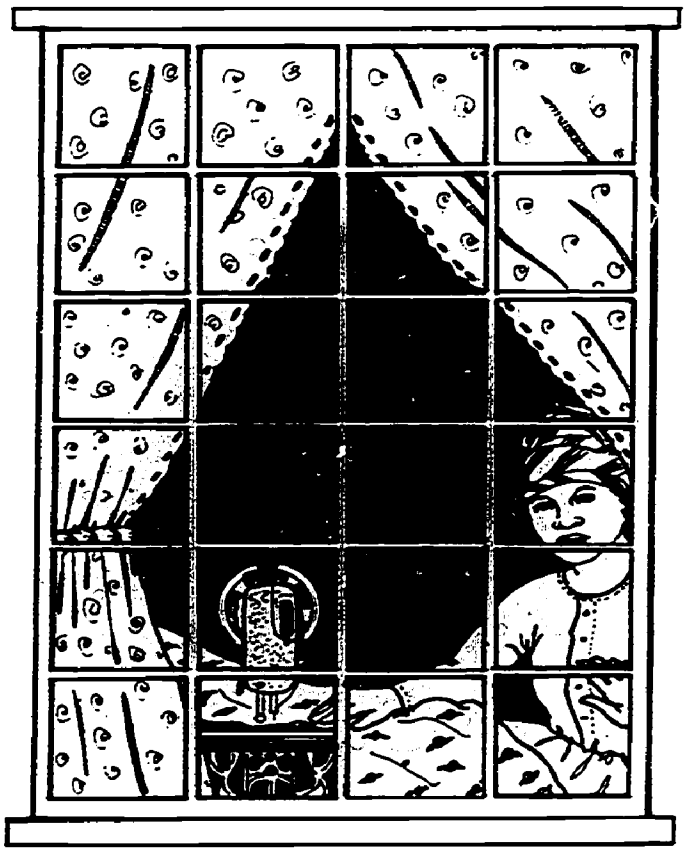


# NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN AND ART

| | POTTERY | BASKET MAKING | WEAVING |
|---|---|---|---|
| What did Native Americans use these for? | | | |
| What were some of the European influences on Native American craft forms? | | | |
| Identify some of the materials used to make these craft forms. | | | |
| What do you like or dislike about each of them? | | | |

# UNIT 2

## Southern Women
## 1820-1860



**SOUTHERN WOMEN**
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**We wish to express gratitude to Fannie Smith, Berkeley Unified School District history teacher, for the idea of the chart, "Woman: The Ideal and the Real"**

## OUTLINE

I. **INTRODUCTION:** Woman—The Ideal and the Real

- A. Teacher introduces the chart
- B. Students fill in the first category, called Your "Ideal Woman"

II. **BLACK SLAVE WOMEN**

- A. Teacher uses background information to introduce the topic
- B. Students read "Sing Together, Children"
- C. Class discussion on "Sing Together, Children"
- D. Students do written assignment of story
- E. Students fill in second category of chart

III. **SOUTHERN WHITE WOMEN**

- A. Teacher uses background information to introduce the topic
- B. Students read "The Diary of Olivia Crawford"
- C. Class discussion on "The Diary of Olivia Crawford"
- D. Teacher reads "Mary Lou Wingate, Southern Matron"
- E. Class discussion on "Mary Lou Wingate, Southern Matron"
- F. Students fill in third category of chart
- G. Teacher assigns oral history project

IV. **SOUTHERN WOMEN AND RESISTANCE**

- A. Teacher uses background material to introduce this topic
- B. Readings on resistance
  1. Students read "Harriet Tubman, the Moses of Her People"
  2. Class discussion on "Harriet Tubman, the Moses of Her People"
  3. Students read "Fight, and If You Can't Fight, Kick"
  4. Class discussion on "Fight, and If You Can't Fight, Kick"
  5. Students read "The Grimké Letters"
  6. Class discussion on "The Grimké Letters"
- C. Role-playing activity

V. **COMPLETION OF UNIT**

- A. Class discussion of oral histories
- B. Class discussion of chart, "Woman: The Ideal and the Real"

VI. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## GOALS

Students will learn:

1. The roles that mid-19th century black slave women played within the slave culture and the institution of slavery.
2. The roles white Southern women played within the plantation system of the mid-19th century.
3. The relationship between the institution of patriarchy and the institution of slavery.
4. The relationship between the image of the Southern Lady and the contemporary image of the "ideal woman."

## OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

1. Recognize the effects of slavery on black women.
2. Recognize the effects of slavery on white Southern women.
3. Contrast the myth of the Southern Lady with the reality of her life.
4. Recognize the important part that black women played in black culture.
5. Identify the relationship between the status of women in this period and the status of slaves.
6. Identify the relationship between the myth of the Southern Lady and the contemporary image of the "ideal woman."

# SLAVE WOMEN

## NOTE TO TEACHERS

The Teacher Background section is to be used as information for the teacher, not as a student reading. It should be used both in the course of class discussion and in introducing the student activities. Ideally, teachers should give a short introduction from this material, and then, using the student activities, emphasize the key concepts. They are:

1. The significant ways in which slavery affected black women
2. The ways in which black women were valued by the slave community
3. The ways in which black culture helped to sustain black women
4. The ordinary and extraordinary ways in which slave women resisted slavery

**We only briefly mention the sexual relationship between slave women and white men, because we feel the teacher should have a choice in deciding whether or not the information is appropriate for students at the eighth grade level.**

# SLAVE WOMEN

Although the black woman, like the black man, was brought to America to work in the fields, she was also brought to perform specifically female functions. If she was a field slave, she was expected to work as hard as any man. However, her most important function, once the slave trade came under heavy attack, was her capacity to produce more slaves. As a breeder, the slave woman could expect to live a short life, punctuated by pregnancies, miscarriages and stillbirths. If her child did live, she often suffered the agony of having it sold away from her. Even if she was allowed to keep her child, she had no say in its future, for the child belonged to her master. Whatever her disposition, the slave mother must have suffered greatly, knowing that her children would be slaves.

Though breeding was extremely important for the "production" of slaves, the pregnant slave woman received little care. She worked in the fields from sunup to sundown, had a short time off for delivery and recovery and nursed her child as she worked in the fields. When the child was weaned, it was cared for by "aunties"—black women on the plantation who were too old to work. The slave mother's contact with her own children was limited by her work in the fields.

Slaves who worked primarily within the "Big House" were called house slaves, and though they might eat better than their counterparts, the field slaves, they often had little family life. Some had to sleep near their mistress so that they could attend to her needs; others took care of the mistress' children. The result was that house slave women had very little time to spend with their husbands and children. In addition, the children of many house slaves were taken from them at a young age, so that they would not interfere with their mother's work. And always the house slave woman was under the watchful eye of the master and mistress.

For both house slaves and field slaves, the extended family structure, which was very much alive in Africa, served an important purpose. An extended family structure considers not only parents and children but also aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins important parts of the family. Many slave children survived only because they were looked after by grannies and aunties while their parents were working in the house or the fields. Many a slave wife or husband whose partner or children were sold was sustained by aunties. The extended family structure continues to play an important role in the black community today.

Slave women were also used by white men for sexual pleasure, a task which ladies were not supposed to endure since they were considered pure. The mulattos who sprung from these unions often became the house slaves and were looked at by the plantation masters as superior to field slaves. One result of this division between slaves, based on the presence of white blood, was that mulatto women were considered by whites to be beautiful, while darker-skinned black women were not. Since beauty in the Old South was considered to be a woman's most important attribute, and since standards of beauty were based on the image of the alabaster lady, the black woman was not only physically

abused but psychologically abused as well. Her dignity as a person, however, was greatly enhanced by the slave culture, of which she was a vital part, and by the nature of the slave family.

Of course, slave women resisted slavery. Some, like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, are well known for their resistance, but they are not the only ones. Some slave women were runaway slaves and some mammies and aunties poisoned their masters. Most important, the slave woman resisted slavery by preserving black culture, by teaching her children how to survive as slaves yet retain their humanity, and by keeping alive the hope of freedom.

In spite of the many emotional and physical traumas connected with motherhood, most slave women were deeply involved with their children, and in the few hours they had with them they tried to give their children laughter, as well as sustenance and instruction. They managed to tell their children stories, sing songs to them and make little gifts for them. Because there were so many dangers, though, slave parents had to be severe with their children. For example, slave children were taught never to talk too much around white people, for what they might say could cause someone to get a beating or to be killed. Slave mothers taught their children to be cautious so that they might survive as slaves, but they also taught them self-respect.

Because the resourcefulness of the slave wife was as important as that of her husband, the black woman shared the responsibility of running the household with the black man. Perhaps this sharing of responsibilities between husband and wife was also a remnant of African culture, where women had always worked and had much influence in family matters. This sharing of responsibility was quite different from the concept of the *ideal marriage* between whites, in which the wife was not expected to be concerned with basic problems like having enough to eat. Black wives and husbands had to cooperate with each other if they were to survive. So women as well as men cultivated their own gardens, collected berries and herbs and made their own furniture. Slave women were also particularly important to their communities as midwives and doctors.

In addition to being field workers and breeders, black women performed duties that were essential to the maintenance of the image of the Southern Lady. If the "lady" was to be delicate and alabaster, then the slave woman would have to perform the arduous tasks necessary to maintain the household. The slave woman worked as a wet nurse, nursemaid, cook, housekeeper, seamstress, etc.—all of the tasks that were relegated to women in the 19th century South. Though it is clear that plantation mistresses worked very hard to maintain their households, it would have been impossible to maintain the myth of the Southern Lady without slave women to perform the necessary physical labor.

# SING TOGETHER, CHILDREN

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The teacher should introduce the material on Slave Women, and then the students should read the story aloud. The story is divided into two parts. The first part describes the life of a field slave woman and the second part describes the life of a house slave woman. If the teacher does not have enough time to do both parts, (s)he may concentrate on only one part.

Here are some terms and questions that the teacher should discuss in relation to Part I of "Sing Together, Children."

A. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| plantation | field slave | extended family structure |
| fable | culture | breeder woman |
| spiritual | alabaster | |

B. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. The cover illustration is based on an old photograph of slaves. What does it tell you about the way slaves related to each other? about the way slaves lived?
2. How did the concept of the slave as property affect Lucinda's family?
3. What were the benefits of the extended family structure to the slave woman?
4. What were some of the different tasks that field slave women performed?
5. Discuss some important ideas that Lucinda's mother communicated to her in this story.
7. In what ways did slave women resist slavery?

Here are some terms and questions that the teacher should discuss with the students in relation to Part II of "Sing Together, Children."

A. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

house slave corn shucking jumping the broom work song

B. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. What does the illustration at the beginning of Part II tell you about Lucinda's childhood?
2. How did being a house slave affect Lucinda's relationship with her family?
3. What were the advantages and disadvantages of being a house slave?
4. What was Lucinda's relationship with Big Missy?
5. How did being a slave affect Lucinda's sense of herself as a woman?
6. What is the meaning of the spiritual "Sing Together, Children" that Aunt Sally sings?
7. Why was learning to read and write forbidden to slaves?
8. In what ways did slave women resist slavery?

# SOUTHERN WHITE WOMEN

During the time when slavery was at its height, approximately 1820-1850, there existed in the South both the *myth* and the *reality* of women's lives. The myth demanded that women be extremely feminine, delicate, morally pure, beautiful, innocent, and dependent on their husbands. This myth put women on a pedestal and allowed the society to use them as beautiful symbols of a man's wealth. The patriarchal system supported by slavery made this myth possible. It was necessary to have women slaves in order for the myth of the Southern Lady to be perpetuated. The following description defines this ideal woman:

> *. . . a Southern matron is ever idolized and almost worshipped by her dependents, and beloved by her children, to whom no word ever sounds half so sweet as "mother" and for whom no place possesses one-half the charms of home.*
>
> Daniel R. Hundley
> *Social Relations in Our Southern States*
> As quoted in *The Southern Lady*,
> Anne Firor Scott

The patriarchal system and the plantation system of slavery were based on the same principle. Just as a woman was to obey her father or her husband, because man, by nature, was superior to her, so was a slave to submit to his/her master. In return for her obedience, the white woman would be protected, even adulated by the patriarch, and the slave would be protected, clothed and fed by the kind master. As George Fitzhugh, one of the South's leading proponents of the patriarchal model and the plantation system of slavery, put it:

> *[a woman's] weakness is her strength, and her true art is to cultivate and improve that weakness. Woman naturally shrinks from public gaze, and from the struggle and competition of life . . . . in truth, woman, like children, has but one right and that is the right of protection. The right to protection involves the obligation to obey. A husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every woman. . .*
>
> George Fitzhugh
> *Sociology for the South*
> As quoted in *The Southern Lady*,
> Anne Firor Scott

Many Southern men saw the plantation system of slavery as an excellent societal model, since each plantation could be virtually a self-sufficient community. But the independence of this unit could not be maintained without the arduous tasks necessary to the maintenance of a household. Men, as patriarchs, relegated these tasks to women, just as they relegated to slaves the task of producing crops for profit. Each plantation would ideally be the picture of a harmonious micro-society, at the head of which would be the patriarch. And each man then could be viewed as the lord of his household, whatever its size.

In spite of women's importance in running the plantation, the image of the strong, self-sufficient patriarch demanded that women be denied recognition for the work they did. As managers of large plantations if they were wealthy, or as wives of poor farmers if they were not, they were responsible for feeding, clothing and taking care of their families. In the largely agricultural South, that meant they either supervised the production of or themselves produced the necessities of life. Although white women of every class worked hard, the image of the "ideal woman" insisted they did not work, and thus devalued their work.

The image of the "ideal woman" could not have survived if plantation mistresses had not had slave women to do the hard physical work necessary to maintaining a household. As proponents of the patriarchal plantation system often noted, this model of society could not last without the institution of slavery.

In order to maintain the image of the "lady" and hence the image of the patriarch, the patriarchal system denied women, as it did slaves, political or economic rights. While the slave was seen as chattel, white women were considered to be the prized, well-kept, beautiful possessions of first their father, then their husband. The following is a list of restrictions imposed upon women:

Women had no legal existence apart from their husbands
Women could not sign contracts
Women did not have any property rights
Women could not speak in public
Women had no legal claim to their children
Women had to have permission from their husbands to buy anything or to travel
Divorce was granted only in extreme cases, such as desertion or non-support
Women were denied an education

Since the slaves were considered a part of a white woman's family, plantation and town women had the added responsibility of administering the slaves' lives. They allocated work, gave them rations, attended to their psychological and medical needs, and guided their behavior. Women who were left with this constant and arduous responsibility of managing slaves developed a resentment that caused friction between themselves and the often recalcitrant slaves. In addition, the sexual life between plantation masters and their female slaves resulted in a mutual resentment between slave women and white women, as well as a less than satisfactory family life for both women. The effect was that some white women saw a connection between the improvement of their lives and the abolition of slavery. A Southern matron suggests: "I often said to my husband that the freedom of Negroes was a freedom to me."

The abolitionist movement became equated with the changing role of women. One Southern woman said: "There is no slave like a wife." Many Southerners believed that with the end of slavery would come the downfall of the family and the end of society. When the movement became threatening from the outside, adherence to the system of slavery from inside the South became more strict.

The myth of the Southern Lady was supported not only by the institution of slavery, but by European history and religion as well. Women were taught

as children the ideals of perfection and submission. They learned to be dependent on their mate, to cope with human relationships, and to suffer in silence. There was an emphasis on women's behavior, rather than on their intellectual development. The history of this behavior can be traced back to medieval times when women were supposed to be pure, soft, and spiritual, and deny their intelligence.

From a letter to a newly married daughter in 1835, we see that a role was to ". . . never oppose her husband, never to show displeasure, no matter what he might do. A man has a right to expect his wife to place perfect confidence in his judgment and to believe that he always knows best." Although these ideas were used in both the North and the South, they became extreme in the South because of the plantation system of slavery.

Religious doctrine reinforced the values of the myth of the Southern Lady. Religion confirmed her inferiority to men. Men were supposed to be submissive to God, but had the power over women, children, and slaves. Husbands were considered to be Lord and Master. "Tis man's to act, tis woman's to endure." "Her life was one long act of devotion — devotion to God, devotion to her husband, devotion to her children, to her servants, to the poor, to humanity." There was tremendous pressure on women to live up to these expectations. They were made to feel inadequate if dissatisfied with their God-given roles. The ultimate effect of not complying with these expectations was to be rejected, and unloved.

Even with these strains on women, they did not openly complain:

Have you asked her whether she is satisfied. . .?

(an imaginary husband answers)

> *No, but I know she is. She is too amiable to desire what would make me unhappy, and too judicious to wish to step beyond the sphere of sex. I will never consent to have our peace disturbed by such discussions.*
>
> Margaret Fuller
> As quoted in *The Southern Lady*,
> Anne Firor Scott

The center of women's lives was their families. Women were expected to marry, the only other alternative being the unhappy life of a spinster. As a spinster, one could live with relatives as a governess or housekeeper, and basically provide unpaid labor. Girls married young, from the age of fourteen or fifteen, and could continue to have children for thirty years. Their activities included running the household, caring for the children, carrying out religious duties, and visiting. Only a few exceptional women could afford to travel, buy new books, or have any leisure time. Most women could look forward to "being confined to the house until spring by bad weather and sickly children." Imagine the shock of a Scarlett O'Hara going from the courting stage to the responsibility of managing a household at sixteen or seventeen years old.

The reality of white women's lives was that they worked hard and long hours. They were taught at a young age that their work, though not as important as men's, gave meaning to their lives. A yeoman farmer's wife worked with her hands; a poor white woman kept the family going while her husband hunted or fished; a plantation wife helped to supervise slaves, gardened, sewed, spun, wove and took care of the sick; and an urban woman supervised

fewer slaves, managed farms, gardened, and sewed. And all of the above women mothered up to eleven children. Still the society believed that women needed the direction and protection of a man.

Although the "ideal woman" could possibly exist without the benefits of wealth, slavery, and adherence to strict Anglo-Saxon norms of beauty and culture, the style of the Southern Lady remained important long after the abolition of slavery and the transformation of the plantation system. Today, poor women as well as wealthy women are expected to be feminine creatures of leisure, and black women as well as white women are judged in terms of their adherence to limited cultural standards of beauty and behavior. Woman is still expected to be *charmingly feminine and attractive*, to be an inspiration to her family, to raise model children, and to be supportive to her husband and community, whatever her personality or circumstances.

Many Southern women in the 19th century tried to follow this ideal because it was the social norm; these were the roles that they were raised to play, and they had no means for economic support, protection or companionship.

This idea of what a woman should be like completed the picture of the patriarchal society. This same self-concept that put Southern women up on a pedestal also enslaved them: kept them subordinate to men, uneducated, and without political or economic rights.

# THE DIARY OF OLIVIA CRAWFORD

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Ideally, the teacher should introduce the material on Southern White Women, then the students should read the story aloud.

Here are some terms and questions that the teacher should discuss with the students.

A. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

| | |
|---|---|
| myth | abolitionist |
| patriarchy | feminine |
| ideal | social class |
| symbol | plantation system |
| pedestal | |

B. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. What does the cover illustration tell you about the roles Olivia Crawford expected to play?
2. What are some of the tasks that Olivia Crawford performs in her household and on the plantation?
3. What does Olivia Crawford believe is the most important ingredient for a successful marriage?
4. To whom does Olivia feel she owes her first duty?
5. What does Olivia's husband do in the story?
6. What was Olivia's education like? Did it prepare her for married life?
7. Why does Olivia feel that her sister is still not married?
8. What opinion does Olivia have of her slaves?
9. How does her frustration from her inability to live up to her ideal affect her relationship with her slaves?
10. What is Olivia's image of an "ideal woman"?
11. Contrast Olivia's view of her life with Lucinda's view of her own life. Contrast their views of each other's lives.

# MARY LOU WINGATE, SOUTHERN MATRON

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

After the students read "The Diary of Olivia Crawford," the teacher should read outloud to the students "Mary Lou Wingate, Southern Matron."

Ask the students to answer these questions:

1. What kinds of *responsibilities* does Mary Lou Wingate have as the wife of a Southern plantation owner?
2. How would you describe a Southern matron?
3. Does her role appeal to you? Why or why not?

At the completion of this activity, students should fill in their list of roles under Southern White Women in the chart, "Woman: The Ideal and the Real."

# *Mary Lou Wingate, Southern Matron*

She was at work by candlelight,
She was at work in the dead of night,
Smoothing out troubles and healing schisms
And doctoring phthisics and rheumatisms,
Guiding the cooking and watching the baking,
The sewing, the soap-and-candle-making,
The brewing, the darning, the lady-daughters,
The births and deaths in the negro-quarters,
Seeing that Suke had some new, strong shoes
And Joe got a week in the calaboose,
While Dicey's Jacob escaped a whipping
And the jellybag dripped with its proper dripping,
And the shirts and estrangements were neatly mended,
And all of the tasks that never ended.

Her manner was gracious but hardly fervent
And she seldom raised her voice to a servant.
She was often mistaken, not often blind,
And she knew the whole duty of womankind,
To take the burden and have the power
And seem like the well-protected flower,
To manage a dozen industries
With a casual gesture in scraps of ease,
To hate the sin and to love the sinner
And to see that the gentlemen got their dinner
Ready and plenty and piping-hot
Whether you wanted to eat or not.
And always, always, to have the charm
That makes the gentlemen take your arm
But never the bright, unseemly spell
That makes strange gentlemen love too well,
Once you were married and settled down
With a suitable gentleman of your own.

And when that happened, and you had bred
The requisite children, living and dead,
To pity the fool and comfort the weak
And always let the gentlemen speak
To succor your love from deep-struck roots
When gentlemen went to bed in their boots,
And manage a gentleman's whole plantation
In the manner befitting your female station.

From *John Brown's Body* by Stephen Vincent Benét

This was the creed that her mother taught her
And the creed that she taught to every daughter.
She knew her Bible—and how to flirt
With a swansdown fan and a brocade skirt.
For she trusted in God but she liked formalities
And the world and Heaven were both realities.

—In Heaven, of course, we should all be equal,
But, until we came to that golden sequel,
Gentility must keep to gentility
Where God and breeding had made things stable,
While the rest of the cosmos deserved civility
But dined in its boots at the second-table.
This view may be reckoned a trifle narrow,
But it had the driving force of an arrow,
And it helped Mary Lou to stand up straight,
For she was gentle, but she could hate
And she hated the North with the hate of Jael
When the dry hot hands went seeking the nail,
The terrible hate of women's ire,
The smoky, the long-consuming fire.
The Yankees were devils, and she could pray,
For devils, no doubt, upon Judgment Day,
But now in the world, she would hate them still
And send the gentlemen out to kill.

The gentlemen killed and the gentlemen died,
But she was the South's incarnate pride
That mended the broken gentlemen
And sent them out to the war again,
That kept the house with the men away
And baked the bricks where there was no clay,
Made courage from terror and bread from bran
And propped the South on a swansdown fan
Through four long years of ruin and stress,
The pride—and the deadly bitterness.

# TEACHER INTRODUCTION TO ORAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT

The purpose of the oral history section is to help students become aware of the process of history, and to understand that everyone shares in the making of history. Oral history taking is particularly important to this unit since one of its major concepts is that ideas about women developed in the Pre-Civil War South have been incorporated into the contemporary American image of the "ideal woman."

Students will interview their mothers about their mothers' mothers' expectations for their daughters. They will interview their mothers about what really happened in their own lives, and what their mothers' expectations are for their daughters. We are thus trying to cover a three generational span.

Through this assignment, students may discover how ingrained the concept of the "ideal woman" has become. Students will be able to compare, as well, the similarities and differences between what women expect in their lives and what actually happens.

Before you give out the oral history assignment, we would like you to explain the relevance of this assignment to the unit. After they are finished with their oral histories, students should complete the chart "Woman: The Ideal and the Real," and keep it for the class discussion at the end of this unit.

# SOUTHERN WOMEN AND RESISTANCE

## NOTE TO TEACHERS

The Teacher Background section is to be used as information for the teacher, not as a student reading. It should be used both in the course of class discussion and in introducing the student activities. Ideally, teachers should give a short introduction from this material and then, using the student activities, emphasize the key concepts. They are:

1. The ordinary and extraordinary ways in which black slave women resisted slavery
2. The relationship between the development of the abolitionist movement and white women's resistance to their own condition

Each of the three selections that are part of this section may also need a short introduction. "Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People" is a biography of this important conductor of the Underground Railroad. It is an excerpt from the book by Ann Petry, herself an important black woman novelist of the 1940's and 1950's. "Fight, and If You Can't Fight, Kick" is an excerpt from a slave narrative. "The Grimké Letters" are fictional letters that we have written, based on actual events in the lives of the Grimké sisters.

Slave women resisted slavery in both ordinary and extraordinary ways. Some extraordinary means of resistance in which slave women took part were open rebellions, individual violence against their masters, and running away. Because groups of slaves were generally isolated from each other, because they had few ways of knowing what was happening outside of their immediate vicinity, and because the plantation system was both repressive and well organized, slave rebellions were not frequent and were doomed to failure. In spite of the consequences, some slaves struck out personally against their masters. House slave women especially were known to poison their masters and mistresses. Individual slaves also sabotaged their master's produce, and arson was a particularly prevalent form of resistance.

Running away was another extraordinary form of resistance. Most runaways were young men, primarily because slave women hesitated to leave their children and taking them on such a journey was an extremely difficult endeavor. Nevertheless, some slave women did run away, and a portion of them were successful. Among the most courageous of these was Harriet Tubman, who was called Moses because she conducted so many slaves from the South to freedom.

By far the most prevalent forms of slave resistance were the ordinary tactics that slaves used in order to survive and hold their own against their masters. Daily, slaves stole, sabotaged equipment and carelessly did their work as acts of resistance. They often feigned illness as well as played dumb in order to trick their masters. Using cunning, intelligence and passive resistance, they managed to create their own world, despite their masters' tactics to completely dominate them. Black slave women were particularly important in helping to maintain the self-respect of the slave community by teaching resistance and cunning to their children and by passing on the culture of black people.

In the 1830's and 1840's, strengthened partially by the public activism of runaway slaves such as Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Ellen Craft, and freed slaves such as Sojourner Truth, the movement against slavery grew. Free black women such as Frances Harper, the poet, and Charlotte Forten, as well as white Northern women, became activists in the abolitionist movement. As a result, these women began to discuss the relationship between the condition of slaves and women's lack of political and social rights. It was this connection that would be the basis for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's attack on slavery and the patriarchal plantation system. As Martha Atkins points out, the structure of the abolitionist movement itself helped to make these women more conscious of their lack of rights.

> *In the 1830's and 1840's, thousands of women and men were drawn into the anti-slavery work. Among these were the women who, moved to horror at slavery, became the first conscious feminists when they found that they could not work against slavery until they first established women's rights to do public work. When the leading male abolitionists met in Philadelphia in 1833 to organize the first anti-slavery society, they permitted a few women to attend, but not to join the society. When the convention adjourned, some twenty women met to form the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society; and within a few years other women were organizing for the same purpose in New York, Boston, and many other New*

> *England towns. Because women were stepping out of their proper place, they aroused an enormous amount of hostility. Their brazen conduct in forming anti-slavery societies was attacked by clergymen, supporters of slavery, and male abolitionists alike. The women's meetings were often interrupted by mob violence. In 1833 at a national convention of American Anti-Slavery Women in Philadelphia, hundreds of women adopted a resolution justifying women's right to take part in the activities of all anti-slavery groups, while crowds of angry men surged around the building, tried to force their way in, and chanted, "burn down the hall." Abolitionist women were ridiculed when they appeared on speakers' platforms and [were] not accepted as delegates at anti-slavery conventions; and within a short time most of the women active in abolitionist work began speaking out for their own rights also.*
>
> From *The Hidden History of the Female*, Martha Atkins

Most women in the South did not publicly oppose slavery. Some noted in their dairies how this institution adversely affected their lives. Some did participate in milder forms of resistance, such as teaching slaves to read, preventing severe punishments and even helping slaves to escape on the Underground Railroad. Many, though, were staunch supporters of slavery.

