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## 4 Ethnic Women, 1900–1940

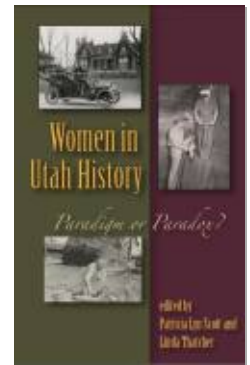
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## Ethnic Women

1900–1940

Helen Z. Papanikolas

Forty years after the Mormons entered the Salt Lake Valley and many centuries after the Anasazi Indians left traces in Utah's varied terrain, immigrant women from the Mediterranean, the Balkans, and Asia began long fearful journeys that led them to Utah. They would not see Native Americans on far-off reservations, but perhaps they would pass an occasional African American woman on the streets. These newcomers were impelled forward by ancient needs to go beyond their current arduous existence in search of a brighter destiny. They were among a legion of women throughout the ages who left their homelands, willingly or unwillingly.<sup>1</sup>

American immigration has been divided into the “old immigrants” and “new immigrants.” The old immigrants came to Utah in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Most immigrated from Britain, northern Europe, and Scandinavia, and came in family groups. They intended to stay and immediately accepted the United States as their adopted country.

After 1900, the new immigrants began arriving in Utah in increasing numbers from Mediterranean, Balkan, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries. These new immigrants were primarily men who expected that their sojourn would be short. Except for the Asians, they had come from countries that had recently freed themselves from foreign rule, and all were intensely nationalistic. They became the force that industrialized Utah.

When the new immigrants lengthened their stay in the United States and sent for brides, the women obediently followed. They had no other choice; in their impoverished countries, dowries were necessary for marriage. Isolated and unassimilated in the larger American-Mormon culture in Utah, they lived as ethnic women did in the East and Midwest—in neighborhoods where religious rituals were recited in old-country languages. As mothers they instilled the traditional ways in their children, hoping to return eventually to their people.

Like Native American and African American women, they experienced historical and social forces that both repressed them and, for many, fulfilled them. This paper gives a general view of the lives of Utah's ethnic women during the first four decades of the twentieth century.

## ETHNIC GROUPS

### *Native Americans*

For Utah's Native-American women, dispossession began even before the Homestead laws of 1862 brought more settlers to plow their lands, destroy the native seeds, and frighten away the small game that constituted an important part of their diet. On that land their mothers and grandmothers had gathered seeds, nuts, and berries; their men had hunted and returned with game for them to dry and preserve. On this sacred ground, they had danced and sung ancient invocations to their gods.

Starving, stealing to survive, Indians were forced onto federal reservations, most often on land the white man did not want.<sup>2</sup> There the old nomadic ways degenerated into weekly allotments from government agencies which included a small amount of meat, bulk lard, salt bacon, flour, beans, and soap. Men were restricted in their hunting and fishing, but women continued to work harder than husbands and sons. They gathered firewood, carried water, picked berries, dried meat, corn, and fruit, cooked meals, raised children, repaired tents, and as a symbol of wifely pride and acknowledgment, braided their husbands' hair.<sup>3</sup>

With the degradation of their people, Native American women suffered on the Uintah-Ouray Reservation and none rose to speak in council meetings as had Chipeta,<sup>4</sup> a leader in the 1860s when the days of following the migrations of elk, antelope, and deer were becoming memories. No woman would dare approach a white agent as his equal as Chief Tsau-wi-ats's wife ("of great influence, and . . . much revered") had faced John Wesley Powell.<sup>5</sup> Like Indian women throughout the country, Utah's Native American women valiantly kept their culture alive and mourned their people's history. The 1900 census listed only 1,270 Native American females in Utah, slightly fewer than the 1,353 males. (See appendix.)

In northern Utah, Western Shoshone women lived on the fringes of white hamlets, working at times as servants to settlers and becoming converts to Mormonism as a prelude to assimilation. In southwestern Utah, Paiute women struggled with poverty on the outskirts of towns and bartered work for food. Farther out in the desert, they slowly starved on reservation land, destitute, their race dying out.

Least affected by white settlers' incursions were the four bands of Gosiutes in western Utah. They lived in Deep Creek, Skull Valley, Snake Creek, and Trout Creek in *wickiups* of stacked sagebrush. Poorest of the tribes, they refused to leave their ancestral land for the Uintah Valley reservation in the



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Navajos learned weaving from neighboring tribes and then surpassed them in skill. Monument Valley, 1941.

1860s, preferring extreme cold and hunger to government subjection. Each day was spent searching for seeds and small animals. There was no time for ceremonies. However, they continued the round dance to the beat of a drum—an invocation to make grass seeds grow. The women made capes from rabbit skins; the children wore nothing. Early explorers were surprised at these people, whom they viewed as savages. John Wesley Powell recorded brief vignettes: “the mother studiously careful of her little one, by causing it to nestle under her rabbit-skin mantle” and a very old, infirm woman portioning out her bread to children. Only after they were fed did she “take the small balance for herself.”<sup>6</sup> In 1912 the Skull Valley and Deep Creek reservations were established. A young doctor who set up practice in the area wondered if the Gosiute women were being “wiser than I when they . . . let the unfit die? They were good mothers, kind and gentle with their children. Were they also kind in eliminating the weak that the tribe might be perpetuated by the strong?”<sup>7</sup>

Navajo women fared far better in their matriarchal society among the red monoliths of the Four Corners area in southern Utah. Many among them had made the Long Walk in 1864 when government troops under Kit Carson had forced 8,500 Navajos to walk through the desert to Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. After four years of suffering in this nineteenth-century concentration camp where they clung to their religion and didactic myths, they returned and began establishing themselves again, gradually increasing their sheep. The women wove rugs using both traditional designs and new patterns preferred by white easterners; the men worked in turquoise and silver.

