THE APPROPRIATION OF SACAJAWEA BY THE WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

This project examines why Sacajawea was an attractive figure to be resurrected and appropriated during the U.S. suffrage movement, especially in the 1890s to 1920s. To understand the construction and use of Sacajawea, I analyzed about 25 newspaper articles published about Sacajawea in the 1900s and read numerous secondary research journals and books investigating Sacajawea. There are primarily three main findings of this research: (1) Sacajawea was used to re-gender “patriotism” from masculine to feminine. Suffragists argued that women’s “services,” “loyalty,” and “sacrifices” should move beyond the household to public space. Referring to Sacajawea as a “patriot” and her acts as “patriotic” lent support to the notion that citizenship is not just for men. The suffragists’ representation of Sacajawea was meant to show that women are “loyal,” “giving” and “sacrificing,” and therefore equipped to be citizens and patriots. (2) The representation of Sacajawea as a “faithful wife,” “loving mother,” and “administrator of the needs of others” made Sacajawea into a symbolic feminine figure. The suffrage argument revolved around the feminine virtues of women’s roles as civilizers. Sacajawea’s feminine virtues resonated with the women’s traditional roles as wives, mothers, and servers, thus supporting the suffragists’ claims that women would be positive influence in society if given the right to vote. (3) The civilizing role assigned to white women could be bolstered by Sacajawea only if her Indian identity was diminished. Sacajawea is therefore whitened, her features become Europeanized, and she becomes an “Indian princess” of “noble blood.” Although Sacajawea’s Indian identity is muted by her whitened, assimilated ways, Sacajawea still remains Indian.
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INTRODUCTION

Sacajawea is a well-known figure in American history due to her association with the Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804-1806). There are numerous sites, parks, and monuments dedicated to her. In fact, there are more statues dedicated in her name than any other woman in the United States. The widespread use of her story began almost a century after the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Eva Emery Dye’s (1902) historical novel, *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark Expedition*. Since then, Sacajawea has been depicted in American history textbooks as an American heroine and more recently, presented as a multicultural icon, despite the lack of evidence about her life.

One of the most interesting uses of the figure of Sacajawea was her depiction as a mythic heroine by women suffragettes in the late 19th and early 20th century. This thesis explores how first-wave feminists in the 1890s-1920s mobilized certain accounts of Sacajawea. Based on both primary sources from this period and subsequent scholarship, I argue that the suffragettes adopted three main representative strategies in relation to Sacajawea. First, they positioned Sacajawea as a female patriot in order to advance their claims for white women’s full citizenship. Second, the suffragists emphasized Sacajawea’s femininity to support their claims that American women could make unique, womanly contributions to public life. Finally, the suffragettes whitened Sacajawea so that white women could identify with her more readily as an inspirational figure. Unlike many scholars who have written about Sacajawea, my project does not try to separate truth from fiction or dispel the myths surrounding her. Instead, my project addresses the
fabrication of the Sacajawea figure by American suffragists and will try to explain why she was attractive for appropriation.

Section one introduces scholarly debates over the representation of Sacajawea. The second section highlights how the portrayal of Sacajawea as a nation-builder and patriot by white women suffragettes advanced the cause of women’s suffrage. Section three explains how first wave feminists portrayed Sacajawea as a model of womanhood and motherhood, understood as civilizing forces in society. The fourth part of the thesis documents the whitening of Sacajawea in relevant texts of the period, highlighting how this assimilated representation was used to support the suffrage agenda. This section also acknowledges the importance of subtly maintaining Sacajawea’s Indian identity to connote bravery and daring. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings of this research.

SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE ON SACAJAWEA

At the turn of 20th century, there was an influx of literature dedicated to Sacajawea—romance novels, newspaper articles, and peer-reviewed scholarship. With Eva Emery Dye’s (1902) *The Conquest*, Sacajawea was popularized in the American West. Dye’s book romanticizes Sacajawea as an American heroine that made the expansion of the West possible. Dye’s accounts of Sacajawea as a “beautiful Indian princess,” “Madonna of her race,” “Indian mother,” and “woman pilot” constructed Sacajawea as an idealized feminine figure. Dye’s narratives of the Indian heroine were celebrated, hence fabricating the image of Sacajawea we know today. In the following decades, Grace Raymond Hebard (1932) “historicized” the Sacajawea story with her research, *Sacajawea Guide and Interpreter of Lewis and Clark*. Dye and Hebard are
generally credited with constructing the Sacajawea myth, because Dye popularized the romanticized notion of Sacajawea’s role in the Lewis and Clark Expedition and Hebard claimed that Sacajawea lived a long life and served as a missionary to the Indian people. However, Elliot Coues (1893) is also sometimes regarded as the father of the myth because his earlier book *History of the Expedition Under the Command of Lewis and Clark*, declared, “Sacajawea…contributed a full man’s share to the success of the Expedition, besides taking care of her baby…” (as cited in Taber, 1967, p. 7).