Two sisters from the South, however, were among the first female public activists against slavery. Angelina and Sarah Grimké became enthusiastic opponents of slavery, and in the process helped to open the way to public speaking for women. They were members of the highest level of Southern society and their resistance to slavery, as well as their speaking in public, resulted in a deluge of protest from the Church as well as society. Clergymen called their activities "unchristian" and "unwomanly."

As a result of the criticism their anti-slavery work aroused, the Grimkés began to see a connection between the issues of slavery and the status of women. It is ironic though strangely fitting that Sarah Grimké, a woman of the South's elite, published the first major work by an American feminist. In *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* (1838) she attacked male supremacy.

> *[Man] has done all he could to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior . . . . I ask no favors for my sex. I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed us to occupy.*

As a result of their experience in fighting slavery, many women, like Angelina and Sarah Grimké, became feminists. Martha Atkins succinctly summarizes the effect this political activism had on the development of the women's rights movement.

*From the ranks of abolitionist women who began to follow the lead of the Grimkés and speak out in public against slavery, and who were also denounced, threatened and mobbed, came the leaders of the organized women's rights movement. It is no wonder that women became aware of their own lack of freedom while fighting for the abolition of slavery, for at every step of the way, they found themselves in opposition to the traditions in which women were bred and bound. "We have good cause to be grateful to the slave," wrote the feminist and abolitionist Abby Kelley, "for the benefit we have received to ourselves, in working for him. In striving to strike his irons off, we found most surely that we were manacled ourselves." Women had only to substitute the word "husband" or "father" for the word "slave-owner" to see themselves as slaves; they knew what it was to be held in legal and social bondage and to be refused basic rights men claimed.*

*The abolitionist and feminist movements were closely allied for a quarter of a century. The anti-slavery campaign drew thousands of women into a radical movement, and through their involvement many discovered a series of grievances aganist men and began to develop a philosophy of their position in society and of their basic rights. Women first won the right to speak in public by speaking out against slavery. The abolitionist movement furnished the feminists with a militant ideology of emancipation and with the political knowledge to begin fighting for their own equality, for it was as abolitionists that women learned to organize, to hold meetings, to carry out petition campaigns. This relationship between the anti-slavery and the women's rights movement helps explain why an organized feminist movement began in the United States instead of elsewhere. Concern over the status of women was fairly widespread in England and Western Europe, but it was the fight for the emancipation of women in the United States that ignited the international feminist movement. From the United States the rights movement spread to England and Europe and later other parts of the world.*

From *The Hidden History of the Female*, Martha Atkins

# HARRIET TUBMAN, THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Ideally, the teacher should introduce the material on Resistance, then the students should read the story aloud. Here are some terms and questions that the teacher should discuss in relation to this story.

A. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

Underground Railroad
fugitive
Quaker

B. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. Why was Harriet Tubman called the Moses of her people?
2. Why did she carry pictures with her to Boston?
3. Why was it important for her to make a speech at the anti-slavery meeting?
4. What were some of the dangers that Harriet Tubman encountered while conducting slaves on the Underground Railroad?
5. Why did Harriet Tubman hope the man she saw was a Quaker?
6. How did Harriet Tubman's behavior go against the image of the "ideal woman"?

# FIGHT, AND IF YOU CAN'T FIGHT, KICK

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did the slave narrator of this story call her mother a captain?
2. Why did Fannie have to be whipped, and why did she refuse to be whipped?
3. What does this narrative tell you about the slave family?
4. In what ways did Fannie resist slavery?
5. What philosophy did she pass on to her daughter?
6. In what ways does Fannie's behavior go against the image of the "ideal woman"? Compare her behavior to that of contemporary black women activists working against sexism and racism.

# THE GRIMKÉ LETTERS

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Here are some terms and some questions that the teacher should discuss with the students.

### A. IMPORTANT CONCEPTS and words to be emphasized

| | |
|---|---|
| resistance | reformer |
| protect | abolitionist |
| struggle | malingering |

### B QUESTIONS to facilitate class discussion

1. What do the letters between Mrs. Grimké and Sarah reveal about why Sarah and Angelina left the South? Do you think they did the right thing? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think Sarah and Angelina Grimké were the only wealthy Southern white women to oppose so openly slavery and women's inferior position in society?
3. In what ways do you think Southern white women might have resisted slavery without being so obvious as to get in trouble?
4. What evidence of resisting slavery and/or women's inferior position can you find in Lucinda's and Olivia's stories?
5. Make a list of ways in which slave women resisted slavery.
6. In what ways did the Grimké sisters go against the concept of the "ideal woman"? How would you compare their activity to the activities of contemporary women's rights activists?

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

Role-playing activity: *The Relationship Between the Patriarchal Plantation System and Slavery*

The purpose of this assignment is to help students to empathize with the positions of black and white, male and female Southerners around the issues of slavery and patriarchy, and thus see the relationship between these two institutions. In addition, the skits give students the opportunity to do limited research on these issues.

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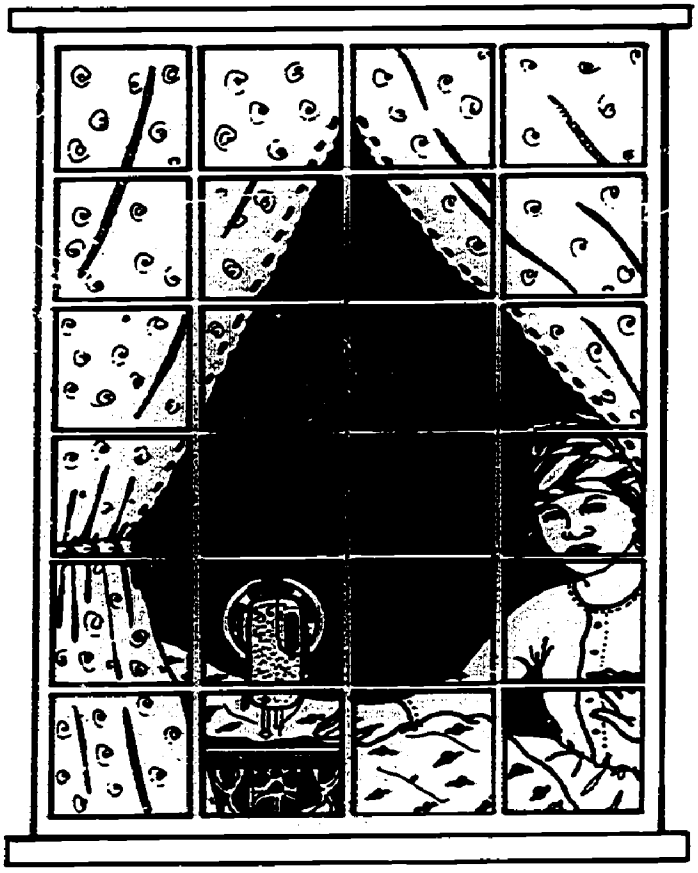
# UNIT 2

## Southern Women
## 1820-1860



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# Woman: The Ideal and the Real

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

Women in our society are expected to play many roles. Although people often disagree as to what these roles should be, there are some ideas about how an "ideal woman" should look and behave that most people share. Many of these ideas come from the standards set for women in the South during the time when slavery was at its height. Any Southern woman, whether she was black or white, knew that the closer she came to being the "ideal woman," the more people would be pleased with her.

In order to understand what it was like to be a woman in the South during slavery, we need to understand two things: 1) how the "ideal woman" was supposed to look and act; and 2) why it was hard for most women to live up to that ideal. This chart will help you to see how your ideas and your mother's ideas about what is expected of women relate to the Southern concept of the "ideal woman." As you do the readings throughout this unit, you will be able to fill in the chart.

# WOMAN: THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

To prepare the chart:

1. First, fill in the first category, called Your "Ideal Woman." Make a list of all the roles you think an "ideal woman" should play. In this activity, a "role" means a part played in real life.

2. After you read the story "Sing Together, Children," make a list of the many roles slave women played in the story.

3. After you read the story "Diary of Olivia Crawford," make a list of the many roles white plantation women played in the story.

4. After you finish the oral history section, make a list of the many roles that your mother expected to play, and then make a list of the roles she did play.

5. After you have completed the chart, analyze the lists you have made under the five different categories in terms of the discussion questions at the end of the unit.

# Woman:
# The Ideal and the Real

| Your "Ideal Woman" | Slave Women | White Women on Plantations | Your Mother's "Ideal Woman | What Your Mother Actually Did |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

# *Sing Together, Children**

## *The Story of a Slave Girl, Lucinda*

### PART I

I was born, about 15 years ago, right after Marster Phipps bought my mammy from Old Marster Davis across the river. Marster Phipps didn't buy my pappy, Luke, and my older brother, Jim. Mammy was afraid she might never see them again, so she called me Lucinda after my pappy. Since I was born, I never have been off this plantation, but I hear white folks say we are in Dalton County, Georgia, so I guess I was born in Georgia.

Every so often, my pappy gets a pass from Marster Davis and walks a way to come and visit us. My mammy says at least we're lucky to know where he is and to see him. A lot of slaves don't know where their families are. Mammy worries that old Davis might sell pappy one day. But she says Marster Phipps isn't doing us any favor to let pappy come see her. Marster wants her to have lots of children so he can have more slaves. And he knows Mammy doesn't favor anyone but my pappy. Since we've been here at Marster Phipps, Mammy has had four babies. Two died because she was too weak from work. Then there is my little brother Toby and Mammy is still nursing the new baby, Bill.

There are about 70 field slaves here. My mammy is a field slave too, and she picks cotton every day from sunup to sundown, so I guess she nursed me, like she's nursing Bill, while she worked in the fields. Mammy gets angry because she's still expected to pick the same amount of cotton as the men. She isn't even healed from childbirth yet and she has to stop to nurse her baby. But she speaks her mind only to me because the overseer, Mr. Blount, doesn't take too kindly to grumbling.

As far back as I can remember, Auntie Juba took care of me and Toby. She was too old to pick cotton anymore: I guess she was about forty or so, so the white folks gave her the job of

* Written by *In Search of Our Past* staff. Based on accounts from this period as cited in the bibliography for this unit.

minding us slave children while our mammies and pappies were out in the field. I remember Missy Phipps telling her she better take good care of us, since we were their property.

Even when we were little, we children had chores to do, like feeding the chickens, and Auntie Juba would make sure we did them. She would also let us play some, though. One game I especially liked was called "Liza Jane." We children would join hands in a circle and one child whom we would call Miss Sue would be in the center. We would sing:

Somebody's in your cellar, Miss Sue
Miss Sue, Miss Sue
Somebody's in your cellar
Miss Sue—Liza Jane.

Then Miss Sue would have to dance her favorite step. We slave children liked to dance, and we had lots of steps like The Monkey, The Chicken and The Hustle. My favorite step was The Monkey, and when I was chosen to be Miss Sue, the other children would sing:

Did you ever see a monkey motion
Miss Sue, Miss Sue?
Did you ever see a monkey motion
Miss Sue—Liza Jane.

Auntie Juba was a great storyteller too. She told us stories about Africa and about John the Conqueror, a slave who was always outwitting the marsters. We would laugh and giggle as she acted out the parts. She would also tell us stories by using different animals as characters. These stories would let us know that no matter what our position in life, we were all the same. Auntie Juba was so good at her stories that even the white children came to hear her, and everyone called her the Storyteller.

Auntie Juba was kind to us but one thing she didn't allow—and that was for us to talk in front of white folks. She said that we might say something without knowing it that might cause the

white folks to think some slave was up to something, so I learned never to let white folks know what I was thinking and to talk as little as possible. Sometimes that makes them think we are dumb, but we know what we are doing. Auntie Juba is dead now, but we children never will forget her.

At night my mammy would bring me and Toby back to the cabin we shared with Mary, another slave. Our cabin was only one room and had a lot of cracks, so it did get cold sometimes in the winter. My pappy is real good with wood so when he came to visit us, he would try to fix the cracks. The weather always seemed to stay ahead of him, though. One time, he made me a real pretty doll from some wood. I sure do cherish that doll. I used to keep it near my pallet at night and I still have it. Daddy was real good on the banjo too, and he taught me a little bit about singing.

Every night when Mammy and Mary came home they would be tired, with sore feet, from picking that cotton all day, but Mammy would cook dinner and Mary would work on a quilt that she was making from every scrap of cloth she could collect. I can still remember her bent over that quilt and the pleasure she got from making it and from teaching me how to sew.

Mary was a willful woman whose husband was sold away because she just wouldn't behave. She never did get over that and used to pine for him. When she lived in our cabin, she helped Mammy with the patch of land we had outside where we raised collards and turnips. Slaves could only work for themselves on Sunday, and though Mammy and Mary would be tired that day, they would tend their garden because the ration of meal and bacon the overseer gave us field slaves could barely keep a soul alive, far less keeping us healthy.

Mary was real good with herbs too. She collected them in the woods and used them to tend the sick among us slaves. Since we worked so hard and long, we were always sick. Mary was always being called to tend to somebody and sometimes she would take me along. She taught me something about what was good for sore feet or rheumatism.

Mary was a midwife, too, and she used to brag that she seldom lost a baby whose mammy drank her herb teas. Babies were always being born stillborn since their mammies had to work so hard. So some people said that since Mary's patients did not die, she could cast spells with her herbs and work hoodoo, but I never did see her to do any hoodoo. Maybe Marster believed it because he never did force her to take another husband. One night Mary just took off and we never saw her again. The dogs didn't find her and though we slaves had our rations cut by the Marster, we were glad because maybe she made it to the North. She left that quilt she was always making with my mother.

Before we went to bed, my mother would braid my hair and tell us stories. Her stories always had a lesson to them about how to be a good person and yet survive as a slave. One time I asked her how come we black folks were slaves. She looked real sad; then she sat up straight and told me that we were just as good as anybody else and that one day all black folks would be free. She believed, like a lot of other slaves, that we were a chosen people and that Moses would come and lead us out of slavery. Until that day came, though, we had to help one another. Her words make me think of an old song that many of the slaves would sing:

Go down Moses
Way down in Egyptland
Tell Old Pharoah
To let my people go.

I could hear the patteroll* go by as I thought of freedom.

*slave patrol

Sunday was the best day of the week for us. Mammy didn't have to go out to the fields, and the slaves could get together for prayer meeting. It was the only time we could all be together, and it was a time when we exchanged news and enjoyed being with one another. Our Sunday meeting was different from the white folks' meetings where the preacher was always telling us to be good slaves. We had a preacher like them but he just didn't preach to us. His preaching was like singing and we answered him as he preached:

No more auction block for me
No more, no more
No more auction block for me,
Many thousands gone.

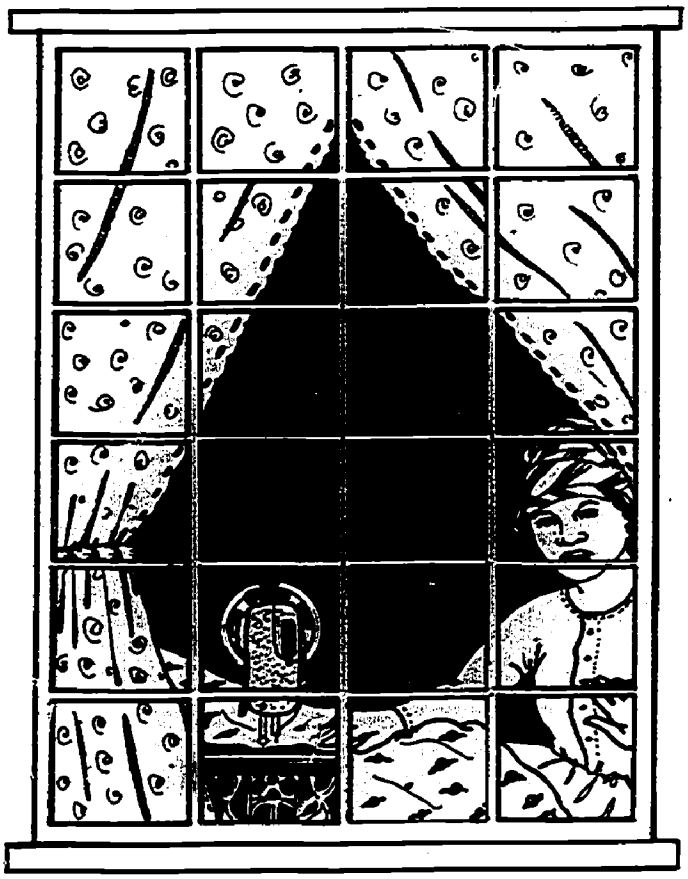
Sometimes we would sing songs that the white folks sure wouldn't have liked, but they expressed just how we felt inside about being slaves. Sometimes we danced as we sang and shuffled our feet in time to our voices, and sometimes the older people had visions about being free. By the time I was seven I realized that prayer meeting with its singing and dancing and its feeling of togetherness and hope was the only thing that kept my mother going throughout the rest of the week. That and the fact that her family was with her.

# *Sing Together, Children*

## *The Story of a Slave Girl, Lucinda*

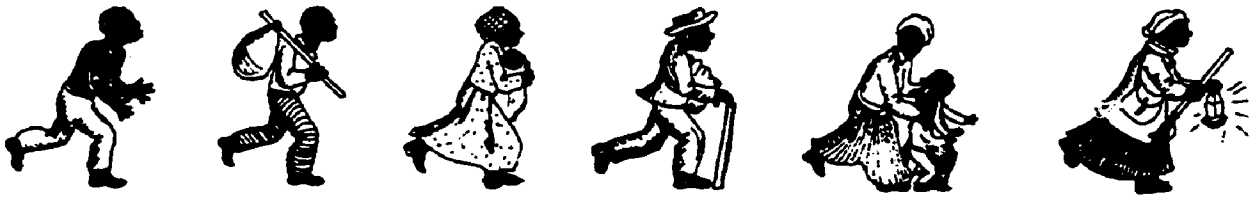
### PART II

When I was 10 years old, my whole life changed. Big Missy heard I was pretty good at sewing. She took me into the Big House to learn to sew as well as her other seamstresses. That meant I wouldn't see my mother and little brothers as much, and that I would have to live with some other house slaves closer to the Big House. It meant that I would eat better and be warmer than the field slaves, but it also meant that I would be under the watchful eye of Missy from dawn till dusk.



At first life was strange in the Big House. There was always so much to do. I helped the cook, Aunt Sally, when I wasn't cutting out cloth or sewing seams. The constant whir of the sewing machines began to give me headaches, and the pushing of the pedals made my feet hurt. I longed for the outdoors where I could run and play every now and then and pretend I was free, even if I wasn't. I almost began to hate sewing after the Christmas holidays when we had to work harder and everyone else was gay. I especially hated it when Big Missy was cross, usually because the Marster had taken off somewhere to hunt, leaving her with everything to manage. Then she would curse and hit us. The only way the other seamstresses and I could keep our pace at the sewing machine during those bad days was by singing together:

"Oh will you wear red? Oh, will you wear red?
Oh, will you wear red, Milly Biggers?"
"I won't wear red,
It's too much lak' Missus' head.
I'll wear me a cotton dress,
Dyed wid copperse an' oak-bark."



I was grateful to have Aunt Sally to teach me how to get along. She was a handsome woman with a beautiful voice and a storeful of wisdom. She taught me how to put biscuits in my pocket so that Missy wouldn't see me, how to use songs so that only other slaves could understand what I was saying and how to soothe my eyes with teas after long hours of sewing. Every now and then I also got to visit my mother and brothers and could bring them some extra rations of food or some warm clothing that Missy no longer needed. In the Big House I sometimes heard conversations too about what was happening outside the plantation. I heard Marster and Missus talk once about Harriet Tubman, called

Moses, a black woman who was leading slaves out of the South. And I made sure to tell my mother, who was hilarious with joy at the news.

I guess my situation could be worse. Still, when I worked at the sewing machine, I wished I was free and making clothes for my own family, who had nothing but rags to wear. As it was, all my labor and skill went to the Big House. I wished I could escape North, but my thoughts on that subject would always be followed by the picture of Louisa, one of the seamstresses, who had tried to escape. She had learned how to write somehow and had written herself a pass. But she was discovered. They branded her forehead with the letter R and sold her little girl away for punishment. Even if I could escape North, I would never see my mammy and pappy again. And I couldn't endure that.

I became a woman when I was thirteen years old and like any young girl began to daydream about young men and think about the way I looked. Here I was sewing fine dresses, and I was dressed in old cotton rags. I resented it. Once I told my mother that I yearned for long straight hair and fine dresses like the little Missy. Never have I seen my mother so angry. She screamed that working in the Big House was beginning to deprive me of my senses. Why, my kinky hair was as good as Little Missy's, whose hair could not even be braided right, and clothes had nothing to do with real worth. She asked me if I'd like to be like Big Missy, who had to manage the plantation for Marster who was always away, but who had to pretend she was weak and stupid to boot. My mother insisted that my pappy thought more of her than

Marster did of Missy and that she sure wouldn't trade his respect for all the fine dresses in Georgia. She screamed she sure would like to be free, really free, not strapped in corsets.

Well, that outburst set me back on my feet; still, I longed for some excitement, some relief from constant work. I daydreamed about the stories Auntie Juba had told us children about Africa, where there was no Big Missy to boss me around. Then, in the fall, Aunt Sal told me about a corn-shucking that old Marster Davis was having at his plantation and that Marster Phipps was letting some of his slaves go, since there was so much corn to be shucked. There would be lots of food and drink, and every slave in the neighborhood would be there.

The corn-shucking was so much fun. We danced the juba to the music of the banjos and everyone sang and worked:

All dem putty gals will be dar,
Shuck dat corn before you eat,
Dey will fix it fer us rare,
Shuck dat corn before you eat,
I know dat supper will be big,
Shuck dat corn before you eat,
I think I smell a fine roast pig,
Shuck dat corn before you eat.
I hope day'll have some whisky dar,
Shuck dat corn before you eat.

When we had to leave, though, our mood was sober, for we knew all that corn we had shucked would not mean we would eat better.

I came back from the corn-shucking to be greeted on Monday by tons of work and a cross Missy, who was irritable because all

the slaves were sleepy. I was singing inside, though, for I had met a slave called Jeb from Mr. Davis' plantation who was attentive to me, and I had seen my father and older brother.

My brother Jim is grown now and he told me he was courting Aramintha, who lives close to my mother's cabin. He said he wanted to jump the broom with her. That was easier said than done. Marster Phipps wasn't interested in having a slave from another plantation take one of his slaves from him, and Jim wanted to live with Aramintha. Jim and Aramintha did jump over the broom, but he is still a slave over at Marster Davis' and she is still here across the river. Jim's got to get a pass to walk miles to see his own wife, and he doesn't think it's going to change any, since Aramintha is big with child, a child that Marster Davis will own. That state of affairs made me think twice about getting to know any slave man who lived on any other plantation, so I didn't encourage Jeb any more.

Sometimes when I am as downhearted as I am today, I try to cheer myself up by remembering my blessings. I am grateful that I am not a breeder woman who would only live a short life after having too many babies, or even a field slave who might be killed by the lash, and I am glad that I have my mammy and pappy. Still, I wonder what I have to look forward to in my life. Will my life be like my mammy's life?

Though she is old and worn, she still has the spirit to say, "Perhaps freedom will come for you, my child, and if not for you, for your children. But it will come." Through the whir of my sewing machine I can hear Aunt Sally's singing, her voice clear and strong as my mother's words:

Sing together, children,
Don't you get weary,
Sing together, children,
Don't you get weary.
Oh, shout together, children,
Don't you get weary,
There's a great camp meeting in the Promised Land.

# *SING TOGETHER, CHILDREN*

A. Can you imagine yourself as a slave? Write a little story about what your day might be like if you were a slave. What are some of the differences between the story you wrote and your real life?

Here are some questions to think about while you are writing your story.

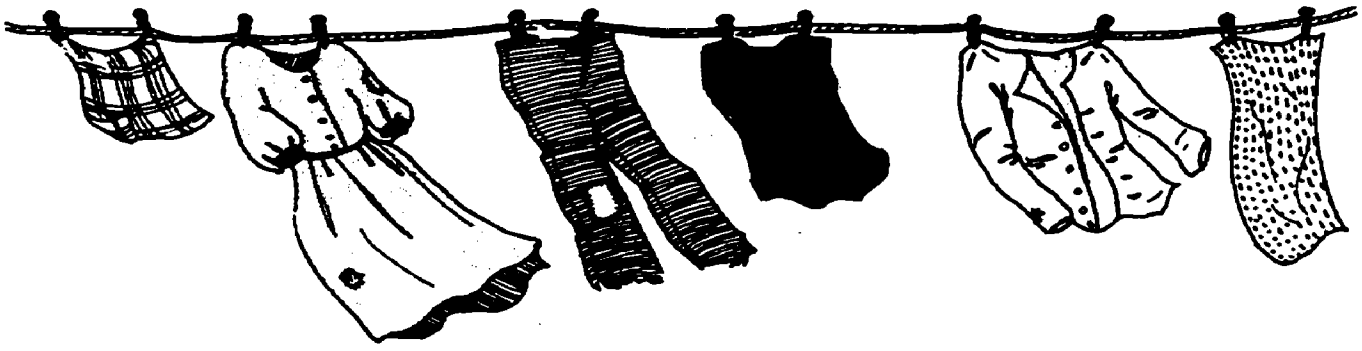
1. What kind of foods do you eat? (Make a list of the foods you ate during the last week. Did you eat any food that could be called soul food?) How often do you eat?

2. Describe the place where you live. What are the differences between your home and the cabins where slaves lived?

3. How much time do you spend working every day? How much time do you spend playing every day?

4. How often do you have money or buy things?

B. Fill in your list of roles under the category Slave Women in the chart, "Woman: The Ideal and the Real."



# *The Diary of Olivia Crawford**

**Felton Plantation, Georgia, 1840**

***March 10th***

This morning I got up late after being up during the night with the baby and her nursemaid, and hurried downstairs to give Joanna, the cook, the order for breakfast. Then I started planning the activities for the day. Charles is away in Savannah and it will be a busy day, since my sister Catherine will be coming to visit me for my birthday and for the Easter season. We had breakfast and prayers and then I got the boys out to town. First I gave my usual orders of the day: what we would have for dinner and what the house slaves were to do for the day. Then I instructed the slaves who spin to prepare a web of cloth for the loom, bacause a whole new set of clothes has to be made for everyone on the plantation. After lunch I spent time with Louise. She is such a precious baby and was not as cranky as she had been last night. Then I spent the afternoon supervising Eunice in airing and cleaning out the guest room for Catherine. After dinner I talked with the boys and wrote a letter to Charles. Only now do I realize that I have not yet started the new quilt for the fall.

***March 12th***

The last two days have been so busy, what with overseeing the spinning and the beginning of spring housecleaning. All of the carpets had to be beaten and hogs had to be slaughtered for the coming holiday season. Joanna informed me that there is much

*Written by *In Search of Our Past* staff. Based on accounts from this period as cited in the bibliography for this unit.

sickness among the field slaves, as there usually is at the end of winter. I must go and visit some of the slave cabins and see if any repairs need to be made.

I have not had a moment to myself and have neglected my prayers. I am peeved with myself about that. I know that somehow I ought to be better organized, for my first duty must be to God. Perhaps my negligence in this area is the reason for my irritation and impatience with the slaves. I know I should not be so irritable, for it is a wife's duty to be able to manage her whole household without being overwhelmed. Yet no matter how I try, I never seem to have enough time for everything. As my mother has told me so often, everything under my care should proceed with perfect system.