By crossing spindly Merino ewes with Rambouillet rams, the Navajos produced strong sheep with thick wool. The sheep belonged to the women who herded and butchered them, and also carded, spun, dyed, and wove the wool. They brought the sheep and rugs to white traders in Oljato, Goulding's, Gap, Hatch's, Aneth, Bluff, and Blanding. Although they often received little for their sheep and handiwork, they increased their flocks. Their hogans were relatively comfortable. Their gardens of squash, beans, corn, and melons provided adequate food.

Native American women retained the rituals of the past into the twentieth century. The Navajo squaw dances, sings, the Kin-nahl-dah (puberty ceremonies for girls), were occasions of clan gatherings and feasting. In spring the Ute and Paiute women faced their men in the ancient ritual of the Bear Dance to the rhythm of drums and singing. They watched for four days and nights as their men danced the regenerating Sun Dance.

### *African Americans*

Decades before Mormon settlement in Utah, several African American trappers and adventurers had traveled within the territory. Not until 1847, however, did the first African American women enter Utah, mainly as slaves of southern converts. The matriarch of the black community was a free woman, Jane Manning James,<sup>8</sup> who had converted to Mormonism in the early 1840s and had worked in Joseph Smith Jr.'s household until his death. Eliza Partridge Lyman, a plural wife of Apostle Amasa M. Lyman, wrote in her journal on April 8, 1849: "we baked the last of the flour today. . . . Jane James, the colored woman, let me have two pounds of flour, it being half of what she had."<sup>9</sup> Jane Manning James repeatedly asked Mormon church authorities to seal her to the Joseph Smith family. She held the millennial beliefs of the time and wanted temple ordinances to ensure her future salvation. She was unwilling to wait for church racial policies to change.

In 1852, the territorial legislature passed a law affirming the legality of slavery. Women as well as men were sold by their masters. One African American woman had tried to escape with other slaves while the wagon train was traveling through Kansas on its way to the Utah territory, but she "was not successful in that direction."<sup>10</sup> In later years not all felt discriminated against. Florence Legroan Lawrence recalled that her mother grew up in the Murray area:

She came from rather a large family with brothers and sisters, and at that time she said there was not the prejudices you felt afterwards because, of course there was not the work either. And I guess it was a way of life that they just understood and that's the way they lived. But she said that they didn't have any problems in the schools for segregation or felt like they were different or anything like that. Of course, you know that's the way it is when you grow up but she seemed like they had a very good time and a nice life growing up.<sup>11</sup>

The women worked as domestics, the men as field hands, carpenters, and shoemakers. Almost all became farmers after a time. Following the Emancipation Proclamation, several former slaves left Utah. Those who remained continued to intermarry and congregated in three areas of Salt Lake County: Union, East Millcreek, and the Salt Lake City neighborhood later called Central City. When the Denver and Rio Grande Western and Union Pacific railroads recruited African Americans to work as porters and waiters, census figures showed a marked increase in the population, from 672 in 1900 (218 females) to 1,144 in 1910 (453 females). A community of African Americans grew around the Union Pacific railyards in Ogden at this time. (See appendix.)

African American women worked long hours in the houses of others, in their own homes, and in their small fields. Because of discrimination, more intense than that felt by any other ethnic group, they relied on each other for help and recreation. They did not readily seek medical help for themselves and their families; instead, they used folk cures handed down through centuries. Their communities were self-contained islands in which church services, fraternal organizations, visiting, and the sharing of limited resources gave cohesiveness to their lives. In Salt Lake City and in Ogden, the women found relief from work in clubs such as the Ladies Civic and Study Club, the Camelia Arts and Crafts Club, and the Nimble Thimble Club.<sup>12</sup> Lone women whose husbands worked in isolated railroad terminals and in mines had none of these social outlets; their existence was circumscribed by the walls of their homes.

African American churches were the nuclei of African American life. Some pioneer African Americans adopted the Latter-day Saint religion, but most African Americans formed their own churches. In Salt Lake City, the Trinity African Methodist Episcopal Church was established in the 1890s, followed by Cavalry Baptist Church soon afterwards. In Ogden, the Wall Street Baptist Church opened for services in the early 1900s.

The small African American population remained stable until World War I greatly accelerated railroad activity for transporting matériel, troops, coal, and steel. The Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads actively recruited African Americans from the South and, with the Denver and Rio Grande Western, became their principal employers.<sup>13</sup> This brought the African American population to 1,146 in 1920 of whom 612 were females. After the war, in 1919, a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded in Salt Lake City; an Ogden branch was established during World War II. African American women were and are among the most dedicated workers in these organizations.

Discrimination, based on the color of their skin, was everywhere—in housing, employment, and whenever African Americans came in contact with whites. Several African American women worked closely with the YWCA, particularly Mignon Richmond who had graduated from Utah State Agricultural College (now Utah State University) in 1921 but was refused work



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Widow and children of Archie Henderson, an African American family living in Castle Gate. Henderson was killed in the Castle Gate mine disaster. Left to right: Mrs. Henderson, Archie, Jr. (9), and Myrtle (12). Elizabeth (15) and Lewis (19) were absent when the picture was taken. Mrs. Henderson was expecting another child, 1924.

as a teacher. For decades she was the attendant in the women's restroom in the University of Utah's Kingsbury Hall. Richmond, whose grandmother had been an object of curiosity in Wellsville, vividly remembers shopping in Salt Lake City's Woolworth store. When her mother ordered hot dogs, they were not allowed to sit at the counter and instead ate them standing in a corner. In theaters ushers directed African Americans to the balcony.