Later scholarship, mostly in the form of journal articles, focused on debates over the empirical details of Sacajawea’s life and her participation in the expedition. The controversies included her tribal affiliations, her actual death date, and her “roles” in the expedition. Several writers openly criticized the suffragettes’ depiction of Sacajawea. For example, Ronald Taber said, “Dr. Anna Shaw, the president of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association, extolled the virtues and achievements of the Indian woman who guided the expedition westward…and fooled many people” (1967, p. 9). Taber claimed that Shaw exaggerated the role of Sacajawea as a guide and replaced fact with myth in order to support women’s rights. Bernard De Voto confirmed that Sacajawea did not participate in “guiding,” however, she was “more useful than her worthless husband [as] she was cheerful, ingenious, and willing to work [because] she was able to direct the expedition to edible roots which they didn’t know about, she sewed deerskin shirts and made moccasins, etc.” (1954, p. 61). De Voto showed that Sacajawea’s role as a guide could be a myth, but he maintained she was useful to the expedition. Still, other critics declared,
But it remained for two well-meaning ladies, both ardent leaders in the Woman's Suffrage movement early in this century, to magnify the role and virtues of Sacajawea way beyond creditability and to attribute to her seven decades more of life than she actually lived. (Anderson and Clark, 1973, p.16)

By “well-meaning ladies,” Irving W. Anderson and William Clark (1973) meant Eva Emery Dye (1902) and Grace Hebard (1932), who each contributed to the Sacajawea myth, by glorifying Sacajawea’s role in the expedition and adding a controversial claim about Sacajawea’s longevity, respectively. Taber (1967), De Voto (1954), and Anderson and Clark (1973) corroborated Sacajawea’s mythic role as a guide. While Taber acerbically attacked the suffragists for their Sacajawea myth, both De Voto and Anderson and Clark acknowledged that Sacajawea may have made some valuable contributions to the expedition. This debate makes clear that the suffragists needed a female historical figure as a rallying point for the suffrage movement and Sacajawea’s depiction by Dye gave the suffragists’ their perfect heroine. Whether denying or acknowledging Sacajawea’s factual contributions to the expedition, these authors recognized the suffragists’ interest in representing Sacajawea in ways that would support their own political project.

As the suffragists constructed the myth, Sacajawea was a good Indian who helped advance civilization. Jan C. Dawson (1992) said of Dye’s *Conquest*: “The book's title notwithstanding, in this passage women and men touched hands not because white men had conquered but because Indian women, natives of the land, had shown them that this ‘wilderness’ could be home” (p. 25). According to Dawson, the narrative of Sacajawea sought to change the conventional colonization story to show that it was not the white
men who had “conquered” the wilderness, but rather Indian woman who welcomed them “home” who were the real heroines. Women and white men touching hands signified Indian women’s collaboration with settler white men. Sheri Bartlett Browne’s (2004) *Eva Emery Dye: Romance With the West* built on this point, arguing that Dye’s influential work presented a contrast: “Native Americans are depicted in rather stark opposites, reflecting her understanding the ‘good’ Indians could be salvaged by the dominant culture and ‘bad Indians were unredeemable’” (p. 87). Good Indians could be “salvaged” if they assimilated to the “dominant” culture while bad Indians were “unredeemable,” incapable of adopting civilized ways. This is similar to what Rayna Green (1975) explained in “The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture” when she argued, “the only good Indian…rescues and helps white men” (p. 703). Therefore, the Shoshone woman who “helped” the Lewis and Clark expedition was a good Indian making her entire tribe better than other Indians while the Blackfeet and Sioux tribes who challenged and resisted the “civilized” ways were considered “bad Indians.” Good Indians, mostly women, welcomed white men and white ways. As a “good Indian,” Dye’s Sacajawea was constructed as a “civilizing agent.” Mothers were of great interest to Dye and Sacajawea was formulated into a powerful image of pioneer womanhood (Browne, 2004, p. 88). The discourse of good versus bad Indian shaped the suffragettes’ Sacajawea narrative. Sacajawea was constructed as a good Indian because she betrayed her own people to help white men pave a higher civilization and protected the white men from the bad Indians, who resisted western expansion.

Scholars have also noted that the suffragettes framed Sacajawea as whitened or assimilated to make her more acceptable. “For suffragists to use Sacajawea as an icon,
her status as an Indian woman had to be erased and she had to be reassigned the attributes emblematic of white womanhood: modesty, purity, domesticity, and a keen sense of moral superiority” (Pillow, 2007, p. 6). Wanda Pillow claims that utilizing Sacajawea as a suffrage icon required whitening Sacajawea. This erasing of Indian-ness in Sacajawea was implemented by assigning her virtues that are often reserved for white women.

Donna J. Kessler explained in *The Making of Sacagawea*, “…as the sole native joining the Corps of Discovery, Sacagawea has come to signify ‘Indian’ compliance with mission to carve a sacred space out of wilderness” (1996, p. 17). This suggests the whitening of Sacajawea complies with the expansionist vision of the settler whites.

At the same time, Sacajawea was referred to as “Indian princess”: “her nobility stems from her ‘royal’ heritage, proving her innate superiority” (Kessler, 1996, p. 83). She was called an Indian princess because she was described as noble, royal, and superior among Indians. Such superiority was achieved by saving and giving aid to white men (Green, 1975, p.703). As an Indian princess above the rest of her people, she was credited with making decisions in favor of the higher civilization, on behalf of white men. Sacajawea’s character is whitened to qualify her as representative of women’s suffrage. The whitening is done by calling her an Indian princess, giving her white features and mannerisms, and showing her support for Manifest Destiny.

