

IMAGINING THE FRINGES: WYOMING AND THE FINAL FRONTIER

by

Gina Szabady

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Gina Szabady, titled "Imagining the Fringes: Wyoming and the Final Frontier" and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____ Date: 7/2/14
Dr. Maritza Cardenas

_____ Date: 7/2/14
Dr. Ken McAllister

_____ Date: 7/2/14
Dr. John Warnock

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

_____ Date: 7/2/14
Dissertation Director: Dr. Maritza Cardenas

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DEDICATION

To all of Wyoming's women and most especially my grandmothers

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation combines theories of nationalism and discourse analysis modeled on Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha with Kenneth Burke's dramatism to demonstrate that political states are constituted as meaningful, exclusionary communities through legislative discourses, literary representations, and practices of historiography. Although a number of scholars have acknowledged the importance of state identifications in the complex of cultural and symbolic nationalism, there has been limited examination of the composition of what I call "statist"—as related to but distinct from "nationalist"—identities in their own right. Using Wyoming as a case study, this project examines the unique and deeply significant affiliations formed within individual states in the United States of America. Wyoming provides an interesting lens for this discussion for several reasons. First, Wyoming's attainment of statehood in 1890 marks an important figurative closing of the frontier acknowledged in the census of that year and remarked upon as significant among many scholars of Western history. This coincidence of timing also places Wyoming's territorial period and attempts to articulate the state as an independent cultural and political entity during the period of colonialism. Many scholars, including Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha as well as Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, consider this the period during which modern nationalism flowered. Finally, Wyoming presents a useful template for this analysis precisely because of its unremarkableness in legislative terms; the language of its constitution draws heavily on the models provided by earlier states as well as the US Constitution and is quite similar in this respect to many that followed. Although the symbols and narratives that circumscribe the Wyoming

imaginary are unique, the process by which they are constituted is not and could be observed in some form in any state in the Union.

KEYWORDS: Nationalism, US States, Wyoming, Community Identities, Rhetorics of the American West, Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, Statism

INTRODUCTION

In 1807, former President John Adams argued that a complete history of the American Revolution could not be written until the history of change in each state was known, because the principles of the Revolution were as various as the states that went through it... We therefore invite you to consider that the history of your state may have more to do with the bicentennial than does the story of Bunker Hill or Valley Forge.

–James Morton Smith,
Wyoming: A Bicentennial History

In the wake of globalization... [nation] states now seem both too big and too small: too big to generate the loyalty and legitimacy needed for a demanding democratic ideal, and too small to solve a myriad of social problems.

–James Bohman, *Democracy across Borders*

The idea of the United States of America as a coherent community is reaffirmed everyday through symbolic appeals to individuals constituted as citizens: The Pledge of Allegiance evokes “one nation under God” and the common utterance “God bless America” suggests a sense of clarity about the national unity.¹ However, the apparent simplicity of these symbolic representations does not acknowledge the fragmented and often contentious nature of identifications formed among groups within the context of US nationalism. The United States is a nation born out of the union of individual republics, and each individual US state plays a unique and important role in the way the nation imagines itself. However, to date, the degree to which individual US states are constructed in nationalistic terms has received relatively little attention. This dissertation argues that individual US states are articulated as distinct cultural and political spaces through the same mechanisms of discursive production that constitute nationalistic

¹ This clarity despite the fact that the “Americas” include over thirty sovereign states as well as a number of colonial departments and territories. Referring to the United States as “America” may, in fact, be indicative of the problem created by the name “United States” which in most other cases refers to an allegiance of equal *nation states* into some kind of multi-state formation (e.g. the European Union).

identities. In it, I offer an analysis of legislative discourse, history, and literature that shows how performances of identity are shaped by rhetorical constructions of statism, which I define as an emotional and cultural identification with a politically organized state. Using Wyoming as a case study, this project examines the unique “imagined community” that is associated within each state in the US.

Wyoming provides an interesting case study for several reasons. First, Wyoming attained statehood in 1890, and the Census of that same year remarks that the frontier can no longer “have a place in the census reports” due to the incursion of “isolated bodies of settlement” (qtd. Turner 27). This figurative reconception of the region is considered significant by many scholars of Western history and played an important role in the construction of Wyoming’s statist identity.² This coincidence of timing also places Wyoming’s territorial era and early statehood in the midst of the period of colonialism marked as significant in the development of modern nationalism by many scholars, including Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha as well as Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm.³ As a result, Wyoming and many other US states adopted the strategies of modern European nation states in articulating a statist identity, including the generation of state flags and other symbols of unity, to represent a coherent identity. Finally, Wyoming presents a useful template for this analysis precisely because of its

²In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner presented a paper entitled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” that would prove to be, according to Harold Simpson’s introduction to a 1963 edition of the speech, “one of the major controversies in American History” (1). In the speech, Turner quotes the 1890 Census’s proclamation that the “frontier line... [no longer has] a place in the Census reports” (27). Using this rhetorical closing of the frontier as his premise, Turner launched an argument claiming the frontier had been a crucial stage for forging the “American spirit” in the challenges of “primitive conditions.” For more on the cultural significance of Turner’s “frontier hypothesis,” see Liza Nicholas *Becoming Western*, Amy Greenberg *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire*, and David Heidler and Jeanne Heidler *Manifest Destiny*.

³ These authors discuss nationalism in different ways, but all agree that the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise of nationalism in Europe and elsewhere alongside the rise of European colonialism abroad.

unremarkableness in legislative terms; the language of its Constitution draws heavily on models provided by earlier states as well as the US Constitution and is quite similar in this respect to many that followed.⁴ Although the symbols and narratives that circumscribe the Wyoming imaginary are unique, the process by which they are constituted is not and could be observed in some form in any state. Although the selection of Wyoming makes this project especially relevant to studies of the Western United States, the rhetorical approach adds relevance to this project in recognizing nationalism as a process of discursive construction that spans genres.

Many scholars of nationalism (Anderson; Fanon; Hobsbawm) point to the American experience as illustrative of the myriad ways modern nationalism has operated in a post-colonial context. The experiences of emerging nations in both North and South have been instructive in studying nationalism as a phenomenon, but the process of nation-making in the United States tends to focus on the commonalities of language and culture by the Anglo colonizers.⁵ However, this project focuses on the ways that each state asserted a unique “People of the State” worthy of admittance into the Union while maintaining a distinct statist identity. This project investigates: How are states articulated as discreet political and social communities? How do the mechanisms of nationalism work at the individual US state level? How are statist identities interpellated and maintained by the citizens who identify with a particular statist identity? To address these

⁴ The original thirteen states echo, and in some cases preface, the Declaration of Independence in both style and appeal to subjectivity. States admitted after 1787 nearly all use the United States Constitution as a template and mirror “We the People” in the language that distinguishes subjects of the state.

⁵ In setting off the United States from cases of nationalism where language divided metropolitan and rural dwellers, Anderson notes that “the USA [was a] creole stat[e], formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought” (47). Similarly, Hobsbawm focuses on solidarity among New World settlers as he discusses how the impact of economic disparity between the Anglo settlers in colonial North America and their counterparts in Europe contributed to the rebellion and eventual Declaration of Independence.

questions, I first employ discourse analysis to texts that articulate such identities in legislative, and particularly constitutional, discourse. This is followed by an investigation of texts that offer accounts of the state history that construct a “cultural memories” and experience of kinship through a narrative that connects present and future through the identification of a “founding narrative.” Finally, I interrogate the search for authenticity in literary representation of the statist community. This examination demonstrates that the subject of statist discourse evoked by these texts is: 1) defined by his/her residence/presence within the discursively constructed place known, in this case, as Wyoming, and qualified by individual attributes such as gender, race, and citizenship; 2) integrated into (or excluded from) a statist community through identification (or dysidentification) with cultural memories cultivated in state histories; 3) negotiated via narratives that *reaffirm*, *purify*, or *subvert* the ideas and values affiliated with the statist identity.