### *Jews*

Jews arrived in Utah during the first decade of Mormon migration. Two single men preceded the first couple, Julius Garson Brooks and his wife Isabell ("Fanny"), a milliner, who arrived in July 1854. Jewish merchants and freighters were supplying Camp Floyd by 1858; and until the Zion Cooperative Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) was established in 1868, the Auerbach brothers had no competition in general merchandising.<sup>14</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, former Jewish peddlers and shop owners had become leading members of Utah's business community. They were German-Jews who began to be outnumbered by eastern European coreligionists escaping pogroms and other forms of virulent antisemitism. After weeks in steerage, the new arrivals came to Utah, often following a short, unproductive stay in the gray, man-made canyons of eastern slums. The Utah

Jews sheltered these newcomers and found work for them, usually in shops, the first step to future ownership. Although many of the Jews moved on, lamenting the lack of kosher food, soon the unmarried were paired up through ubiquitous matchmaking and new families began in Mormon Zion.<sup>15</sup> For the most part, Jewish families lived in the area of Ninth South between Main Street and West Temple. Until 1883 when their first synagogue was erected, they conducted services in private houses and assorted buildings.

Less fortunate were the 150 Jewish immigrants from New York and Philadelphia who arrived in Clarion, near Gunnison, in 1910 to establish an agricultural colony. The exodus to Utah was part of a dedicated effort of eastern Jewish philanthropists to transfer their people from city slums, where tuberculosis and other diseases were rampant, to rural areas in the East and West. Among these settlers were well-educated men, idealists who thought farming would be the answer to the rootlessness of Jews. However, the experiment failed after three years of freezing winters, miserably hot summers, ignorance about farming, and a fatal shortage of irrigation water.<sup>16</sup>

Nathan Ayerhoff, a member of the colony, recalled: “The women for instance they were objecting from the first day they came in. . . . I had to go 7 miles to Gunnison to bring some [drinking] water, by the time I brought the water it was all frozen. . . . Most of the children didn’t see a cracker, a candy or anything like this.”<sup>17</sup>

Of the few Clarion colonists who remained in Utah, two became the heads of successful enterprises: Benjamin Brown founded the Utah Poultry Cooperative Association, and Maurice Warshaw pioneered a chain of supermarket/department stores. The Auerbach, Bamberger, and Rosenblatt families had, by then, become business and community leaders in Salt Lake City.

Matriarchs of the founding Jewish families kept boardinghouses for employment-seeking sojourners, enhanced the family’s financial condition by their creative frugality, and faithfully maintained their religious and cultural traditions. Friends and relatives converged from small towns and surrounding states for the Jewish High Holidays. These were the most important days of the year for the women. Faith, friendship, and food reaffirmed their Jewishness.

Within a generation of their arrival in Utah, women became prominent in the Jewish experience in Utah. More than any other ethnic group, they were businesswomen, working in family concerns. In 1903 they founded the local Hadassah to support Zionism and have been in the vanguard for promoting the arts in Utah.

During the last half of the twentieth century, Jewish-Mormon relationships eased through emphasis, from the Mormon side, that they are also of the “house of Israel,” a theological concept related to Mormon belief in being a covenant people. This view countered the widespread animosity toward Jews that was based on their not accepting Christ as the Messiah and



in the widespread stereotype that Jews had a stranglehold on business. In the early years of life in Utah, Jewish women struggled to keep a dignity that this prejudice denied them. Doris Neiditch Guss, who lived in Ogden as a young girl, remembered:

I don't recall the name of the family, but he was what they call a *melamed*, a teacher. He felt sorry that I couldn't understand a word of Yiddish. Actually, I never wanted to speak Yiddish. I never wanted my mother to speak Yiddish in front of my friends. I was embarrassed by it. When I was a child, in Chicago, and we'd take the streetcar, whenever she took out the *Jewish Daily Forward* to read, I'd say, "Mama, please, put it down."

She would tell me, "Doris, never be ashamed of who you are. Don't ever do that to yourself because you'll never be a happy person."<sup>18</sup>

### *Armenians*

The Armenians are an ethnic people whose experience in Utah as new immigrants is unique. Like the Jews, the Armenians also fled persecution; but in their case, they were persecuted because they were Christians under Muslim authority. Their ancestral land between the Black and Caspian seas had been ruled ruthlessly by the Turks since the early 1500s. Beginning in 1897, a handful of Armenian families—fewer than fifty individuals all told—began arriving in Utah thanks to the efforts of Mormon missionary H. H. Hintze, who chose to serve a mission in Constantinople in 1888 rather than face punishment for practicing polygamy. Hagop Thomas (Tumas) Gagosian, one of Hintze's converts, records his wife's fear of this new American religion that had replaced his ancient Armenian faith: "My wife would cry and plead with me to quit this new religion and come back to my old fold. My old friends and neighbors did not help either because they would take my wife's part and tell her I was lost."<sup>19</sup>

Gagosian and his family tried to farm in both Utah and Nevada but he ended up working at the smelter in Midvale. Other Armenians worked for the Denver Fire and Clay Company in Salt Lake City. Between 1910 and 1920, the employment records of Utah Copper Company (later Kennecott) lists 150 Armenians. Wherever they lived, the mothers attempted to maintain some of the old traditions while those who had become Mormon converts practiced their adopted religion faithfully. Several Armenian and Lebanese women sold notions and Middle Eastern bedspreads and tablecloths door to door with better success than their men, who were looked upon with suspicion.