***March 13th***

I do not know how Charles can stay away so long when he knows how much there is to do here. What is he doing in Savannah? What am I saying? I have no right to question my husband's actions, for I must obey him in every way. That, after all, is the necessary ingredient for a good marriage. Nevertheless, when I think about what I was led to believe my married life would be like and what it is, I feel such discontent. Why, I ask myself, was I told that the essential qualities for a young woman's happiness are beauty and refinement, and that the "ideal woman" should cultivate submissiveness? My household activities scarcely demand a carefully done hairdo, and I must speak with authority so that my slaves will obey me. Why was I not trained in household duties rather than in the development of charm?

I must stop thinking this way or I will become despondent. Still, it seems to me that much of my education was a waste. I must spend more time with the boys. Perhaps I can start working on the quilt tomorrow.

***March 15th***

Catherine is coming tomorrow and everything is ready for her arrival. I realize, when I think of her situation, how foolish I was to be despondent a few days ago. How terrible it is for her to be a spinster with nowhere to belong. She must continually visit her sisters and aunts, hoping that she will meet an eligible gentleman. She is 24 and no longer young, and it is unlikely that she will ever get married. What will she do without a husband, without children? What life is there for her? I am lucky to be married and to be a mother. Still, I am glad that Catherine is coming to visit. Perhaps she has some news about what is happening in Savannah. I realize that I have not left Felton in over a year, and have not talked to anyone other than my children and slaves in such a long time.

I began cutting out new dresses for the summer. Tomorrow the seamstress can start working on the clothes for the slaves.

*March 18th*

I have had such a good time remembering the past with Catherine. We talked about the balls and parties I went to when I became a young lady, and of my many suitors. Such talk brought back to my mind the first time I met Charles. I was not particularly impressed with his appearance or his manner. Later my mother told me about his family background and his wealth, a subject she never tired of during the following months. I realized during our courtship that the man of my dreams had very little to do with reality. And though Charles was not the knight in shining armor that I had dreamed of meeting, he was a respectable gentleman.

Still, after our marriage, I was disillusioned when he no longer paid me compliments, and expected me to become an organized housekeeper overnight. At that time, too, I realized that if I had not come from a good family and did not have some material wealth, he would not have considered me worthy to be his wife, no matter how beautiful and refined I was.

Now I sometimes feel that to be a wife means nothing more than to be the manager of your husband's household. What is a woman though, if she is not a wife and a mother? I count my blessings. Charles has written to say that he will be home in 2 or 3 days.

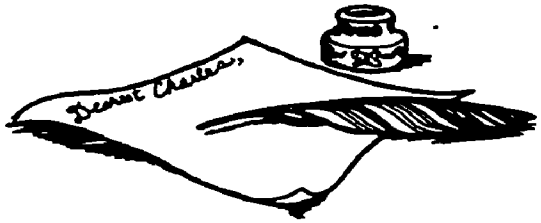
*March 20th*

Catherine has been a great help with the many tasks for which I am responsible. It is irritating that during her visit, so many of the field slaves are ailing and that I have had to spend the last 2 days tending to their illness. Sometimes I wonder why they cannot take better care of themselves and why they act so much like children. Even Eunice, one of my more reliable house slaves, is so slow and the seamstresses never seem to get anything done correctly without me. I believe, too, that Joanna steals some of the food she cooks, which is surprising because she is supposed to be a Christian. I just cannot understand them. They are no better than untrained children and just as helpless. I have such a splitting headache tonight. Fortunately Charles will be back tomorrow.

***March 21st***

Charles finally has returned and, as usual, he seems refreshed and lively. I, however, am exhausted by my duties. It is wonderful to hear him talk about the gay parties in Savannah, though I secretly resent his being able to go and my having to stay here.

He has pointed out to me why he thinks Catherine, as lovely as she is, remains unmarried. And he is right. Catherine is not feminine, because she is too willful. Perhaps that is because she reads too many books. Why, she even tried to engage in a discussion about Savannah politics. How could *she* possibly understand such affairs? Yet even as Charles was objecting to Catherine's behavior, I noticed that he enjoyed being able to talk with her. Sometimes I feel so ignorant of the world, I wish that I could talk to my husband about the things that interest him. Still, I am married, and Catherine is not, and if she wants to be, she will have to become more submissive.




***March 24th***

I told Charles about the illness among the slaves and presented him with a list of repairs that the overseer had told me about. He seems to be quite unconcerned about these matters, though he did offer some suggestions about the spring planting. Tomorrow he will inspect the newly prepared fields for planting. Perhaps then, if the seamstresses are working well on the new clothes, I can begin my quilt.

In 3 days, I will be 27 years old. To celebrate my birthday, I have begun to prepare a new schedule for myself, so that I can spend more time with Louise and the boys. Most of all, I am resolved never to miss my prayers. Perhaps this spring I will perfect the art of running my household without becoming so flustered. One day I hope to be able to measure up to my ideal of what a woman should be.

# ORAL HISTORY

Ask your mother or a woman in your family the following questions. Explain to the woman you interview that you are doing an activity for U.S. History. The class is trying to see what kinds of behavior are expected of women and if those expectations have changed over the years.

The woman you interview may either answer the questions directly on paper, or you may want to ask the questions yourself and take notes on her answers.

*Questions to ask your mother about her mother:*

1. What memory of your mother do you cherish the most?

2. What rules of conduct did your mother expect you to abide by?

3. Did you abide by them? Did you always agree with the rules?

4. Did she work outside her home?

5. What kind of life did she want for you?

*Questions to ask your mother about herself:*

1. When you were my age, did you expect to be married or single now?
2. Did you expect to have children?
3. Did you expect to be working?
4. Did you expect to have the lifestyle you have now?

*Questions to ask your mother about you:*

1. What kind of life do you want for me?
2. What things do you want to teach me?
3. What kind of person do you want me to be?

# *Harriet Tubman, The Moses of Her People*

***By the late 1850s Harriet Tubman was famous throughout the North and South because of her many daring trips to help slaves escape North on the Underground Railroad.***

Early in December 1858 Harriet Tubman arrived in Boston, with a little packet of letters of introduction and a small bundle of daguerreotypes—pictures of some of her old friends like Gerrit Smith and Thomas Garrett. That afternoon of her arrival she sat in the front parlor of a boarding house waiting for a man named Franklin B. Sanborn. She had never seen him but he knew some of her friends. One of the letters of introduction she had brought from New York was addressed to him.

She felt a little strange in Boston. She never thought of her own safety. It was just that this city was unlike New York or Philadelphia or Syracuse or any other city she had known. The streets were very narrow and as crooked as a hickory stick. Most of them were cobbled. From what little she had seen of this famous old city, it looked like a place where it would be easy to get lost.

She folded her hands in her lap and her lips curved into a smile. Why would she get lost here? She had traveled thousands of miles [leading slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad] and never lost her sense of direction. Suddenly she frowned. How would she recognize Mr. Sanborn? Suppose some slave catcher came instead? Boston was said to be overrun with them.

From *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad,* Ann Petry

Then there was a tap on the door of the parlor. She said, "Come in," and stood up, holding herself very straight. The tall man who entered smiled [and] said, "Mrs. Tubman?" and when she nodded, said, "I'm Franklin Sanborn."

She did not answer him. Instead she opened the little package of pictures that she had placed on a table near her chair and handed one of them to him. Because it had occurred to her that if he recognized the picture, then surely he was who he said he was—Franklin B. Sanborn. In the back of her mind an old memory flared: the Sims boy, Anthony Burns, Shadrach, all of them arrested here in Boston, charged with being fugitives. And she was a fugitive, too. For all she knew, this big young man smiling at her with such cordiality might be a sheriff—or—

"Do you know who that is?" she asked.

He raised his eyebrows. "It's Gerrit Smith," he said, "Why do you ask?"

When she explained, he nodded, his eyes amused. "You're quite right to be cautious." As she continued to stand, he said, "Let's sit down and talk."

He sat down beside her, asked her a few questions, listened intently as she answered, [and] kept her talking—for more than an hour. As he was leaving he asked her if she would make a speech at an anti-slavery meeting in about two weeks. At first she refused. But he overrode her objections, saying, "You have no idea how important it is that you should tell some of these stories to the people here in Boston."

Two weeks later there she was on the platform at Faneuil Hall. She was wearing a dark gray, long-skirted cotton dress. The only adornment was a bit of lace at the neck and jet buttons down the front. She held an old black handbag on her lap. The other speakers were distinguished-looking men: Wendell Phillips, Franklin Sanborn, Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

When Sanborn introduced her, she stood looking shyly at this audience of well-dressed people, not knowing what to say. And someone on the platform asked her a question, and then another. Then she started talking, telling about the trips she had made back into the slave country, how she carefully selected the slaves that would go North with her, how they traveled mostly on

foot, wading through rivers, hiding in haystacks, in barns. Sometimes there were babies in the party, and once there were twin infants, tiny babies that she had drugged with opium so that they would sleep. She found that one of the stopping places on the route had a new and hostile owner. She had expected to find food and shelter for her passengers and instead had to hurry them along, hungry, cold, fearful, and she herself fearful, too.

She had led them to the edge of a swamp, and she remembered there was an island in the swamp, so she took them there, leading them through the tall, rank swamp grass, urging them on, because the people at the farm where she had stopped might well spread the word that a group of runaways was in the neighborhood. She had them lie down in the swampy grass, so tall it concealed them completely. It was cold there on that sedgy little island, and they shivered, their clothes sodden with mud; only the babies, the little twins, were dry and warm in their basket. She said she looked at them, looked at their small brown fists, and thought of them as treasures, tiny treasures who would be free with the help of the Lord.

They stayed there all day. All day she prayed, "Lord, I'm going to hold steady on to You." There was always danger on the road, always the unexpected, but the Lord had never failed her.

The sun began to go down, and the tall grass looked golden. Then the light began to fade and water birds murmured their good-night songs. It was dusk, and the little island was all shadow, when she saw a man. He was walking up and down along the edge of the swamp. She frowned, watching him, wondering what he was doing there. He could not possibly see them. He wore the wide-brimmed hat of a Quaker, and she thought perhaps he is really a friend, and yet one could never be sure. Anyone could put on the clothes of a Quaker; a Quaker's clothing did not turn a man into a friend.

His lips kept moving. She thought he must be talking to himself. She listened, and she heard what he said:

"My wagon stands in the barnyard of the next farm, right across the way. The horse is in the stable. The harness hangs on a nail."

He repeated these words. Then he was gone as suddenly as he had come.

When it was completely dark, Harriet left the little island, moving slowly, quietly. She looked back. The tall grass concealed where her passengers lay. No one passing by would know that they were there. They did not move, did not talk.

She approached the farm as cautiously and as quietly as she had left the island, a prayer on her lips. Sure enough there was a wagon, a big farm wagon in the barnyard. She reached inside it, felt along it, to make certain that no one lay concealed in it. One never knew when one might be walking straight into a trap of some kind. Her hands touched something bulky and she gave an exclamation of surprise. There was a package on the floor of the

wagon, bulky. She pulled it toward her, and almost cried from thankfulness, for she could smell food.

After that she moved quickly into the barn. A big white horse turned his head toward her, and she patted him, then put on the harness. A few minutes later she had hitched him to the wagon and was driving toward the little island. Thus she and her passengers rode to the next stop on the road (the Underground Railroad), a farm belonging to another Quaker, where they left the horse and wagon to be picket up by its owner.

She described the rest of the journey, the stop at Thomas Garrett's in Wilmington, and the slow journey North to Philadelphia, where William Still recorded their names and the names of their owners in his thick notebook.

This firsthand information about the Underground Railroad, by a woman who had served as one of its conductors, thrilled that first audience before whom she spoke. They stood on their feet and cheered and clapped when she finished.

# *Fight, and If You Can't Fight, Kick*

My mother was the smartest black woman in Eden. She was as quick as a flash of lightning, and whatever she did could not be done better. She could do anything. She cooked, washed, ironed, spun, nursed and labored in the field. She made as good a field hand as she did a cook . . .

My mother certainly had her faults as a slave . . . . Ma fussed, fought, and kicked all the time. I tell you, she was a demon. She said that she wouldn't be whipped, and when she fussed, all Eden must have known it. She was loud and boisterous, and it seemed to me that you could hear her a mile away. . . . With all her ability for work, she did not make a good slave. She was too high-spirited and independent. I tell you, she was a captain.

The one doctrine of my mother's teaching which was branded upon my senses was that I should never let anyone abuse me. "I'll kill you, gal, if you don't stand up for yourself," she would say. "Fight, and if you can't fight, kick; if you can't kick, then bite." Ma was generally willing to work, but if she didn't feel like doing something, no one could make her do it. At least, the Jennings couldn't make, or didn't make her . . .

One day my mother's temper ran wild. For some reason Mistress Jennings struck her with a stick. Ma struck back and a fight followed. Mr. Jennings was not at home and the children became frightened and ran upstairs. For half an hour they wrestled in the kitchen. Mistress, seeing that she could not get the better of Ma, ran out in the road, with Ma right on her heels. In the road, my mother flew into her again. The thought seemed to race across my mother's mind to tear mistress' clothing off her body. She suddenly began to tear Mistress Jennings' clothes off. She caught hold, pulled, ripped and tore. Poor Mistress was nearly naked when the storekeeper got to them and pulled Ma off.

"Why, Fannie, what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"Why, I'll kill her, I'll kill her dead if she ever strikes me again."

From *Black Women in White America,* Gerda Lerner, ed.

I have never been able to find out the why of the whole thing . . . .

Pa heard Mr. Jennings say that Fannie would have to be whipped by law. He told Ma. Two mornings afterward, two men came in at the big gate, one with a long lash in his hand. I was in the yard and I hoped they couldn't find Ma. To my surprise, I saw her running around the house, straight in the direction of the men. She must have seen them coming. I should have known that she wouldn't hide. She knew what they were coming for, and she intended to meet them halfway. She swooped upon them like a hawk on chickens. I believe they were afraid of her or thought she was crazy. One man had a long beard which she grabbed with one hand, and the lash with the other. Her body was made strong with madness. She was a good match for them. Mr. Jennings came and pulled her away. I don't know what could have happened if he hadn't come at that moment, for one man had already pulled his gun out. Ma did not see the gun until Mr. Jennings came up. On catching sight of it, she said, "Use your gun, use it and blow my brains out if you will . . . "

That evening Mistress Jennings came down to the cabin.

"Well, Fannie," she said, "I'll have to send you away. You won't be whipped, and I'm afraid you'll get killed . . . "

"I'll go to hell or anywhere else, but I won't be whipped," Ma answered.

"You can't take the baby, Fannie. Aunt Mary can keep it with the other children."

Mother said nothing to this. That night, Ma and Pa sat up late, talking over things, I guess. Pa loved Ma, and I heard him say, "I'm going too, Fannie." About a week later, she called me and told me that she and Pa were going to leave me the next day, that they were going to Memphis. She didn't know for how long.

"But don't be abused, Puss." She always called me Puss. My right name was Cornelia. I cannot tell in words the feelings I had at that time. My sorrow knew no bounds. My very soul seemed to cry out. "Gone, gone, gone forever." I cried until my eyes looked like balls of fire. I felt for the first time in my life that I had been abused. How cruel it was to take my mother and

father from me, I thought. My mother had been right. Slavery was cruel, so very cruel.

Thus my mother and father were hired to Tennessee. The next morning they were to leave. I saw Ma working around with the baby under her arms as if it had been a bundle of some kind. Pa came up to the cabin with an old mare for Ma to ride, and an old mule for himself. Mr. Jennings was with him.

"Fannie, leave the baby with Aunt Mary," said Mr. Jennings very quietly.

At this, Ma took the baby by its feet, a foot in each hand, and with the baby's head swinging downward, she vowed to smash its brains out before she'd leave it. Tears were streaming down her face. It was seldom that Ma cried, and everyone knew that she meant every word. Ma took her baby with her . . .

An uneventful year passed. I was destined to be happily surprised by the return of my mother and father. They came one day, and found me sitting by the roadside in a sort of trance . . .

"Puss, we've come back, me and Pa, and we've come to stay. . ."

She and Pa embraced and caressed me for a long time. We went to the cabin, and Master Jennings was there nearly as soon as we were.

"Hello, Fannie. How did you get along?" he said.

"Why, Mr. Jennings, you know that I know how to get along," she answered.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that, Fannie."

Ma had on new clothes, and a pair of beautiful earrings. She told Aunt Mary that she stayed in Memphis one year without a whipping or a cross word.

# *Letter from Mary Smith Grimké to Her Daughters, Sarah and Angelina Grimké**

*February 12, 1839*

*My darling daughters, Sarah and Angelina,*

*How can I help you see how much pain you have caused us, your devoted family? How could you think of continuing to speak out against all we stand for—and in public in front of MEN? Where did we go wrong?*

*All Charleston is talking about the shocking news that you are no longer satisfied just to call for the end of our noble institution of slavery. (And that is certainly shameful enough!) But now you are beginning to claim that women should cease to obey their natural masters, men, and participate in public affairs just as they do. I am so relieved that your father did not live to see you show him such disrespect.*

*I have spent many hours in contemplation and in prayer, trying to uncover what it was we did or did not do that could lead to your total rejection of all that we in South Carolina hold so dear. It's not as if you were so unlucky as to have been born into a family of low rank. You should be proud to be a part of one of the finest families in South Carolina. You were given all that any girls might want, and we tried to teach you how to behave like proper young ladies.*

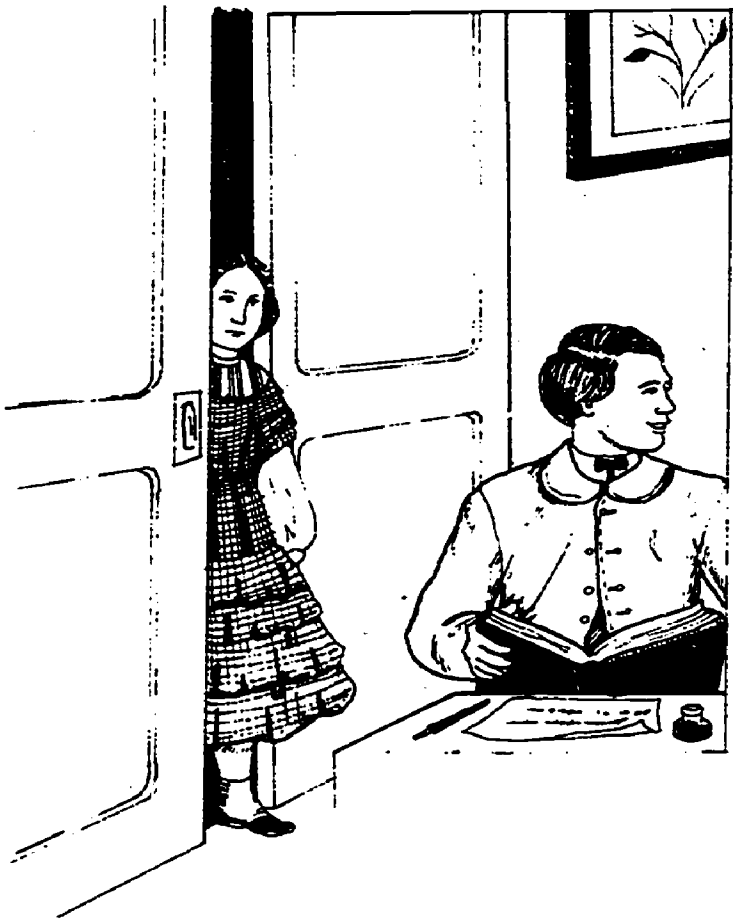
*I used to be so proud of each of you when you were dressed in your prettiest clothes ready to go to a ball. Sarah, dear, I know you had once thought that you would have preferred to study law, like your brother Thomas, rather than be a debutante, but you did seem*

* Written by *In Search of Our Past* staff. Based on accounts from this period as cited in the bibliography for this unit.

*to enjoy the parties. Perhaps we were wrong to have let you spend so much time when you were younger doing Thomas' lessons with him. Boys and girls just aren't meant to study the same things.*

*I know that you both mean well when you call for the freeing of the slaves, but after all we have to accept the realities of life. Neither of you ever seemed to grasp the obvious fact that the colored folk need us to guide them.*

*Angelina, you above all should be aware of how strong we Southerners feel about the continuation of slavery. You weren't able to convince anyone when you were here; how could you expect to do so in the North? Perhaps I should have been firmer when you insisted on speaking to our friends about what you call "the evils of*



*slavery." I know your father would never have stood for that. And do you know anyone who was more respectful of justice than he, one of South Carolina's greatest judges?*

*Sarah, I thought you had come to terms with the need to accept slavery long ago when we discovered you had been teaching your little waiting-maid to read instead of letting her brush your hair before you went to bed. Do you remember how angry your dear father was and all he said about why it is so wrong to give slaves an education? Not only is it unrealistic to expect them to be able to use such a skill, but it has long been against the law to teach slaves to read! As far as I know, you never willingly disobeyed our wishes after that. Why, now that you are older and supposedly more able to be aware of the consequences of your actions, would you decide to go against everything we ever taught you?*

*Is it true that even Northern ministers have openly condemned your actions? Surely that should make you reconsider. Everytime I come to Charleston from one of our plantations, the police remind me that both of you will be arrested, imprisoned, and sent back North if you ever try to come back here. Don't you realize what torture it is for me to know that I can never see my darling daughters again?*

*It seems that all you need to do is circulate a statement admitting that you were wrong to question the existence of slavery and to step out of the proper woman's role. I feel sure that if you look deep into your hearts, you will be ready to come back to a world in which women are proud to serve in their proper place—in the home. Please say that you are ready to come back to me, for I am, as ever,*

*Your loving Mother*

# *Letter from Sarah Grimké to Her Mother, Mary Smith Grimké*

*March 8, 1839*

*Dearest Mother,*

*As always, Angelina and I find it such anguish to hear that you are still unable to understand why we feel we are doing God's will. It was you and Father who taught us that we should be loving and helpful. Why should we limit that love to white people or to within the home?*

*You said that you keep asking yourself what you should have done differently. Don't you see that there is no way that we could live in the heart of the South without being exposed to the dreadful cruelties of the system of slavery? One of my earliest memories is of how shocked I was when I witnessed the brutal whipping of one of the house servants. I must have been about four years old. I remember running and running until I found myself at the wharf. A kindly old ship captain stopped me and I begged him to take me someplace where I would never have to see such actions again.*

*For years I tried praying to God to warm the hearts of those in our household who believed that physical punishment of the slaves was necessary. Finally I realized that God needed me to help Him fight the institution of slavery.*

*When Angelina was born, I hoped that I might be able to protect her from seeing the pain inflicted on the slaves, but I should have known there was no way to do that. Do you remember what happened to her one day at the school for young ladies? Her teacher's little servant boy came into the room to open a window. When he turned his back, everyone saw that it was*

covered with welts and dried blood from recent beatings. Angelina was so upset she fainted. It was days before she would tell me why she fainted. It hurt so much to see her so tormented. How much better it is that we can stand up together to try to change what we know is wrong.

Oh, Mother, you would be so amazed if you could hear what a silver tongue our Nina has. People come from miles to hear her speak about her conviction that slavery is a crime against God and man. My speeches are never so moving as hers, but I am honored to be able to serve with her. Do you realize that we are the first women to become traveling speakers (agents, they call us) for the abolitionist movement in the United States?

You asked about the reaction of the Northern ministers. Yes, there was a statement circulated by some of the officials of the Congregational Church, but it seems to me that it just proves that we are right. Think of all the work you have done during your life—managing the household, seeing to the health of the slaves as well as that of your own children, and so many other tasks. I'm sure you will agree with me that the ministers have been unfair to women when they claim that the best women are dependent and weak. They seem to think that by becoming public reformers, Angelina and I are trying to make men our inferiors. I feel so strongly that God created women to be men's companions and equals. We're not asking for power over men—only that we be allowed to live up to the potential God put into us.

I know that you and Father thought that you were doing the right thing when you encouraged us to limit our learning to the subjects women need to manage a home. We both had far too much curiosity and concern about life to be satisfied with that. I never felt that there was anything any of our brothers did that I couldn't have done equally well. I only wish I had been allowed

to study longer with Thomas. Then maybe public speaking would be easier for me.

My one regret about all that Angelina and I have done is the way the people of South Carolina torment you because of us. I wish you would understand, however, that even to make things easier for you we could never make a statement claiming that we have been wrong. I hope and pray that someday you will learn to accept this and see why what we are doing is necessary.

Angelina asked me to send you her love and to tell you that she will write to you soon. Right now she is preparing a speech she will give tomorrow night. I too have work to do, so I will stop for now. Please never doubt that we both love you very much and wish that there were some way we could all be together again.

Your devoted daughter, Sarah

# ROLE-PLAYING ACTIVITY

You, along with other members of your class, are to produce a skit and present it to your class. You should use the information you have learned in this unit, as well as any research that you may personally want to do on the relationship between slavery and the patriarchal system. Read the description of these sketches carefully before you choose one.

1. A runaway female slave speaks at an abolitionist meeting in Philadelphia. The slave tells the audience about her life, as well as the story of her escape. The audience should include free blacks, both male and female, and whites, both male and female. People in the audience should ask questions after the ex-slave makes her speech.

2. On a visit to a friend's home, a few Southern women discuss the issue of slavery and the effect the abolitionist movement is having on them and their husbands. Slaves should be present, of course, merely doing their work. This skit could also be based on these women's discussions of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which case you would have to read the novel.

3. Southern white men, of the upper, middle and lower classes, are drinking at a local tavern and talk about the abolitionist movement, in terms of its effects on blacks, on women, and on themselves. A few white women and slaves might be present as barmaids and servants.

4. Sojourner Truth speaks out for women's rights at an anti-slavery convention. You can look up her speech and study the circumstances which led to her making it. Included in the cast should be black and white, male and female abolitionists.

5. A poor white woman visits with her wealthy cousin at Christmas time. They talk about their lives, their feelings about slavery, and the abolitionist movement.

6. A white abolitionist woman speaks to a church group on the issues of slavery and women's rights.

7. A slave husband and wife discuss the pro's and con's of escape. In the process they mention their daily acts of resistance and the difficulties the wife, who is a mother of small children, would have if she tried to escape.

# Woman: The Ideal and the Real

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

Discussion questions for "Woman: The Ideal and the Real" chart and the oral history assignment

Share your chart with the other members of your class. Be sure to incorporate the information from your oral history assignment into your answers to these questions.

1. Compare and contrast the roles that white Southern women were expected to play with the roles that they did play.

2. How does the life of the black slave woman compare with the roles that the "ideal woman" was supposed to play, and with the roles that white Southern women did play?

3. What feelings do contemporary women have about themselves that go back to the Southern "ideal woman"? Are there any differences between the feelings of different groups of women, according to their race and class?

4. What feelings that black and white women have toward each other stem from this period in history?

5. Does a gap between the ideal and the real still exist? Describe.

6. How do you see this gap in your mother's life? in your life? Is the nature of this gap "destructive," "unimportant," "positive"? What word would you use?

7. We discussed resistance during the Pre-Civil War Period. What is the nature of resistance to the "ideal" of womanhood now?

8. Do you think the gap that exists between the real and the ideal functions within a system of oppression now, as it did before the Civil War? Explain.

