

NM HERstory Symposium: Heritage and Innovation
July 27, 3-5 pm MT, Santa Fe Prep Auditorium and Zoom

“She Who Shaped New Mexico” and the NM Social Studies Curriculum Project

Lisa Nordstrum

Recent scholarship is recognizing the important influence of women’s ideas around culture, identity, and independence in the American Southwest. Multiple visions and perspectives spring from the intersectionality of these women’s voices.

Women in the Southwest have centered communities, demonstrating their spirit of independence in accordance with and in spite of gendered ideas about the roles of men and women within the organization of power. Native American women held the responsibility of gathering, growing, and processing foods, maintaining dwellings, and participating in the rituals and traditions of their community. The vastness of the American Southwest provided migratory choices according to needs, and women sustained the cultural fabric wherever they lived.

Early European exploration and settlement brought a new culture of women into this landscape, where they faced both hardship and opportunity. Native women served as interpreters, mothers, and peacekeepers as the cultures mixed by both force and choice. As women became mothers of racially mixed children, they faced new challenges. Some women were able to use this to position themselves in places of power within westward expansion. As the US government promoted 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. Under the pivotal Homestead Act, single women were empowered to settle and make a home of their own, receiving the independence they sought.

Through a NM Department of Cultural Affairs funded project, I am developing a curriculum aligned to the NMPED Social Studies and Humanities Content Standards for use by educators, students, and the general public. Women as significant shapers of the history of New Mexico will be the focus, bringing intentional inclusion of women’s roles to the forefront of teaching. The New Mexico Historic Women Marker Initiative: She Who Shaped New Mexico website is the focal point for students’ research. Lessons include an examination of the website content to create interpretive projects, development of secondary source research skills, and extensions into primary source research through archival documents, collections of journals and letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and diaries of personal experiences.

Lisa Nordstrum, NM K-12 certified teacher with 30 years of experience; history teacher at Santa Fe Preparatory School; field researcher/educator for School for Advanced Research, Museum of Indian Arts and Culture; and NM History Museum. Lisa is developing relevant curriculum and primary research methodology for high school students related to NM’s new Social Studies Standards. Her contract with the Department of Cultural Affairs to expand New Mexico’s marker project, <https://www.nmhistoricwomen.org>, will broaden our appreciation for the numerous contributions women have made to advance our multicultural state.