The transition to Mormonism and Americanism was often difficult. "In the ward," a daughter of converts who had settled in Murray, said, "people looked at us as if we were intruders. I was conscious of being darker than the rest of the congregation. I felt I didn't belong."<sup>20</sup> A few children of immigrants married out of their group into the encompassing Mormon community,



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Armenian family store located in Salt Lake City, ca. 1910. (Notice the American patriotic décor on the background pole and balcony.)

but “Mormon Armenian immigrants have married among themselves to an intense degree—especially so among the children and grandchildren of the first settlers.”<sup>21</sup>

The Turkish program of Christian genocide in 1915 and 1921 was especially devastating to the Armenians, and the two World Wars brought other Armenians to Utah who were not Mormon converts. They were mainly affiliated with the Gregorian, or Apostolic church; a few were Eastern Orthodox. These Armenians followed the experience of the new immigrants except they did not come with the belief that they were sojourners in America; they came to stay.

### NEW IMMIGRANTS

The immigrants who came to Utah in the greatest numbers between 1900 and 1930 were not fleeing persecution nor had they converted to Mormonism. Rather, the poverty in their homelands pushed them, while the promise of a better economic life in America pulled them. They came from the Balkans, Middle East, and Mediterranean countries, from Japan,<sup>22</sup> and later, from Mexico. A few of the earliest arrivals from each ethnic group became labor agents for the mine, mill, smelter, and railroad companies that were industrializing the agrarian West. These agents, the “*padrones*,”<sup>23</sup> provided management with an unending supply of laborers who were willing to work for lower wages than

Americans. In Utah, the importation of industrial workers was unconsciously aided even more because of the strong emphasis within Mormonism of working on the land.

The early immigrants, almost all men, moved from one mining camp or railroad gang to another. Management seldom provided adequate housing, and the men lived in abysmal conditions. Few boardinghouses were available. Workers sheltered themselves in tents; others rented old houses and set up housekeeping under an elected leader.

The men had left their native countries expecting to return after having provided sisters with dowries and support for aging parents, hoping to save enough for themselves to open a shop or become money lenders. When the steady work that America offered kept them longer in the country than they had intended, they began to think of marrying; women would provide the amenities they had known in their native countries.

So few women of their national heritage were available that competition for them became intense. Girls as young as fourteen eloped. Mainlander Greeks who ran off with Cretan women had to be protected by their friends against the ire of their bride's parents and the Cretan community as a whole that vehemently opposed such unions. Although less fanatical, north and south Italians also discouraged marriage between their groups. Among the South Slavs (Yugoslavs), "frequent resorts to violence were made by males and many murders arose from the inflamed passions which developed."<sup>24</sup> Asians tolerated marriage with women from other ethnic groups or Americans, but they far preferred to import brides from their own villages.

When the prospective husbands could afford to return home to court and marry, they were desirable bridegrooms with their new clothes, their money, and their wealth of information about America. After ancient wedding festivities that gave zest to the toil of village life, these brides left for America as properly married wives under the protection of husbands. Often the men brought several other women along to become brides of their friends and relatives.

Most immigrant men, though, could not leave their work to find wives, spending weeks on trains and ships that depleted their savings and deprived them of earnings. Sending for "picture brides" was one solution to finding a wife from their native countries. Such arrangements were risky but also promised hope. In the villages of their homeland, girls began working in the fields from the time they could walk. They lived in one- and two-room huts with earthen or rough-planked floors. They slept on mats, sheep pelts, or hand-woven blankets, crowded among their sisters. In good weather, animals were penned beneath the houses, in winter often at one end of the room, separated from the family by a partition. Only in provincial towns did a few parents send their daughters to school for a smattering of reading and writing.

Educated or not, married or not, women lived under the rule of husbands, fathers, brothers, and village elders. The slightest breach of conduct



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Wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Angelo Heleotes, Magna, at the First Greek Church in Salt Lake City, located on 400 South between 300 and 400 West. The church was dedicated October 29, 1905, and served the Greek, Serbian, and Russian communities until the present Greek Orthodox Church located at 300 South and 300 West was constructed.

stigmatized them and their children. Mothers, grandmothers, and mothers-in-law were on their guard so that no aspersions could be cast upon their own respectability, and they exercised strict control over their daughters so that impeccable reputations could claim the most desirable marriages—those that would strengthen the clan.

But economic realities forced different choices on them. The bride's wishes were of no concern. Sorrowing but hopeful, mothers acquiesced in their husbands' decisions to send their daughters to America where people had enough to eat and where even a dowryless girl could be married. A Greek folksong of the 1910 decade pleads: "Don't send me, Mother, to Ameriki / I'll wither there and die."

Sometimes several picture brides would travel together, apprehensive of what awaited them in the new country, but drawing comfort from each other. Many others came alone, demoralized and fearful at leaving their homes to enter a land of strange people, language, and customs, clutching pictures of the strangers who would meet and marry them. Sewed to their coat lapels were tags on which were written their destination and their future husbands' names. The discomfort of their journey—crammed into steerage quarters in the bowels of pitching steamship, overwhelmed by fear and confusion for a few days in New

York ghettos, and then exhausted by the cross-continental train trip—was often comparable to the days of sail and wagon.<sup>25</sup>

They were further oppressed by their ancient cultures' dictum that respectable women did not travel without male relatives. My mother, Emily Zeese, used her dowry to secretly purchase passage to America, traveling on the ship with a Jewish family:

[She] talked to no one so that nothing would be known about her. One day the [Greek] woman approached her and asked where she was going. "To New York, Kyria."

