



Introduction:
New Mexico Historic Women Marker Program:
She Who Shaped New Mexico
Curriculum

Throughout this curriculum, students will examine the significance of women in New Mexico, specifically focusing on the centering of communities, spirit of independence, movement, and change. Each woman or group of women, whether well known or previously silent in the public eye, illuminates the “herstory” of New Mexico.

Gendered ideas may be traced back to the earliest native groups in the Americas, with varied attitudes toward the roles of men and women within the organization of power. Native American women held the responsibility of gathering, growing and processing food, maintaining dwellings, and participating in the rituals and traditions of their community. Women’s interactions with the landscapes where cultures first developed, based upon their contributions, claimed community and a sense of “home”. The vastness of the American Southwest provided migratory choices according to needs, and women created and sustained the cultural fabric. Indigenous women of New Mexico are celebrated here within the context of their communities, as both unique individuals and communal groups that represent some of the significant contributions made to New Mexico.

Early European exploration and settlement brought a new culture of women into this landscape, where they faced both hardship and opportunity. Spanish women appreciated many legal freedoms, as they could inherit, acquire and sell property according to Spanish law. Additionally, these women accessed the court systems, exercising their rights to elevate their position in society.

This shifted under American occupation, and Hispanic women faced new challenges as members of a society that was dominated by a masculine political world. Native women served as interpreters, mothers, and peacekeepers as the cultures mixed by both force and choice. As these women became mothers of racially mixed children, there were additional hurdles and opportunities. Some women were able to use this to position themselves in places of power within westward expansion.

As the US government promoted the ongoing occupation of the continent, women migrated to the Southwest, seeking new beginnings, independence, and creative opportunities. Here they found a place that enabled them to do so. Though the government promoted a male-led claiming of the land, under the pivotal Homestead Act, single women were empowered to settle and make a home of their own. Women provided their talents and skills to bring about the success of new communities, while often receiving the independence they sought.



As recent scholarship is beginning to examine gender roles within the creation of empires and societal changes, it is important to include a study of feminist scholarship around race, class, culture, identity, and independence. There exists a rich tradition and history regarding the roles of women in the American Southwest. This open-ended curriculum is inclusive of multiple cultures and their respective values of womanhood; Native American, Hispanic, Anglo, Jewish, Latino, Asian and Black voices offer multiple visions and perspectives.

The voices and stories of women as the creators of culture, whether by hearth and home or through a departure from the confines of societal expectations, are presented here in *She Who Shaped New Mexico*.

Some Core Questions:

- Considering older histories' interpretations of expansionism as a male dominated construct, why/how might women be the creators and keepers of culture within this?
- How have different groups of women been involved in multiple cultures in the Southwestern region, and how did these women use notions of community, frontier, empire, and nation to provide opportunities for themselves and others?
- What causes a woman to move? Necessity? Desire for something different/change? How is the spirit of independence a result of internal and external causes?
 - Within this idea of independence and women moving west, how have single women been perceived throughout history? What are the reactions and assumptions made?
- How are women today informed by the past experiences of their ancestors, and how are women able to support each other through these shared histories and experiences?
- How can students be inspired by the lives and impacts of New Mexico women in order to examine historical narratives, especially those around justice and equity issues?
- How can students understand thematic areas of impact such as: sustenance/survival, politics/power/protest/policy, family/transfer of knowledge, artistic endeavors and expression, and/or cultural preservation?

Join the journey in celebrating New Mexico's trailblazing women in order to educate, inspire and empower those that follow.