The scholarship also shows that Sacajawea was widely celebrated as a maternal figure by the suffragettes. Michael Heffernan and Carol Medlicot describe in “A Feminine Atlas? Sacagawea, the Suffragettes and the Commemorative Landscape in the American West, 1904-1910” that the women’s rights activists emphasized how Sacajawea “transported the infant on her back through the rest of the perilous journey”
Here, Sacajawea is shown as a mother. In “Sacagawea and Son: The Visual Construction of America’s Maternal Feminine,” Patricia Vettel-Becker also speaks to pro-suffrage arguments of that time which stressed women’s unique role in society, showcased by Sacajawea, “an ideal prototype for the pioneering ‘New Woman,’ for she demonstrated that a woman could play an important role in public life without sacrificing her femininity” (2009, p. 35). The suffragists portrayed Sacajawea as a woman who was both a traditional feminine figure and someone who accomplished patriotic deeds. Proponents of women’s suffrage used their portrayal of Sacajawea to reinforce women’s traditional feminine roles as mothers and highlight the potential contribution they could make as civilizing agents in the society.

SACAJAWEA THE PATRIOT: RE-GENDERING PATRIOTISM

The use of the Sacajawea narrative helped white women suffragists emphasize women’s important role in making of the nation and suggest that women could exercise their patriotism through the vote. It made sense for the suffragists to turn to a figure from the early settlement of the country because “Western pioneer history… became the key point of entry for understanding America” (Browne, 2004, p. 81). Contrary to the usual masculine frontier narratives, Dye insisted that women played a significant role in making American history (Browne, 2004, p. 54). Dye’s portrayal of Sacajawea showed that “[Sacajawea] could be presented as a real, flesh and blood historical character born within the period of US national history and an active agent in one of the nation’s most important episodes” (Heffernan & Medlicot, 2002, p. 114). Despite limited evidence about her activities, her mere historical existence made her powerful and usable. Suffragists framed her as an “indispensable” member of the expedition, thus claiming her
Figure 1. Painting by John Gast titled "American Progress," 1872.

participation in Manifest Destiny. Manifest Destiny during the 20th century was prestigious so the participation of Sacajawea, a woman, in this “American mission,” effectively feminized patriotism.

The underlying principle of Westward expansion was Manifest Destiny, the belief that Europeans were “chosen” to occupy the land from Atlantic to Pacific Ocean. Figure 1 shows a representative painting by John Gast from 1872 showing Lady Columbia moving westward with a Bible in her right hand. Behind her follow white pioneers in horses with others by foot, carriages, and railway. Lady Columbia is leading from the East, bright and “civilized,” in relation to the West that is still dark and “untamed.” She extends the telegraph wire from the east to the west symbolizing the “necessity” of the
west’s adoption of modern technology and civilization. Finally, the picture depicts the Indians running away from “progress.”

The story of the Lewis and Clark expedition is often framed by the idea of Manifest Destiny. Their “epic journey” is presented as an important vehicle for transforming the American landscape after a century of clearing Native American populations. The expedition is usually credited with creating a pathway for Western settlement (1807-1910). The removal of native people from their lands in conjunction with European-American migration to the New West is often seen as a key time in the making of the nation. The Lewis and Clark expedition plays a pivotal role in this progressive narrative.

Historically, white men have been credited with establishing the new frontier. Richard A. Bartlett commented on the “masculinity of the frontier society” (as cited in Jensen and Miller, 1980, p. 177). He indicated that white women were left out of frontier narratives. John Mack Faragher (n.d.) describes the “myth of the frontier” not as synonymous for erroneous belief, “but as the body of tales, fables, fantasies that help people make sense of history.” Faragher defines the American archetypal Western hero as “a man who loves and understands the wilderness, an intimacy he uses to defeat the Indians and tame the country” (n.d.). That indicates that a typical hero in the West was a man who defeated the Indians and tamed the country.

The suffragettes started altering the masculine founding narratives by claiming women as key agents in the expansion of the West. “Given the centrality of the frontier myth to the debate about the nature of American national identity, it was clearly important for American women activists to counter the impression that West had been
‘won’ entirely through the actions of men” (Heffernan & Medlicot, 2002, p. 111). The frontier myth was so central to Americans’ self-identity that it is logical women suffragettes sought to reconstruct frontier narratives with female protagonists. This also helps explain why women suffragists focused on Sacajawea. The only other female figure present in the narratives of American frontier was Columbia, but she was an allegorical symbol with non-historical existence. Sacajawea and her assumed role in the Lewis and Clark expedition offered the possibility of a new agent who could assert women’s integral role in the expansion and making of the American West.

Eva Emery Dye emphasized women’s importance to the American frontier when unveiling the statue of Sacajawea in the Lewis and Clark Exposition on July 6, 1905:

Women are not by nature, explorers and travelers, but where women go, homes can go, families can be reared, towns, cities and states can be founded. Not until women came could America take any secure hold of Oregon and this great Pacific empire. With women and wagons Oregon was taken. The Indians expected to see an army with banners when the white man came, but no, the mother and the child took Oregon. Trappers had been here, traders and ship-masters had skirted these wilds, but not until mothers came was the true seed of a nation planted. And Sacajawea led them all, the dark-eyed princess of the native race, the child of Asia, beckoned the white man on, toward her ancient home in the Orient.

