

GRACA CONFERENCE PAPER

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**TOPIC: HEROIC WOMEN OF THE WEST: THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN
DEVELOPING THE WEST**

The women's suffrage movement in Wyoming offers an illustrative example of the instrumental role that some women played in shaping the early American West. In 1869, Esther Morris spearheaded the fight for women's right to vote in the Wyoming territory. As a prominent judge and justice of the peace, Morris utilized her political clout and legal expertise to lobby territorial lawmakers. She helped draft a progressive bill granting all Wyoming women the right to vote, which the all-male legislature passed into law that same year. Using primary sources, this research discusses how women like Esther Morris paved the way for the creation of a new culture governed by equality, empowerment, and less marginalization.

It is a commonly held opinion that the success of women's suffrage in Wyoming was because of a decrease in population. Wyoming granted women the right to vote so that they could have enough voters to qualify for statehood, after being rejected by the U.S. Congress during the first application. This means that women gaining the right to vote was purely political and the rest of the population were not happy with this. This research will delve into the various societal expectations of women and men's reactions to this movement. The agitation by other people like the artists who created political cartoons to mock women about their decisions, religious leaders who kicked against women's leadership, and writers who published articles criticizing women for their decisions will also be discussed. The interplay between economic, societal influences, political roles, and how all these factors played out in the women's suffrage movement. Beyond

just discussing the roles of influential women in politics, the article also gives a voice to ordinary women and their contribution to the development of the West.