Locating the US State in Nationalist Literature

Among the most pervasive and significant texts on nationalism is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, first released in London in 1983 and, by 2007, published in “thirty-three countries and in twenty-nine languages” (Anderson 207). Benedict Anderson argues a nation is “imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Although recognizing nations as a product of the modern era with its attendant technologies and social organizations, Anderson contends that nations are grounded in human connection. Perhaps Anderson’s

most significant contribution is his articulation of the nation as primarily located in the cultural affinities of individuals:

nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a certain kind. In order to understand them properly, we need to consider carefully how they have come into being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy. (4)

Like Anderson, this project is interested in the processes by which statist communities come to exist and evolve in response to contextual and political exigencies. Not only does this examination reveal how identifications with individual states—as significant locations of cultural and social meaning—are sustained, it also highlights an important and under-considered consubstantiation undergirding the national unity. The United States necessarily honors and recognizes the “separate and equal” status of each individual state, and, in turn, each state contributes its own narratives, history, and subjectivity to the diversity of the “American experience.”

One notable example of a discussion of the complex interconnection between individual states and national consciousness in the United States can be found in Lauren Berlant’s *The Anatomy of Fantasy*. In it, Berlant acknowledges that symbolic nationalism in the United States is disrupted by an underlying tension resulting from the ability of what she calls “micro-formations” to assert the legitimacy of countervailing identifications. She argues that cultural nationalism in the United States is “distinguished by an insistence that the legitimacy of micro-formations (states, individuals), is conferred by the nation-state [sic] itself” (34). Although Berlant devotes limited time to her

discussion of individual US states as particular “micro-formations” legitimized by the nation state, she evokes the process by which states are granted entry into the Union. This process relies on the assent of Congressional representatives of existing states to establish the “legitimacy” of individual states. Anderson notes that acknowledgement by other nations, which he describes as “membership in a league of nations,” is a crucial proof of a nation’s legitimacy (149). Likewise, when Congressional representatives approve or deny a request for statehood, they validate or reject the appeal of a would-be state’s claim to equal status. The approved statehood petition provides each US state with a date-stamped birth certificate, a bona fide founding moment to which narratives of a state-based community can refer in constructing a continuity that draws past and present citizens of the state into a coherent relationship.

States, Nations, Nation States, and Other Matters of Terminology

Scholars of nationalism are inherently faced with the problem of clearly defining a series of interlocking and overlapping terms, and this project faces an additional challenge in attempting to inject a discussion of individual US states into the linguistic lexicon of “nations,” “states,” “nation states,” and “nationalisms.” The most troublesome of these terms is also central to them: nation. According to most scholars, nations are conceptual unities structured along lines of cultural and emotive connection. Ernest Gellner lays out two criteria essential to the formation of a nation in *Nations and Nationalism*: first, “Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture, where culture in turn means a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating,” and second, “if and only if they *recognize* each

other as belonging to the same nation” (7). Gellner’s formulation highlights the social nature of the nation, which requires not only the existence of such relationships but also the recognition of some criteria that establishes and marks who belongs to the community. This social orientation is what Fanon and Anderson refer to as “national consciousness.” This sense of belonging is crucial to this project because it highlights the emotional and cultural connections that undergird cohesive representations of identity within politically defined spaces. The experience of connection is implicated in the term “national consciousness” which suggests a way of knowing that is conceived as a sort of communal property. National consciousness is enabled, according to Anderson and others, as a result of widespread literacy, print capitalism, and other functions of modernization that allow one to identify others within the nation as “fellow-readers, to whom [one is] connected through print” going on to assert that such conceptual relationships represent “the embryo of the nationally imagined community” (44). These political and economic connections are especially relevant to constructions of statism because of the state’s institutional dominance in the political and economic lives of citizens.⁶ The sense of kinship that undergirds national consciousness is supported by texts that represent a particular experience of identity including, often very powerful, narratives of shared experience that become national “memories” and histories. Within the context of a political state, the “national consciousness” is granted political and social access through its attachment to an empowered citizenry, denoted in constitutional discourse as “the People of the State.”

⁶ Although individual US states are not sovereign and therefore cannot engage in trade among themselves or with other nations, they have wide latitude in establishing policies that deeply impact the lives of individual citizens. Many political commentators refer to the states as “laboratories of democracy,” suggesting the power of states in setting policy around issues of commerce, medicine, education, transportation, and many other aspects of citizens daily lives.

Although both nations and states are contingencies, the state is a political and geographical construct whereas the nation is a socio-cultural one. Their frequent overlap is suggested by the term “nation state,” and gives rise to the kind of discussion that Tony Bennett, Lawrence Gossberg, and Meaghan Morris attempt to clarify in *New Keywords*: “the conflations between [nations and states] nevertheless persists in various contexts—for example in the conventional usage of the word ‘international’ or in the name of the United Nations, which is an organization of states” (233). However, these authors note that “[t]o say that nations have a right to self-determination is to acknowledge that nations and states are distinct” (Bennett, Grossbery, Morris 233). Unlike the nation, the state is empowered and organized along political lines; according to Gellner, the state is defined as “that agency within society which possesses the monopoly of legitimate violence....within the territory which they more or less effectively control” (3). Whatever its configuration and modus operandi, the ability to coerce those within its sphere of influence is a defining feature of the state. In the case of individual US states, this power is checked by the existence of the Federal Government, which limits the state’s ability to exert control beyond its own borders. However, the enumeration of powers in the United States Constitutions allows individual states to maintain considerable autonomy in managing affairs, so states have considerable sway in setting individualized policies related to issues from reproduction to education and labor. The residents of the state are circumscribed not only as citizens of the state but also as subjects of statist discourse, which include state laws and institutional policies.

Louis Althusser suggests that an individual’s recognition of him or herself as a subject occurs when one is ‘hailed’ through ideological state apparatuses. Althusser

suggests that "the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit feely to the commandments of the Subject...i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures of subjection 'all by himself'" (Althusser 123). Institutional State Apparatus (ISAs), including schools, churches, families, and other groups, delineate and regulate behavior by supporting the construction of a particular sort of subject who belongs to the group. Such organizations are crucial to maintaining the distribution of power by naturalizing the relationship between the subject and nation or state through the perceived voluntary nature of the relationship; the acknowledgement of allegedly "free" subjects allows coercion without the need to employ violence. Thus, states benefit from the interpellation of subjects through a process that effectively naturalizes power relations. Like both nations and states, nation states are a contingency, and can "switch back from nation to ethnic group, from state to tribe" (Fanon 97). The United States is conceived as a national union of states. Because most states, and particularly US states, are political creations, establishing a collective identity is accomplished through a process of naturalization that renders the political entity as a cultural and social group, a community.

Official nationalism is described as a top down strategy for creating a sense of "national unity" that "can be best understood as a means for combining naturalization with retention of dynastic power, in particular over huge polyglot domains" (Anderson 86). All nationalisms rely to varying degrees on strategies for asserting the coherence of the national community in order to generate the "natural" recognition of one's fellow citizen. This naturalization takes place through the cultivation of particular histories, or "invented traditions" according to Hobsbawm and Ranger, that can circulate through state schools and other ISAs. While such traditions purport a connection to some historically

significant moment, they are often arbitrary rituals that serve a contemporary political exigency. Strategies of official nationalism, including the creation and circulation of a State Symbolic, are especially important to propagating a statist identity.