(Furtwangler, 2007, p. 165)

In this speech, Dye asserts that white women made the expansion of the American West possible. She claims that unlike men, women are not “explorers or travelers,” but because they “rear families,” they made settlement possible. Contrary to masculine narratives of
conquest, Dye claims that the mother and child “took” Oregon. Her speech communicates that white women/mothers made possible what white men, the “trappers,” “traders,” and “ship-masters” could not have accomplished otherwise. Thus, women’s natural role as mothers and their urge to raise families “secure[d]” the Oregon and Pacific empire for men. Finally, she praises Sacajawea, “the dark-eye princess” because she “led” the white women and white men to her “home.” Dye creates parallels between the experiences of white women settlers and Sacajawea by presenting both as having labored with white men as wives and mothers, giving them strength and instilling the values needed to battle the hostile frontier environment. Therefore, unlike Theodore Roosevelt’s chronicles The Winning of the West that “equated manliness with civilization” (as cited in Browne, 2004, p. 93), narratives by white women suffragists proclaimed that womanhood actually paved the path for American civilization.

In addition to the narratives generated by the suffragettes, their images of Sacajawea were also carefully used to establish her role as a patriot. During the unveiling of a Sacajawea statue on July 6, 1905 at Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition, the statue was draped in the American flag (Browne, 2004). Wrapping the statue of Sacajawea in the American flag strengthens Sacajawea’s role as a patriot. In 1942, Donald C. Peattie claimed, “Sacajawea could not understand what the fluttering banner … stood for. Yet when you look at it today, remember that she put five of the stars on it” (as cited in Chuinard, 1976, p. 20). Inspired by earlier scholars, Peattie linked Sacajawea with patriotism, even though he claimed she did not know what the American flag signified. Nonetheless, he suggests that the nation owes the addition of five states to the Union to her because she made the expansion of the West possible.
The suffragists often used the imagery of Sacajawea’s contribution to the nation to announce women’s capacity for patriotism. In 1914, *The Suffrage Daily News* reported that Mrs. Helen Fitzgerald marched as Sacajawea, “the first Montana suffragist” in a “native Indian costume.” Personifying Sacajawea through Native costume and claiming her as “the first Montana suffragist” further constructs Sacajawea as a woman who played a crucial role in the founding and shaping of the country.

Moreover, on July 6, 1906, in what became known as “Sacajawea Day,” Susan B. Anthony said, “This is the first time in history that a statue has been erected in memory of a woman who accomplished patriotic deeds” (as cited in Taber, 1967, p. 10). In her speech, Anthony brought attention to Sacajawea Day as a groundbreaking event because it celebrated a woman for her contributions to the nation. During her presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), Carrie Chapman Catt (1915-1920) gave a speech titled “Woman Suffrage Now Will Stimulate Patriotism” (n.d.). In her speech, Catt demanded, “… The nation has a right to the patriotic services of women….” Through her speech, Catt proclaimed that the nation could be better if women, the natural reformers/civilizing agents, partook in patriotic services. Given that women’s patriotic role was so important to the women suffragettes, the manipulability of Sacajawea’s story was utilized to model a sense of female patriotism in the United States.

**SACAJWEA AS WIFE AND MOTHER: A MODEL OF CIVILIZING FEMININITY**

The suffragettes in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century embraced women’s roles as civilizing agent; and through Sacajawea, they tried to provide evidence of women’s intrinsic civilizing qualities. Additionally, the leadership role attributed to
her as a guide advocated one of the key arguments of suffragists—that the right to vote would allow women to “guide” the country and make society a better place.

By the early 1900s, Sacajawea became a symbolic figure whose representation supported the suffrage movement’s argument that women were moral agents who could improve their communities and the nation. Sara Evans, one of the key members of Sacajawea Statue Association (SSA) used her journalistic skills to express the symbolic potential of a Sacajawea statue in her journal articles (as cited in Olsen, 2008). “In Sacajawea, she [Evans] discovered a symbol that was as malleable as it was powerful. She was the unsung pioneer mother, sustainer and nurturer of men and children; yet, she was also the indomitable female interpreter, guide, and leader” (Olsen, 2008, p. 195). Sacajawea’s femininity as a mother as well as her expertise as a translator and leader was depicted by Evans and other suffragettes through and narratives and imagery.

Figure 2. Two statues of Sacajawea

Sacajawea Statue from 1905, Lewis & Clark Exposition 1905. Commissioned by Alice Cooper

Sacajawea Statue from 1904, Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St. Louis World Fair Commissioned by Bruno Louis Zimm
Figure 2 shows two statues commissioned by Alice Cooper in 1905 and Bruno Zimm in 1904 respectively. Cooper’s statue shows Sacajawea with Baptiste in her arm as she pointing into the distance. Like Cooper’s statue, Zimm’s statue (1904) shows Sacajawea as a maternal figure. However, Cooper’s statue embodies the suffragist vision and makes her appear more enterprising than Zimm’s Sacajawea who is earthy and more passive. In 2009, Patricia Vettle-Becker described the Sacajawea statue commissioned by Cooper for the 1905 Lewis and Clark Exposition. She explains how the statue idealizes Sacajawea’s role as a mother and a guide:

Cooper's noble heroine strides forcefully ahead, her chin raised, her arm lifted and pointing towards the horizon. She appears to be in vigorous motion, her buckskin garments flowing swiftly and gracefully around her, and seemingly unencumbered by the baby casually wrapped around her left shoulder. (Vettle-Becker, 2009, p. 34)

Cooper’s Sacajawea “strides forcefully ahead,” appearing determined. With her “chin raised,” “arm lifted,” and “pointing towards the horizon,” she appears to be confident and active. This also gives the impression of being a leader. Finally, with “the baby around her left shoulder,” she asserts her motherhood. Even as a leader, she continues to fulfill her role as a mother. On the other hand, Zimm’s Sacajawea is shown holding a cane and has a baby on her back. Sacajawea is with a child in both Cooper’s and Zimm’s statue. However, unlike Zimm’s “well researched” design, which shows a more passive and docile Sacajawea, Cooper’s statue for the St. Louis Fair in 1904, “idealized her theme.” Olsen (2008) points out that the article written in a promotional magazine, The Lewis and Clark Journal acknowledged the idealized theme of Cooper’s statue compared to well-
researched one for Zimm’s. Olsen also speculates that article was written by Sara Evans herself.

Sacajawea was the only woman on the Lewis and Clark Expedition. As “the suffragettes had a penchant for seeking out strong women of the past to whom they could point with pride…Sacajawea was to exceed them all as image of perfect womanhood” (Taber, 1967, p. 8). The tales of Sacajawea were fashioned to embody everything white suffragettes considered important in women: Sacajawea’s role as a wife, mother, caretaker, and her perceived role as a guide gave her the traits of feminine perfection. In 1905, Abigail Scott Duniway, one of the leading suffragists of the 20th century said,

…an Indian, a mother…she pointed out the devious way in the wilderness…a man-child on her back and in her heart the protective mother instinct that was of itself sufficient to nerve her to deeds of daring in emergencies which strong men quailed and her own husband cried like a baby…. (as cited in Heffernan & Medlicot, 2002, p.119)

Duniway claimed that Sacajawea was a “mother” and had a “man-child,” possibly referring to her husband, Charbonneau, who “cried like a baby”. That means she was fulfilling her responsibilities as a mother and wife while guiding men in the expedition. Most importantly, her “protective mother instinct” assuaged fears in the party because her women’s intuitions allowed her to take the best actions during emergencies.

In Conquest, Dye (1902) described February 1805, when Sacajawea gave birth to Baptiste. This is an important moment because Sacajawea’s capabilities as a woman are seen to increase as she becomes a mother, which reflects suffragettes’ views of womanhood. Dye writes:
Now barely sixteen, in that February at the Mandan fort she became a mother. Most of the men were away on a great hunting trip; when they came back a lusty little red-faced pappoose was screaming beside the kitchen fire…The men had walked thirty miles that day on the ice and in the snow to their knees, but utterly fatigued as they were the sight of that little Indian baby cuddled in a deer skin robe brought back memories of home. (1902, p. 197)

In this key moment Sacajawea shifts from “wife” or “squaw” to mother. The reproductive role of motherhood provides white women a characteristic through which to relate to Sacajawea. This depiction of Sacajawea emphasized the supposedly natural role of women to give birth to offspring and care for them. This depiction also emphasized the joy women can bring to men’s lives through motherhood. Sacajawea’s transformation grants her idealized femininity as her experiences of motherhood are tied to women’s caretaking and civilizing capacities.

Sacajawea is depicted as a maternal figure, which appealed to early 20th century white women who viewed child rearing as one of the most important aspects of women’s lives. Suffragists used Sacajawea to reaffirm the women’s civilizing role at home and in the society. This model pushed women to embrace their “special skills” associated with motherhood and to use the vote to influence society just as women exercised control at home (Buhle, as cited in Landsman, p. 255). The suffragette tactic was to affirm traditional feminine roles in order to claim that the expansion of the vote would not undermine those roles and would only benefit society. For example, in the early 1900s in Montana, the Weekly Bulletin claimed “suffrage would …bring needed legislation for the protection of children….” (Larson, 1973, p. 36). As motherhood was considered an
important aspect of femininity, one of the key pro-suffrage arguments was that women would make society better for their children through the vote. This was further showcased through the use of Sacajawea.

Dye’s narrative of Sacajawea made her into a symbol of motherhood:

Out of a few dry bones I found in the old tales of the trip I created Sacajawea and made her a real living entity…The beauty of that faithful Indian woman with her baby on her back, leading those stalwart mountaineers and explorers through the strange land, appealed to the world. (as cited in Taber, p. 8)

Here Dye described her hunt for a heroine. Dye stated that her storytelling of “faithful” Indian woman with her “baby” made Sacajawea more appealing to the world. Inspired by Dye’s narratives, many newspapers also framed Sacajawea in maternal terms. The Lincoln County Leader from 1905 described Sacajawea with “papoose strapped on her back” and the St. Paul Globe explained that “[A]lthough [Sacajawea was] burdened with the baby, she labored with the men.” Sacajawea’s presentation as a young Indian mother with a baby on her back was so effective that it remains with us today.