# UNIT 3

## Women in Struggle: Immigration and Labor 1820-1940

**WOMEN IN STRUGGLE**
was developed by the following team of people:

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## OUTLINE

I. **INTRODUCTION**
   - A. Teacher Background
   - B. Teacher introduces activity "Who Is an American?"
     1. Students complete activity
     2. Class discussion
   - C. Teacher introduces poem "What Are You?"
     1. Students read poem
     2. Class discussion
   - D. Teacher introduces activity "Men's Work—Women's Work"
     1. Students complete activity
     2. Class discussion

II. **IMMIGRANT WOMEN**
   - A. Teacher uses Teacher Background section to introduce this topic
     1. Students read "Why They Came" and "Living and Working Conditions"
     2. Class discussion
   - B. Teacher uses background information to introduce "Three Lives: Immigrant Women"
     1. Students read and discuss each of the selections in "Three Lives"
     2. Class discussion on similarities and differences in the lives of Fanny Shapiro, Mei-ling and Irene Castañeda

III. **WOMEN IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT**
   - A. Teacher uses Teacher Background section to introduce this topic
   - B. Students read and discuss "Women in the Labor Movement"
   - C. Teacher assigns oral histories
     1. Class discusses rationale for doing oral histories
     2. Students conduct "Trial Interview" activity
   - D. Teacher introduces "Three Lives: Women in the Labor Movement"
     1. Students read and discuss "A Cap Maker's Story"
     2. Students read and discuss "Emma Tennayuca"
     3. Students read and discuss "The Garment Workers' Strike"

IV. **COMPLETION OF UNIT**

A. Role-playing activity
B. Class discussion of oral histories
C. Students write story on "A Woman Labor Organizer"

V. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

## GOALS

### Students will learn:

1. That American women have played a significant role in the labor force.
2. That immigrant women shared many common experiences.
3. That women were channeled into the lowest paying, least skilled, lowest status jobs.
4. That women actively struggled within the labor movement to improve working conditions for all workers.

## OBJECTIVES

### Students should be able to:

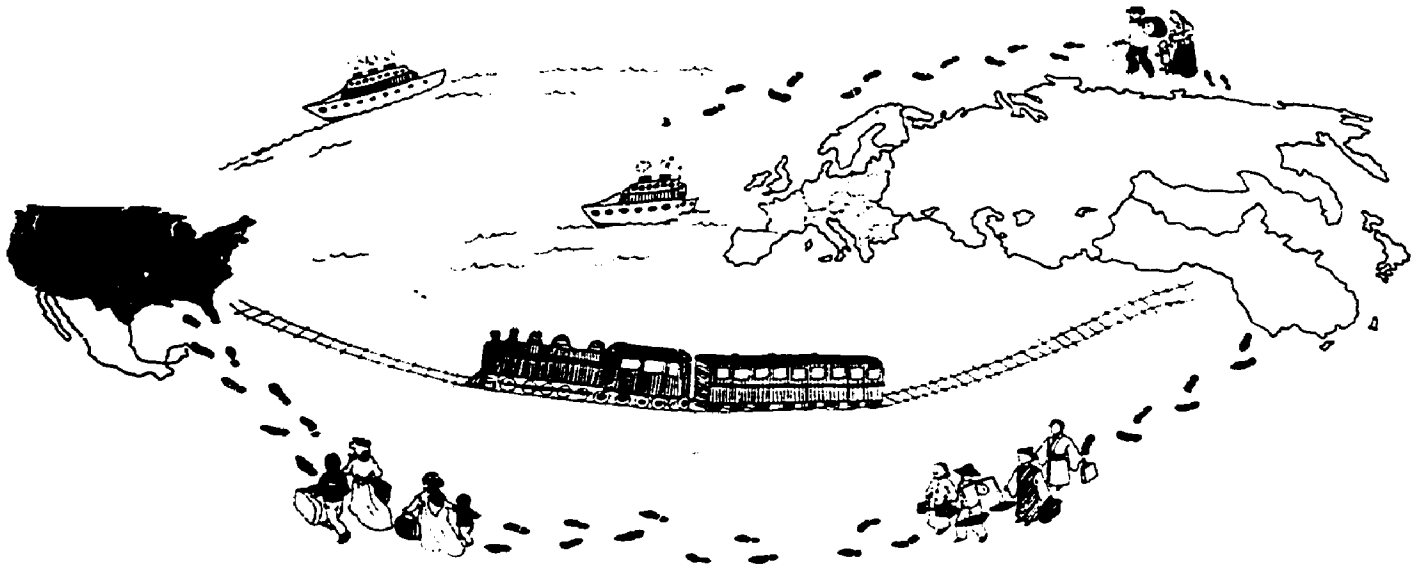
1. Recognize the effects of sex, race, and class discrimination on working women.
2. Recognize the effects of industrialization on immigrant women.
3. Identify the relationship between women's work at home and women's place in the labor force.
4. Recognize the importance of women organizing themselves to better their working conditions.

# WOMEN IN STRUGGLE: Immigration and Labor 1820-1940

The purpose of this unit is not to cover all aspects of immigration and labor, but to focus attention on several key concepts regarding the roles and experiences of American women workers from 1820 to 1940. During this period in American history three crucial events occurred that shaped the development of the United States: 1) technological advancements which made possible the tremendous development and growth of industry; 2) mass immigration, which provided the necessary cheap source of labor for the growing industrial demands for labor; and 3) workers' struggles against oppressive working and living conditions which resulted in the development of national labor organizations. This unit focuses on the important contributions made by working women in their roles as workers and organizers to the development of the United States. The unit is divided into two main sections entitled "Immigrant Women" and "Women in the Labor Movement."

The first section, "Immigrant Women," deals with immigration from the point of view of women immigrants. During the years 1820 to 1940, millions of women immigrated to the United States. Although they came from diverse ethnic origins, their experiences show many commonalities. Many immigrant women were victims of various forms of sex, race, and class discrimination. They were discriminated against because of their status as women, as immigrants and as workers. As a result they were forced into the lowest paying, lowest status and least skilled occupations. Wages and working conditions were deplorable. Many women had the double burden of factory work and childrearing and household responsibilities.

The section on "Women in the Labor Movement" emphasizes the historic role of women as workers and organizers. Within the time frame 1820-1940 the number of women in the labor force grew by leaps and bounds. Women



workers have been one of the most exploited sectors of the working class, receiving lower wages than men and being relegated to the bottom of the labor hierarchy. Women, recognizing their inferior economic and social status, have fought on their own behalf.

At the turn of the century, immigrant women played a leading role in the burgeoning labor movement. Women labor organizers had to struggle under incredibly difficult circumstances in their attempts to organize women workers. The composition of the female labor force was primarily of immigrant origins, although many working women were native born. Antagonisms between the "American" workers and immigrant workers, divisions among the immigrant groups, and antagonisms toward female workers in general were some of the conditions which made labor organizing particularly difficult.

Of singular significance was the antagonism on the part of organized labor to the conditions and needs of women workers. Unions either overtly or subtly discriminated against women workers. Faced with these hostilities, women, and in particular immigrant women, forged a massive effort to organize women into unions. Contrary to the sexist attitudes of the period, women workers proved that they were entirely capable of organizing themselves.

The Great Depression of the 1930's witnessed another period in labor history. Severe economic problems pitted workers against each other. Women and minorities were victims of sexist and racist propaganda aimed at excluding them from the labor force.

In an effort to protect their wages and working conditions, millions of workers became active in the labor movement. Violent workers' struggles occurred during this period. Once again women workers participated and led numerous organizing activities.

# WHO IS AN AMERICAN?
# What Are You?

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The student activity "Who Is an American?" is intended to stimulate students to explore their own family's ethnic/immigrant roots, and to familiarize them with the ethnic composition of their community.

The student activity "What Are You?" is intended to help students to explore their own attitudes about ethnic groups.

# STUDENT SURVEY
# Men's Work—Women's Work

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

One of the assumptions on which this activity is based is that students, like the American public in general, have learned attitudes about the division of work (jobs) in this country that are sexist in nature. It is also assumed that many students have learned stereotypes about the labor roles that different ethnic groups have filled in the development of the United States. This activity is intended to help students see that women have been limited to specific jobs in America, and that minorities have been limited to certain jobs to an even greater extent.

We suggest that teachers discuss the concept of stereotype with students before beginning this activity.

# IMMIGRANT WOMEN

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

This section of the unit focuses attention on the roles, expectations and experiences of immigrant women, specifically concentrating on immigrant women as workers.

The teacher background essay, "Immigrant Women," provides the teacher with information which is to be conveyed to students in introducing the student activities. The essay introduces four major concepts:

1. Immigrant women shared many common experiences in coming to a new country.

2. Many immigrant women were victims of discrimination against their nationality, race, class and sex.

3. Immigrant women came to America during a period of rapid industrial growth and they became a source of cheap labor.

4. Generally, women immigrants received the lowest paying, lowest status, and least skilled jobs.

*A condensed version of the essay is provided as a student reading. Teachers should use the background essay to introduce the students to the reading. In the course of class discussion following completion of the reading assignment, the following terms, guidelines for discussion, and questions should be covered.*

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

A. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| racism | classism | factory system |
| sexism | exploitation | immigration |
| status | exclusion laws | picture-brides |
| ghetto | industrialization | persecution |
| barrios | greenhorns | discrimination |
| pogroms | cultural values | |

B. **SPECIFIC POINTS** for class discussion

1. Examples of discrimination based on sex, race and class
2. Reasons for immigration
3. Reasons for immigrant women receiving low wages
4. Problems of adjusting to a new environment
5. Working conditions of immigrant women
6. Wage disparities based on sex
7. Living conditions of immigrant women
8. Contradiction between idealized role of women and their role as wage-earners

C. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. Describe some of the circumstances which contributed to women leaving their own countries to migrate to the United States.
2. What economic conditions existed in the United States that made massive immigration profitable?
3. Describe and compare the expectations of women immigrants with the realities of conditions they faced.
4. Compare the adjustment problems of the different immigrant women. How are they similar? In what ways are they different?
5. What were some of the problems faced by immigrant women in relation to their responsibilities as wives and mothers?
6. How did the "ideal" notion of women's roles affect the immigrant woman?
7. Give explanations for the differences in the earnings of men and women.
8. What are some of the effects of discrimination based on sex, race or class?

# IMMIGRANT WOMEN
# Teacher Background

More than thirty million immigrants entered the United States between 1820 and 1940. Women came to the United States for many different reasons, but they encountered similar life experiences and problems, and shared job-related activities. Even though the various ethnic groups developed ghettos where they could retain some of their traditions and look after one another, they still had much more in common than the surface differences exhibited. Many were victims of various forms of race, sex and class discrimination, and were forced to struggle against terrible living and working conditions. The double exploitation that came as a result of being both female and "greenhorn" resulted in women receiving the lowest paying, lowest status, and least skilled and desired jobs. Women workers suffered from the cultural value in this country which stated that it was improper for "ladies" to work, and therefore "girls" who did work were not worthy of "respect." This idea was directly linked to the Southern patriarchal system which kept women divided by class as well as race.

The class structure of United States society at the turn of the century pitted immigrant women against native-born white women. Even the working-class white woman considered herself above the immigrant woman. Except for the few "female" occupations of midwifery, nursing, and teaching, most middle-class white women were expected to remain housewives as symbols of their husband's economic position. As one working woman states in an imaginary conversation with a more prosperous woman:

> People "look down" on us because we work? Why, the lawyer and the doctor and the clergyman and the professor and the merchant all work . . . and everyone looks up to them. "Of course," says a bright, young lady, "we expect men to work and support their families, but ladies do not work." . . . we have lady artists and musicians, lady doctors, lawyers and lecturers, trained nurses and teachers. If it isn't work that they are doing, what is it? "But," says the same young lady, "have you never discovered that there is a difference between brain work and manual labor?" Yes, we have discovered it, to our sorrow.[1]

## WHY THEY CAME

Massive immigration to the United States during the period 1820-1940 was a result of various factors. Of primary importance was a growing need for cheap labor in the expanding industrialization of the North. Immigrants came

[1] Baxandall, Rosalyn, et al., *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600-Present*, Vintage Books, New York, 1976, p. 215

as a result of this need for labor and to escape various crises within their own countries: famine, persecution, or political upheavals.

The first large wave of European immigration in the mid-1880's coincided with the great labor demands of the rapidly industrializing North. Immigrant labor, however, provided only a partial solution to an economic and political problem that was challenging the industrial growth of the United States. Slavery in the South came into direct conflict with the needs for a free labor force in the North. The Civil War, which freed slaves, opened the way for industry in the South. It not only resolved the conflict, but also helped to greatly accelerate industrial growth in the South.

The demands of the Civil War on northern industry changed the nature of industrial production, and also the composition of the work force. Women and immigrants became an excellent source of cheap labor. With the men in the battlefields, more and more women began to enter the factories. At this time, immigrants were entering the country in record numbers.

Women, and in particular immigrant women, were highly sought for factory-related work. The profit motive as well as a sexist ideology provided the necessary rationale for employing women at lower wages than men. Racial ideology directed against many immigrant groups provided further justification for meager wages and the deplorable working conditions of immigrant women and minority women.

With the abolition of slavery, black women and men migrated to northern industrial centers hoping to find decent employment. During this period the majority of black women found employment as washerwomen and domestic workers. Some entered factory jobs. However, their presence was met with hostility and prejudice, by both the native born and the immigrant. Many refused to work alongside black workers. Because of these attitudes, blacks were relegated to the most menial jobs, barely making enough money for their families to survive.

Women came to find a better life for themselves and their families. They believed that America was a land of milk and honey. Unfortunately, in many cases their dreams conflicted with the reality of their lives in the United States. As Mother Jones, an immigrant union organizer, observed:

> Immigrants poured into the country and they worked cheap. Hours of work down under ground were cruelly long. Fourteen hours a day was not uncommon, thirteen, twelve. The life or limb of the miner was unprotected by laws. Families lived in company-owned shacks that were not fit for their pigs. Children died by the hundreds due to the ignorance and poverty of their parents.
>
> Often I have helped lay out for burial the babies of the miners, and the mothers could scarcely conceal their relief at the little ones' deaths. Another was already on its way, destined, if a boy, for the breakers; if a girl, for the silk mills where the other brothers and sisters already worked.[1]

[1] Wertheimer, Barbara Mayer, et al., *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America.* Pantheon Books, New York, 1977, p. 346

Many women left their native lands to escape from horrible circumstances at home. The Irish came to escape from the famine of 1845. Usually in family groups, they lived in the poorest slums, were forced to accept low pay and were victims of relentless discrimination.

The Jews of Eastern Europe came, primarily to escape religious persecution. In their own countries, Jews were the victims of pogroms (riots sanctioned by the government and against the Jews) and other forms of religious attacks. Many Jews came to avoid being drafted into the Russian army, where anti-Semitism was rampant. They thought that America was a place where they could escape this persecution and establish a sense of belonging. For them, coming to America was a permanent move. This was not necessarily true for many of the other ethnic groups. The majority of Eastern Jewish immigrants came to the U.S. between 1882 and 1914.

By 1910 the Jewish women outnumbered the Jewish men in America. Jewish women thought America promised them an education, a free choice in marriage, financial security, sophistication, and an independent life. Many women came alone, without money. Many were under the age of eighteen. A Polish Jewish woman describes her dreams of coming to America contrasted with the reality of her life here.

> I had dreamed of free schools, free colleges, where I could learn to give out my innermost thoughts and feelings to the world. But no sooner did I come off the ship than hunger drove me to the sweatshop, to become a "hand"—not a brain—not a soul—not a spirit—but a "hand"—cramped, deadened into a part of a machine—a hand fit only to grasp, not to give.[1]

Chinese immigration differed from that of the previous groups. Labor recruiters who went to China were interested in bring back to the United States strong young men for the heavy work needed in mining and railroad construction. Recruiters were not interested in women and children. Men who came as a result of this labor recruitment intended to return to China after making their fortunes. Their families remained at home. Contrary to their expectations, most were unable to make fortunes. Instead they received meager wages that made it impossible to pay the passage for their wives and families. This situation produced long separations and great loneliness for the Chinese families.

Many Chinese men were also unwilling to bring their families and subject them to discrimination and terrorism directed against Chinese immigrants. Anti-Chinese riots, lynchings, and burnings of homes and the destruction of shops were common events during the late 1880's.

The federal Exclusion Act of 1882 suspended further Chinese immigrant labor. The result of all these conditions was that by 1890 there were 3,868 women and 103,620 men. Few Chinese American children were born during this period.

[1] Kramer, Sydelle, and Masui, Jenny, *Jewish Grandmothers*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1976, p. 45

The Japanese experience was similar to that of the Chinese. There were very few Japanese women immigrants at the beginning of the 1900's. In order to reverse this trend, the "picture-bride" practice was developed. This practice increased the Japanese female population substantially. "Picture-bride" marriages grew out of arranged marriages. This gave single men an opportunity to marry and made the family unit possible. This practice made it possible for a couple to be married without both people present at the proceedings. The marriage was considered to be legal for a U.S. passport as long as the wife's name was on the husband's register for at least six months. Japanese women facing the trip to America alone approached the passage with determination, apprehension, and sadness. One Japanese woman, representing the feelings of many others, made the following resolution:

> For a woman who was going to a strange society and relying upon an unknown husband whom she had married through photographs, my heart had to be as beautiful as Mount Fuji. I resolved that the heart of a Japanese woman had to be sublime, like that soaring majestic figure eternally constant through wind and rain, heat and cold. Thereafter, I never forgot that resolve on the ship, enabling me to overcome sadness and suffering.[1]

Unlike the Chinese and later the Japanese, the first large wave of Mexican immigrants came to the United States in family groups. They came to escape the turmoil and violence of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. It is estimated that one-tenth of the Mexican population entered the U.S. between 1910 and 1920. Most of the Mexican immigrants became migrant farm workers, establishing themselves in the five southwestern states. Some began to work in the railroad industry; then they began migrating into the midwest section of the country. Small pockets of Mexican "barrios" began appearing in Detroit, Chicago, and other cities.

Governmental policy on immigration and citizens' attitudes toward immigrants often had a direct relationship to the economic and political fluctuations in the U.S. During World War I, Mexican labor was actively recruited. During the depression, however, Mexican immigrants were used as scapegoats for a failing economy. Large-scale media campaigns were launched to blame the Mexican immigrant, and at times the entire Mexican community, for unemployment problems. During the depression, laws were passed which made it illegal to hire an alien. Anti-Mexican feelings were widespread and overt throughout the Southwest in the 1930's. Signs reading, "Only White Labor Employed" and "No Niggers, Mexicans, or Dogs Allowed" were evidence of the feelings and attitudes of that time.

[1] Asian American Journal, *Asian Women*, Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975, p. 11

## LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Upon arrival in the United States, immigrant women did not have time to adjust to their new environment. Unfamiliarity with the language and customs of their new country made the experiences of dealing with immigration officials and finding jobs and homes a frightening and confusing process. They were alienated by the urban culture of the big cities, and they were met with tremendous prejudice in the country as a whole. The immigration movement and the end of slavery had left the country with renewed conflicts and prejudices. Social and economic disparities added to the differences between rich and poor. A greater gap developed between middle-class women who were protected by either husbands or fathers and working-class women who were unattached. Many of the immigrant women were single, in their mid-teens, and alone.

Generally, women held the lowest paying, least skilled jobs, making barely enough money to stay alive. They were channeled into jobs that were considered to be exclusively women's work. They were employed as domestic and agricultural workers. They worked in food processing plants, laundries, textile and garment industries, and service jobs. For example, four out of five Irish women between the ages of 15 and 19 worked in textile factories. Immigrant workers replaced the Yankee mill women, who were then expected to return to their traditional women's roles as housewives and mothers. At the beginning, immigrant women thought their employment would be temporary also, but once they were married and had children, their families were forced to rely on their labor to survive.

Women were employed in jobs that were not exclusively female, but where working conditions were extremely poor. "Raw immigrants were exiled to the damp and putrid basement rooms to strip tobacco." They were given unskilled tasks and often denied the opportunity to acquire skilled jobs. Many of these jobs were also divided along sexual lines. For example, in the garment industry, men usually cut out and pressed the material, while women finished the garments, sewing on buttons, and working with the inferior materials. Baking was done by men, while women packaged and frosted the cakes. Women were also paid less than men:

| | |
|---|---|
| (man) garment worker | $16.00 per week |
| (woman) needle worker | $6.00-7.00 per week |
| (man) baker | $100.00 per month |
| (woman) packager | $22.00 per month |

Many women were paid by piecework rather than by the standard wage. Women would repeat the same process throughout the work day and be paid for the number of products they were able to finish, or "turn out." This type of wage favored the fast workers. Speed became the only means of attaining economic advancement. In 1913 workers could earn between $9.00 and $15.00 for sixty hours of work through this method. One woman's experience tells a common story:

> Sarah Cohen, a seasoned worker who was allowed to roll cigars, worked her way up to making $12 a week with her deft hands by the age of sixteen. The nervous strain, however, became too much, and at twenty-one she had descended to the stripping room, where she made a mere $4.20 a week.[1]

Women also worked long hours. Thirteen-hour work days were common. Many women with children were forced to work on night shifts. These women had the double burden of factory work and household responsibilities.

> All the women with families did their own housework; they prepared three meals a day, including breakfast, after a night's work. They also did the washing for the family. They averaged about four and one-half hours sleep a day. The time of sleep varied with the individual. Some slept an hour or two in the morning and for a time in the afternoon; others slept at intervals of about an hour each during the day. They all slept in bedrooms which had been occupied during the night by husbands and children.
>
> When the mother works at night the little ones learn to keep quiet out of doors while she is sleeping in the day time.[2]

This situation made the task of child rearing difficult for immigrant mothers, who were primarily responsible for the children. Children were sometimes left alone or haphazardly with other people. Other working mothers were forced to take menial jobs in order to work their hours around their children's schedules. Husbands were of very little help in this regard. As one Japanese woman reveals:

> My husband was a Meiji man. He did not think of helping in the house or with the children. No matter how busy I may have been, he never changed the baby's diapers. Though it may not be right to say this ourselves, we Issei pioneer women from Japan worked solely for our husbands. At mealtime, whenever there was not enough food, we served a lot to our husbands and took very little ourselves.[3]

The result of this situation was that "working women were the second sex in double jeopardy, at home and in the work force."

Many Asian women and Jewish women worked alongside their husbands. Jewish women worked in "mom and pop" stores while still having the responsibilities of running their homes. Japanese women worked in the fields or in shops, and as homemakers and child rearers. This burden of multiple work took its toll on women, but still they persevered.

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[1] Ryan, Mary P., *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*. New Viewpoints, A Division of Franklin Watts, Inc., New York, 1975, p. 204

[2] Baxandall, Rosalyn, et al., *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600-Present*, Vintage Books, New York, 1976, p. 160

[3] Asian American Journal, *Asian Women*, Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975, p. 15

Another way for women to make money was to take in boarders. This was a very common practice for women with children, who were also expected to contribute financially to the family's support. Many times this additional cooking, cleaning, washing and sewing meant survival for the family. For the women, it meant long hours of work, limited free time, isolation, and living with people who spoke different languages and had different cultural habits.

Women lived and worked under unsanitary and often dangerous conditions. Many lived with eight to ten persons of different families in small rooms located in shacks or tenements. Their diet, clothing, and health were often substandard. In 1925 only one in three homes in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, had indoor toilets, and three-quarters of the families had no bathtubs. Diseases were easily spread under these unhealthy conditions.

The factories where women worked were in no better condition than their homes. There were no safety regulations or worker's compensation laws. Serious industrial accidents were common, and workers were easily replaced. In one linen thread industry:

> . . . in one branch women were compelled to stand on a stone floor in water the year round, most of the time barefoot.
>
> . . . these poor creatures must go to their homes with water dripping from their underclothing because there could not be space or a few moments allowed them wherein to change their clothing. A constant supply of recruits is always on hand to take the places of any who dare rebel against the ironclad authority of those in charge.[1]

These conditions are seen again in a fortune cookie factory that employed Chinese women:

> In the beginning, she didn't have any thick gloves and her fingers were always burned by the hot cookies. The temperature in the factory is terribly hot, especially in the summer. It's stuffy and noisy inside. It takes a long time to practice the skill of folding and bending the cookies. During these times, the beginning workers don't get full pay. They have to wait until they can handle a machine all by themselves.[2]

A factory worker reveals why these conditions existed:

> I regard my work-people just as I regard my machinery, where my machines get old and useless, I reject them and get new, and these people are part of my machinery.[3]

[1] Lerner, Gerda, *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., Indianapolis, 1977, p. 297

[2] "Just a Trap," *Sojourner IV*, Asian Writers Project, Asian American Studies, Berkeley High School, Berkeley Unified School District, 1974

[3] Wertheimer, Barbara Mayer, et al., *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1976, p. 105

The message of how little value was placed on women's work was clear. The resulting discrimination against their sex, race and nationality was also evident. As one Slavic woman states from her experiences: "Greenie not wanted in nice clean places." Women couldn't even hide these realities from their children, because in many cases daughters and sons worked alongside their mothers.

As mothers and wives, these women from different ethnic groups shared a similar fate. Their children were forced to watch them suffer from overwork, sickness, and overwhelming responsibilities. They saw women who showed extraordinary strength and fortitude in managing to survive under incredibly *oppressive* circumstances. As stated by one immigrant child:

> My mother wanted to be in the better neighborhoods. . . . That was the immigrant woman. She wanted always something better for her children. . . . The father went out to make the living; the mother was the backbone of everything. . . . I think that the mother, the immigrant mother, was a real woman because the children looked up to her, the community looked up to her 'cause she was the leader.[1]

[1] Kramer, Sydelle, and Masui, Jenny, *Jewish Grandmothers*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1976, p. 98

# IMMIGRANT WOMEN

## SOURCES

The student readings in this section, "Immigrant Women," have come from the following sources:

"Fannie Shapiro" from Kramer, Sydelle, and Masui, Jenny, *Jewish Grandmothers,* Beacon Press, Boston, 1976, pp. 94, 98-99

"Mei-ling" from Pat Sumi, *Leaving What I Know Well . . . Learning Anew: Readings on the Experiences of Asian American Women in the 19th and 20th Centuries,* Women's Studies Program, Berkeley Unified School District, 1977

"Irene Castañeda" from Shular, Ybarra-Frausto, Sommers, eds., *Literatura Chicana,* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972, pp. 246-247

# THREE LIVES: Women Immigrants

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The teacher should use the background information to introduce the following life accounts. The readings cover the immigration experiences of Fannie Shapiro, a Jewish immigrant, Mei-ling, a Chinese woman immigrating to America, and Irene Castañeda, an immigrant woman from Mexico.*

## SUGGESTED PROCEDURE

1. The stories may be read aloud by the teacher to the class, or the students may read in teams of three, with one student reading aloud and the other two being responsible for explaining the meaning to the class.

2. Questions for each reading can be found at the end of that reading. The teacher can use these questions for class discussion or written assignment.

3. When all three stories have been read and discussed, it is important that the teacher conclude this lesson with a discussion summarizing the similarities and differences in the immigration experiences of these three people.

4. The following terms, discussion guidelines and questions can be used to facilitate student understanding of the readings and the summary class discussion.

A. **IMPORTANT CONCEPTS** and words to be emphasized

*Fannie Shapiro*

| | |
|---|---|
| gentiles | immigrants |
| Yiddish | greenhorn |

*Mei-Ling*

| | |
|---|---|
| Golden Mountains | "Foreign Devils" |
| heathens | barbarous |
| merchant | dowry |
| cleaver | clan |

*Irene Castañeda*

| | |
|---|---|
| foreman | adobe |
| epidemic | el traque (railroad) |
| journeying | chaparros |

*Note: the readings appear here as they are printed in the original versions. Grammar and spelling remain unchanged.

B. **SPECIFIC POINTS** for class discussion

1. Reasons for immigration
2. Similar travel experiences
3. Similarities in problems encountered
4. Similarities in living conditions
5. Working conditions
6. Discrimination based on sex, race, and class
7. Women's "double shift"

C. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. Discuss the reasons given by Fannie Shapiro and Mei-ling for coming to America.
2. Discuss the similar travel experiences of these two immigrant women.
3. Speculate on the ways in which Mexican immigrants such as Irene Castañeda came to America. Why did these immigrants leave Mexico?
4. Discuss similarities and differences in the problems encountered by these women.
5. Compare and contrast the living conditions of all three women.
6. What types of work did these women perform? Describe their working conditions.
7. Describe specific ways in which they encountered discrimination based on their sex, race or class.
8. Discuss the problems of immigrant women who not only had to work to support their families, but at the same time were responsible for looking after the needs of their children.