Remembering and Forgetting in Representing Community Identities

Because nations, states, nation states, and individual US states are built on abstract relationships, symbols and narratives professing fellowship are crucial in maintaining the imagined unity of these constructs of rhetoric. According to Hobsbawm and Ranger, these narratives can be cultivated to meet a particular exigency, contributing to a “history which...is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those in power to do so” (13). The citizen-subject is drawn into the social sphere through histories that invite identification with past citizens participating in heroic or otherwise noble deeds in service of the statist community. Highlighting the collective nature of memory as developed by memory scholar Maurice Halbwachs, Astrid Erll asserts that “through interaction and communication with our fellow humans [we] acquire knowledge about dates and facts, collective concepts of time and space, and ways of thinking and experiencing” (15). The timeline of the state begins with the founding moment of statehood, but the continually evolving narratives of identity that circulate within the community manage the changing political and social contexts within which such identities circulate. For Wyoming, the statist identity is managed as part of a broader conception of the United States that focuses on the divisions between “East” and “West.”

The West is an amorphous geographical and cultural construction defined through narrative as much as through space. Different texts vary widely on how the region is defined, and further subdivisions of the region further complicate the designation. Geographically, the West is defined variously, though most agree that Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho are a part of the construction.⁷ More important than the geographical space of the West is the discursive and rhetorical representation of the West as a space ripe with significance in both nationalist and statist narratives. Geographer D.W. Meinig quotes a nineteenth century guide book for travelers to the West, claiming that “whatever one’s intention and experience might be, the traveler was certain to gain ‘a new conception of the magnitude, the variety and the wealth, in nature and resource, in realization and in promise, of the American Republic,—a [sic] new idea of what it means to be an American citizen’” (32). For much of the nineteenth century and beyond, the West has been more idea than location. For the purposes of this project, I will consider the West as both a geographic and a cultural construct that is continually undergoing a process of redefinition. Because I am interested in the ways elements of regional and national narratives into articulations of identity are integrated into statist narratives, I am less concerned with defining the region than in the ways that various states, and Wyoming in particular, defines itself in relation to the West.

Despite the complexity of political and social allegiances in the United States, national symbols serve to create a coherent image of the nation and a people even where no such coherence exists. Through their iconographic status and ubiquitous reproduction, such totems support the logic of nationhood in important, if implicit, ways. Lauren Berlant argues that “[t]he National Symbolic [seeks] to produce a fantasy of national

⁷ See Travis, Meinig, Smith, Limerick, and LaDuke for various definitions of the West.

integration,” and she goes on to explain the primary challenge to this symbolic unity is that the “content of this fantasy is a matter of cultural debate and historical transformation” (22). The need to maintain an imagined sense of the nation or state as timeless and natural requires the ability to evoke emotive connections quickly and powerfully; symbols that can act as metonymic substitutions for abstract values and principles are therefore invaluable to the maintenance of national or statist identities.⁸ Berlant develops an example of the Statue of Liberty to demonstrate that a nation with complex and often conflicting values across time and space can be evoked as a stable entity through the figure of Lady Liberty; her “appearance of timeless monumentality is central to the populist fantasy that animates the fantasy of American nationhood” (23). Just like the contentious history of the nation’s founding is covered over by the “self-evident” truth that “all men are created equal” evoked in the Declaration of Independence, potent symbols of community unity support group cohesion through a process of metonymic simplification. Within individual states, a State Symbolic emerges that represents the statist community as homogeneous and cohesive. In the state of Wyoming, the space is continually represented as vacant, and this trope serves a variety of political and social purposes for those attempting to create a unified statist identity. Underlying this sense of vacancy is the suggestion of fullness; a vacant space is rife with nascent potential. The rhetorical implications of “vacancy,” particularly as opposed to mere emptiness, allows for the evocation of an ideal future for the state and the idealized community discursively imagined in the documents examined in the following chapters.

⁸ According to Barry Brummett, metonymy is the trope most affiliated with highly visual representations which condense meaning in the interest of economy. In *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*, Brummett defines metonymy by saying “[w]hen you think about something by reducing it to a simpler, smaller, more manageable image that leaves out certain details of the larger whole, you are using metonymy” (73).

Although there has been limited discussion of nationalist phenomena occurring at the level of the US state, I contend that individual states are sites where nationalism operates.⁹ For the purposes of this project, I use the term “statist” and “statism” to refer to constructs that are organized along the same lines as the “nationalism” described above. Thus “official statism” refers to strategies employed by ISAs operating at the level of the individual US state for propagating a statist identity through appeals to historical and cultural affinity. Because there is not an adequate substitution for “state” in its functional and archaeological character, I will rely on descriptions of particular agencies at the US state level that represent a partiality of what is traditionally included in discussions of state functions. For example, Chapter One engages with Constitutional discourse as an example of empowered state agencies actively participating in the construction of statist subjectivities through various forms of statist rhetoric. Similarly, Chapter Two engages with the work of a historian made significant by her affiliation with the University of Wyoming and other powerful institutions within the state.

Conceptual Map: Structure of the Project and Chapter Abstracts

Despite the seemingly ‘natural’ connections among individuals who identify themselves as subjects of a particular nation, Anderson, Hobsbawm, Fannon, and Gellner all acknowledge the reality that nationalist movements employ appeals to such emotive identifications strategically, and thus rhetorically. In order to explicate how discourses construct the subjects of statist discourse, I examine the ways that such subject positions

⁹ To avoid confusion, I will use “US state” as well as “individual states” in contexts where this is clear. When the word “state” is used in absence of qualifiers of this kind, it can be assumed that I mean “state” in the more usual sense defined above.

help to support and negotiate place-based identities. Using a genealogical method, I begin by examining the construction of a prospective US state as a specific space. Drawing on Michel DeCerteau, and Henri Lefebvre, I emphasize the role of state borders in creating and naturalizing the state as a “place.”¹⁰ I use Kenneth Burke’s conception of “identification” to explain how individuals marked by gender, race, class, and other indicators of belonging are incorporated into or excluded from this place-based statist community. Attending to the complex interconnection between myth and history in the cultivation of a statist identity, I interrogate attempts to *affirm, reaffirm, purify, or subvert* dominant representations of statist identities using Walter Fisher’s concept of narration.

Chapter One explores two key functions I identify in State constitutions: First, they establish the state as a “place.” Before statehood imposes boundaries and gives a name to the space those boundaries enclose, the state is merely an undifferentiated space that people move through. However, imposing boundaries begins a process of ordering the state as a “place.” According to philosopher Michel DeCerteau, a place is organized and predictable. Places establish: “the order ... in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence.” When Congress establishes the borders of a state, they do so from a strategic remove, with an interest in defining order. The dominant understanding of the space is crucial to how that order is established, even if it does not accord with the experience of living in and moving through the less ordered sense of “space” the new boundaries enclose. The second key function of constitutions is to evoke a people (the “imagined community”) whose will undergirds the legislative act. In the

¹⁰ I use the terms “space” and “place” to denote different perspectives and relations of power to a particular location. According to DeCerteau, “places” are observed from a perspective of power, often with the intent to manipulate and impose “rules” or “order” on the place and those moving through it. By contrast, “spaces” are navigated from within in response to immediate and individual exigencies.

case of the Wyoming State Constitution, the document opens: “We the People of the State of Wyoming.” It is “the People of the State” whose authority creates the state, yet the “people” of the state and the “place” of the state come into existence through the Constitutional Act. This chapter moved on to explore the ways that citizenship is defined in the Wyoming State Constitution through clauses addressing labor exclusions, Reservation policy, and suffrage. Despite its reputation as “The Equality State,” Wyoming’s Constitution creates multiple exclusions based on gender, race, and education. In particular, the exclusion of Native Americans resonates with the dominant understanding of the space as vacant because acknowledging the existence of this community challenges the claim laid out to the space by rightful citizens of the state in the Constitution. Likewise, the clauses delineating behavior and access based on gender, education, and race demonstrates the Constitution as an instrument of statism in its definition of who is fit to inhabit the newly organized place. With the cast and scene in place, state histories come in to dramatize the experience of belonging in the statist community.

