Women and the Environment
Editor's Introduction

This special issue of **Environmental Review** on women and environmental history addresses several theoretical issues that have emerged in recent discussions of the interrelations between women and the environment.

1. What are the theoretical and historical relationships between women and nature, men and culture? Are these relationships universal throughout human culture or are they limited spatially and temporally to Western culture and its articulations? How should the critical question formulated by Sherry Ortner, "Is female to male as nature is to culture?" be answered? (Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., **Woman, Culture, and Society**, Stanford University Press, 1974, pp. 67-87).

2. Does women's perception of the environment differ from men's? What are the cultural and historical influences that constitute the perceptual glasses that frame the female response?

3. How has the cultural division between culture and nature in Western society reinforced the perception that women are natural caretakers of the environment as a home for humankind? What has been the political response of both women and men to this dichotomy?

The four essays in this special issue address these questions from several disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Sandra Marburg in "Women and Environment: Subsistence Paradigms, 1850-1950," argues that the identification of women with the environment is not a universal condition but rather the result of two different conceptual paradigms that have changed over time. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars who looked at women's role in extracting subsistence from the environment described their roles in substantial detail using an ethnographic paradigm of the interdependence between the sexes that supported the identification of women with nature in non-Western societies. In a different way the same identification was incorporated into the economic paradigm that men support women that emerged in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Here women's role in subsistence production was rendered almost invisible through the use of passive voice descriptions and resulted in considerable erosion of knowledge concerning their real contributions. She offers suggestions for the further study of women and the environment based on emerging female-oriented typologies.

The issue of women's perception of the environment is addressed in the papers of Jance Monk and Vera Norwood. Monk's paper "Approaches to the Study of Women and Landscape," reviews scholarship on human responses to the landscape, arguing that most interpretations have either ignored female perception or masked it by assuming that "the culture" of a society represents women's response as well as men's. Sources for research in the area of women's responses to the landscape include women's diaries, literature, art, and novels as well as scholarship in the related fields of women and nature, women and the environment, and women and space. Particularly rich in potential are the sources on women's perception of the American West and the westward movement.

Vera Norwood's contribution, "Heroines of Nature: Four Women Respond to the American Landscape," examines and compares the response of four women writers to four different environments from the late nineteenth century to the present: Isabella Bird's mountains, Mary Austin's deserts, Rachel Carson's oceans, and Annie Dillard's creek. Rather than showing that women are defenders of nature or, conversely, mere reflections of a male dominated culture, she looks at their ambivalent feelings about the environments in which they immersed themselves. While defying cultural norms by seeking out and writing about wild nature, they neither totally accepted nor rejected it, thus challenging the women/nature identification. Yet women's ambivalence differs from men's ambivalence in that nature for these female writers is recognized and accepted for its action on humans, rather than perceived as an entity to be acted on, challenged, or overcome.

My own contribution, "Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement, 1900-1916," shows how middle-class women of the early twentieth century extended a socially defined role as nurturers of men, children, and the home to include and legitimate the preservation of the natural environment. They used the ideology of the nature/culture and female/male separation to justify political action in the traditional public sphere of men in order to protect forests, waterways, birdlife, and natural areas. Yet this political action ultimately functioned to insure their own social status as leisured middle-class homemakers and reproducers of future generations of middle-class Americans.

Finally, Jane Yett provides a detailed bibliography of books that may be used for teaching courses on women and the environment and as an introduction to the issue of feminism and nature. As exemplified by the rising number of university and college courses and conferences on women and the environment, and by women's prominent roles in the world-wide environmental, anti-nuclear, and peace movements, the question is one of current interest and political significance. It is hoped that this special issue of *Environmental Review* will help to stimulate further investigation as well as social action.

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Guest Editor