# IMMIGRATION AND LABOR 1820-1940
# Women in the Labor Movement

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

This section of the unit focuses attention on the historic role of women wage earners, the attempts of women workers to unionize, and the effects of racism and sexism within the labor movement.

The teacher background essay, "Women in the Labor Movement," provides the teacher with information to be conveyed to students in introducing the student activities. The essay introduces six major concepts:

1. Since they came to this country, women have been wage earners, with the number of women workers growing every year.

2. Working women work on their jobs and continue, as well, to perform the majority of household and child-rearing activities at home.

3. Working women have experienced sexism not only on their jobs but also in labor unions.

4. Minority working women have been doubly discriminated against in employment and in the labor unions.

5. Sex and race discrimination have resulted in the development of a labor situation in which women earn less than men for equal work.

6. Working women have consistently struggled to better their working conditions.

*A condensed version of the essay is provided as a student reading. Teachers should use the background essay to introduce the students to the reading. In the course of class discussion following completion of the reading assignment, the following terms, guidelines for discussion, and questions should be covered.*

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

### A. IMPORTANT CONCEPTS and words to be emphasized

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| exploited | factory system | organize |
| discrimination | plight | picket |
| hierarchy | sexism | union |
| competition | racism | local |
| status | antagonism | militant |
| depression | relegated | propaganda |
| deported | | |

### B. SPECIFIC POINTS for class discussion

1. Historic role of women workers
2. Contradiction between "ideal" role of women, and their status as workers
3. Women sought for factory work
4. Male worker attitudes toward women workers
5. Union discrimination based on sex, race and national origin
6. Problems women faced in unionizing
7. Importance of immigrant women workers and organizers
8. The importance of the Women's Trade Union League to the struggle of working women
9. Strength shown by women during strikes
10. Women and minorities were more severely affected by the Great Depression of the 1930's
11. Violent workers' struggles during the depression
12. Sexism and racism affected provisions of labor contracts
13. Link between past struggles and contemporary status of women workers

C. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. Discuss the important role of women workers. The chart on "The Female Labor Force" should be used to emphasize the growth of women workers.

2. Historically there has been an idealized notion that "women's place is in the home." Discuss this notion in light of the reality of the historic role of women workers.

3. Discuss the reasons for employers seeking women for factory work.

4. Discuss the relationship between sexist attitudes among male union members and the working and wage standards of women workers.

5. Discrimination based on sex, race or national origin has been a factor in the labor movement in the United States. Discuss some of the problems women organizers had to deal with because of these conditions.

6. Immigrant women were extremely influential in the labor movement during the early part of the 20th century. Discuss some of the reasons for this phenomenon.

7. Discuss the action of women workers and organizers which challenged the sexist views of women as passive and not capable of organizing themselves.

8. Why were women and minorities more severely affected by the Great Depression of the 1930's?

9. What important union accomplishment occurred during the 1930's?

10. In which ways did sexism and racism affect the provisions in labor contracts?

11. What is the relationship between the struggles of immigrant and minority women workers and organizers and the contemporary status of working women today?

# WOMEN IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT
# Teacher Background

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1820's when women began entering the labor force in significant numbers,* women workers have been one of the most exploited sectors of the working class. Women from immigrant groups have at various periods in history been discriminated against because of their ethnic or national origins. Minority women have been doubly disadvantaged due to racial discrimination. Sexism and racism have affected not only the types of occupations that women have been allowed to enter, and the wages they have received, but also their ability to participate equally in the labor movement.

Working women have been and continue to be at the bottom of the labor hierarchy. Traditionally women have been kept out of jobs and have earned less simply because they were women. However, women have long recognized the inferior economic and social status assigned to them and have fought on their own behalf. Working women of diverse ethnic backgrounds have struggled collectively and endured many hardships to improve their working and living conditions and to secure their children's future. During a bitter strike in the earty part of the 20th century, a striking woman who had just given birth to a child said: "It is not only bread we give our children. We live by freedom, and I will fight till I die to give it to my children."[1]

## WOMEN BECOME INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

Throughout the history of the United States, women have participated in economic activities that go beyond the scope of what is considered child-rearing activities. However, it was not until the introduction of the "factory system" at the beginning of the 19th century that women became a significant part of the wage earning force. The factory system introduced production on a large scale. With the introduction of machinery it became possible to break up the labor process into many smaller specialized jobs and to increase productivity. Large numbers of workers were needed for this new type of production.

During the 1820's women began entering the labor force in significant numbers. The rapidly growing textile industry of New England was the first industry to employ large numbers of female factory workers, actively recruiting the unmarried daughters of Yankee farmers. Young women began to flock to the mill towns in large numbers. Between 1820 and 1840, fourteen percent of all women 16 years and over were wage earners. The average salary for a "mill girl" during this period was $2.00 weekly, plus board. These young women often slept six in a room, two to a bed.

*see chart "The Female Labor Force" at the end of this Teacher Background

[1] Flexner, Eleanor, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1975, p. 252

During this period, speedups, wage reductions, and employer's dictatorial decisions were oftentimes resisted by workers. Women workers staged a series of strikes during 1828 and 1844-1845 in the cotton mills of Paterson, New Jersey. These strikes were significant in that they are the first of many attempts at labor organizing among women workers. Out of these struggles emerged the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association.

In the South, slave women worked in the tobacco and textile industries under deplorable conditions. Women slave workers, like their sisters on the plantations, resisted their conditions by staging slowdowns and sabotages, and by refusing to work, at great personal risk. With the abolition of slavery, black women continued to work in these industries as wage earners. They were also employed as agricultural, domestic and laundry workers. In 1866 a group of black women laundry workers formed the first labor organization in Mississippi, the Washerwomen of Jackson.

Industrial demands encouraged massive immigration. Employers welcomed immigrant women, since they would work for lower wages. Soon immigrant women began replacing native-born women workers. Black women in the North working as domestics and washerwomen were also displaced by the newly arrived immigrant women.

By the 1850's, women factory workers comprised 24% of the labor force in the manufacturing industries. (This figure does *not* include domestic workers and farm laborers, both areas of high female concentration.) The idealized concept of the role of women as wives and mothers prevailed, although the everyday lives of millions of working women contradicted the "ideal" notion of womanhood. The immigrant woman had no choice but to work; for her the "ideal" role of women was not a reality.

Immigrant women worked because many families could not make ends meet with just the man's earnings. Other women were forced to work because they were the sole support of their families. Women continued to enter the labor force in large numbers. By 1870, one out of every four workers was a woman.

Faced with this reality, working men continued to cling to the unrealistic "ideal" of women. Men viewed women's participation in the labor force with fear and suspicion. Women workers were paid lower wages; thus their participation in the labor force jeopardized the higher wages earned by men. Antagonisms were heightened when immigrant women were used as strikebreakers, further depressing wages. These conditions led to the exclusion of women from most male-led unionizing activities.

Antagonism toward black workers during this period ran high. At the end of the Civil War, large numbers of black women and men migrated to some of the northern industrial centers. White workers viewed blacks as a threat to their jobs, and their wages. Employers, taking advantage of the situation, used blacks as strikebreakers. Black women were used in the garment-trade disputes. Racial antagonisms, successfully exploited to the advantage of the employers, were encouraged. Most unions barred blacks from membership. In order to protect themselves, blacks began to organize their own unions. In 1869 the National Colored Labor Union was established.

Union discrimination was not limited to black workers. Labor organizations were also anti-immigrant. A large majority of labor unions supported attempts to limit Mexican and Asian immigration. Their organizational practices were aimed at the exclusion of Mexican and Asian labor. Mexican and Asian workers also began organizing their own unions.

Anti-immigrant and anti-black attitudes prevalent during the late 1800's affected the women's movement as well. The suffrage movement, which had expected that women would be granted the vote when blacks were, suffered a severe [illegible]v when women were not given the vote.

Instead of directing their anger toward the white males who had refused them this right, some of the leaders in the movement directed their frustrations toward racial minorities and ethnic immigrants. "The militant women's leaders, who were white and middle class, reacted violently with racist slurs against putting 'Sambo' Africans, Chinese, and 'ignorant' foreigners ahead of women."[1]

It was a period of rapid industrial growth in the 1880's and 1890's that accelerated the debate about female workers within the labor movement. Cheap labor was needed for the rise of the giant industrial enterprises. Women workers were in great demand because they could be employed for the lowest wages. Although the demand for labor was great, the tremendous influx of European immigrant labor created a favorable situation for the employers. They were able to hire workers for miserably low wages, and women were of course the lowest paid of those. In 1886 a woman working 10 hours a day could expect to earn an average salary of $5.25 per week.

Because women were entering the labor force in such large numbers, unions were forced to accept women.

Although both the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869, and the American Federation of Labor, founded in 1881, admitted men and women, the policy of the Knights of Labor toward women and blacks was more egalitarian. Throughout the country women and blacks began joining the Knights in unprecedented numbers. By 1886 the union had chartered 113 women's locals, and 400 all-black locals.

The American Federation of Labor was primarily concerned with unionizing the more skilled and the more highly paid crafts such as the plumbers, carpenters, and printers. The AFL accepted female and black workers; however its locals developed various mechanisms for discriminating against women, blacks and other minorities.

Once they joined, women were not treated equally. Women were discouraged from attending union meetings, were relegated to the lowest paying jobs and received about half the salary of male workers. Women complained: "The men think that the girls should not get as good work as the men and should not make half as much money as a man."[2]

Blacks and other minorities received similar treatment. Although AFL President Samuel Gompers endorsed a policy of equality regardless of race, he eventually succumbed to racial prejudice and declared that ". . . Caucasians are not going to let their standard of living be destroyed by Negroes, Chinamen, Japs or any others."[3]

Many attempts were made by dedicated women labor leaders to organize women workers, but their attempts throughout the 1890's and early 1900's were sporadic and usually unsuccessful. This was due to the lack of support for women workers by the male-dominated labor unions.

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[1] Deckard, Barbara, *The Women's Movement: Political, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Issues*, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, San Francisco and London, 1975, p. 262

[2] Wertheimer, Barbara Mayer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1977, p. 200

[3] Allen, Robert, *Reluctant Reformers: The Impact of Racism on American Social Reform Movements*, Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1974, p. 184

> Despite an occasional convention resolution or statement by President Samuel Gompers endorsing the principle of organizing women or of equal pay, only sporadic attempts were made to implement such pronouncements, and these were usually sparked by the women themselves.[1]

## WOMEN ORGANIZE

> Ever since they had entered the factories, women workers had attempted to organize in their own behalf. Previous documents have shown that these efforts met with failure. In the second half of the nineteenth century, labor unions began to grow in strength and confidence, [and] male unionists had to deal with women workers, whom they regarded as mostly unwanted competitors, potential strikebreakers, and only rarely as potential valuable allies.[2]

The beginning of the twentieth century was characterized by increased industrialization, massive immigration (over one million people entered the U.S. per year), and violent workers' struggles for higher wages and better working conditions.

In 1900 women workers accounted for 20% of the labor force. Yet few were organized into unions, and their wages were half of those earned by men. As more and more women entered the work force, their participation and importance in union struggles increased. Working women, in particular immigrant women, participated in and led many strikes, especially in the industries with the highest concentration of female workers. The garment industry, considered a "female" trade, witnessed some of the most violent struggles. The early locals of what is presently the International Ladies Garment Workers Union date back to this period.

Immigrant working women from diverse ethnic backgrounds who became involved in union activities found allies among some middle-land upper-class women who were sympathetic to the plight of working women. One of the most important organizations to emerge at the turn of the century was the National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) founded in 1903. The primary purpose of the WTUL, was to organize women into trade unions. The WTUL made a great effort to publicize the specific problems of working women.

> They pointed out that 10 hours in the factory, plus 2 more hours a day spent in travel, left women too little time and energy to perform their many household tasks and bear and rear children. It was no wonder women's life expectancy averaged less than 48 years.[3]

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[1] Flexner, Eleanor, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1975, p. 205

[2] Lerner, Gerda, *The Female Experience: an American Documentary*, The American Heritage Series, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., Indianapolis, 1977, p. 293

[3] Wertheimer, Barbara, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1977, p. 265

As part of its effort to upgrade the economic and social status of working-class women, the WTUL established training and educational facilities. It was here that many immigrant women learned organizing techniques that later enabled them to assume leadership positions. The WTUL was also very instrumental in informing male workers of the special needs of women workers. Most important, the WTUL contributed to the women's labor movement by organizing and supporting women's strikes.

> There was hardly a strike of women workers from 1905 on in which the WTUL was not to be found taking an active part in organizing the strikers, or picketing, raising bail or strike funds, mobilizing public opinion, or running relief kitchens, and welfare committees.[1]

During the winter of 1909-1910, the garment industry erupted with a series of violent strikes. These strikes were the first large-scale women's strikes. The "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand" in New York City was the high point of this period. Eighty percent of the twenty to thirty thousand workers that participated were women, many of them immigrant Jewish and Italian women. Italian women.

Immigrant women were at the forefront of the struggle. One such young woman was a Jewish girl in her teens named Clara Lemlich. At the inception of the workers' walkout, a meeting was called to discuss further action. The meeting was dragging on when Clara Lemlich walked up to the speaker's platform and declared: "I am a working girl, and one of those who are on strike against intolerable conditions. I am tired of listening to speakers who talk in general terms. What we are here for is to decide whether or not we shall strike. I offer a resolution that a general strike be declared—now!"[2] The workers responded with a tremendous outburst of enthusiasm.

As the strike grew in proportion, twenty-four halls were required for strikers' meetings. Because the workers were from different ethnic groups (primarily Jewish, Italian and native-born American), each meeting required speakers in Yiddish, Italian and English.

Factory shops were often segregated along sex and ethnic lines. Ethnic differences made conditions for organizing more difficult. Employers took advantage of divisions that existed, and pitted workers against each other. Native-born American working women were victims of anti-immigrant attitudes. They considered themselves a notch above immigrant workers. During the "Uprising" these women joined the strike out of sympathy for their fellow workers, and not out of an understanding of their common oppression as working women. Contrary to reality, they had previously believed that their working conditions were better. During the course of the strike they discovered this was not so.

[1] Flexner, Eleanor, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1975, p. 253

[2] Ibid., p. 249

The most militant workers were the Jewish immigrant women. There were several reasons for this. Many Jewish women had come from urban areas of Eastern Europe and had already been exposed to factory conditions and labor agitation. They had already learned the importance of collective struggle. Equally important was the fact that many Jewish women had come to the U.S. alone and were unmarried.

Jewish women became very prominent in the labor movement during the early part of the twentieth century. This coincided with the peak period of Jewish immigration. The majority of Jewish women entered the garment trades, dominating the industry for years as workers and organizers.

Italian women differed in that most had come in family groups, primarily from rural areas of Italy. They had little or no previous experience with factory conditions or labor agitation. The more male-dominated family structure limited the participation of Italian women. Many Italian women participated in union struggles, but were less likely to assume leadership roles.

Given all these differences, it was extremely difficult for the women to organize along common interests as workers. Antagonisms often developed between the different ethnic groups. Women in the labor movement not only had to struggle against ethnic divisions, but also had to simultaneously fight prevailing sexist attitudes. Male union organizers and workers viewed women workers with contempt and fear. Despite the fact that women had to work in order to survive, male workers continued to cling to the concept of "women's place is in the home." It was precisely because of this sexist ideology that women received lower wages. Women's low status in the labor force made them easy prey for employers who often used the raw immigrant women as strikebreakers. Sexism also fed the notion that women were passive, unorganizable, and incapable of enduring under strike conditions.

Women involved in the "Uprising of the Twenty Thousand" proved that even under extremely difficult conditions women were capable of organizing themselves. The striking women were subjected to mass arrest and police brutality. "They were clubbed, manhandled, and hundreds were arrested daily."[1] However, this did not deter them. The Women's Trade Union League made its greatest contribution by publicizing the arrests and brutalities, and by providing funds for bail and legal expenses.

The strike was significant not only because it was the first general strike of its kind, but also because it was the first large strike in which the majority of the participants were women. The strike provided a dramatic response to those who argued that "women could not be organized," and that "they could not be counted on to hold out in a long, hard fight."

The strike lasted ten weeks. At the conclusion, the workers had won a 52-hour week, an increase in wages, and an assurance that all of the striking workers would be given back their jobs.

[1] Neidle, Cecyle S., *American Immigrant Women*, Hippocrene Books, Inc. New York, 1976, p. 137

Helen Marot, an organizer for the WTUL, writes about the Shirtwaist Strike:

> The same temper displayed in the shirtwaist strike is found in other strikes of women, until we have now a trade-union truism that "women make the best strikers . . ."
>
> . . . The shirtwaist maker's strike was characteristic of all strikes in which women play an active part. It was marked by complete self-surrender to a cause, emotional endurance, fearlessness and entire willingness to face danger and suffering. The strike at times seemed to be an expression of the woman's movement rather than the labor movement. This phase was emphasized by the wide expression of sympathy which it drew from women outside the ranks of labor.[1]

The years 1900-1920 saw women workers involved in numerous strikes. Immigrant women were at the forefront of many of these struggles. During this period significant gains were made in organizing women into industrial unions. However, in 1920 only 7% of women were organized into trade unions, as compared with 25% of men. At this time, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, one of the strongest of the female unions, had a membership of 105,300. The Women's Trade Union League provided support and training for the ILGWU and other predominantly female unions. This was vital as the AFL attempted to keep women from fully participating in the male-dominated unions. The support of an all-women's organization was critical to the development of a successful women's labor movement.

The important support given to working-class women by the upper- and middle-class women within the WTUL was not matched by the women's movement. Toward the end of the 19th century, the women's movement had become increasingly focused on a single issue—suffrage—neglecting other issues of grave importance for working women. For the working woman, obtaining the vote had little relationship to her immediate economic situation. Immigrant women working in sweatshops focused their attention on economic issues of wages and working conditions. These differences led to the neglect of working women's concerns within the women's movement and severely limited the participation of working-class women within the movement.

## WOMEN JOIN THE RANKS OF ORGANIZED LABOR

By the 1930's women workers comprised 22% of the labor force. One out of every five white women was employed as a wage earner, while two out of every five black women worked. Women's wages were lower than men's. Under the minimum wage law, it was still legal to pay women lower wages than men for equal work. In the boot and shoe industry, men earned 35 cents an hour, while women earned only 30 cents an hour. Black women's wages were

[1] Baxandall, Rosalyn, et al., *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600-Present*, Vintage Books, New York, p. 190

even lower than white women's wages. This discrimination can be seen in the cigar industry, where white women earned an average of $16.30 per week, while black women in the same industry earned only $10.10 per week.

During the depression, propaganda aimed against women workers accused them of taking jobs away from men. Women workers were among the first to lose their jobs. Married women were discriminated against because it was felt that men should be given priority for available jobs. "Even the Women's Bureau declared: 'The welfare of the home and family is a woman-sized job in itself, and wives who work are destroying their families'—this despite the fact that the same Bureau found that 90 percent of all women who worked in the 1930's absolutely had to do so."[1]

Racist propaganda was directed against black, Mexican, and Asian workers. Minority workers were often laid off, and their jobs were given to white workers. Mexican workers were accused of taking jobs away from white workers. About 500,000 women, men and children were deported from the United States during this period. Even though women and minority workers were most severely affected by the depression, all working people suffered tremendously.

The Great Depression of the 1930's resulted in greatly intensifying the misery and militance of all working people in the United States. This situation provoked a series of violent confrontations between the industrial workers who were struggling for survival and the giants of industry who were attempting to keep wages to a bare minimum. Out of these struggles emerged the largest national industrial union, The Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.). Due to the great efforts made by the men and women of the C.I.O., from 1936 to 1940 organized labor tripled in size.

The C.I.O. was formed in order to organize and protect the unskilled men and women, regardless of nationality, race or sex, who were employed in the mass production industries. It was dedicated to the principle of equal pay for all workers. The C.I.O., however, was not unmarred by prevailing sexist and racist attitudes of the time. Although the C.I.O.'s official pronouncements called for better working conditions for all workers, differential pay scales for men and women, white and minority workers were part of its practice. The C.I.O. signed contracts which provided for unequal pay scales based on sex and race.

Nevertheless, we must give credit to the C.I.O. for its commitment to women and minority workers within the labor movement. Throughout the 1930's women and minority workers were brought into organized labor in unprecedented numbers. Under the sponsorship of the C.I.O., many women organized and led strikes, and thousands of women joined unions. Many emerged from the ranks and attained positions of leadership within the unions as organizers, business agents, and labor educators. However, despite these tremendous gains, the majority of the women in the labor force remained unaffiliated.

Many of the gains made by working women today are directly linked to the struggles of the millions of working women of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds who struggled under extremely difficult conditions to gain respect.

[1] Deckard, Barbara, *The Women's Movement: Political, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Issues*, Harper Row Publishers, New York, San Francisco and London, 1975, p. 297

## *Bread and Roses*

*As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day,*
*A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray,*
*Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses,*
*For the people hear us singing: "Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"*

*As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men,*
*For they are women's children, and we mother them again.*
*Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes;*
*Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!*

*As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead*
*Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.*
*Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.*
*Yes it is bread we fight for—but we fight for roses, too!*

*As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days.*
*The rising of the women means the rising of the race.*
*No more the drudge and idler—ten that toil where one reposes,*
*But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!*

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Lyrics based on the poem by James Oppenheim, written in the aftermath of the Lawrence textile strike. The poem was inspired by the banners of the picketing mill women.

# THE FEMALE LABOR FORCE

| Year | Female Labor Force as Percentage of Total Labor Force | Female Labor Force as Percentage of Female Population |
|---|---|---|
| 1890 | 16 | 18 |
| 1900 | 18 | 20 |
| 1910 | 21 | 24 |
| 1920 | 20 | 23 |
| 1930 | 22 | 24 |
| 1940 | 25 | 27 |
| 1950 | 29 | 31 |
| 1960 | 33 | 35 |
| 1970 | 38 | 43 |
| 1973 | 39 | 45 |

From *American Working Women*, Baxandall et al.

Sources: Peter Gabriel Filene, *His/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, p. 241;

U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *1975 Handbook of Women Workers*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975, pp. 9, 11, 17, 18.

## SOURCES

The student readings in this section, "W... n in the Labor Movement," have come from the following sources:

"A Cap Maker's Story-1905" from Lerner, Gerda, *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, Bobbs-Merrill, Co., Inc., Indianapolis, 1977, pp. 300-302

"Emma Tennayuca and the Pecan Shellers of San Antonio, Texas" from Pesquera, Beatriz, M., *La Chicana*, Women's Studies Program, Berkeley Unified School District, 1977

"The Garment Worker's Strike" from Sumi, Pat, *Leaving What I Know Well . . . Learning Anew: Readings on the Experiences of Asian American Women in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Women's Studies Program, Berkeley Unified School District, 1977

The Teacher Background on "The Garment Workers' Strike" is from *Chinese Working People in America*, Wei Min She Labor Committee

# ORAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of the oral history assignment is to help students become aware of the process of history, and to understand that everyone shares in the making of history. Oral history taking is particularly important as a method of "recovering" women's experiences, since women generally have been excluded from the mainstream of historical research.

In the course of the interviews, students will increase their understanding of the ways in which immigration, labor struggles and work itself have affected the lives of American women. Students also will each learn from being an interviewer. By recording some of the life experiences of another person, their ideas of how history is written will be affected.

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

A. Trial interview activity
The following activity is intended to familiarize students with the interview process:

1. Divide the class into groups of approximately six students. Ask three students from each group to play the role of interviewer, and the other three the role of interviewee.
2. Within each group one interviewer and one interviewee discuss, in interview fashion, the experiences of the interviewee concerning immigration. The other two pairs take the topics of labor organizing and women's work situation.
3. Within the group each pair of students should conduct a mock interview.
4. At the end of the group activities, the entire class should discuss the experiences they had with interviewing. Strategies for improving the interviewing should be discussed.

B. Ask students to select one of three oral history topics for their assignment:

1. Interview a woman who has emigrated from another country.
2. Interview a woman who has been involved in a labor struggle.
3. Interview a woman regarding her feelings about her work in her home and at her job.

C. Make the oral history assignment at this point, allowing students approximately one week to conduct their interviews.

D. When students complete the interview, instruct them to fill out an interview report.

E. Lead a class discussion on the interview responses. (This activity will take place at end of this unit.)

# THREE LIVES: Women in the Labor Movement

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

"A Cap Maker's Story"
"Emma Tennayuca and the Pecan Shellers of San Antonio, Texas"
"The Garment Workers Strike"

The teacher should use the Teacher Background material for each selection to introduce the student readings: "A Cap Maker's Story" written by Rose Schneiderman, an important labor leader during the first half of the 20th century; "Emma Tennayuca," a story dealing with Chicana union activities in the 1930's; and "The Garment Workers' Strike," a story about Chinese garment workers and their attempts to form a union (this story is a fictionalized account of an actual event).

## SUGGESTED PROCEDURE

1. The stories may be read aloud either by the teacher or the students.

2. Questions for each reading can be found at the end of each reading. The teacher can use these questions for class discussion or written assignment.

3. When all three stories have been read and discussed, it is important that the teacher conclude this lesson with a discussion summarizing the similarities and differences in the labor experiences of these three people.

4. The following terms, discussion guidelines and questions can be used to facilitate student understanding of the readings and the summary class discussion.

5. The films *Union Maids* and *Salt of the Earth* are excellent sources of information to enrich the activities of "Three Lives."*

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

### A. IMPORTANT CONCEPTS and words to be emphasized

*A Cap Maker's Story:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| progressing | open shop | restive |
| National Board | union shop | resist |

*Emma Tennayuca:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| unsanitary | segregate | harassed |
| tedious | suppression | second-class citizen |

*The Garment Workers' Strike:*

| | |
|---|---|
| women's equality | rights of women |

### B. FILMS

***Union Maids*

**50-minute film that illustrates women's roles in labor struggles of the 1930's and 1940's, told by three women who participated in those struggles. Available through New Day Films, P.O. Box 315, Franklin Lakes, NJ 07417. Rental fee is $60.00. The film was made in 1976.**

***Salt of the Earth*

120-minute film. It is the story of a strike in New Mexico. The film deals with conflicts caused by class, race and sex differences. Available through Audio-Brandon, 3868 Piedmont, Oakland, CA 94611. Rental fee is $55.00. This film was made in the 1950's.

### C. SPECIFIC POINTS for class discussion

1. Experiences of women labor organizers
2. Importance of collective action
3. Importance of unions
4. Reasons for workers' strikes
5. Methods used by employers to break strikes
6. Effects of women's low wages on family living conditions
7. Effects of racism
8. Women's "double shift" of work and home

D. **QUESTIONS** to facilitate class discussion

1. Rose and Emma were both labor organizers. Discuss some of their experiences.
2. How do the experiences of Jun Ping differ from those of Rose and Emma? How does the role she played differ?
3. All three stories refer to the concept of collective action. Discuss why this is so important for workers.
4. In all three stories women workers were involved in strikes. Discuss their reasons for going on strike.
5. Discuss the various methods employers used in an attempt to break the strikes.
6. Why is it important for workers from other unions to support a strike?
7. What was the outcome of the strikes? Discuss this in light of any worker benefits or repercussions.
8. Discuss the qualities exhibited by the working women in these stories. How do they differ from any stereotypes you have had about women?
9. Using the "Emma Tennayuca" story as a reference, discuss the effects of sexism and racism on the Chicana workers and their families.
10. What types of changes did the family of Jun Ping go through during the course of the strike?
11. Discuss women's "double shift" of work and home, using Jun Ping as an example of the problems of working women.