Chapter Two engages the work of Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard—who was a powerful figure in Wyoming before, during, and after statehood—to argue that her work helped to create a narrative of Wyoming’s “founding moment” and establishes a timeline that supports the experience of kinship that the term “imagined community” is meant to evoke. Crucial to Hebard’s work was an understanding of Wyoming as part of the Frontier Hypothesis and its celebration of pioneers and other “pathbreakers,” as she describes the early explorers. In 1883, Frederick Jackson Turner lamented the closing of the frontier and extolled the values of the frontier in shaping the “American Character.”

Jackson Turner argued that, as each generation of pioneers moved west, they abandoned useless European practices, institutions and ideas, and instead found new solutions to problems created by their environment. Hebard adapts this narrative to the Wyoming context in her work by establishing the pioneer as “forefather” and her celebration of statehood as a moment when Wyoming’s rightful citizens took possession of their rightful “place.” Although Hebard wrote books about prominent Native Americans, including Sacajawea and Washakie, these works also lionize the pioneer and praise these Native Americans for their assistance in the project of Expansion. In this way, the dominant narrative of Wyoming is both influenced by a larger national narrative and helps to shape that narrative through its adaptation of these themes in the statist context. This celebration of Wyoming as exemplary of the “American ideal” can be found in other examples of statist narratives, including, perhaps most notably, Owen Wister’s 1902 novel *The Virginian*, which I examine in Chapter Three.

Like Hebard, Owen Wister’s representation of Wyoming and Wyomingites in the years following statehood has become totemic in its celebration of the community, and particularly the ranching industry as symbolized by the novel’s ideal cowboy. Chapter Three analyzes the ways that a literary narrative can help support the development of a statist identity using Walter Fisher’s theory of the narrative paradigm. Fisher asserts that human communication can be understood through the lens of narration. According to Fisher: “texts function (1) to give birth to—to gain acceptance of—ideas/images, *affirmation*; (2) to revitalize or to reinforce ideas/images, *reaffirmation*; (3) to heal or to cleanse ideas/images, *purification*; and (4) to undermine or to discredit ideas/images, *subversion*” (144). Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* supported the creation of a dominant

narrative for Wyoming that substituted the cowboy for the pioneer as the ideal citizen to people the vacant space of Wyoming. This chapter argues that *The Virginian* (1902) was crucial in gaining popular acceptance for the dominant narrative about Wyoming and the place of the cowboy in that narrative. Through this novel and other romantic portrayals of the Wyoming and the West, the cowboy becomes a symbol of values celebrated in the larger national narrative, particularly values like hard work and the willingness to take risks in the interest of great rewards. Although Wister's novel, and even more so his journals, expressed much disdain for pioneers and early settlers of lesser economic means, *The Virginian* celebrates Wyoming as a place where America could be at its best. Through diligence, honesty, and perseverance, the title character finds economic and romantic fulfillment, and many Wyomingites embraced this image as indicative of the essential or authentic spirit of the state in the same way that Jackson Turner represented the pioneer as the vessel for the American spirit. This text and the image of the state and its community presented in it have had a pervasive impact on the ways the state is represented and understood both within and as part of the greater national narrative.

Chapter Four investigates contemporary representations of statist identity, focusing on the 1997 50 State Commemorative Quarters Program Act and the coins minted as a result of the act between 1999 and 2008 as well as the "Wyoming Story" turned movie "Brokeback Mountain." This chapter demonstrates that statist communities are alive and well in the twenty-first century, despite the lack of attention paid to these formations in studies of nationalism. This chapter engages the debate in Wyoming over the effectiveness of the cowboy as statist symbol, which began over thirty years ago. In 1979, historian Peter Iverson delivered a talk entitled: "Wyoming: Still the Cowboy

State?” In it, Iverson muses that “times have changed” and perhaps it is time for Wyoming’s iconography to catch-up: “Ironies abound. As someone recently suggested, the ranchers are something like the Indians now: fighting a society that seems to know increasingly less about them, fighting a culture that feels as though their land can be put to some higher, better use. . . . The Indians did not vanish. They changed” (6). Iverson’s point was that the life in the state has changed and the cowboy image so prominent in the State Symbolic should change along with it. However, the image of the cowboy remains stable in many representations of the state, including the 2007 statehood quarter. Despite Iverson’s recognition that the symbol should change with the times, the cowboy remains a touchstone in representations of Wyoming’s statist community that are *affirmations* of that identity, like the statehood quarter. Even subversive texts like “Brokeback Mountain” take the cowboy as their starting point, and, in the case of that novel, don’t make it much beyond him in their challenge to the statist identity.

CHAPTER ONE: WYOMING, “VACANCY,” AND THE US STATE AS “PLACE”

Although exploring parties crossed portions of Wyoming from the mid-eighteenth century onward, the vast barren region was treated only as a roadway to the beckoning rich lands beyond.

–William F. Swindler, “Wyoming Constitutions”

The people of Wyoming are the State and control it. They have made it what it is. ... This is all that is meant when we say the will of the people is expressed in power of the lot-box [sic]. If you fail to do your part in the government of affairs, someone else will do it for you.

–Grace Raymond Hebard, *The Government of Wyoming*

In the mid-1970s, a collection of state histories was commissioned by the American Association for State and Local History in honor of the up-coming national bicentennial. In the “Invitation to the Reader” that opens the *Wyoming* volume, the general editor asserts that “[t]he Revolution has continued as Americans extended liberty and democracy over a vast territory....the states are part of that story, and the story is incomplete without an account of their diversity” (vii). States Constitutions provided the textual model for the United States Constitution, and state histories continually contribute narrative elements that compose the national narrative.¹¹ And yet, the state has become such a familiar and mundane experience of collective identity that many fail to grasp the regularity of their engagement with statist identifications. This chapter highlights the role of narratives in the transformation of mere space into a political and cultural unity through the establishment of a state. I focus on the narrative construction of Wyoming as vacant space to argue that the statist narrative both participates in and co-constructs the national narrative’s celebration and romanticizing of the Expansion Era. As John Adams suggests, such a process of inquiry is necessary not only to revive the sense of import

¹¹ Later states, including Wyoming, drew on the United States Constitutional as a textual model as well as the constitutions of other states.

associated with statist identifications but also in an effort to grasp the warp and woof of nationalism in the United States; a nationalism whose distinguishing feature has been from the very beginning defined in relation to coexistence and equality in the face of multiplicity and diversity.

Perhaps because the document presupposed territorial expansion, the US Constitution focuses on establishing the mechanisms of representative government rather than establishing the scope of the space that will be included in the newly organized country. Where location is evoked, it is through reference to the thirteen nascent states that will constitute the Union. Indeed, the existence of the colonies as thirteen distinct places provides the premise for the creation of “a more perfect Union.”¹² The utterance that gives birth to the United States as a nation and “Americans” as a people does so by transforming individual states into a national unity.¹³ In the enumeration of powers, the states currently existing and brought forth later are expressly defined as autonomous and equal; the role of the federal government primarily concerned with maintaining this equality through standardization and mitigation of interstate relationships. Article 1 Section 9 outlines the limitations of the federal government and the following section outlines the limitations of state governments. Although granted wide leeway in their management of political and economic conditions within their borders, individual US states are prohibited from coining money, engage independently in wars, keeping troops or ships in peacetime, and, according to Article 1 Section 10, “enter[ing] into any

¹² With the exception of Connecticut, all of the original thirteen states adopted constitutions by the end of 1779. Several state constitutions, including Delaware, South Carolina, New Hampshire, and New Jersey, drafted constitutions before the Declaration of Independence was ratified on July 4, 1776. See Swindler for more on the dates and processes of adoption of individual state constitutions.

¹³ Following Wald and Anderson, I use this term to denote the particular sort of U.S. nationalist identity that these authors describe. However, the term appears in quotes to acknowledge the paucity of this term in acknowledging the existence of multiple “Americas” and “American” identities.