"Is someone meeting you or are you going on?"

Emily thought she should lie so that the woman would not consider her immoral for traveling without a male relative, yet impelled to tell the truth, she answered, "I am with a Jewish family. The father will meet us."<sup>26</sup>

Jun Kuramada recalled in an interview the family stories of his mother's intense reluctance to accept a marriage that had been arranged through family connections:

The family in Japan had induced my mother to come over here. And like this one conversation with my uncle says that well we practically had to carry her, screaming and hollering that she didn't want to go. And they finally got her on the boat. And—I guess she cried all the way over. And, whether she actually knew my father except just by name, and, I guess it was just the case where—many of the cases at that time where—the men who would send photographs back and they might—ah—might send a photo of a very handsome friend of theirs, not themselves. And so those things going on—but—ah— But my father actually was a very handsome man. He really was. So I'm sure she wasn't all that disappointed when she got here.<sup>27</sup>

A few of these brides were well-educated women who became teachers in Greek and Asian schools for children of immigrants. Haruko Terasawa Moriyasu recalls: "My mother, Kuniko Muramatsu Terasawa, was the first girl in her family to leave for Tokyo and school. She asked her parents to use her dowry money for schooling. She taught for two years when my father, who had gone to Utah in 1906, returned to Japan for a wife. This was in 1922. My father had intended to make money in America and return to Japan to enter politics. [Instead] in 1914 he began publishing the *Utah Nippo* and my mother became the business manager."<sup>28</sup>

Besides the illiterate picture brides and the small group of educated women were an even smaller handful of women who had defied the mores of their people, married beneath their class or chosen men of whom their families disapproved, and left for America to avoid ostracism. Other difficulties awaited them in Utah. Filomena Bonacci, whose husband Frank, a hereditary laborer in Italy, became the foremost United Mine Workers organizer in Utah from

1920 to 1950, found herself shunned in Carbon County because of his labor activities.<sup>29</sup> Jinzaburo Matsumiya, a section foreman near Jericho in Juab County, returned to Japan where he married a wife who proved herself adaptable and hard-working: “In the desert she cared for her children, raised three hundred chickens at a time, ripped the seams of her husband’s clothes to make patterns for new ones that she sewed on a treadle machine, and was one of the shearers herself when the sheep were driven to the water tank.”<sup>30</sup>

Some women were frankly exploited for their labor. Italian Margaret B. Bertolina came to America under the protection of her brother, who promised to find a husband for her. Instead, he put her to work in his hotel in Helper. “From the basement to the top floor, four floors, all day long, I carried heavy buckets, mops, made beds, all day long,” she recalled.<sup>31</sup>

For Thelma Siouris, a Greek woman, the loneliness of her new home at Soldier Summit in Carbon County where her husband was a railroad gang foreman become almost unbearable. “There were no Greek women there. I could not speak English. I was so lonely that I baked sweets and waited for the children to pass my house after school. I had them sit down and eat the cookies. Then I sat down and looked at them.”<sup>32</sup>

Other women experienced similar isolation from nearly all human contact: Chinese mothers lamenting the children that federal laws forced them to leave behind; wives of Asian railroad gang foremen living in railroad houses next to water stops; young Greek mothers, a great distance from each other, homesteading with their husbands on the Uintah-Ouray Reservation opened to white settlers; Italian women on farms far out on sagebrush plains; Jewish women, alone in Mormon communities. The lives of these women recall Mari Sandoz’s Midwestern homesteaders in *Old Jules* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1935) and Beret in Ole Edvart Rolvaag’s *Giants in the Earth* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1927).

Most brides, however, were met by cheering countrymen. In coal mining towns, uniformed Italian musicians played arias at the depots. Men left their mine, smelter, and mill shifts, eager to bath and shave, put on their Sunday suits, and get a glimpse of the women. A Yugoslavian from Midvale remembered when the first Yugoslavian woman arrived: “Gus Murphy’s father run a bakery there. They had the saloon there and some Serb used to run a saloon there. First woman come there, his wife come, the Erol. God, well, you know we crazy. See here, first woman come from Yugoslavia. We give her \$800 that night. . . . Because they hadn’t seen a woman for a long time?”<sup>33</sup>

These earliest arrivals became the matriarchs of each ethnic community. They were remembered with respect by the young men who ate the foods of their native lands in their houses and who brought their brides to live with them until their wedding days.

As Balkan, Mediterranean, and Asian women continued to arrive, Congress passed the Cable Act of 1922. Women could no longer automatically



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Widow and children of Joe Talarico. Joe Talarico was killed in the Castle Gate Mine disaster, 1924. The Italian family from left to right: Mrs. Talarico, Marck (6 mos.), Frances (15), Mary (12), John (9), Sam (8), Amelia (6), Catherine (3). Nick (14) was absent when the photograph was taken. He was salvaging the coat his father wore in the mine.

become citizens through their husbands; and American-born women of Asian ancestry married to *Issei* (Asian immigrants) had their citizenship revoked. Most important were the immigration restrictions of 1921 and 1924, with the lowest quotas assigned to southern and eastern European countries. To circumvent the law, immigrant men traveled to Mexico, Cuba, and Canada to marry picture brides who could then enter the United States legally. The Exclusion Act of 1924 prohibited all Asian immigration; the Chinese Exclusion act had been passed in 1882.