# A CAP MAKER'S STORY (ROSE SCHNEIDERMAN, 1905) Teacher Background

Rose Schneiderman, a Jewish immigrant who came to the United States as a child, was one of the rank and file garment workers who rose to union leadership in the course of the organizing drives of 1905-1913. She describes her beginnings as a trade unionist in the selection below. She was soon to be an organizer of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, becoming the organization's vice-president in 1907. At the same time, she rose to leadership in the National Women's Trade Union League, becoming its president in 1918. A staunch trade unionist, feminist, and suffrage leader, she was appointed secretary of the New York State Department of Labor in 1937.

# EMMA TENNAYUCA AND THE PECAN SHELLERS OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS Teacher Background

During the 1930's, workers, organized in labor unions, led hundreds of strikes throughout the United States. Mexican women workers, whose working and living conditions were among the worst in the U.S., organized and led many strikes. One of the most well known of these strikes was the pecan shellers' struggle of San Antonio, Texas.

During the 1930's, 47.8% of the total population of San Antonio was Mexican. Many members of the Mexican community were American citizens who could trace their American ancestry to the 18th and 19th centuries. Almost 40% of the foreign-born Mexicans living in San Antonio during the 1930's had entered the country between 1911 and 1912. Some had become naturalized citizens, but almost all Mexicans were treated as foreigners.

Due to race and sex discrimination, Mexican women were employed in the lowest paying occupations. The San Antonio census of 1930 showed that Chicanas comprised 40% of the domestic workers and 44% of the factory workers.

# THE GARMENT WORKERS' STRIKE
## Teacher Background

The largest garment factory in San Francisco's Chinatown was owned by the National Dollar Store Chain. In 1938, its 200 workers protested against the practice of using part-time shifts, and demanded a nine-hour, full-time work day. When their employer refused, the workers voted in favor of union representation and went on strike for 14 weeks.

These workers formed the first Chinese chapter of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The retail clerks' union of the AFL supported their strike and refused to cross the picket lines, closing down the chain's stores until a court injunction was obtained, making the picketing illegal. With that vital support cut off by the courts, the Garment Workers' Strike was greatly weakened. A contract was signed giving the workers their demands, but the owner of the National Dollar Store was able to close down his factory and move his operation to Los Angeles. With the help of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the workers were able to find other jobs, but the fact that the owner would rather spend his capital by crushing their protest than by giving them fair working conditions remained bitterly in their minds.

> We know we cannot fail. We will fight our fight to the end, and hope to raise the living conditions not only for ourselves but for the workers in Chinatown as well. From a leaflet of the Chinese Ladies Garment Workers Union, Local 341 of the ILGWU, April 30, 1938

# WOMEN'S ROLES IN LABOR ORGANIZING

## ROLE-PLAYING ACTIVITY

The purpose of this assignment is for students to assume the roles of working women and men in order for them to identify some of the struggles, issues, and problems involved with women in the labor movement.

# A WOMAN LABOR ORGANIZER'S STORY

## TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this activity is to enable students to incorporate what they have learned from the various readings, activities, and class discussions to write their own story about a contemporary woman organizer. This story may be either an imaginary account or taken from the experiences of contemporary women labor organizers. If a student chooses to write a story from an actual experience, s/he should be instructed on research procedures.

We have used the United Farm Workers Organization (UFWO) as an example. Dolores Huerta and Jessie de la Cruz are two prominent women within the movement.

The UFWO represents a great achievement in the history of farm workers in this country. In the past, attempts at organizing farm workers have not succeeded. The struggles and achievements of the UFWO have brought national attention to the plight of farm workers, who have been victims of some of the worst working and living conditions. Until fairly recently, the minimum wage standard did not apply to the agricultural industry.

Today the farm work force in the United States is primarily Mexican/Chicano. Historically the entire family, including children, have worked. During the struggle to unionize, the entire family participated. Many women became organizers.

We suggest the following sources for the activity:

### FOR TEACHERS

Meister, Dick, and Anne Loftis, *A Long Time Coming: The Struggle to Unionize America's Farm Workers*, Macmillan, New York, 1977

*Women's Lives, Women's Work, Women Working for Social Change*, Interview with Jessie de la Cruz, The Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, New York 11568

### FOR STUDENTS

Weiner, Sandra, *Small Hands, Big Hands, Seven Profiles of Chicano Migrant Workers and Their Families*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1970

*Women's Lives, Women's Work, Women Working for Social Change*, Interview with Jessie de la Cruz

Students may also check articles about the farm workers written in newspapers and magazines.

**STUDENT ACTIVITY**

Write your own story about a contemporary woman labor organizer. If you select to write about a woman UFWO organizer, here are some key points you should include in your story:

1. The working and living conditions of a Chicana farm worker.
2. The working conditions she might focus on, such as breaks, medical benefits, health hazards, or wages.
3. The activities she might be involved in while attempting to organize her co-workers.
4. Slogans she might use in order to catch the attention of her fellow workers.
5. The arguments she might use to convince her fellow workers of the merits of a union.
6. The specific tactics she would use in organizing women farm workers.

If you choose to write about a woman organizer in a different work area—for example, the garment industry—the above questions can be adapted to your topic.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allen, Robert, *Reluctant Reformers: The Impact of Racism on American Social Reform Movements*, Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1974.
An excellent account of the impact of racism on the labor movement.

Asian Women's Journal, *Asian Women*, Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1975.
An anthology of writings by Asian women. Excellent for student readings.

Baxandall, Rosalyn, et al., *America's Working Women: A Documentary History, 1600-Present*, Vintage Books, New York, 1976.
An anthology focusing on working-class women from 1820 to 1975. Selections from the anthology could be used to provide students with further readings.

Deckard, Barbara, *The Women's Movement: Political, Socioeconomic, and Psychological Issues*, Harper and Row, New York, 1975.
economic and political struggles that women in past and present societies have waged. Teachers may find it useful, particularly in relation to the development of the women's movement in America.

Flexner, Eleanor, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 1975.
An excellent account of the women's movement from 1800 to 1920.

Kramer, Sydelle, and Masui, Jenny, *Jewish Grandmothers*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1976.
Oral histories of ten Jewish immigrant women who came to America during the beginning of the twentieth century. Includes an oral history with Fannie Shapiro. Good for further teacher background.

Lerner, Gerda, *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., Indianapolis, 1977.
Focuses on many aspects of what it has meant to be a woman in American society from an historical perspective. Includes such themes as the female cycle, marriage, women workers, and women in politics. Good for general teacher reference. Includes excellent selections by working women.

Lynd, Alice and Staughton, *Rank and File: Personal Histories by Working-Class Organizers*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973.
Personal experiences of men and women involved in union activities. Selections could be assigned as supplementary reading for high potential students.

Neidle, Cecyle S., *American Immigrant Women*, Hippocrene Books, Inc., New York, 1976.
An historical account of the impact of immigration on women immigrants and their contributions to American society. Includes biographical sketches of influential immigrant women.

Ryan, Mary P., *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, New Viewpoints, A Division of Franklin Watts, Inc., New York, 1975.
A discussion of woman's contribution to the development of America, as well as an analysis of the concept of woman in American society, from colonial times to the present.

Wertheimer, Barbara Mayer, *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1977.
An excellent historical account of working women. Although the focus is on wage earners, the book includes material on colonial, slave and pioneer women. Also an excellent section on women in the labor movement during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

# UNIT 3

## Women in Struggle: Immigration and Labor 1820-1940

**WOMEN IN STRUGGLE**
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# WHO IS AN AMERICAN?

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

America is a land of immigrants. The majority of people who now consider themselves Americans are descendents of immigrants or are themselves immigrants. The *only* people who are *not* immigrants in this country are Indian peoples or Native Americans.

A. Look at your community.

1. Are there restaurants in your community that offer "ethnic foods"?

2. Are there newspapers that print in languages other than English?

3. Are there "ethnic sections" in your community?

B. Discover the ethnic heritages of your neighbors and friends.

1. Ask five people where their ancestors came from.

2. Ask these people if anyone in their family speaks a language other than English.

C. Research your own family's ethnic heritage.

D. What have you learned about "Who Is an American?"

# WHAT ARE YOU?

When I was young
kids used to ask me
what are you?
I'd tell them what my mom told me
I'm an American
chink chink Chinaman
you're a Jap!
flashing hot inside
I'd go home
my mom would say
don't worry
he who walks alone
walks faster

people kept asking me
what are you?
and I would always answer
I'm an American
they'd say
no, what nationality
I'm an American!
that's where I was born
flashing hot inside

and when I'd tell them what they wanted to
know
Japanese
. . . . Oh, I've been to Japan

From *Asian Women's Journal,* Asian American Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles.

I'd get it over with
me they could catalogue and file me
pigeon hole me
so they'd know just how
to think of me
priding themselves
they could guess the difference
between Japanese and Chinese

they had me wishing
I was American
just like them
they had me wishing I was what I'd
been seeing in movies and on tv
on bill boards and in magazines
and I tried

while they were making laws in California
against us owning land
we were trying to be american
and laws against us intermarrying with
white people

we were trying to be american
when they put us in concentration camps
we were trying to be american
our people volunteered to fight against
their own country
trying to be american
when they dropped the atom bomb
on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
we were still trying

finally we made it
most of our parents
fiercely dedicated to give us
a good education
to give us everything they never had
we made it
now they use us as an example
to the blacks and browns
how we made it
how we overcame

but there was always
someone asking me
what are you?

Now I answer
I'm an Asian
and they say
why do you want to separate yourselves
now I say
I'm Japanese
and they say
don't you know this is the greatest country
in the world
Now I say in america
I'm part of the third world people
and they say
if you don't like it here
why don't you go back

# WHAT ARE YOU?

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

*HOW WELL DID YOU READ?*

1. Her mother told her to answer

   a. I'm Chinese
   b. I'm Japanese
   c. I'm American

2. People pride themselves on

   a. being what they are
   b. guessing the difference between Japanese and Chinese
   c. going to Japan

3. Now when people ask her, she says

   a. I'm Asian
   b. I'm American
   c. I'm Chinese

*EXTENDING YOUR IDEAS*

What is the mood of this poem? Why is the author writing this to you?

# STUDENT SURVEY
# Men's Work—Women's Work

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

Which sex, male or female, comes to your mind when you consider each of the following jobs?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| doctor | lawyer | teacher |
| nurse | laundry owner | principal |
| gardener | restaurant owner | housekeeper |
| bank teller | tailor | garment factory worker |
| judge | plumber | construction worker |
| secretary | pilot | flight attendant |
| engineer | store clerk | gas station attendant |
| bartender | TV newscaster | radio disc jockey |
| band leader | zoo keeper | union leader |
| maid | dentist | auto mechanic |
| cook | filing clerk | police officer |
| barber | truck driver | cafeteria worker |
| athlete | custodian | farm worker |
| carpenter | artist | karate instructor |
| scientist | landlord | political official |
| author | inventor | newspaper reporter |

1. **Tally the number of jobs which have a "male image." Tally the number of jobs which have a "female image." Compare your numbers with those of others in your class. What conclusions can you draw about job opportunities for women in this country?**

2. **Which of the jobs above has an "Asian image," "Black image," "Latina image," or "Caucasian image"? What conclusions can you draw about the attitudes toward jobs for various ethnic groups in the U.S.?**

3. a. List *five* "high class" jobs.

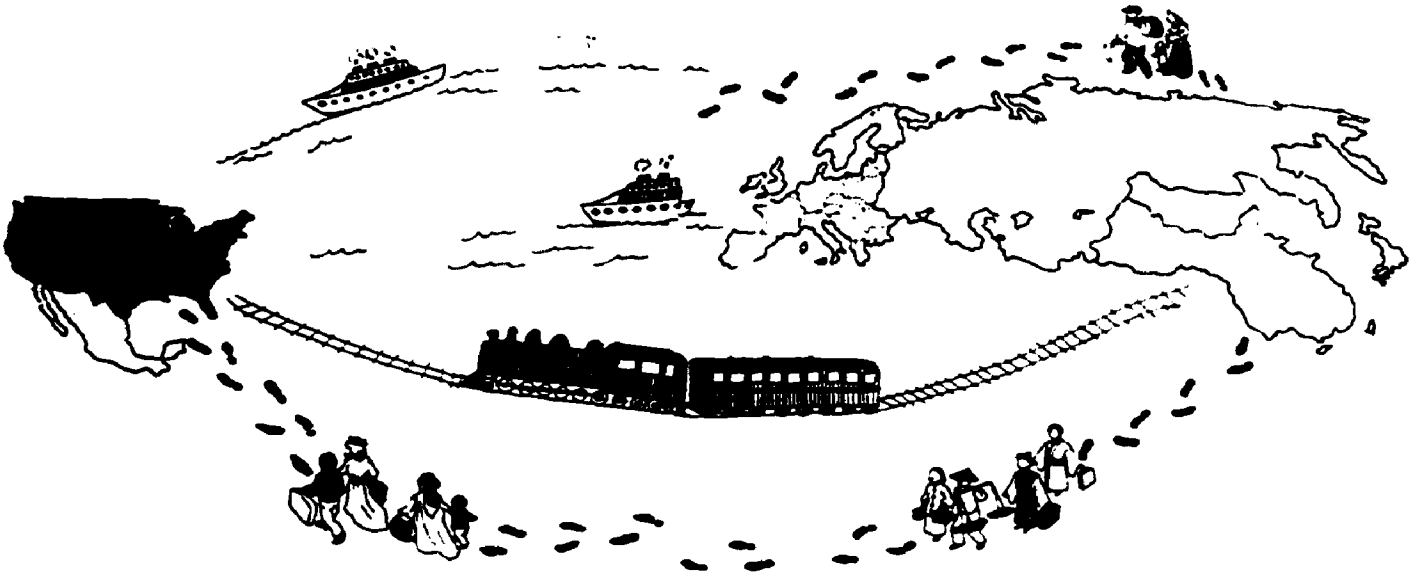
   A high class job is one in which the person has respect, training, steady work and high pay.

   b. List *five* "low class" jobs.

   A low class job is one in which the person has little respect, little training, little job security and low pay.

4. How many of the jobs that you considered "high class" have a "male image"? How many of the "low class" jobs have a "male image"? How many have a "female image"? What conclusions can you draw about the jobs that have higher status? What about the ones with lower status?

# WOMEN IMMIGRANTS



## WHY THEY CAME

More than thirty million immigrants came to the United States between 1820 and 1940. Women came to America for many different reasons. Once here, they encountered similar life experiences and problems. Although they came from all parts of the world and had various ethnic backgrounds, these women had more in common than their surface differences showed. Many women were victims of various forms of race, sex and class discrimination. They were discriminated against because they were both women and "greenhorns" (rookies). As a result, they received the lowest paying, lowest status and least skilled jobs. They suffered greatly from the popular idea that "ladies" did not work, and that "girls" who had to work were not to be respected. One woman said:

> ***People "look down" on us because we work? Why, the lawyer and the doctor and the clergyman and the professor and the merchant all work . . . and everyone looks up to them. "Of course," says a bright, young lady, "we expect men to work and support their families, but ladies do not work."***[1]

As American factories developed, immigrant labor became very important. Most of the immigrants were poor and unskilled. They had no choice but to accept the lowest paying, most unpleasant jobs, jobs that most native-born Americans would not accept. Immigrant women came to America to find a better life for themselves and for their families. Many women came alone and without money; many of them were under the age of 18. They truly believed that America was the land of milk and honey:

> *Immigrants poured into the country, and they worked cheap. Anywhere from 12 to 14 hours of work each day were common. No one was protected by safety laws from on-the-job injuries. Families lived in company-owned shacks not fit for pigs. Children died by the hundreds due to the ignorance and the poverty of their parents.*[1]

[1]Wertheimer, Barbara Mayer, et al., *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1977.

Many women left their native lands to escape from horrible circumstances at home. The Irish came to escape from the potato famine of 1845. Here they lived in the poorest slums and were victims of discrimination. Mexicans came to escape the Revolution of 1910. The Jews of Eastern Europe came to escape the pogroms—campaigns of religious persecution.

The Chinese immigrants came with ideas that were different from those of many of the other groups. At first only Chinese men came to America. They came solely with the idea of making money and then returning to China. However, most did not return. At the turn of the century, there were 30 Chinese men here for each Chinese woman. The Japanese also came with the idea of returning to Japan. Forced to stay, many of them sent home to Japan for mail order brides. "The "picture-bride" practice increased the female population substantially.

By 1940 many Japanese women had come to the United States alone. They came with a mixture of feelings that included fright, apprehension, sadness, excitement and hopefulness. They all came with the determination to make new and better lives for themselves.

## LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Upon arrival in the United States, immigrant women were given very little time to adjust to their new environment. Being unfamiliar with the language and customs of their new country meant dealing with immigration officers and finding jobs and homes, a frightening and confusing process. Many of these women were alone and only in their mid-teens. All faced tremendous ethnic and sexual prejudice.

They were able to obtain only the lowest paying and the least skilled jobs. They became maids, cooks (in homes), farm workers and workers in food processing plants and laundries, and they worked in factories that made clothing and textiles. For example, four out of five Irish women between the ages of 15 and 19

worked in textile factories. Even after many immigrant women married, they had to work to help their husbands support their families.

Women also worked long hours, often up to thirteen hours a day. Many women with children were forced to work on the night shifts. These women had the double burden of factory work and housework.

> *All women with families did their own housework; they prepared three meals a day, including breakfast, after a night's work. They also did the washing for the family. They averaged about four and one-half hours [of] sleep a day. The time of sleep varied with the individual. Some slept an hour or two in the morning and for a time in the afternoon; others slept at intervals of about an hour each during the day. They all slept in bedrooms which had been occupied during the night by husbands and children.*
>
> *When the mother works at night the little ones learn to keep quiet out of doors while she is sleeping in the day time.*

Many immigrants lived in terrible places under unhealthy conditions. Whole families were cramped into damp basements or were forced to live in one-or two-room apartments that had no bathrooms or other sanitary facilities. By 1925, only one house in three had an indoor toilet. Three-fourths of the houses were without bathtubs. In addition, many women took in boarders to make extra money. This added to the already cramped living space.

Jobs were generally divided along sexual lines. Men cut out and pressed material while women finished the garments and sewed on the buttons. Men did the baking, and women frosted the cakes. Male garment workers received $16.00 a week, while women received six or seven dollars a week. Men bakers received $100 a month and women received $22 a month.

Conditions in the factories were poor for both men and women. There were no safety regulations, and if people were injured, there was no health insurance or workers' compensation to help them. At first women were too poor and ignorant to fight these living and working conditions. Their children were forced to watch their mothers suffer from overwork, sickness, and overwhelming responsibilities. But they also watched women who showed extraordinary strength and determination in managing under these oppressive circumstances. One immigrant child said:

> *My mother wanted to be in the better neighborhoods. That was an immigrant woman. She always wanted something better for her children. The father went out to make the living; the mother was the backbone of everything. I think that the mother, the immigrant mother, was a real woman because the children looked up to her, the community looked up to her 'cause she was the leader.*

# Jewish Women Immigrants: Expectations and Arrival
## FANNY SHAPIRO*

I told my parents, "I want to go to America. I want to learn, I want to see a life, and I want to go to school." I used to keep all the time thinking: But how am I gonna live? What am I gonna do? All right, I'll come to family.

Costed thirty dollars for the ship, so my father wouldn't give me the money so they sent me the money from my mother's family, and I had to pay them off. When I came, they showed me the bill, and they said, "See, when you start working, you have to pay a dollar a month on this to pay that off."

So then my mother cried so bitter, "Our little girl, our *kind*, picking herself up and leaving home and daring, daring." My father took me to the train, and he cried. But he understood that I was right. . . .

And you got in that ship—I can't describe it to you, the filth; old and dirty and filthy. And you had to walk three floors down, on the bottom there. It was something undescribable. First day, I have to get to the steerage, all the ways down, so I didn't know how to get down there. I had a little valise in my hand, and I was sitting and crying. So a man comes over, with a beard, an old man, and he must have come from Galicia. He was saying, "Little girl, why are you crying?" So he called over a sailor and the sailor took me and showed me where it was. The cots were one on top of another—three, I think, and I was on the very top one. If I had to go now on that kind of a ship, I don't think I'd make it.

*From *Jewish Grandmothers*, Kramer and Masui, Beacon Press, Boston, 1976, p. 45.

Well, when I came off the ship—at that time, there was a lot of prostitution going on in the United States, 1906. And they used to pick up girls from the ship and take them to Argentina, to different countries, if they were nice looking. I wasn't pretty, but healthy; and you know, I thought maybe I'd fit for the game. So an uncle of mine was supposed to pick me up. And this uncle, when he was in the Old Country, he had a beard—he looked like an old man and he wasn't old. Here he was shaving, he dressed pretty nice. I didn't recognize him. And he comes to the gate, and they open the gate and call his name and mine, and I wouldn't go. So the man who was standing there, he asked me, "Do you know him?" I said, "No." And he says to me in Jewish, "Don't be afraid. Come with me. I'm your Uncle Isaac." Well, I was shivering; but I went. And then I came to his house. I pictured to myself, America, a big house. And he had three or four children and a three room apartment and two boarders. And when I saw all of this, I says, "What did I come to? Is that America?"

But I didn't live with this uncle because I had my mother's sister so I stayed with her. They had a candy store and in back of the store there was one little room, no windows. And I slept in the kitchen—no bed, no bath. Just a toilet, and if you had to take a bath, so you took a bath in the washtub.

[The neighborhood] was mixed, and those Gentiles that lived around the Jews, they too were immigrants. You see, I came to people, they were poor themselves—immigrants. They couldn't speak English. They had a paper stand by the candy store. I had to get up five in the morning and open the store, and get myself ready to go to work. Meanwhile people would come buy the paper. My aunt, she was here for years—she couldn't read. So I said no, this wouldn't go, I had to read to know what I'm selling.

Oh, I had pictures of I would come to this country, I go right to school. Whoever thought of working? So well, I came to America, I only saw New York. Harlem. I thought to myself, "I don't blame my father that he went back." A man buys a coal cellar: you can't picture, imagine it. Buys coal cellar, lives in the

coal cellar, eats there and sleeps, carries a pack of coal to the fifth floor for five cents, and out of that he has to make a living and save a couple of dollars to bring his family to the United States.

I was so naive and my whole hope [was] that I was coming to this country to get an education. I didn't realize—I didn't understand how things are. I heard so much about America—a free country for the Jews, and you can get an education and you didn't have to pay for schooling, so I came. I didn't think, I didn't know. I never saw anybody working, I didn't know what it was all about; so I thought that I'll stay with the family. I'll help probably in the house, with the children, wash the dishes, and I'll go to school. But it didn't work out that way.

I came in on a Saturday, and Monday I had to go and look for a job. I come up for a job, they set me down by a machine and they show me how to operate it; and I take a little while to learn. In Russia I used to come to the small town and they had these little shops—two, three, four, or five girls in a house, working, making dresses and things. And they had a Singer's sewing

machine. I used to envy [them]; the girls would be sitting and working and singing; I thought it was so much fun. Singing. God, I didn't think it was anything serious.

[Here] you're not allowed to talk to each other. And you had, I think, about fifteen minutes for lunch and I'd have to take along something from home, but I could buy an apple for a

penny. Where I come from I never knew I had to pay a penny for an apple. I was getting about $1.95 or something like that for six days work, sixty hours.

And little by little I tried to pick up the language as best as I could. And working in a shop, hardly anyone spoke English. All Yiddish; the shop belongs to a Jewish man and all the workers were Jewish. They were all just immigrants, immigrants, immigrants. And all you can hear are these who are a short time in this country and they thought they were Americans and they call me and others the *grueneheim*, greenhorn. And my aunt and my uncle—I was here about a few months, if she had to go downtown, I had to take her. And she used to call *me* the grueneheim.

Then I thought to myself I'm gonna work another while and I'm gonna go out look for a job, and see what I can accomplish. So I met up with a girl. We went to look for a job together. We went up and found a job. We worked partners, and we made each six dollars a week. I had to leave the shop on account of the boss pinched me. One day the machine—those old machines—broke; I had to get up on the table to reach it. So when I went up on the table reaching and the boss, an old man, he went and he pinched me so I gave him a crack and he fell. He was very embarrassed; so the whole shop went roaring. He thought I would keep quiet. I was so naive, I thought a man touched me—so he fired me. He told me, "Get out, greenhorn. . . ."

Then I started looking around for other jobs, and I went and registered at night school. And night school was about six or seven blocks away, and I never got home before seven. So I take a bits, and run to night school; I was so anxious to learn. And when I came to night school, I was so tired, after all, I'd fall asleep there. So I had to give up; I went and I bought one of these translators and I used to [learn with it], after washing all the diapers and all the dishes and going to bed and getting up.

Then I got tired of this kind of life with them. I started earning a little more money. I moved out. There was such a scandal in the family; I tell you—uncles and aunts; but, they wrote to my parents that I moved to strangers and my parents were so worried about it. I moved out to strangers, to strangers. I mean, I worked in a shop with a girl, we became friends, and so she said she has a room all to herself, so we can share it, and I wouldn't have to pay much.

There I met people my own age; we formed a Jewish Club, we played theater, and we danced. None of us had any talent, but we just got together, and life was different. I worked a little shorter hours that time. It was an entirely different life I started living.

# FANNIE SHAPIRO

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Why did Fannie Shapiro come to America?

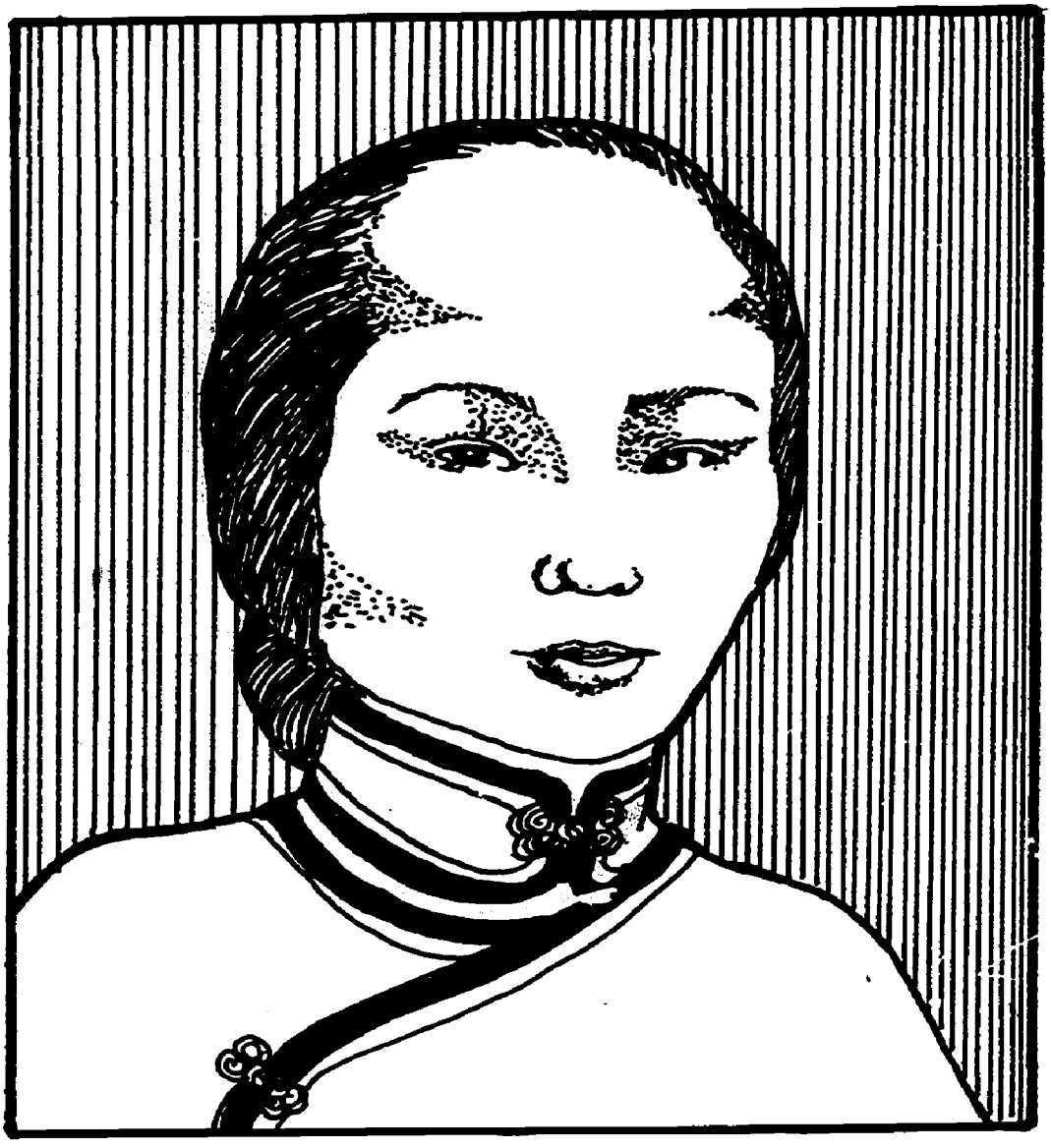
2. How was her trip to America?