Suffragists capitalized on Sacajawea’s traditional feminine roles while establishing that she was able to work hard. Besides the traditional maternal role that Sacajawea fulfills, she is also an administrator of others’ needs. The Bismarck Daily Tribune in 1914 reported in the article titled “Sacajawea, the Indian Woman of Mandan who led Lewis and Clark should rank above all” report that “when men were sick, she nursed them.” The same article also mentions that she cooked, therefore exhibiting the traditional feminine role of caretaker and provider. However, she also proves capable of doing “men’s jobs” without compromising her femininity. The St. Paul Globe in 1903
reported that “[she] underwent greater hardship,” and “labored with men.” The Daily East Oregonian reported in 1905 reported that “[she] shared with the men the hardships of the toilsome journey across the continent” (p. 8). All these examples show Sacajawea as a hardworking woman who could balance her traditional feminine roles with non-traditional roles that “the mission” or “the cause” demanded.

Supporters of women’s right to vote maintained that women as mothers and caregivers could exert positive influence on political life and their narratives of Sacajawea were designed to affirm women’s civilizing role. As Olsen argues in regard to suffragist Evans, “With Dye as her mentor, Evans transformed Sacajawea from ‘little Shoshone’ mother to grand ‘civilizer.’” This role fit well with Evans’s view that women, once given the vote, would change society for the better (Olsen 2008, p. 195). According to Ronald Schaffer (1964), “the enfranchised mother would be able to use her vote to ensure the purity of the foods she purchased, to safeguard her children against public health hazards, and to oversee indirectly the conditions under which her family worked” (p. 12). According to this view, if given the power to vote women could enhance safety for their children and create favorable conditions for their family members. From this perspective, society “needed the special skills and experiences of motherhood and it was only through the use of the ballot the modern woman could regulate conditions…that she had previously controlled at home” (Landsman, 1992, p. 255). The suffragists argued that women as mothers could better society through the vote, building on their pre-existing domestic roles. It was the “mother, not fathers were particularly responsible for inculcating children with the piety, benevolence, and self discipline…”(Bloch, 1987, p. 46). Although Bloch was describing the 18th century, it also applies to the context in
which Sacajawea was being used as a portrait of motherhood by suffragists. Again, the suffragists claimed feminine superiority by stressing mothers’ roles in teaching children “piety,” “benevolence,” and “self discipline,” and alleging that this made them equipped to reform the society.

The suffragettes constructed Sacajawea as a pacifist mother figure to reiterate women’s roles as advocates of kindness and peace. In 1903, *Monroe Democrat* claimed that Sacajawea “rallied quickly, and bore all the hardships, including those attending the care of her child, cheerfully and courageously.” While she worked hard and took care of her child, she was “cheerful” and “courageous.” Sacajawea was also presented as a source of comfort. Dye mentions, “The presence of her child and herself gave a touch of domesticity in that Oregon winter” (1902, p. 245). “The Oregon winter” described the excruciating experiences the white men were dealing with—the climate as well as the distance and lack of warmth the men were experiencing from being away from their home and families. Dye explains that Sacajawea’s femininity—her motherly care and cheerful spirit—kept men going. Sacajawea’s femininity also served to establish peace during the journey. According to Dye, “Not until Sacajawea landed with her baby was tranquility restored” (1902, p. 237). Sacajawea’s feminine presence was also thought to be important in warding off evil Indian tribes, as the *Daily East Oregonian* (1905) reported: “Her presence served to allay the suspicions of the tribe through whose country they passed.” Sacajawea’s story as told by suffragettes showcased women’s importance as “peacemakers” and “comforters” of the nation.
WHITENED REPRESENTATION

The white suffragettes who were responsible for constructing Sacajawea assimilated her to Western European-American ways to make her more presentable. In fact, as Sheri Bartlett Browne argues, “Sacagawea’s Indian[-]ness seems to vanish along the trail” (2004, p. 94). Browne means that Sacajawea’s Indian identity was minimized to cater to the suffragettes’ need to adopt a woman who could embody the American frontier spirit without challenging Euro-American perceptions of beauty, morals, and ideal womanhood.

Dye’s descriptions of Sacajawea in The Conquest present her as white by assigning her European features:

Sacajawea’s hair was neatly braided, her nose was fine and straight, and her skin pure copper like the statue in some old Florentine gallery. Madonna of her race, she had led the way to a new time. To the hands of this girl, not yet eighteen, had been entrusted the key that unlocked the road to Asia. Some day upon the Bozeman Pass, Sacajawea's statue will stand beside that of Clark. Some day, where the rivers part, her laurels will vie with those of Lewis. Across North America a Shoshone Indian Princess touched hands with Jefferson, opening her country. (1902, p. 290)

Dye’s account of Sacajawea muted her Indian identity. Unlike other Indians, Sacajawea was “neat.” Her nose was “fine and straight” and her skin “copper,” not brown. She is compared to a statue in Florentine gallery, giving her European status. Pillow asserts, “The whitening of Sacajawea's physical features, thoughts, and deeds was performed partly by assigning her the tropes of white womanhood-Madonna, maiden, and
mother-were integral to her creation as an emblem of manifest destiny and suffragist icon” (Pillow, 2007, p. 5). Pillow argues that Sacajawea’s whitening occurred by assigning her European features like fine/straight nose and white mannerisms like “neat.” References such as “Madonna of her race” also linked Sacajawea to tropes of white womanhood. These techniques made it possible for Sacajawea to be taken as an emblem of manifest destiny and suffragist icon. Europeanized features and white mannerisms render her more acceptable to a white audience.