Agreement or Compact with another State” (United States Constitution). In essence, individual US states are prohibited from engaging in military or financial pursuits that could impede upon the national interests or the lives of individuals in other states. However, their existence as independent social and political units is affirmed by the Constitution, which also assures their autonomy from one another and, to a certain extent, from the federal government, in perpetuity. The states as independent places composed of empowered subjects as defined in the US Constitution, which leaves the details of defining the space of a given state and statist subjectivity largely at the discretion of the individual US state constitution.

Because of the federalist design of the US Constitution, state status is necessary for full participation in the democracy as outlined by the Constitution.¹⁴ Territories remain under the control of the federal government, so they lack both the internal mechanisms for self-determination as well as equal representation in Congress.¹⁵ The US Constitution differentiates between states and territories in Article 4 Section 3:

The Congress shall have Power to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States; and nothing in this Constitution shall be so construed as to Prejudice any Claims of the United States, or of any particular State.

Thus, with the transition to statehood comes considerable increases in the ability of inhabitants to assert their democratic agency, not the least of which includes the ability to

¹⁴ Cornell Law School offers this definition of federalism: “Federalism is a system of government in which the same territory is controlled by two levels of government. Generally, an overarching national government governs issues that affect the entire country, and smaller subdivisions govern issues of local concern. Both the national government and the smaller political subdivisions have the power to make laws and both have a certain level of autonomy from each other. The United States has a federal system of governance consisting of the national or federal government, and the government of the individual states.”

¹⁵ The sub-status of Territories is highlighted by the fact that they are considered temporary designations of Territory whereas states are considered to exist “in perpetuity.”

vote on Congressional and State representatives. In these matters, the US Constitution routinely defers to states in setting “time, place, and manner” restrictions and makes specific reference to existing states in establishing that

each State shall have at Least one Representative; and until such enumeration shall be made, the State of New Hampshire shall be entitled to chuse (sic) three, Massachusetts eight, Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations one, Connecticut five, New-York six, New Jersey four, Pennsylvania eight, Delaware one, Maryland six, Virginia ten, North Carolina five, South Carolina five, and Georgia three. (United States Constitution)

Subdividing the space of the Union in the interest of providing political representation is a crucial gesture toward the subdivision of the body politic along state lines. While the nation signifies the unity, the states circumscribe the peoples and histories that compose it, organizing them politically as well as spatially.

Statist Discourse and the Meaning of “Place”

When the Constitution of the State of Wyoming identifies “[w]e the People of the State of Wyoming,” the document’s appeal to “the people” simultaneously evokes and creates a statist community by establishing the expectation that the people and the space will be represented in relation to one another (Swindler 468).¹⁶ In this utterance, the state and its people simultaneously emerge as a discursive object. Michael Foucault suggests

¹⁶ I will follow de Certeau in using “place” to indicate a particular, ordered and strategic conception of a given location as imagined/represented in empowered discourses like Constitutions. “Space” indicates the daily experiences of individuals negotiating those locations and power dynamics. A fuller discussion is provided below.

that discursive objects form in accordance with a “body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance” (48). Understanding the process by which a statist subject position emerges and is negotiated as a discursive object operating within various rhetorical situations requires an examination of the “rules” determining how the state itself emerges, attended from the outset by a people who are the subject of the state’s laws, narratives, and symbols.¹⁷ Because the statist community is defined along spatial lines, identifying “the People of the State” begins with the definition of the state as a discreet and ordered “place.”

According to Michel de Certeau, a place is “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence” (117). For de Certeau, places are imagined from a strategic remove. Like a chess player staring down on a board whose pieces are within his control, the organization of places is accomplished from a perspective of power and with an eye to determining the best course of action toward accomplishing a given motive.¹⁸ The establishment of a sense of place generated by the appointment of state borders does not create the state, but it does allow it to emerge as “an object of discourse,” as described by Foucault. The Constitutional documents that establish boundaries render an experienced space an ordered place with “the status of an object—[making] it manifest, nameable, and describable” (Foucault 40-41). Places are plotted and predictable, and, similar to the nation as described by Benedict Anderson, “*limited* because even the largest of them . . . have finite, if elastic,

¹⁷ For my purposes, “statist subjects” are defined by their identification with a subject positioned defined in relation to a particular U.S. state. Such subject positions are identified in what I call “statist discourses” or discourses that contribute to the formation and negotiation of the state as a discursive object. For example, the Wyoming Constitution is an example of “statist discourse,” as are the historical narratives discussed in the Chapter Two.

¹⁸ In the case of creating a US state, these empowered agents are the President, Congressional representatives and, to a lesser extent, Territorial officials appointed by the President. See Swindler for more information on the process by which states transition from territories to states.

boundaries” (7). In the US Constitution and in state constitutions, the individual US state is conceived as a specific political and geographic place. Each US state contains a “People of the State” who are subject to the laws of the place and, in the United States at least, in whose name the laws of the place are authorized and altered. For example, it is in the interest of “We the People of the State of Wyoming” that the state Constitution is offered, and in their names it is later amended. However, what it means to exist within and move through the space of a given state is not defined by the “rules of place;” such norms make it possible to conceive of a particular state as a meaningful entity, but they do not foreclose the possibilities for other meanings to emerge.

Because discursive objects exist “under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations,” what the object “is” or “means” are matters constantly in the process of negotiation and transformation (Foucault 44). Places give way to the more flexible experience of “space” as they are navigated and experienced by those operating within them. Spaces, de Certeau explains, are places as they are experienced in daily life, navigated tactically as individuals respond to events happening around them in real time:

[I]n relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoke, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time) , and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. (117)

Spaces and places exist conterminously; the one transformed into the other through the practices of planners plotting boundary lines on a map, and back again through the exercises of pedestrians traversing the terrain in response to unplanned challenges or

exigencies. As it considers a petition for statehood, Congress' discussions imagined would-be states as places. The landscape is viewed from a strategic remove, and the ability to decide where to position the boundaries is at the discretion of those involved in the discussion. However, the strategic machinations taking place in the capital likely have little effect on the daily existence of people going about their lives in the landscape under discussion. Whether or not individuals going about their day-to-day lives were alert to or concerned about the strategic planning underway, the placement of their residence within or outside of the place being organized is crucial to whether the document would effectively embrace them as subjects of the state. As Pricilla Wald suggests of the US Constitution, speaking the nation into existence is merely the first step in the ongoing process of negotiating who is included in the rhetorical sweep of the National "We." In the case of statist subjects, *where* is as important as *who* in determining belonging.

In *Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre emphasizes the ways that spaces become social through the relations that a given space engenders: "([s]ocial) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships. . . . social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others" (73). In this way, concepts of place and space manage the relations among individuals contained within and excluded from them. In these moments, the place/space of the state becomes a scene in the way described by Kenneth Burke as "dramatism" in *A Grammar of Motives*.

Dramatism is invested in the relationship between individuals and their environment, and Burke suggests that the actions flowing from a particular human motivation are shaped by the place/space, or "scene" as he calls it, in which actions take place. According to

Burke, “any statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answer to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)” (*A Grammar of Motives* xv). For Burke, the scene is not just the physical space in which actions take place but also the contextual scenery for an event. For example, to think of Wyoming as a “scene” not only requires attention to the physical attributes of the rectangular block of the territory, but also begs consideration of the context shaping events that established these boundaries. That powerful, wealthy cattle barons occupied the space, with interests in keeping it unincorporated and the land “open” for ranging, has an important impact on considerations of “scene.” So too would the presence of iconic story tellers like “Buffalo” Bill Cody and Owen Wister, whose work to publicize representations of the place also impacted the experience of life in the state of Wyoming both during both men’s lifetimes and for decades to come. As this example demonstrates, the various elements of the pentad impact one another; Burke warns that any attempt to focus on one element will invariably evoke and become entangled in the others. He notes that the scene must be a “fit container” for the agent as well as the action and purpose; although the agent might manipulate the scene to make it better fit his purpose, the ultimate accomplishment of the action *requires* the appropriate alignment of scene, agent, agency, and purpose. In this sense, the scene (or place/space) is as inextricable from the agent (or subject) as is the act or agency; what *can* take place is determined as much by the *where* as it is by the *whom* and *by what means*. From this perspective, what is possible within a given place will be circumscribed by the organization of the place itself and the kind of actions not only permissible but also possible within a given context.