#### DAILY LIFE IN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

If the women were lucky, they would be living in neighborhoods already formed by each ethnic group—collections of homes, shops, coffeehouses, cafes, and bakeries. Americans referred to them patronizingly as “Greek Town,” “Wop Town,” “Little Italy,” “Lebanese Town,” “Jap Town,” etc. Company houses owned by the mining companies, despite cheapness and shoddy workmanship, were often better than the women’s ancestral homes. Their wooden floors were sometimes covered with linoleum. Fuel was cheap, and the houses, no matter how poor, all had large black coal stoves. Nails pounded into the doors and walls held the family’s clothing. In America even the poor had beds, a luxury available only to the middle and upper classes in the homelands.

In their “towns” the mothers planted gardens and watered them with Utah’s plentiful irrigation water. They learned quickly about water turns,

the dictates of water masters, and how to outwit “water hogs.” This seeming drudgery, added to washing by hand, chopping wood, and baking bread in outdoor earth ovens, resembling beehive-shaped Navajo ovens, could often be almost restful. One daughter remembers her mother “coming in from tending the garden with her face smoothed out, a look of peace on it.”<sup>34</sup> Almost all ethnic women in rural and industrial areas raised animals and fowls: sheep, pigs, a cow or two, chickens, pigeons, and rabbits. They could afford the cost of feed in Utah that was prohibitive in their homelands.

Many brides discovered that their first task was to take in boarders, either male relatives or some of their countrymen. It was not only out of economic necessity but also out of respect for the traditional demands of hospitality. Hospitality was an aspect of “Old World” cultures to which the mothers were bound. The mothers taught by proverbs, cooked the special foods associated with religious observances, and insisted on the native language being spoken in their homes. All immigrants had centuries-old means to strengthen the family, mainly by extending kinship ties to include sponsors at weddings and godparents. In the “towns,” the women, deprived of female kin, rushed to help each other with births, illnesses, and deaths. Men were not expected to help. A girl of six, however, was considered old enough to tend her younger brothers and sisters.

Folk-healers were in demand: the workers feared company doctors, and women preferred the old village remedies. In the “towns,” brides of every nationality would find at least one welcoming midwife. One of them, Magerou, a Greek midwife and folk-healer in the Salt Lake County area, set bones and used numerous cures that were touted as more effective than the company doctors’ academic ones.<sup>35</sup>

Food was a strong bond with the homeland. Even before women arrived in Utah, Jewish, Greek, Italian, and Asian stores sold imported foods distinctive to each culture: olive oil, octopi, salted cod, Turkish paste, many varieties of olives, cheeses, matzo flour, prosciutto (cured peppered ham), pastas, and Jordan almonds. Soon Greeks and Italians became owners of goat ranches on the outskirts of every mine, mill, and smelter town, providing housewives and boardinghouses with various hard and soft cheeses.

Food was important to ethnic people—not only for sustenance and well being; it was synonymous with necessary, elaborate hospitality. Families were judged by their adherence to these ancient rites. Informality or indifference to them branded a family as one without breeding. Rocco C. Siciliano wrote in his autobiography: “The other symbol of well-being was plentiful food. Uppermost in my parents’ minds was to make sure that we ate well. They remembered life in Italy, where they had so little. Dad would bring food home from the restaurant kitchen, and that gave us a sense of surplus that made us feel better off than others, especially during the hard survival days of the Depression.”<sup>36</sup>



Mothers toiled by day over hot stoves, washtubs, and ironing boards, yet they were squeezed out the time to prepare pastries and sweets for both expected and unexpected visitors. At weddings, baptisms, bar mitzvas, confirmations, and communal picnics, women brought out their specialties while men turned lambs or pigs on spits over hot coals; and men and children danced to the music of instruments brought over the ocean. The Asians often watched sumo wrestlers at their gatherings.

Churches, synagogues, and Buddhist temples were the center of ethnic life. They served as an adjustment in America and as continuity with the homelands. Men built and administered the religious structures, but women sustained and maintained them. Frequently in these buildings, mainly for Greeks, Jews, and Asians, schoolmasters taught the native country's history and language, the most important element in culture. Many Asian also sent their children to grandparents in Japan to learn the culture of their people.

Within their communities, women were the center of their homes, as their proverbs clearly attest. Men's domain was the work world. The two were separate spheres. Mothers bonded with their daughters and deferred to their sons, particularly the oldest. Fathers were feared and honored, but mothers managed the households, took complete care of the children, and instilled their people's values. Even the strongly patriarchal Mexican society "offer[ed] the wife an unchallenged monopoly over domestic life."<sup>37</sup> Family members who failed to uphold the ethnic code of honor lost their relatives' respect, although they still had a place within the group. Asians, however, were stricter and frequently ostracized deviants.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF OUTSIDERS

Ethnic people regarded Mormons and other Americans as inhospitable. The lack of ritual ceremony towards visitors meant to immigrants that they were living among a cold people with peculiar attitudes toward food: forcing children to eat everything on their plates; sending children to bed without food as punishment; using sweets as rewards or discipline. Further, American children waited in misery until fathers came home from work to punish them. Immigrant mothers punished at the moment of wrongdoing; fathers were involved when they witnessed misbehavior. The mothers heard, too, that Mormon wives asked permission from their husbands about household matters. This was strange to the immigrant women who were responsible for properly run households without the interference of men.