One of the ways an Indian can appear whitened is by emulating white women’s dress. Matilda Gage, a leading suffragist, distinguished between “conservative” and “progressive” “squaws” by dress style and praised her contemporary Iroquois women for assimilating into the American culture (Landsman, 1992, p. 268). In 1875, The Evening Post reported, “some of the women among them have become civilized enough to imitate their Caucasian sisters in the fashion of their garments (cited in Landsman, 1992, p. 268). Following Gage, who assessed Indian women’s progressiveness through their dressing sense, Dye also dressed Sacajawea as a white woman. In Conquest, Dye writes:

Sacajawea was dressed as a white woman; she had quickly adopted their manners and language; but, in the words of a chronicler who saw her there, ‘she had become sickly, and longed to revisit her native country. Her husband also had become wearied of civilised life. (1902, p. 351).

Sacajawea’s apparel was used to show her assimilation, despite being “Indian.” The St. Paul Globe reported in 1903, “The woman seemed fond of white people, tried to imitate civilized ways in her dress and manners, and in general appeared like one in whom an inspiration had been aroused for something higher than savagery.” Similarly, the
Minneapolis Journal in 1903 stated, “she welcomed with intelligent appreciation the civilization of the white race”; “she had shown such appreciation and power of assimilation of civilization”; and “found her still attempting to emulate the life of the whites.” “Dressing up” like white women, appreciating “the civilization of white race,” and embracing whites made the figure of Sacajawea presentable and consumable.

Sacajawea’s fabricated identity as a “friend of white people” was used to emphasize her contribution to colonization and the spread of civilization. During the unveiling of the Sacajawea statue, Dye praised Sacajawea for “revealing the secrets of [her] country and giving its trade and resources to the whites, opening the way to a higher civilization…” (Cohen, 1996, p. 718). This quote states that Sacajawea “revealed” secrets of her country and “gave” its “trade and resources” to the whites. This account justifies colonization by claiming that Indian woman assisted the expansion, not that they were conquered. This special role of Sacajawea sets her in a loftier position, thus making her different and better than other Indian people. For example, The Sumpter Miner reported, “Savage though she is, the Indian woman possesses many virtues which ennoble the heart and minds of her civilized sisters.”

Many reports from the period construct Sacajawea as an admirer of white civilization. The anthropologist and Indian reformer, Alice Fletcher emphasized Indian women’s special abilities at assimilating Indians into white civilization (Landsman, 1992, p. 269). Building on the view that women have natural civilizing tendencies, Indian women, more than their male counterparts, were understood as open to “civilized ways.” In 1893, suffragist Gage explained, “it is through the Indian women that the problem of their civilization must be answered” (as cited in Landsman, 1992, p. 268). Suffragettes’
depiction of Sacajawea embodied the belief in an Indian woman’s role as a “civilizer” among her people. By framing her as someone who accepted white ways and shared with “others” new knowledge and practices, Sacajawea assumed the role of a “civilizer,” which made her more “woman” than Indian.

With European features assigned to her, she is presented not only as “whiter” than she in fact was, but also as especially beautiful. *The Conquest* describes “a leathery old dame and a captive Indian girl from the Rocky Mountains, — the handsome young Sacajawea, the Bird-Woman” (Dye, 1902, p. 188). Sacajawea is “handsome” and “young” while the other Indian is “leathery” and “old.” Sacajawea may grow old, but she was different from other Indian girls. “Sacajawea, too, was a Princess, come home now to her Mountain Kingdom” (Dye, 1902, p. 228). She is referred as a princess; her “noble blood” makes her different. Nevertheless, there is a tenet to being a princess; “if she wishes to be called a princess, she must save or give aid to white men” (Green, 1975, p. 703). That means to maintain her noble identity she is required to assist white men. In *The Conquest*, Dye announced, “Shoshone Indian princess touched hands with Jefferson, opening her country” (1902, p. 290). Dye claims that Sacajawea partnered up with Jefferson to “open” her home. More importantly, it was a “Shoshone Indian” who collaborated with white men and welcomed them to her home. Her Indian identity is important here to alter the narrative from “conquest” to “allowance.” Sacajawea’s Indian identity becomes a rationalization for colonization.

Although Sacajawea was whitened, she was never completely white. *The Omaha Daily Bee* in 1907 called her a “faithful squaw” and the *Bismarck Daily News* in 1903 stated she “belonged to the Shoshone, or Snake Indians”. She was regularly referred to as
Indian squaw and her tribal identity was often cited. For example, *Daily East Oregonian* in 1905 refers to Sacajawea as “the girl pointing toward a distant sea, her face radiant and head thrown back and eyes full of daring.” The report presents her as the girl “pointing” toward a distant sea suggesting Sacajawea possessed knowledge of landscapes because she was Indian. In 1903, *The Sumpter Miner* newspaper reported, “Shoshone girl wife rendered invaluable service in piloting the expedition through the Rocky Mountains to her former home, and establishing friendly relations.” Sacajawea’s Indian identity, associated with bravery and daring, gives credibility to the narratives that claim Sacajawea “led” the expedition.