3. What were some of the problems she faced upon her arrival in America?

4. What kind of jobs did she obtain? Describe some of her work experiences.

5. What were the reactions of Fannie's family?

6. How did the reality of Fannie's life in America compare with her expectations?



# Chinese Women Immigrants: Expectations and Arrival

## MEI-LING*

Mei-ling looked up from her cooking lessons for a moment and thought about her uncle Kwan Chok. One year ago her uncle had written Mei-Ling's father to announce that a young merchant in the Golden Mountains had offered the Kwan clan the proper dowry to send him a wife. Uncle Chok suggested Mei-ling be sent. After all, she was the fifth daughter of a busy Canton city merchant and suitable for a young merchant in the Golden Mountains. After proper negotiations with her husband-to-be's clan, the marriage contract had been signed.

For years she had lived with other young girls in a special school to learn the duties and skills of a good wife and mother.

In a few weeks, Uncle Chok would return from the Golden Mountains and she would participate in the marriage ceremony. Her husband-to-be, Wang Kway, would be represented by his cousin. Then Uncle Chok would take her across the Pacific Ocean to the Golden Mountains. Mei-ling's eyes sparkled at the thought. Many stories had been brought back by young men who had gone there. They talked of the Americans with pale eyes, the manners of barbarians and flame-colored hair. Mei-ling had been frightened at first but then had felt an overwhelming sense of adventure and curiosity. Uncle Chok knew she would feel this way. Her four sisters and three brothers called her the least likely to succeed as a proper Chinese maiden because of her independent spirit.

*From *Leaving What I Know Well* by Pat Sumi, Women's Studies Program, Berkeley Unified School District, 1977.

A sharp word brought her back to the cooking lesson. The other girls giggled as she again began to mince the pork. Four years at the House of Maidens had taught her all the womanly arts of pleasing a husband. Mei-ling wondered if what she had learned would benefit her in a new land. She would be one of the very few Chinese women there.

As the day's lesson came to an end, Mei-ling thought about her neighbor Gum Ling. She remembered the wedding and her father's comments on the prosperity of the family, who were rice merchants. But drought had struck and the great Tai Ping rebellion further reduced rice supplies. The family lost its money. Rumors circulated that Gum Ling's sister-in-law might even be sold to a wealthy family. Finally, in desperation Gum Ling's husband had gone away to the Golden Mountains to seek a fortune to save the family. Gum Ling had stayed behind to care for her in-laws, as was the usual custom. Her mother-in-law could often be heard scolding her for not performing her duties better. Mei-ling shivered when she thought of her neighbor's fate. Although it made her sad to think of being so far from her mother, she was glad she would go to be with her husband and there would be no mother-in-law.

Finally, the great day of departure arrived. After the wedding ceremony, Mei-ling had packed a small leather chest with her clothes and a few wedding gifts from friends. Holding tight to Uncle Chok's arm, she said one last good-bye to her family before going by rickshaw to the wharf where the Pacific Mail ship waited to take them to the Golden Mountains. Mei-ling, in later years, would always remember her mother's parting words, "When you were a child you obeyed your father. Now you go to your husband. You must obey him now because a husband is more important to a woman than even her parents. And when you have children, your oldest son will be most precious to you. You have been taught the arts of pleasing your man, of

making a good home for him. You must never forget these things even if you live in the foreign land for the rest of your days." Mei-ling's mother hugged her one last time as they both cried.

On the boat, Mei-ling and her uncle found themselves crammed into the hold with about 200 young Chinese men who were going to the Golden Mountains. They had signed on to build

an iron road across the mountains. Mei-ling was the only woman. But the men acted respectfully once they learned she was a bride going to meet her new husband. Mei-ling unrolled her sleeping mat and also unrolled her uncle's. Finally, with a long blast of the ship's whistle, the ship pulled away from Canton harbor, leaving behind everything Mei-ling had ever known.

The 20 days of passage across the Peaceful Ocean were some of the grimmest days of Mei-ling's life. As the ship rolled and pitched, waves of seasickness shook Mei-ling's body. For the entire passage she seldom ate or drank. The humid, dark hold filled with the stench of 200 seasick people. The American crew

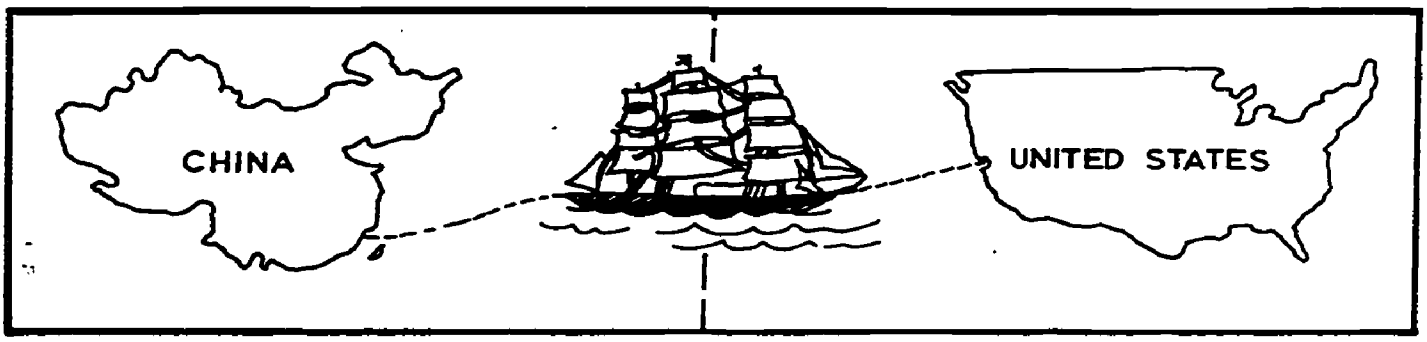
threatened to beat up any Chinese who tried to go up on deck for fresh air, so the smell grew worse and worse.

One day, Mei-ling awoke from a half-sleep to hear a sharp exchange of words at the top of the stairs leading to the deck. In the dim light she realized that someone lay huddled in a blanket at the foot of the stairs while her Uncle Chok and two others were at the top talking to three Americans who leaned over the hatch opening. Finally, Uncle Chok and the others came down, picked up the man on the floor and carried him up to the deck. A few moments later they returned empty-handed as the crew slammed shut the hatch behind them. Seeing the question in Mei-ling's eyes, Uncle Chok shook his head sadly and said only that one of the fellow passengers had gone to his ancestors. Mei-ling burried her face in her hands and wept.

Mei-ling lay on her sleeping mat wondering how long she had been in this pitching, rolling ship. It seemed like months. The sea-sickness still kept her from eating anything. Enviously she looked up at Uncle Chok, hungrily eating his morning meal. Suddenly, Mei-ling became aware of a change in the sounds on deck. The shouts soon stirred all the men in the hold. A murmuring roar rose to excited and animated conversations. They were in sight of the Great City! Within the hour they would have arrived at the gateway to the Golden Mountains! Mei-ling anxiously packed her luggage and rolled up her sleeping mats. A blinding shaft of sunlight came through the hatch as a hawk-nosed sailor threw it open and shouted, "Now hear this, you heathens! Get ready to go ashore!" His nasty tone startled Mei-ling. "What could he mean?" she asked Uncle Chok. Her uncle merely said, "He tells us to be ready." With doubt in her eyes, Mei-ling, holding one end of her trunk while Uncle Chok held the other, shuffled toward the stairs.

Once on deck, she could hardly believe her eyes. Gazing at the bare brown hills that flanked the straits through which they sailed, she could not hide her disappointment. "These are the Golden Mountains? But Uncle Chok, they are just like our hills at home." Uncle Chok chuckled and said, "You are near to truth. The mountains of gold are far from here, to the east. But for those who have good fortune, gold can be earned here as well as found." But Uncle Chok could not sound very sincere. Although he himself, made a good living as an herb merchant among the Chinese of San Francisco, he thought of the thousands of Chinese who had not made their fortunes and now labored away their youth, hoping against hope to save enough money to go home. He himself knew of dozens of laborers who had gone to the eastern mountains to build the iron railroad who had never returned. Now, he thought bitterly, their bones will rest in a foreign land thousands of miles from their families.

As the ship rounded the bend, Mei-ling saw hundreds of wooden shacks tumbling down the sides of the hills almost to the water's edge. On the pier were several "foreign devils" waiting for the ship. Her anticipation gave way to fear and apprehension as she thought of the hawk-nosed sailors. Anxiously she tugged at Uncle Chok's sleeve.



"In truth, are all the foreign devils such barbarians?" Her uncle stared out over the water for a long moment and slowly said, "Their ways are not our ways and our ways are not their ways. They call us unfeeling, superstitious heathens who have no hearts because we do not display our feelings for all to see. We call them children and barbarians because even their grown men will weep in public. Who speaks the truth? They also call us job stealers because the poorer and unemployed among them look upon us as the cause of their misfortune. Yet among us also are many poor and unemployed. I do not think they understand us."

Uncle Chok's face grew very grave. Mei-ling did not know what to say, so she looked toward the dock. There, behind the foreign devils, stood a slender Chinese man in a long black gown [that hung] over his trousers. Mei-ling excitedly pulled her uncle's hand, "Is that my husband, uncle? Is that him?" Chok smiled and could not resist prolonging the suspense. "Hmmm, yes. Well, I can't see very well. Ah, perhaps, him." Finally, he laughed and said, "Why yes, I think that's Uncle Kim." He chuckled at Mei-ling's disappointment. "You will see your husband-to-be very soon."

As Mei-ling and Uncle Chok descended the gangplank, the rest of their fellow passengers gathered in 6 groups, each behind a well-dressed Chinese man calling out the name of a district in Mei-ling's native Kwangtung province in Southern China. Uncle Chok whispered that each of the district associations contracted the labor of newly arrived Chinese to the owners of the railroad.

Finally, after clearance through the American authorities, Mei-ling met her Uncle Kim, who hurried them to a waiting carriage. At first she wondered at his haste but suddenly she became aware of a large crowd of foreigners on the edge of the wharf area. As they neared the carriage the crowd began shouting at her in the same nasty tone as the hawk-nosed man on the ship

[had used]. "Look, they're bringing over women now!" "Down with the Chinese!" "Go home!" "Go back, you heathens!" they shouted. Mei-ling clutched Uncle Chok's hand. "What are they saying, uncle?" "Never mind," said Uncle Chok anxiously.

Quickly they boarded the carriage. Just as the crowd began to surge toward them, the driver whipped the horse and they clattered away. Mei-ling heard several stones slam into the back and sides of the carriage. Frightened, she wondered what this might mean for her future life in this strange land.

# CHINESE IMMIGRANTS: Discrimination

## PART I

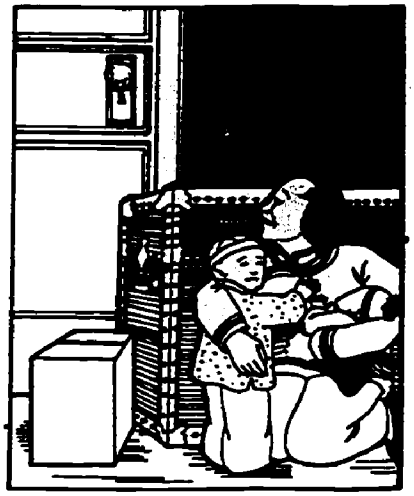
Mei-ling brushed a lock of hair back from her forehead and listened for sounds of her two children. Ah Lim, her first-born son, was laughing merrily at some pieces of colored paper twirling on the end of a stick. Ah Fong, the new baby, slept peacefully in a box on a chair behind the counter where she worked. Five years had passed since her arrival in the Golden Mountains, and her marriage to Wang Kway. He was a stern, thin-faced man 12 years older than Mei-ling. Since their marriage, Mei-ling had worked in their herb and food shop buying merchandise through her uncle's family in Canton and selling it to the hundreds of Chinese passing through San Francisco to work on the railroad.

At noon her husband emerged from the back room where mahjong and fan-tan tables were already crowded with fortune seekers. While Wang Kway stayed at the counter, Mei-ling tied the baby on her back and, taking Ah Lim by the hand, went out


to shop. She headed for the American area, which lay beyond Dupont Street in Chinatown with its Chinese stores and hotels. As she walked toward Market Street she saw a group of rough-dressed American men gathered in an empty sandlot. One man stood on a box. As she drew nearer, she heard him shouting angry words. The crowd answered shaking their fists. Mei-ling remembered the angry crowd at the dock the day she had arrived here with her uncle. Instinctively she slowed her walk, finally stopping, clutching her child to her side. The man shouted, "The Chinese must go!" and the crowd cheered. Then the speaker saw Mei-ling.

What happened next always seemed partly unreal to Mei-ling. She mainly remembered great fear, especially for the children. The man on the box screamed, "Look, they're even having children

now to take away more jobs from us! Down with the heathens! Down with the Chinese!" The crowd turned to look at Mei-ling, who was already running back toward Dupont, half-dragging, half-carrying Ah Lim. The mob started to follow, at first slowly, then faster. Mei-ling fled down Dupont and rushed into her husband's store. She cried, "Quickly, close the shop! The foreign devils are coming for us." Wang Kway tried to suppress a smile at his wife's hysteria. "Now, now. Why should they come here?" But just as he spoke they heard shouts and screams at the far end of Dupont. The crash of breaking glass was followed by a terrible grinding and tearing. Wang Kway ordered Mei-ling to take the children upstairs to the living quarters while he cleared the back room of customers and then tried to close the shutters and barricade the front door.



Mei-ling cradled the baby and hugged Ah Lim to her side. The sounds of the mob grew closer and closer. Just as the mob reached the shop across the street, Mei-ling heard loud smashing sounds slam against the doors downstairs. Terrified, she withdrew with her children to a far corner. It sounded as though

wild horses stampeded through the shop. Wang Kway, where was he? Concern for her husband overcame Mei-ling's fears. Covering the baby with a large basket, she instructed her eldest son to sit by him and not move. Slowly grasping the handle of her kitchen cleaver, Mei-ling cautiously opened the door and began descending the stairs. In the dim light of the shuttered store, she stared uncomprehendingly at the heaps of goods smashed on the floor and the suddenly empty shelves. Then a movement to the side caught her eye. While two men held him by the arms, a man beat her husband in the stomach and over the head with a club. With a cry of rage Mei-ling flew down the remaining stairs and go. The two others jumped back, dropping Wang Kway, who crumpled in a heap. Mei-ling raised the cleaver and swung at the next man striking his arm. With that the three men fled, leaving Mei-ling gasping for breath holding the bloody cleaver in her hand.

Mei-ling ran to her husband's side, her eyes wide with concern and fear. Even as she slowly turned his head toward her she saw that his thin, bony chest was utterly still. Holding his head in her hands, she gazed at his bloody and distorted face for a long moment. Then slowly, slowly, with heavy steps, she mounted the stairs toward her now fatherless children.

## PART II

For two weeks Mei-ling had tried her best to serve the shop. At first, her dead husband's clansmen, including some distant cousins, had tried to discourage her from trying business. "It is unseemly for a woman to be seen without a husband," they argued. Besides, it made them look bad, as though they couldn't care for a dead relative's family. But the fact of the matter was

that they couldn't help her. Their businesses, too, had been almost destroyed by the mobs. Those who were not merchants had almost no money, since wages were low and every penny saved was sent to families in China. Finally, it was Uncle Chok who saved the day.

A born diplomat, Uncle Chok approached Wang Kway's cousins by saying, "I know it is highly irregular for the relatives of a married woman to step forward. However, since we are not

in China, some things may have to be done somewhat differently." Uncle Chok paused for a moment to let his words sink in. Taking a deep breath, Uncle Chok continued, "In China, Wang Kway's family would have the responsibility of caring for his widow and two children. Perhaps even an unmarried brother would marry the widow. Wang Kway, however, had no immediate family here." The cousins all nodded, waiting for his next words, "And," Uncle Chok added delicately, "foreign devil's mobs have caused difficulties for everyone. Therefore, I propose that I

be allowed to help Wang Kway's widow maintain the shop. Being one of the few respectable women from the old country, I'm sure someone will propose marriage. Then I will be responsible for everything. I offer to put up half the money to establish the store." Wang Kway's cousins sat in silence. Of the six cousins, the eldest arose. Clearing his throat, he thanked Uncle Chok for his offer and said, "We will seriously consider your kind offer." His friendly tone assured Uncle Chok they would accept his help.

Back at the shop, Uncle Chok sat on a low stool and helped Mei-ling sort through the piles of rubble looking for salvageat merchandise. When he told her of his offer, her eyes sparkled and danced. Such an opportunity to run a shop on her own would be unheard of in China. A sharp look from Uncle Chok brought her back to reality. "You realize, of course, that this would only be to pay back Wang Kway's debt to the district association. As soon as it is repaid we must find a suitable father for your children. Otherwise, people would wonder if the barbarities of the Golden Mountains had made the women of our clan uncivilized."

# MEI-LING

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Why did Mei-ling come to America?

2. How was her trip to America?

3. What were some of the problems she and her family faced?

4. Why did other Americans fear the Chinese immigrants?

5. What was life like for women in China during this period?

6. What was important about Mei-ling's arrival as a Chinese woman in America?

7. What experiences did Mei-ling have in common with Fannie Shapiro?

# IRENE CASTAÑEDA*

Well daughter as I remember there was lots of Mexican families [in Crystal City] and they'd go to pick cotton—Ganado, Texas, Corpus Cristy, Agua Dulce, Kerney, and lots of other little towns. When the cotton picking was done they'd come back to their shacks—they'd start to cut spinach, tomato, onion, watermelon, melon, radishes, then—in time—they started traveling to Minnesota, North Dakota and Ohio, Wisconsin—to top beets—the people who had transportation would carry people in the trucks and charged $10.00 per person or $5.00—depending on the price they got paid for beets. Some of the people had houses—only 2 rooms—a room to sleep and a little kitchen. The toilets were outside or in the *chaparros*. The people who couldn't get out to work the crops because they had too many little kids, well they had *adobe* houses or houses made from old tin cans that they hammered open and nailed—they'd fix a little shack. They would sleep on the floor or make wooden benches to sleep on. Mattresses weren't very common then—there wasn't enough money to buy them.

My parents—I think they got to Crystal City in 1910—there wasn't too much there then—they didn't sell lots. Everything was like a ranch, cows and horses roamed loose in 1910. 1911 they brought people from Mexico, they started to clear the land. My father was the foreman because he was the only one who could understand English—so that's how they started to make up lots and sell them and many people stayed.

*From *Literature Chicana*, Shular, Ybarra-Frausto, Sommers, eds., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972.

Mother had a small house and a little tent. Once when they came to Texas to work, father worked on the railroad, or *el traque* as they called, he had an accident and lost two toes from his left foot—he was in the hospital—when he got out the company gave him a little money and with that they returned to Crystal City and bought a few lots—I think they were $35.00 each.

In 1913 there was the smallpox epidemic and many people died—they would burn the bodies. With the kind of work they did, tuberculosis was pretty common. With spinach, you worked right in the water, people would get wet clear up to their waist—women, men and children—everybody all wet and the hot sun beating down on the head—they began to get sick from tuberculosis—the doctor would say what they were sick from and they would build little shacks for them outside of town—and whole families died there from that sickness.

There was no cemetery for Mexicans. They would bury them in ground that was all rocky. My father and other men collected money—they collected and gave the first payment on a piece of ground to form a cemetery. You paid twenty-five cents to dig a grave—that's how they collected to keep making payments on the place. He took the responsibility of paying for it and he saved the papers for twenty-five years so that no one except us Mexicans would have right to it.

Mother, from seeing the poor people die for lack of medical attention, wanted to do something to help them and she learned, as best she could, to deliver babies. Sometimes on the floor with just a small blanket. Lighting was a candle or petroleum lamp—there were no electric bulbs. Sometimes she would bring pillows or blankets from home—many of the women had not eaten—she would bring them rice from home and feed them by spoonfuls. The shots were a cup of hot pepper tea—to give strength for the baby to be born—because there was no doctor. The only one had to travel to several towns and when he arrived it was too late.

There was no school for Mexicans. That's why no one knew how to read. Mother washed other people's clothes for a dollar for a big load. She had to starch and iron it. She would earn five dollars for a week's work. When she was washing clothes she would sit us down beside her and she taught us to read Spanish.

In time people began to go out to [the state of] Washington to work in asparagus, corn, warehouses, in the so-called hop. Then when that work is over, they go to the coast to pick [straw] berries, then they return to the hops—the final stage—with the whole family, and from Washington they go to Idaho in September. They stay there a month, from there they go to Texas—spending four months of the year there. So the children go to school four months in Texas and one or two in Washington. They take them out of school there then they take them out of school here and the youngsters get very confused. Many learn something—others don't—and time passes and they know hardly anything.—They grow up and keep on in the same way—journeying from here to there—from there to here—and that's the reason why the Mexican hasn't learned anything and can't have a decent job.

# IRENE CASTAÑEDA

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Describe the conditions of Mexican immigrants.

2. What type of work did most people do?

3. What were some of the health and medical problems facing the people?

4. How did migrant labor work affect the education of the children?

5. In which ways did Irene's experience differ from the experiences of Fannie and Mei-ling?

6. What experiences did she share in common with Fannie and Mei-ling?

# WOMEN IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1820's, when women began entering the labor force in large numbers,* women workers have comprised one of the most exploited groups of the working class. Women from immigrant groups have at various periods in history been discriminated against because of their ethnic or national origins. Sexism and racism have affected not only the types of jobs that women have been allowed to enter and the wages they have received, but also their ability to participate equally in the labor movement itself. Minority women have been doubly disadvantaged due to race as well as sex discrimination.

Working women have been and continue to be at the bottom of the labor hierarchy. Traditionally women have been kept out of jobs and have earned less, simply because they are women. However, working women of diverse ethnic backgrounds have struggled collectively and endured many hardships to improve their working and living conditions. They have struggled not only for themselves, but for the futures of their children. During a bitter strike that occurred in the early part of the 20th century a striking woman who had just given birth to a child said: "It is not only bread we give our children . . . . We live by freedom, and I will fight till I die to give it to my children."

## WOMEN BECOME INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

The introduction of the *factory system* at the beginning of the 19th century brought many changes. The factory system made it possible to produce on a large scale. Jobs that had been done by one person were broken down into a series of smaller,specialized

*See chart "The Female Labor Force"

jobs that almost anyone could do. The use of machinery made this possible and more profitable. Large numbers of workers were needed for this new type of production.

Many women became factory workers during this period. Between 1820 and 1840, 14% of all women sixteen years and over were wage earners. These women worked under terrible conditions and earned very little money. The average salary of a "mill girl" at a New England textile mill was $2.00 weekly, plus board. The first strike of women factory workers occurred in July 1828 in a Paterson, New Jersey, cotton mill.

By the 1850's, women factory workers comprised 24% of the labor force in the manufacturing industries. The belief that

**THE FEMALE LABOR FORCE**

| YEAR | FEMALE LABOR FORCE AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL LABOR FORCE | FEMALE LABOR FORCE AS PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE POPULATION |
|---|---|---|
| 1890 | 16 | 18 |
| 1900 | 18 | 20 |
| 1910 | 21 | 24 |
| 1920 | 20 | 23 |
| 1930 | 22 | 24 |
| 1940 | 25 | 27 |
| 1950 | 29 | 31 |
| 1960 | 33 | 35 |
| 1970 | 38 | 43 |
| 1973 | 39 | 45 |

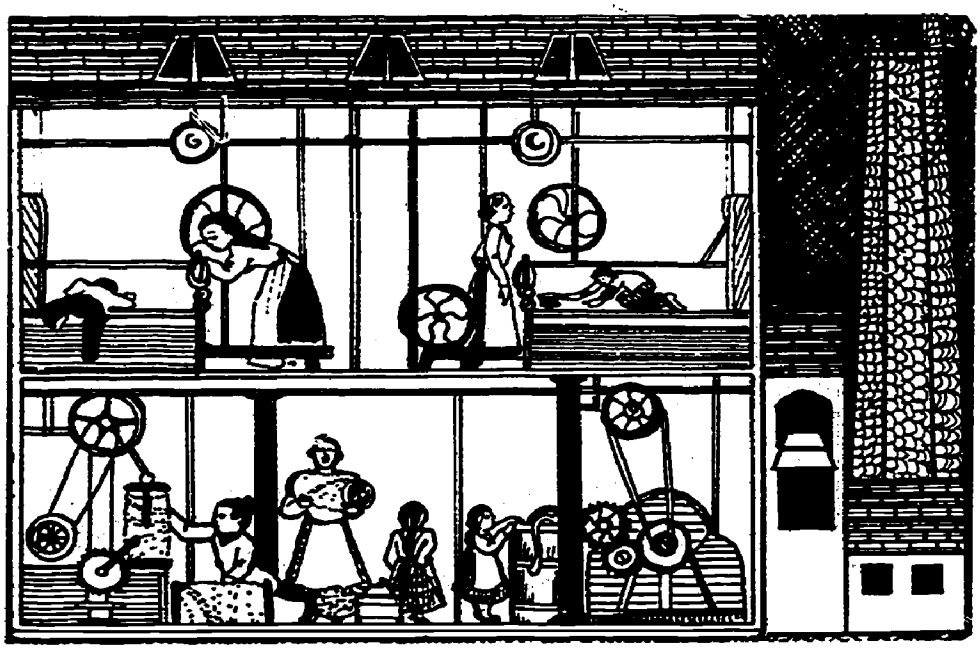
From *American Working Women*, Baxandall et al.

Sources: Peter Gabriel Filene, *His/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975, p. 241;

U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1975 *Handbook of Women Workers*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975, pp. 9, 11, 17, 18.

"women's place was in the home" was not true for the many women who had to work to support their families. By 1870 one out of every four workers was a woman.

Because women were paid lower wages, employers oftentimes preferred hiring women over male workers who made more money for the same work. Men thought that as more women became workers, men might not only lose their jobs, but their salaries would also tend to become lower. These conditions made male workers fearful and suspicious of female workers. Because of these attitudes, women were not allowed to join unions. Many union men felt that if you could keep the women from the unions, you could keep them from jobs.



During the late 1800's anti-woman, anti-immigrant and anti-black feelings were very common. Most unions discriminated against these groups.