The young mothers observed other odd characteristics among the American families who lived within their "towns" or on the peripheries. Over chicken-wire fences they talked about these parents who allowed young men to take out their daughters. In their native countries, girls and women did not speak to boys and men; even when meeting male relatives in full public view, they only nodded or bowed to acknowledge them, eyes downcast. The

mothers were shocked that American women stopped on the street to speak with men, addressed them by their given names, got on trains and stages alone, even occasionally smoked, and shockingly, could divorce without being isolated from the community.

American religion seemed to them as bland as American food. Italian mothers lamented the lack of rituals for their provincial saints, ignored by American and Irish priests. The color and ancient rites of Jewish High Holy Days, the bar mitzvahs celebrating thirteen-year-old boys' readiness to assume moral and religious duties; the Christian saint-day feasts when open houses were held for fathers, husbands, and sons named for biblical and canonized figures—all were eagerly anticipated events in which the immigrants' faiths and histories converged with great emotion. Easter, not Christmas, was the high point of the year for Christian immigrants who saw gifts and Christmas trees as an American superficiality. Nothing was as shocking, though, as the American celebration of Easter. Preceded by a forty-day fast, church services followed Christ's journey to the cross and culminated in the joyous resurrection. Mothers saw Americans marrying during Holy Week ("While Christ hangs on the cross!") and going to dances on Good Friday as monumental sacrilege. They were particularly offended by the Mormons who, they believed, had replaced Christ with Joseph Smith.

Each group followed ancient rituals of mourning and were shocked by Americans' simple funeral customs. Where was the extravagant grief merited by the departed?<sup>38</sup> Each ethnic group lamented deaths. Native Americans chanted spirits to the other world; African Americans sang spirituals; Hispanics spent the night reciting the rosary and singing *alabados* or hymns. Balkan and Mediterranean immigrants keened dirges at the side of open caskets. All draped black cloth over mirrors and photographs, wore black clothing for long periods (widows until death), and held memorial services at designated times. Jews remembered their dead by reciting the Kaddish in morning prayers.

Some immigrants also feared Americans. Anti-immigrant campaigns escalated during the first World War, in Utah as across the nation. The Ku Klux Klan organized in the first half of the 1920s in Utah. Klan marches and cross burnings occurred in Salt Lake City, Bingham, Magna, and Helper.<sup>39</sup> The immigrant "towns" trembled. Mothers stood on porches looking down dirt roads for tardy sons. They sent their daughters, always restricted, on errands only within their neighborhoods. Wives of Basque, French, and Greek sheepmen, whose husbands were away for the summer grazing or on winter grounds, were alone and felt most vulnerable. "When my dad was away at sheep," recalls a daughter, "my mother pushed a chest and trunk against the door. We knew it was because she was afraid of the Americans."<sup>40</sup>

The separate male and female spheres merged, ironically enough, in labor wars, with male immigrants accepting and praising female involvement. Men were regularly killed by falls of coal or ore, by electrocution, by defective

machinery, by explosions; their cases fill the pages of the Utah Coal Mine Inspectors' yearly report.<sup>41</sup> The foreign-language press editorialized against industrial deaths and maimings, little or no compensation to dependents, and poor working and living conditions.

In the Carbon County Strike of 1903, Italian women joined their husbands in tent colonies after mine managers evicted them from company houses. The women marched down dusty and muddy roads to support the strike while Americans lined the streets to stare. One of the women, Caterina Bottino, successfully hid Mother Jones, the great labor leader, from authorities. Strikers stopped for shelter at her house, called "Halfway House" because it was half way between Helper and Castle Gate.<sup>42</sup>

Italian and South Slav women championed their men in subsequent strikes in 1922 and 1933. Asian culture, like the Greek, would not permit women to display themselves in public activities. The Italian and Yugoslav women who marched for unionization had their husbands' approval; otherwise they would not have dared take on a role alien to their cultures' dictates.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1933 Carbon County strike, Yugoslav women became leaders.<sup>44</sup> In that bleak Depression year, women marched against deputies, taunted and harassed them, threw pepper in their eyes, and brought food and blankets to their men imprisoned in jail and fairground buildings. They rallied strikers in union meetings, and many kept up a vociferous campaign after the strike was lost.

### THE NEXT GENERATION

By the 1920s, immigrant families had become established and had prospered along with the rest of the country. During the decade, many families moved out of their "towns" into more affluent neighborhoods. Some took advantage of Prohibition and, like a number of enterprising Americans, shared in the enormous profits of bootlegging.<sup>45</sup> Their children were still in school, studying to meet their parents' expectations but not yet rebelling strenuously against their immigrant cultures. The restrictive immigration laws of 1921 and 1924 brought relief to women who ran boarding houses.

By the 1930s, however, children were young adults. Pulled in opposite directions by their parents' and American cultures, they wanted to be free from the restrictions of patriarchal bonds. With a freedom denied their sisters, young men began to marry American girls. "They still go for the honey blondes," a Chicana respondent wryly noted in the 1970s.<sup>46</sup>

Most demeaning to ethnic women was the assumption of their inferiority. Family resources gave priority to educating the sons. Sisters often worked to provide college educations for their brothers. "Italians of the immigrant generation [believed that] to give a daughter more education than required by law was an extravagant waste of money."<sup>47</sup> Deprived of further education and moving in social circles restricted by Old World mores, many daughters never married and became typists and sales clerks.