State constitutions illustrate this kind of dramatic entanglement—the place and her people are inextricable; the kinds of actions permitted to various types of agents help to define the subject position associated with “We the People of the State” but also constitute the arrangement of possibilities for actions. When a state joins the Union, it is by way of the United States Congress granting approval to the state’s constitution. State constitutions not only establish the place and the community proper to the place, but, as the following reading of the Wyoming Constitutions suggests, also works to ascribe agencies and actions within this context. However, as inhabitants refigure the space through tactical navigation, the possibilities for the deployment of a strategic articulation of state subjectivity and the actions available to these statist subjects (as agents) are reconfigured as well. The creation of state borders is clearly a strategic rhetorical act that performs a particular sort of scene setting, but the question remains as to how the actors circumscribed by the border will navigate the spatial and relational boundaries it establishes.

Space, Territory, State: Wyoming’s Constitutional Drama

Like many other western states, Wyoming is large, and its nearly perfect rectangular shape makes it easy to spot on a map. While the iconic shape might make Wyoming easy to locate, the apparent orderliness of the borders in fact speaks to the arbitrariness of border setting, particularly in the Western United States during the late nineteenth century. A “Background Note” to the Wyoming Constitutional Documents asserts that “from the mid-eighteenth century onward, the vast barren region was treated only as a road-way to the beckoning rich lands beyond” (Swindler 461). Gary Alden

Smith, author of *State and National Boundaries in the United States*, suggests that this sense of the space as amorphous byway persisted well into the mid nineteenth century: “[t]he boundaries of Wyoming were not an important consideration in the early 1860s because that area was just a [space] to go through on the way to greener pastures further west” (170). The state was pieced together from lands characterized by their lack—of permanent settlements, of infrastructure, of the kind of mineral wealth beckoning settlers to other western states. Once Wyoming emerged as a discursive object, this lack became a vacancy; with the establishment of borders, the empty space took on the potential of fullness. This rhetorical renovation mirrored the physical transformation of the landscape as the “Indian Wars” effectively cleared the space of Native Americans, leaving it vacant for settlement.

The very idea of a “State of Wyoming” is premised on imagining the pre-state space as empty—an idea made fact by the United States Army and renowned figures of western mythology like Buffalo Bill Cody, whose work fighting the “Indian Wars” nearly exterminated indigenous Native populations in the region.¹⁹ The end result of these conflicts was settling Native communities on Reservation Lands that remained the province of the United States government via the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Although the reservations were located in the state of Wyoming, the Native Americans living there were not accorded state citizenship. This carving out of space and subjects supported the generation of a gendered and raced subject of Wyoming’s statist discourse, and a crucial step in this process was establishing borders and naming the place. These actions fundamentally establish an official “beginning” of the state’s existence that effectively

¹⁹ See Linford, Larsen, DeBoer, and Nicholas for more on the “Indian Wars.” These scholars all suggest that increasing the settler population of the state was perceived to require the extermination of native populations that were seen as “hostile” and “dangerous” to settlers.

cancels the complicated history and use patterns of the space prior to the granting of Territorial status.

The language of the Wyoming Territorial Act begins by attaching the discursive object that is “Wyoming” to a particular parcel of land. The first sentence of the Territorial Act of 1868 establishes Wyoming as a distinct and discreet place defined in relation to other states and organized along particular lines of latitude and longitude:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That all that part of the United States described as follows: Commencing at the intersection of the twenty-seventh meridian west from Washington with the forty-first degree of north latitude, and running thence west to the thirty-fourth meridian of west longitude, thence south to the forty-first degree of north latitude, thence east to the twenty-seventh meridian of west longitude and thence north to the place of beginning, be, and the same is hereby, organized into a temporary government by the name of the Territory of Wyoming.

(Swindler 462)

Where Wyoming begins and ends is established by this language, which effectively sets the scene for the pursuit of statehood by a rhetorical founding of the state Wyoming where before there had been a mere empty plain.²⁰ The powerful act of naming transforms something from abstract and amorphous idea into a coherent object of discourse. The political agency of the United States Congress undergirds the discourse of legislation so that mere declaration is rendered an action—“be it enacted” functionally

²⁰ The borders established in the Territorial Act were identical to the borders used in the State Constitution, and this language is repeated verbatim there.

makes it so by fiat of the United States Congress. The significance of this “act” however, is most properly considered in the context of creation.

Before the 1868 declaration of the Territory, the land that would constitute Wyoming was merely a space that individuals with other motivations and identifications moved through. Though certainly not bereft of inhabitants the space was included in a number of different configurations.²¹ Velma Linford notes that the area eventually formalized as Wyoming was distinguished by variety formations that included the space in the decades before the Wyoming Territorial Act:

[n]ever an outpost of empire, the Wyoming country represented the furthestmost fringes of four great land grants: Louisiana, Texas, Oregon, and Mexico.²² Three powerful empires once held the territory—Spain, France, and Great Britain. Two newly revolted republics, Mexico and Texas, also claimed small portions. (63)

As Linford describes, the “country” that would eventually become “Wyoming” was an amorphous space with no “natural” border or boundary. Similarly, geographer D.W. Meinig describes the lands proposed for inclusion in Wyoming Territory as “the great exhibit of a spatial remnant, a large, virtually vacant block of country left over after the formation” of other western territories (150). Before the discursive object that is “Wyoming” emerged, there was only the unbroken plain and the unforgiving range, to be parsed and parceled at the leisure of the nation builders. Although the space that would

²¹ See LaDuke *All Our Relations* for a discussion of Native groups in the area before statehood, as well as Jordan and DeBoer *Wyoming, A Source Book* for data on Native American populations in Wyoming since 1869. LaDuke’s maps, in particular, suggest that “pre-scene” Wyoming was used by different Native American populations at different times and was included in some of the treaty lands granted to the Cheyenne and Sioux as well.

²² The term “country” here denotes the unsettled piece of land of pre-statehood Wyoming. Linford is not suggesting that Wyoming is a distinct country in the sense of nation state. Rather, she describes the “country” or landmass eventually included in the state of Wyoming in its multiple pre-1868 incarnations.

make up Wyoming was a constituent part of other discursively defined spaces—Dakota Territory, Idaho, Mexico, and others—its emergence as a distinct entity in the Territorial Act represents a particular sort of “first act.” Burke notes that “[t]he symmetry of the pentad requires that even a ‘first act’ must have been enacted in some kind of ‘scene’ . . . a ‘pre-first’ scene” (69). In the case of the state of Wyoming, this ‘pre-first’ scene is defined by its alleged barren emptiness. This emptiness, and the challenge it represented to the territory’s eventual application for statehood, would drive not only the shape and scope of the territory, but would also play a crucial role in defining the subject of developing statist discourses.