Sacajawea’s whitened and Indian identities played simultaneously. For example, her face was “radiant” because she helped white men bring civilization to the wilderness. Yet her “daring eyes” showed her Indian traits and the ability to defy her savagery. Sacajawea’s Indian identity also plays a crucial role in defining her courage. As the *St. Paul Globe* in 1903 reported, “Yet hers was not merely a solitary act of bravery—a flash of savage courage. Her devotion was the kind that demanded faithful toil for weeks and months.” Sacajawea’s services did not simply come from her savagery; she was devoted to the cause. Terms such as “bravery,” “daring,” and “savage courage” were commonly associated with American Indians so these references made Sacajawea’s Indian identity apparent. As Philip Deloria (1998) explained in his influential book *Playing Indian*, “Revolutionary era constructions of the interior Indian Other had almost completely emphasized positive qualities—Americanness, a claim to landscape, and individual liberty. Even savagery, coded as martial prowess, could be a positive value when attached to an American self” (p. 104). This insight suggests that following the American
Revolution, positive qualities were associated with Indian-ness. These included ties to the land, individual liberty, and American identity. In this context savagery was equated with strength and bravery. However, Indian people’s resistance to American expansion complicated the relationship between American national identity and Indian-ness (Deloria, 1998, p. 45). Indian identity started to represent rebellion. Sacajawea’s Indian identity may have been important to the suffragettes because it implicitly affirmed a special tie to the land and conveyed courage. In addition, Sacajawea’s Indian identity cast her as a rebel, who fought against the “primitive[ness]” of her own people, for the “nobility” of the whites. This implication may have been useful for the suffragists who were rebelling against reigning social conventions.

CONCLUSION

The Suffragettes’ relationship to Sacajawea was one of appropriation. Loretta Todd, the documentary filmmaker explains “Appropriation occurs when someone else speaks for, tells, defines, describes, represents, uses, or recruits or images, stories, experiences, dreams of others for their own. Appropriation also occurs when someone else becomes the expert on your experience” (Coombe, 1993, p. 279). This means appropriation can happen when a person or group of people uses stories or images of members of other groups for their own purposes. Kathryn W. Shanley argues that cultural appropriation is the theft of cultural property that leaves those who are robbed without a specific history or language. It is a form of “political and ideological domination of indigenous Americans by the mainstream culture” (1997, p. 676). This explains that cultural appropriation is a way a dominant actor can subordinate indigenous people, their culture, and stories by representations of the indigenous culture are taken away by
claiming them as their own. When suffragettes spoke about Sacajawea’s “heroic deeds,” she was appropriated and misrepresented. She was constructed by whites to reflect dominant views, identity, and beliefs; her history and ties were taken from her.

The fabrication of Sacajawea by suffragists started with Dye’s romantic novel, *The Conquest*, which offered suffragists a heroine who embodied women’s potential to “serve the nation.” With Sacajawea, white women suffragists found an icon who was part of American history, but the lack of evidence about the details of her life made her adaptable to the narratives women suffragists wanted to advance.

In seeking to gain the right to vote, white women suffragists in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century embraced an argument focused on women’s unique role as civilizing agents. Sacajawea was presented in this framework. She was portrayed as the mother, wife, and leader in the expedition believed to be so important to westward expansion. She was represented as a woman who had served the nation as a patriot, thus challenging masculine understandings of citizenship. Sacajawea’s guidance was presented by the suffragists as feminized. Though a leader, Sacajawea was the source of comfort, nurture, and peace.

White women suffragists cast Sacajawea as a patriotic, feminine, and whitened figure. Not only was her story re-told, but her very existence was appropriated. There is hardly any evidence of Sacajawea’s desire to participate in the expedition, but she was claimed by early American feminists who turned her into a convenient symbol—one still found throughout the world on statues, coins, and the pages of American history books.
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Women’s Suffrage Movement

When the United States Constitution was written, only white men had the right to vote. Women were not allowed to vote under the law. Women also did not have many other rights such as the right to own property or to be educated for certain jobs. As time passed, many people came to feel that this was unfair and that women should have the same rights as men in our country. Women’s suffrage (right to vote) became an organized movement in 1848 at a convention in New York. Women’s Suffrage Parade in New York City

The suffrage movement did not have much success in the beginn

Women’s Suffrage summary:
The women’s suffrage movement (aka woman suffrage) was the struggle for the right of women to vote and run for office and is part of the overall women’s rights movement. In the mid-19th century, women in several countries, most notably, the U.S. and Britain, formed organizations to fight for suffrage. In 1888, the first international women’s rights organization formed, the International Council of Women (ICW). Because the ICW was reluctant to focus on suffrage, in 1904 the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) was formed by British women’s rights activist Millice Men and women who opposed women’s suffrage did not necessarily join the organized anti-suffrage movement. Resistance to the vote, and to the changing gender roles which this implied, often took the form of passive prejudice. However the growing threat of suffragist success stirred some powerful men and some outstanding women into action. The men who defeated women’s suffrage in Parliament belonged to both the main political parties. The Liberal party, despite generally appearing more attuned to the advance of democracy than the Conservatives, included many Liberal Unionists who were convinced.