During the Depression decade of 1930-40, immigrant women helped each other, expanded their gardens, and raised more chickens and rabbits. African American women had a harder time; white women had turned to domestic service and black men were the first to be laid off work. Mexicans, some naturalized citizens, were deported to Mexico.<sup>48</sup> All Native Americans suffered. The Navajos had known a period of relative prosperity; but by the 1930s, their flocks were overgrazing the red earth. In that decade the federal government gave the Navajos the choice of selling some of their cherished sheep for as little as two dollars a head or living on rations.<sup>49</sup> The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, however, provided for decreased federal control of tribes, an increase in self-determination, and other reforms.

World War II coincided with the end of the immigrant era. Many sons and a small number of daughters served in the armed forces and their loyalties were with the United States. Although still highly concerned about their native homelands, parents by then recognized America as their true country. The war brought a mobility unknown previously; ethnics ventured into the world beyond their neighborhoods. The parental hold on daughters loosened. Inter-marriage with other groups became common. Funeral customs also changed. The custom of bringing the dead to homes had to be discontinued during the war emergency. Keening for the dead dwindled under the discouragement of grown American-born children. Except for the Hispanics, folk-healing was replaced by conventional medicine.<sup>50</sup>

After the war, many immigrants returned to their native countries for visits. Jun Kuramada's mother was one who eagerly returned, but "seeing the changes—all the tremendous changes that had taken place, she much preferred to come back here."<sup>51</sup>

The war deeply affected life for Native American, African American, and Hispanic women. Activist organizations began determined campaigns to gain rights for their people. Ironically, the war also had a salutary effect on second-generation Japanese-American women who had been incarcerated in relocation camps. Until then, they had been subservient to fathers and brothers. In the camps they were often paid as much as males, sixteen dollars a month. This equality gave them the confidence to seek college educations and careers for themselves as teachers, nurses, social workers, and attorneys.<sup>52</sup> Seeing these improvements in the economic and social lives of their grandchildren comforted the women who had ventured into the unknown as frightened but hopeful immigrants. "Yes, we pined for our country and talked about it all the time," confessed Emily Zeese, "but we didn't go back as we said we would. Where else could our children become educated and be free of other people deciding their lives?"<sup>53</sup>

These immigrants' daughters thought themselves successful if they did not have to work outside the home. Their granddaughters consider themselves successful if they have a career. Daughters of immigrants seldom married outside their ethnic group, but grandchildren marry "out" in ever increasing



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Lucero Ward Relief Society members, ca. 1938.

numbers. For all the energy ethnic groups spent on attempts to preserve the native languages, they were lost by the third generation. Only the Hispanics continue to speak their language in their homes and organizations. However, customs connected with religious observances and secular holidays endure and are celebrated with communal and family feasting.

## APPENDIX

U.S. Census figures for 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940 show the fraction of Utah population belonging to the indigenous inhabitants and the immigrant generations. When country of origin did not denote ethnicity, mother-tongue designation was used. Beginning in 1920, women were counted separately (shown in parentheses). The categories are riddled with questions: Russian-Jews may have been counted as Russians, rather than Jews; Basques as either Spanish or French; Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as Austrians but, after 1928, as Yugoslavs.<sup>54</sup>

### 1900 Census

*Population of Utah: 276,749*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: M/F</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: Female</b>
Indians	2,623	1,270
Blacks	672	218
Chinese	572	21

Japanese	417	11
Italians	1,062	—
Austrians (Includes Slovenes, Serbs, Croats)	272	—
Russians	119	—
Mexicans	41	—
Greeks	3	—

## 1910 Census

*Population of Utah: 373,351*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: M/F</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: Female</b>
Indians	3,123	1,450
Blacks	1,114	453
Chinese	371	26
Japanese	2,110	89
Austrians (Includes Slovenes, Serbs, Croats)	2,628	—
Serbs	275	—
Greeks	4,062	—
Italians	3,172	—
Finns	1,535	—
Mexicans	273	—
French	550	—
Syrians	215	—
Yiddish (sic)	198	—
Arabic	118	—
Armenian	35	—

## 1920 Census

*Population of Utah: 449,396*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: M/F</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: Female</b>
Indians	2,711	1,269
Blacks	1,146	612
Chinese	342	28
Japanese	2,936	762
Mexicans	1,083	154
Slovens, Serbs, Croats	993	164
Greeks	3,033	299
Italians	3,261	1,008
Yiddish (sic)	404	169
Finns	779	—
French	626	281
Spanish	365	70
Arabic (sic)	162	61
Armenians	80	24

**1930 Census***Population of Utah: 507,847*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: M/F</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: Female</b>
Indians	2,869	1,353
Blacks	1,108	499
Chinese	342	60
Japanese	3,269	1,213
Italians	2,814	1,012
Greeks	2,197	414
Yugoslavs	934	281
Finns	507	201
Mexicans	2,386	610
Russians	342	116
French	484	219
Spanish	277	67
Yiddish (sic)	280	114
Arabic (sic)	144	59
Armenians	41	15

**1940 Census***Population of Utah: 550,310*

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: M/F</b>	<b>Total Utah Population: Female</b>
Indians	3,611	1,778
Chinese	228	52
Japanese	2,210	655
Blacks	1,235	552
Mexicans	1,069	228
Italians	2,189	839
Greeks	1,882	402
Yugoslavs	661	228
Finns	309	164
Russians	286	105
French	184	87
Syrians	137	57
Spanish	131	40

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