The pervasive understanding of Wyoming as a vacant space not only allowed for the conceptual erasure of Native Americans in the space, it also contributed to questions about the number of inhabitants in the Territory and the ability of the landscape to support enough people to qualify for statehood. Because petitions for statehood required proof that a territory had achieved a necessary number of settlers, Wyoming needed to boost population. The threshold for admittance to Union was 60,000 inhabitants, and Wyoming’s population was far below that mark prior to 1868. In fact, “the first [Territorial] census . . . reported [only] 9,118 inhabitants in the entire territory”—and nearly all of these were consolidated along the southern border and its railroad centers until the early twentieth century (Meinig 150).²³ The ability to support a population of the size requisite for statehood was a key concern to Congress in drawing up the borders of the western states, including Wyoming: “[Congress] knew that much of the West was very arid, and it believed that the area would not sustain a large population. It followed,

²³The development of irrigation systems in the northern counties in the early twentieth century helped transform that area into an agricultural center. The development of the coal and oil industries would follow in the mid to later twentieth century. For more on this period, see T.A. Larson’s *History of Wyoming*.

therefore, that in order for a potential territory to have a large enough population for admittance as a state in to the Union, Congress needed to create large areas” (Smith). The ability of a potential state to support the level of population necessary for providing 60,000 voters placed these considerations of space into the larger context of political agency. The motivation for the territory to ultimately achieve state status was shaped by the style imagined necessary for the people who would become the residents of the state. The assumption that the agrarian model that characterized settlement of the East Coast and Midwestern states would be replicated in the West led to the creation of states that could accommodate families living on much larger parcels of land required for subsistence in the arid climate. Noting the complexity of maintaining continuity in a democracy, Dankwart Rustow notes that “the boundaries must endure, the composition of the citizenry must be continuous” (qtd. Olick 149). Where the boundaries would be placed proved far less significant than the emphatic clarity of place they carved out. Although the purported “emptiness” of the space raised questions about the validity of the petition for statehood, the portrayal of the space as “vacant” allowed for a much more dynamic conversation about agency that would focus on who was most fit to fill this void.

Celebrated Cowboys, Enfranchised Ladies, and Invisible “Indians:” Dramatis Personae in Wyoming History and Literature

Creating a place called Wyoming Territory began with the placement of borders, but it extended through the structuring of relationships the borders established. Concerns about population density proved relatively accurate when the returns for the statehood

vote, hastily organized and held November 5, 1889, in the midst of one of Wyoming's notoriously harsh winters, came in at just over 8000 votes, "6,272 in favor to 1,903 against" the petition for statehood (Roberts). Applications for statehood required 60,000 voters; although not all of these voters need cast a ballot, their verifiable presence in the territory was essentially the agency required for the act to be carried off. The exceedingly low turnout was interpreted by many as evidence of insufficient population, and therefore insufficient agency to validate the act of Congressional approval of statehood. The Territorial representative to the Congress, Joseph M. Carey, devoted much of his persuasive energy to convincing the Congress that this low voter turnout should not be interpreted as evidence of lack of population. Indeed, the ambivalence toward politics was merely evidence of the proclivities of the agents who occupy the largely vacant space. To do this, he appealed to the "natural" sensibilities of the Wyomingite forged in the face of the challenges posed by his or her "natural" environment. In Wyoming, he claimed, landscape provided an impediment to voter turnout, in some areas quite severe, and conducting accurate census counts was equally complicated by the state's isolation, mountainous terrain, and long, cold winters. By nature of the place, Wyomingites prove hard to tabulate. His ancillary explanation relies on a sense of the "natural" Wyomingite and his/her proclivity toward politics. He claimed, "There is but little of politics in Wyoming. Every year is an off year" (qtd. Roberts). In eschewing the problem of emptiness, Carey's argument becomes one of community values. Those who belong in Wyoming, those who are capable of filling the vacant space, are not the type of people who fuss over what folks in Washington want or need them to do. Part of this arrangement of values, according to Carey, is a profound lack of interest in politics.

Carey's decision not to mention Wyoming's role in national politics may have had more to do with the political interests of his audience than of the people who was there to represent. Despite the groundbreaking decision to enfranchise female voters in the Wyoming State Constitution, Roberts reports that, according to Congressional records, Joseph M. Carey "made no mention in his speech of the women's suffrage article." The omission suggests that much more was in play in the political calculation than merely counting voters, and the attendant characterization of Wyoming as an apolitical space likewise indicates a desire to downplay this achievement. Despite the denotative evocation of "the People of the state of Wyoming," the delegate suggests that the people are so concerned with their labors to survive in an inhospitable and vacant territory that they cannot be bothered to ride the long, desolate road into town to vote. They are a people by dint of experience and place-based practice, but, perhaps ironically, one of the defining features of the community is the lack of interest in cultivating a sense of community.

Just as establishing Wyoming as a place was merely the entry point for the creation of a statist subject, so too the legislative articulation of whom to properly include represents a beginning rather than a closure of negotiations for inclusion in the statist community. The symbolic representation of Wyoming has grappled with the state's identity as a feminist vanguard, on the one hand, and the state's *etho* as participating in a rugged, western fantasy of masculinity, on the other. These poles create tension along which the subject of statist discourse is continually negotiated. However, the articulation of who "counts" is outline in the Wyoming Territorial Act, Section 5 specifies that

every male citizen of the United States above the age of twenty-one *and* [including] persons who shall have declared their intention to become citizens of the United States, who shall have been a resident of the said Territory at the time of the passage of this act, shall be entitled to vote at the first and all subsequent elections in the Territory, and shall be eligible to hold any office in said Territory. And the legislative assembly shall not at any time abridge the right of suffrage, or to hold office, on account of the race, color, or previous condition of servitude of any resident in the Territory. (Swindler 463-64)

Denotatively, at least, this language exhibits a motivation toward inclusion; the abridgement of rights on basis of gender, race or “previous condition of servitude” is expressly prohibited and closes up the crucial loophole that Wald interrogates in the US Constitution’s “We the People.” For Wald, inclusion in “We the People” of the US Constitution has been a matter of continual transformation and debate throughout US history. In the state of Wyoming, inclusion remains somewhat complicated, in part due to the continuance of low population density and diversity, but also due to the ways that rights of migrant workers and Native Americans are ascribed and abridged later in the Act, and in an even more pronounced fashion in the Wyoming State Constitution twenty-two years later. The establishment of statehood not only set the scene when it set the boundaries, it also doled out agency along many axis of identity, including gender, ethnicity, and residency, but also on the basis of occupation, literacy and a number of other factors that cut across those expressly provided for in this apparently wide-ranging inclusive statement.

In establishing the Territory, suffrage was not granted to women, but neither was it abridged on the grounds of “previous conditions of servitude,” “race,” or “color.” However, by 1869 the territorial legislature moved to grant women the right to vote. The strange setting for this act expanding suffrage is noted by the Women of the West Museum, who premise their discussion of the landmark with this question: “Why would a western backwater like Wyoming, where there were more antelope than people, challenge the nation to embrace such a controversial experiment?” The strange alignment of scene and agent in this drama enticed “tourists and journalists [to make] regular pilgrimages to the territory, like anthropologists observing an exotic tribe” (“Wyoming: The Equality State”). As the Women of the West museum’s colorful description suggests, the enfranchisement of female voters spurred much interest, and the connection between granting agency to women and the particularity of the scene in which the act occurred heightened interest in the political and social turmoil occurring as the new state attempted to articulate a subjectivity for its citizens.