The 1880's and 1890's were periods of rapid industrial growth. Cheap labor was needed, and women were in great demand because they could be employed for the lowest wages. The great influx of immigrants allowed employers to hire workers for

the most miserable wages. In 1886 a woman working 10 hours a day could expect to earn an average salary of $5.25 per week. Because so many women were entering the labor force, male unions were forced to admit female workers.

Throughout the country women began joining the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. Women who joined the unions found that they were not treated with equality. One woman complained: "The men think that the girls should not get as good work as the men and should not make half as much money as a man."

Although many attempts were made by women labor leaders to organize women workers, they received little help from the AFL. This was due to the lack of support given to women workers by the male labor unions.

## WOMEN ORGANIZE

In 1900 women workers made up 20% of the labor force. Yet few were organized into unions, and their wages were half of those earned by men. In 1903 the National Women's Trade Union League was formed. The primary purpose of the WTUL was to organize women into trade unions. From 1900 to 1920, women workers, with the help of the WTUL, organized and led many strikes. One of the most famous was the Shirtwaist Strike, called "The Uprising of the Twenty Thousand." Twenty to thirty thousand workers participated in the strike. Eighty percent of the strikers were women, and many were immigrant Jewish and Italian women. The striking women were clubbed and manhandled. Hundreds were arrested daily. Despite this mistreatment, they continued the strike for ten weeks. Helen Marot, an organizer for the WTUL, wrote about the Shirtwaist strikers:

> *The shirtwaist makers' strike was characteristic of all strikes in which women play an active part. It was marked by complete self-surrender to a cause, emotional endurance, fearlessness and entire willingness to face danger and suffering.*


Through this period women workers were involved in many strikes. At the forefront of many of these struggles were immigrant women.

## WOMEN JOIN THE RANKS OF ORGANIZED LABOR

By the 1930's women workers made up 22% of the labor force. Women's wages were lower than men's. Under the minimum wage law, it was still legal to pay women lower wages than men for equal work. During the depression women workers were among the first to lose their jobs. Married women were discriminated against in employment. Many people believed that women were taking jobs away from men. It was felt that men should be given priority for jobs. These conditions were unfair to women, since 90% of the women who worked during the depression had to do so in order to provide for their families.

Black, Mexican and Asian workers were also discriminated against in jobs. Minority workers were often laid off and their jobs were given to white workers. Mexican workers were accused of taking jobs away from white workers. Around 500,000 women, men and children were deported from the United States during

this period. Even though women and minority workers were more severely affected by the depression, all working people suffered tremendously.

The Great Depression of the 1930's brought tremendous suffering to all working people. During this period violent conflicts occurred between the industrial workers, struggling for their very survival,and the giants of industry, who were attempting to keep wages to a bare minimum.

During this period the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was formed with the intention of organizing all workers regardless of race, nationality or sex. Under the sponsorship of the CIO many women organized and led strikes. Thousands of women joined unions. Due to the great efforts made by the CIO from 1936 to 1940, union membership tripled. However, despite the tremendous gains made by the CIO, the majority of women in the labor force remained outside of the unions. This is also true today. Despite their official pronouncements of equal pay regardless of race, nationality and sex, the CIO signed many contracts which provided for unequal pay scales for men and women and for white minority workers.

Many of the gains made by working women today are directly linked to the struggles of the millions of working women of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds who struggled under extremely difficult conditions to gain respect.

*Bread and Roses*

*As we come marching, marching in the beauty of the day,*
*A million darkened kitchens, a thousand mill lofts gray,*
*Are touched with all the radiance that a sudden sun discloses,*
*For the people hear us singing: "Bread and roses! Bread and roses!"*

*As we come marching, marching, we battle too for men,*
*For they are women's children, and we mother them again.*
*Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes;*
*Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!*

*As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead*
*Go crying through our singing their ancient cry for bread.*
*Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.*
*Yes, it is bread we fight for—but we fight for roses too!*

*As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days.*
*The rising of the women means the rising of the race.*
*No more the drudge and idler—ten that toil where one reposes,*
*But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!*

Lyrics based on the poem by James Oppenheim, written in the aftermath of the Lawrence textile strike. The poem was inspired by the banners of the picketing mill women.

# ORAL HISTORY: INTERVIEW

## DIRECTIONS

1. Make a date in advance with the woman you want to interview.

2. Allow at least 30 minutes for the interview.

3. Ask only one question at a time. Avoid questions which lead to yes-and-no answers. If you do get yes-and-no answers, then ask for an explanation. "Could you explain a little more, please?" or, "Why did you feel that way?"

4. Be patient. Remember, most people never have been interviewed. It is an unusual experience. A person must have time to think about her answer. If you act as if you are in a hurry, the other person doesn't feel that her answers are important to you.

5. Be sure to thank the person when you have finished the interview.

# ORAL HISTORY: IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Interviewee_____ Age _____

Place of birth _____ Ethnic background _____

Interview a family member or another woman who came to the United States from another country. Ask the person you interview only those questions which pertain to her situation.

1. What were the conditions like in the place you came from?

2. When did your family come to the U.S.?

3. Why did your family come here?

4. What did you expect the U.S. to be like? Were you disappointed?

5. Describe your feelings about leaving your native land, and your passage here.

6. What were some of your earliest memories of the U.S.?

7. What were your living conditions like when you first came to the U.S.? How and why did those conditions change?

8. What kinds of jobs did the people in your family obtain?

9. What were some of the effects of immigration on your family life?

10. Were you ever treated unfairly because of your sex, age, or race? If so, what was the reason? How did you handle the situation? What can be done to eliminate unfair treatment for any reason?

11. Did you and your family believe that life in the U.S. was an improvement over your life in your native land? Why?

# ORAL HISTORY: INTERVIEWER REPORT

1. What was one thing that you learned about the woman you interviewed that you did not know before?

2. Briefly describe one important work experience in the woman's life.

3. Describe one example of unfair treatment the woman you interviewed received because of her race, sex, nationality, or age. What was her reaction?

4. Rate yourself as an interviewer:

   Excellent_____

   Good_____

   Fair_____

   I have a long way to go!_____

# ORAL HISTORY: WOMEN IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Interviewee_____Age _____

Occupation_____Ethnic background_____

Interview a family member or another woman you know who has been involved in a union strike.

1. What union are you a member of?

2. Why did your union decide to go on strike (wages, working conditions)?

3. What types of activities did you engage in while on strike (boycott, picket line, marches)?

4. Did you experience any type of physical or verbal abuse as a result of your strike actions (arrested, beaten, shouted at)?

5. What was the outcome of the strike?

6. Were you satisfied with the outcome?

7. Have you ever been discriminated against because of your sex, age, or race? If so what did you do about it?

# ORAL HISTORY: INTERVIEWER REPORT

1. What was one thing you learned about the woman you interviewed that you did not know before?

2. Briefly describe one important work experience in the woman's life.

3. Describe one example of unfair treatment the woman you interviewed received because of her race, sex, nationality, or age. What was her reaction?

4. Rate yourself as an interviewer:

   Excellent_____

   Good_____

   Fair_____

   I have a long way to go!_____

# ORAL HISTORY: WOMEN'S WORK

Interviewee_____ Age_____

Occupation_____ Ethnic background_____

Interview a family member or another woman you know. Write or tape-record your interview.

1. What kind of a job did you expect to have when you were my age?

2. What kinds of choices were available to you?

3. If you had any brothers, did your parents have different expectations for them because they were boys?

4. Did you want to go to college? If you did want to go, were you able to go? Why or why not?

5. Are you satisfied with your job? If not, what would you have done differently?

6. Were you ever discriminated against for any reason in trying to get work or while on the job? If so, what was the reason?

7. If you are a working mother, what are some of the problems you have faced? How has your job affected your home life?

8. What are some of your feelings toward the issue of child care?

# ORAL HISTORY: INTERVIEWER REPORT

1. **What was one thing you learned about the woman you interviewed that you did not know before?**

2. Briefly describe one important work experience in the woman's life.

3. Describe one example of unfair treatment the woman you interviewed received because of her race, sex, nationality, or age. What was her reaction?

4. Rate yourself as an interviewer:

   Excellent_____

   Good_____

   Fair_____

   I have a long way to go!_____

**THREE LIVES**

# A CAP MAKER'S STORY - 1905
## Rose Schneiderman*

. . . After I had been working as a cap maker for three years, it began to dawn on me that we girls needed an organization. The men had organized already and had gained some advantages, but the bosses had lost nothing, as they took it out on us.

Finally, Miss Brout and I and another girl went to the National Board of United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers when it was in session, and asked them to organize the girls. [Instead, the women organized their own shop.]

Then came a big strike . . . . About 100 girls went out.

The result was a victory, which netted us—I mean the girls—[a] $2 increase in our wages on the average.

All the time our union was progressing very nicely. There were lectures to make us understand what trades unionism is and our real position in the labor movement. I read upon the subject and grew more and more interested, and after a time I became a member of the National Board, and had duties and responsibilities that kept me busy after my day's work was done.

But all was not lovely by any means. . . . Soon notices . . . were hung in the various shops:

> *After the 26th December, 1904, this shop will be run on the open shop system, the bosses having the right to engage and discharge employees as they see fit, whether the latter are union or nonunion.*

Of course, we knew that this meant an attack on the union. The bosses intended gradually to get rid of us, employing in our place child labor and raw immigrant girls who would work for next to nothing. . .

*From "A Cap Maker's Story—1905," in *The Female Experience: An American Documentary*, Gerda Lerner, Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1977.

Our people were very restive, saying that they could not sit under that notice, and that if the National Board did not call them out soon they would go out themselves.

At last word was sent out, and at 2:30 o'clock all the workers stopped, and laying down their scissors and other tools, marched out, some of them singing the "Marseillaise."

We were out for thirteen weeks, and the girls established their reputation. They were on picket duty from seven o'clock in the morning till six o'clock in the evening, and gained over many of the nonunion workers by appeals to them to quit working against us. . .

During this strike period we girls each received $3 a week; single men $3 a week, and married men $5 a week. This was paid us by the National Board.

We were greatly helped by the other unions, because the open shop issue was a tremendous one, and this was the second fight which the bosses had conducted for it.

Their first was with the tailors, whom they beat. If they now could beat us, the outlook for unionism would be bad.

Some were aided and we stuck out, and won a glorious victory all along the line. That was only last week. The shops are open now for all union hands and for them only. . .

Our trade is well organized; we have won two victories and are not going backward.

But there is much to be done in other directions. The shop girls certainly need organization, and I think that they ought to be easy to organize, as their duties are simple and regular and they have a regular scale of wages.

Many saleswomen on Grand and Division streets, and, in fact, all over the East Side, work from 8 a.m. till 9 p.m. weekdays and one-half a day on Sundays for $5 and $6 a week; so they certainly need organization.

The waitresses also could easily be organized, and perhaps the domestic servants. I don't know about stenographers. I have not come in contact with them.

Women have proved in the late strike that they can be faithful to an organization and to each other. The men give us the credit of winning the strike. . .

The girls and women by their meetings and discussions come to understand and sympathize with each other, and more and more easily they act together. . .

So we must stand together to resist, for we will get what we can take—just that and no more.

# A CAP MAKER'S STORY

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Why was Rose Schneiderman interested in organizing her co-workers?

2. Describe some activities in which Rose participated that helped her to understand the importance of unions.

3. Who were the bosses going to hire in place of the union workers?

4. Rose was also thinking of organizing other female workers. Name some of these areas of employment.

5. Why did she feel workers needed to be unionized?

6. Why should workers stand together and resist?

7. Why is it important for other unions to aid striking workers?

8. Describe what might happen on "picket duty."

9. How did their achievement in winning a strike affect the women's wages?

THREE LIVES

# EMMA TENNAYUCA AND THE PECAN SHELLERS OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS*

During the 1930's in San Antonio, Texas, the pecan shelling industry employed about 12,000 workers; 80% of the workers were Chicana (Mexican) women. Although pecan shelling is a very difficult and tedious job, workers were paid extremely low wages. The meat of the pecan had to be taken out by hand, and workers had to be careful not to break the meat because they

*From *Literatura Chicana,* Shular, Ybarra-Fausto, Sommers, eds., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1972.

were paid less for the broken pieces. The workers were paid 3 cents a pound for the small broken pieces and 5 cents a pound for halves. If a worker could shell eight pounds in an eight-hour day, she would earn less than $2.00 a week. Most workers earned less than that. In 1934 the average wage was $1.29 per week for a fifty-four hour week.

Because of the low wages, entire families had to work in order to survive. Many mothers were forced to take their children into the factories because the families needed the children's earnings. For these women and children, work did not stop at the end of the work shift. Most of the families took pecans home, where together they would continue to shell them late into the night.

Working conditions were unsanitary. Workers were crammed into rooms with little or no ventilation. It was not unusual to have 100 workers in a room that was only 25 by 40 feet. Lighting was poor. Toilets and running water were not always provided.

The pecan shellers were dissatisfied with their working conditions. No matter how hard they worked, they could not earn enough money to meet the needs of their families.

The owners of the pecan factories were not concerned about the needs of the workers. They were only interested in making profits. The president of the largest company, The Southern Pecan Shelling Co., said: ". . . five cents per day was sufficient to support the Mexican pecan shellers because they ate a good many pecans while they worked. Since no limit was set on the amount they could eat, money earned could be used for any additional wants that the shellers might wish to satisfy." Another company official said: "Mexican workers did not care to make much money. They were satisfied to earn little, and besides, they had a nice warm place to work, could visit with their friends, and bring their children to work."

The low wages received by Chicana (Mexican) pecan workers were conditioned by both the practice of paying women workers lower wages, and by the fact that due to racism, minorities were paid lower wages than white workers.

In Texas, as in many other states, there was open discrimination against Chicanos, blacks and other racial minorities. "White Only" signs were posted in businesses. There were separate bathrooms marked "For Whites Only." Chicanos and other minorities were not allowed to live in certain neighborhoods. They were in fact treated as second-class citizens. Chicanos were very aware of the fact that they were considered inferior. Their low status and low wages had a devastating effect on the living conditions of their families and the entire Mexican community.

Most Chicano families lived on the West Side of San Antonio in an area that was known as the "Mexican section." Many families lived in rundown wooden shacks. Most homes did not have running water and toilets, and only 25% of the homes had electricity. Because of the poverty and unsanitary living conditions, many infants and children suffered from diseases such as tuberculosis and malnutrition. Because children often had to work, or because they were often ill, only 40% of the children went to school.

There were some Chicano families who were economically better off than the average pecan shelling families, These families also lived in the "Mexican section" of San Antonio, but they lived closer to where the Anglo neighborhoods began. It was here that Emma Tennayuca grew up.

Emma liked school; she was a bright and serious student. One of her teachers took an interest in her and began giving her books to read. Emma began to spend a great deal of time in the public library. Many of the books she read spoke about freedom and equality for all U.S. citizens, yet Emma knew this was not true. She began to question the way in which Chicanos, blacks and poor working people were treated. She saw that some people were treated better than others. Some had good jobs, nice homes, good neighborhoods and good schools, while others had low paying jobs, lived in shacks in the slums, and went to inferior schools.

Emma wanted to do something about this unequal treatment. After graduating from high school she decided to dedicate her life to the struggle for better treatment of poor people, especially Chicanos. She began organizing her neighbors in the *barrio* and writing articles in which she defended the rights of Chicanos and other oppressed people.

Emma also demanded the rights given to Chicano people under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. One of these rights stated that Chicanos had the right to use the Spanish language. She felt that the suppression of the Spanish language and of the Chicano culture were partially responsible for the high dropout rate among Chicanos. She believed, too, that unfair child labor practices contributed to the small numbers of Chicano children attending school.

Emma organized many rallies and demonstration. On February 25, 1931, she and other community leaders organized a demonstration in Austin, the state capital. They demanded unemployment benefits for unemployed workers.

From then on, most of her time and energy was devoted to helping the pecan workers organize to fight for higher wages and better working conditions. She became one of the leaders during the pecan sheller's strike.

On February 1, 1938, pecan shellers walked off their jobs in protest. Their already miserable wages had been reduced by 1¢ per pound for small pieces and 4¢ per pound for halves. The

workers refused to accept this cut in pay. Thousands of angry workers throughout San Antonio walked out in protest and organized a strike.

Most of the striking workers were Chicanas. Many, including Emma, were jailed. Tear gas was used against the strikers, and many were harassed and beaten by the police. Strikers were arrested for carrying picket signs and for standing on the sidewalk. Those arrested were thrown in jail and fined $10.00. Throughout the strike, 1,000 were arrested. When the women were arrested their children were often thrown in jail with them.

This treatment only made the striking workers more determined. They continued to picket and demonstrate for their rights. The strike lasted 37 days. Finally, the union—United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America of the C.I.O.—negotiated a settlement. The workers won a salary increase. They were to be paid 5¢ per pound for pieces and 6¢ per pound for halves.

A 1¢ increase was certainly not very much money; however, the workers felt a sense of satisfaction because they had struggled together. Their strike was successful. The police and the companies had tried to break their strike, but they could not. The women, men and children learned that by struggling together, changes could be made.

The victory, however, was short-lived. The Fair Labor Standards Act forced the industry to pay workers the minimum wage of 25¢ per hour. Rather than pay this salary increase, the pecan industry owners found it more profitable to mechanize the industry. In doing this, 7,000 workers lost their jobs.

# EMMA TENNAYUCA AND THE PECAN SHELLERS OF SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. In the story we are told that Chicano parents were unhappy about their children missing school. If this is true, then why were the children working in the factories with their parents instead of going to school?

2. What were the factories like where the Chicanos worked? Were they healthy and pleasant places to work?

3. Describe an effect of racism.

4. What are some things that Emma Tannayuca did as a union organizer?

5. Describe some of the conditions that Emma observed.

6. How were the striking workers treated?

7. How did the strikers feel about the strike?

Pretend that you would no longer be able to attend school and that you had to go to work in a factory. Think of the name of a large factory in your community.

1. Make a list of all the activities you would no longer be able to do because you had to work.

2. Write a short, imaginary diary entry describing a typical working day. How would you feel at the end of the day?


sewing
factory
210
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THREE LIVES

# THE GARMENT WORKERS' STRIKE*

*Jun Ping lived in a tiny, one-bedroom apartment with her husband, Boon Hong, their two children, and Uncle Ah Lim.*

Uncle Ah Lim, his white hair cut short, was in his sixties. But he talked of "new" ideas such as women's equality and the rights of workers. Jun Ping thought she understood in her heart what he meant, although she had no idea what to do. Each morning, she arose before five a.m. to start breakfast and pack lunches. Boon Hung didn't like old rice for lunch or breakfast, so each morning she had to cook fresh rice. Before anyone else woke, she washed some clothes and hung them on the line outside the window. When the men and children arose, they ate a quick breakfast. Sometimes there was just a piece of bread or a bowl of rice. Then everyone went to work or school. Jun Ping then hurried through the dishes, again swept the floor, mended clothes, cleaned the family quarters, went downstairs and cleaned the shop. Finally after everyone had gone to bed, she would sew a little to make money. After all this, Jun Ping discovered she had earned only enough to buy the family food, not enough left even to help with the children's school supplies or clothes. Once she had told a friend, "Sometimes, after work, I am so tired I don't dare even sit down for fear I would fall asleep." Her friend nodded, "Yes, it's like that for all of us women who work. But we must be grateful we even have jobs. Think how hard it would be for us to live if we didn't work at all." Jun Ping agreed, but she also felt it was unfair to work so hard and still be so poor.

*From *Leaving What I Know Well . . . Learning Anew: Readings on the Experiences of Asian American Women in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Women's Studies Program, Berkeley Unified School District, 1977.

Then, a year later, Jun Ping's whole life changed. She took part in the National Dollar Store strike of Chinese women garment workers. At first, Jun Ping had a hard time understanding why some of her co-workers wanted a union.

The different arguments for and against the union changed her mind back and forth. Some said the union would be more trouble. It would change the shop rules so women could not work overtime or take pieces home and the cost of union dues would take away any raises in wages they might win. Others said the union was the only way to prevent unfairness and keep the shop owners from taking advantage of Chinese women who could not find other jobs. They said that Gum Wai was a good example. Burdened by six children and many in-laws to support, she had worked many hours overtime to earn more money. When she became ill, the manager fired her and refused to give her her last paycheck, claiming she had been so slow she had not filled her quota. "Besides," said the pro-union women, "we should stand up not just for pay raises, but so we can show everyone that Chinese women cannot be taken advantage of."

The idea of being in the public eye was so contrary to everything she had known about the proper conduct for Chinese women, Jun Ping's hands got cold at the very thought. At her first meeting, she sat quietly in a corner and never said anything. Her friends who worked with her kept encouraging her to speak. But she couldn't say anything. Every day when she went to work, Chinese women with picket ribbons across their clothing or carrying signs talked to her at the entrance to the shop. But Jun Ping could not make up her mind.

Then in one week, most of the women who had worked for the union were fired. The floor lady and the manager both claimed the women were not filling their quota. But Jun Ping knew that was not true. And women who lost their jobs all had families to support. Finally, Jun Ping decided she had to help. That night, there was to be a meeting to discuss what should be done about the firings.

As she hurred to prepare the evening meal, Jun Ping thought about her co-workers. She worried about their families and was moved deeply. As they sat down to eat, Jun Ping asked Boon Hung for permission to go to the meeting. Boon Hung stared at her for a moment and stopped chewing his rice. Sensing a crisis the children stared down at their food, eating as silently as possible.

"My wife want to go out in the evening by herself?" he asked in disbelief. "What is this?"

Hurriedly, Jun Ping explained the situation, trying to get her husband to share her sympathies with the fired workers.

"What business is it of yours?" Boon Hung said, raising his voice. "No good Chinese woman goes out in public at night by herself. Would you have everyone in Chinatown say Boon Hung is a fool? That his wife goes out without him? No!! You cannot go tonight, or ever! I forbid it!"

Jun Ping bowed her head and murmured, "I'm sorry to have made trouble. Please do not be so angry."

Boon Hung finished his bowl of rice and left the table without another word.

The next day, when Jun Ping went to work, she stopped in front of the shop unable to conceal her surprise. On the sidewalk dozens and dozens of her co-workers plus others she had never seen paraded up and down carrying pickets in English and Chinese. There were even a few whites. Jung Ping blinked. The signs said, "Reinstate the Workers"; "On Strike"; "National Dollar Stores Unfair"; "Support the Union." One of the picketers saw Jun Ping and came over to her.

"Jun Ping" she said, "we have gone on strike! We will refuse to work until the owners of the shop re-hire our friends and raise our wages. We will have a union. Then they won't dare fire us like poor Gum Wai."

"But I thought we had a union," said Jun Ping.

"No, no," laughed her friend. "The owners have to recognize it. They won't talk to us. Come and join us. Together we will make changes."

Jun Ping walked with her friend. The questions poured out.

"Why are you doing this? What does it mean? Can we win? How will you support your families? What does your husband think?"

Her friend laughed again, "Well, we are doing this because we must. We have no choice. If we remained that way, think how difficult life is! No, we must change things. If we help each other, we can do it, don't you think?"

Jun Ping walked round and round the picket line thinking about her friend's statement. She hardly realized she was in the picket line until she looked up and saw a crowd had gathered to watch this spectacle of a Chinese women's picket line. Suddenly, she saw Boon Hung. He looked at her surprised, but soon he frowned and set his mouth in a line. Then he turned and walked away.

Dinner that night was delayed because Jun Ping stayed at the picket until dark. Everyone ate in silence, with Boon Hung muttering complaints the whole time. Finally, after the dishes were cleared, he began to criticize her. At last, Jun Ping said, "It's true, dinner was late, but you are not thinking of others." As calmly as she could, Jun Ping described the situation. She talked about the firings, the bad faith shown by the management. She spoke of the hope the workers placed in working together to make wages and conditions better for everyone. Finally, she appealed to her husband to change his heart. Boon Hung sat silently for awhile. Even the children were quiet and sensed the difficulty in changing his old attitudes towards Jun Ping. Finally, Uncle Ah Lim rose from his chair, "It may be impolite to say anything in a matter between husband and wife, but this situation affects all of us. It is not just Jun Ping's working conditions that are at stake. Her situation at the factory is of concern to everyone." Gently, he called attention to how hard Jun Ping worked and how no one helped with the housework. Then he said, "If

Jun Ping's union wins, it will give encouragement to all of us Chinese workers to stand up. Think of all the hardships and discrimination we have experienced in this country from our grandparents to now. Shouldn't we all help Jun Ping and her coworkers to make a success of their work? After all, Chinese women are important to us."

Jun Ping also talked of how much she felt a part of her friends' hardships since they lost their jobs. She spoke of how hard it was to go against all her training to be quiet and submissive. Boon Hung looked at his wife with new eyes. He felt somehow he had never understood her before. Her determination to help others had lifted her out of being concerned for his benefit alone. At last he looked up and smiled. "Yes," he said, "we will win this strike together."

# THE GARMENT WORKERS' STRIKE

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

1. Besides working in the garment factory, Jun Ping was responsible for looking after the needs of her family. List some of the things she had to do.

2. Why was it difficult for Jun Ping to join the striking women?

3. How did Boon Hung, her husband, respond to Jun Ping's request to be allowed to go to the meeting?

4. How did Uncle Ah Lim feel about Jun Ping participating in the strike?

5. List the reasons given by the Chinese women for wanting a union.

6. Why are unions important?

# WOMEN'S ROLES IN LABOR ORGANIZING

## ROLE-PLAYING ACTIVITY

You, along with other members of your class, are to produce a skit and present it to your class. You should use the information you have learned in this unit, as well as any research that you may personally want to do on women's roles in labor organizing and the effects of women's efforts. Read the description of these sketches carefully before you choose one.

1. You are a working women in a non-union shop. You have called for a meeting of all the employees. Your job is to discuss the benefits of joining a union in order to convince your co-workers to join the union. Among the employees there is a man who believes that joining the union is against the best interests of the employees. What might some of his arguments be? Stage a confrontation between the two opposing sides.

2. At a garment factory in 1908 a group of employees are discussing the issue of whether or not to allow women into their union. They are concerned about the possible effects this might have on the future of their jobs and their family lives. The men are discussing the issue because of a leaflet that was circulated by some of the women employees listing the advantages of including women. You, along with other students, are to write out this leaflet expressing the advantages.

3. Teachers are out on strike asking for better wages and better working conditions. Two teachers are discussing the advantages and disadvantages of joining the strike. They are also discussing whether or not teachers and other public employees, such as police officers and fire fighters, should be allowed to strike at all. The skit should include a discussion of the advantages/disadvantages of a strike, what possible harm to others is involved with the strike, and other methods that could accomplish their goals more effectively than a strike.

4. A group of women workers employed in the garment industry are getting together to make some picket signs for their strike. What kinds of slogans would you put on the placards?

5. Rose Schneiderman is speaking in favor of organizing women. She is speaking to a mixed audience. What are some of the questions she might be asked? How does she respond?

6. A woman who is the sole support of her two children is involved in a discussion with two other workers who are interested in organizing a union. These workers, one male and one female, are not the sole supporters of their families. The woman worker must decide if she will support her co-workers' efforts to organize a union. Since the employer is in disagreement, she could possibly get fired. In your skit discuss the unique problems of parents in her situation (single head of household).

# STORY WRITING

## STUDENT ACTIVITY

Write your own story about a contemporary woman labor organizer. If you elect to write on a woman UFWO organizer, here are some key points you should include in your story:

1. The working and living conditions of a Chicana farm worker.

2. The working conditions she might focus on, such as breaks, medical benefits, health hazards, or wages.

3. The activities she might be involved in while attempting to organize her co-workers.

4. Slogans she might use in order to catch the attention of her fellow workers.

5. The arguments she might use to convince her fellow workers of the merits of a union.

6. The specific tactics she would use in organizing women farm workers.

If you choose to write about a woman organizer in a different work area—for example, the garment industry—the above questions can be adapted to your topic.