The 1889 Wyoming State Constitution solidified the right to suffrage established in the Territorial Act with the inclusion of this language in Article VI, section 1: “The rights of citizens of the State of Wyoming to vote and hold office shall not be denied or abridged on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this State shall equally enjoy all civil, political and religious rights and privileges” (Swindler 483). According to Wyoming Historian T.A. Larsen, there were a number of potential motivations for passing suffrage, perhaps the most well-known among them the desire to attract population to the territory. However, public agitation by Women in Wyoming was not among the reasons Larson and most other sources list. In fact, Larson voices the

commonly held account of an extremely constrained conversation about suffrage occurring in the state: “Wyoming women in 1869 did not speak in public, had no suffrage organization, and limited their expressions of suffrage sentiment to private conversation” (79). Once again, the rhetoric of vacancy allows for wide interpretation by later commentators. The lack of outright agitation for suffrage affirms Carey’s presentation of Wyoming as a place with little interest in politics. Conversely, the relative ease with which the suffrage amendment passed supports assertions that Wyomingites are fair-minded people with an orientation toward justice. Larsen’s bicentennial history, *Wyoming*, describes “Colonel” William H. Bright, the delegate who introduced the original suffrage language for the Territorial Act, as having “introduced the suffrage bill because he thought that women like his wife and mother has as much right to suffrage as the black men who had recently received the franchise” (77). Clearly, Wyoming’s pursuit of statehood came at a moment of turmoil surrounding the national identity; debates over the enfranchisement of African American men and women of any stripe were rattling the national consciousness. As Wald suggests, such debates over the inclusion of “others” in the national “we” contributes to the “experience of [multiple] ‘selves’ [and tears] the fabric of cultural identity” (136). Although Wyoming needed all the voters it could count in order to achieve the political agency necessary to the act of statehood, acknowledging participation in larger debates about the nation’s identity were judged too risky. Instead, the familiar rhetoric of vacant space and democratically-minded people were deployed to obscure the complex political and social context surrounding Wyoming’s statehood.

The same discourse of vacancy also effectively covers over the disenfranchisement of other groups in the transition from Territory to state. The extension

of the vote to men of color and previous slaves in the Fifteenth Amendment to the US Constitution took place in the interim period between the establishment of Wyoming Territory and statehood. As a result, the clause extending voting rights irrespective of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” was removed from Wyoming’s Constitution without harm to people who met other classifications for citizenship. By contrast, section 9 introduces language denying the right to vote or hold office to those “who shall not be able to read this constitution of this State” (Swindler 484). The desire to prove sufficient residency to apply for statehood was not powerful enough to dissuade legislators from the inclusion of a clause requiring literacy as a condition of franchise in a territory with limited educational infrastructure. Although the Wyoming State Constitution avoids voicing exclusions from state citizenship and the rights and privileges accorded to such status on racial grounds, Native Americans living in the state were also denied voting rights and other forms of political access. The configuration of rights and privileges granted to Native Americans, often referred to as “Indian Policy,” developed through a complex of legislative actions at both the federal and state level as well as a number of court decisions.²⁴ The US Constitution excludes “Indians not taxed” from representation in Congress in Article I Section 2 in the same sentence that establishes the “three-fifths” calculation for determining representation in slave states. While the Fourteenth Amendment abolishes the “three-fifths” doctrine, it leaves the exception for “Indians not taxed” in place. Furthermore, in enumerating the powers of Congress, Article I Section 8 stipulates the power to “regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and

²⁴ I borrow this term from the collection *State and Reservation* edited by George Pierre Castile and Robert L. Bee. See this volume for a deeper discussion of the evolution of laws related to Native Americans and the continued negotiation of these laws in the “New West.” See also Donald Fixico *Indian Resilience and Rebuilding* for more information about negotiations of Native issues and policies.

among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.” The US government’s approach disenfranchised Native groups from the protections of citizenship even as it purported to preserve “self-determination.” Wyoming mirrored the US Constitution in continuing to treat Native Americans in the state as non-citizens.

The paradox of protection via exclusion was not lost on Native Americans living in Wyoming in the years following the achievement of statehood. In an undated letter to the current Indian Agent for the area, Chief Washakie and several other leaders living on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming express a desire for equal access to the privileges and responsibilities of state citizenship enjoyed by their white counterparts.²⁵ Washakie begins by pointing out “I am of lawful age and a resident of Wyoming Territory” (“Indian Affairs Copies”). Washakie appeals to his own rights to citizenship implied by his meeting of the criteria laid out in the Territorial Act and reprised later in the State Constitution. Washakie’s appeal suggests that he sees the status of “citizen” as empowered; his letter does not attempt to evoke the privileges of self-determination promised to Native Americans in the US Constitution. While the citizen of the state of Wyoming is clearly a member of a protected class, the status of Native Americans is nebulous in both documents. The Wyoming State Constitution specifies that “[t]he people inhabiting this State do agree and declare that they forever disclaim all right and title to... all lands...owned or held by any Indian or Indian tribes” in Section 3 of a series of “Ordinances” listed under Article XXI, and goes on to assert that “said Indian lands shall remain under the absolute jurisdiction and control of the congress of the United States” (Swindler 505). Thus, the State Constitution renders the Native peoples living within the

²⁵ The reference to the men’s residence in the “Wyoming Territory” and dates of materials surrounding this letter in the archival collection in which it was found suggest the letter was probably written sometime in 1877 or 1878, though there is no concrete evidence suggesting the letter’s precise date.

borders of the state the responsibility of the federal government in language that manages to suggest not only their separate-ness, but also supports the narrative construction of Wyoming as vacant space. Contrasted to white settlers who are “the people inhabiting the state,” “Indians” are mere squatters who “hold or own lands” but remain under the “control of the congress of the United States.”

The value of citizenship status and the racial barriers to it were quite clear to the Native petitioners writing with Washakie. Another man identified in the document as Black Coal expands on Washakie’s assertion of the men’s claim to citizenship when he suggests that “I want to be a white man in every sense of the word and live among the Shoshones and both travel together along the white man’s road and we want the same privileges in trading that white men have” (“Indian Affairs Copies”). Although Washakie asserts grounds on which he and his counterparts deserve equal privileges and protection under the law, Black Coal acknowledges outright the racial component that the Territorial Act is at pains to deny. The Territorial Act may explicitly claim that “race, color, or previous condition of servitude” offer no impediment to enfranchisement in the Territory, but Black Coal clearly articulates an implicit sense of the “rules” of place this document lays out. Equal treatment may not require white skin, but it does require one to “be a white man” in order to enjoy full access.

Despite the many exclusions built into the subject position the Wyoming State Constitution articulates, the state’s official nickname, featured on the state seal as well as the state quarter, is “The Equality State.” This tribute to Wyoming’s status as the first state to grant suffrage to white women, but there are other moments in the constitution

where agency is specifically restricted on gendered grounds. For example, Article IX deals with Mines and Mining in the State, and specifies that

no woman or girl of any age shall be employed or permitted to be in or about any coal, iron or other dangerous mines for the purpose of employment therein; provided, however, this provision shall not affect the employment of a boy or female of suitable age in an office or in the performance of clerical work at such mine or colliery (Swindler 490).

Women might have the wherewithal to vote and participate in the political process, but a woman also still “has her place,” which might include occupation “in an office or in the performance of clerical work” but emphatically does not include the perilous conditions of the coal mines. This gendering of labor might conflict with the notion of the state as the site of female enfranchisement, but it accords well with the gendering of labor presented in symbolic and narrative representations of the state.²⁶

Along with the extension of suffrage to white women, the Wyoming State Constitution is touted as pioneering the protection of water resources by the establishment of a comprehensive water management system in the Wyoming Territorial Act and expanded in the Wyoming State Constitution. The attempt to turn the state’s emptiness into vacancy required transforming the landscape from arid plains to fertile valleys, so the establishment of water rights was crucial to the project of attracting settlement. According to *A History of Water Law, Water Rights & Water Development in Wyoming 1868-2002* funded by the Wyoming Water Development Commission office in 2002, “Wyoming was a frontrunner in pioneering concepts for the innovative handling of

²⁶ See Chapter Two for a discussion of Wyoming State Symbolic, including analysis of the State Flag and State Seal. See Chapters Four and Five for a discussion of literary texts that participate in the construction of the statist subject.

the complex process of bestowing the use of her water to her citizens.... [since 1868 Wyoming's] streams and rivers have been the lifeblood of her economy and growth." The importance of water management to economic success in a region where agriculture represents a key segment and the semi-arid climate makes water a crucial and contentious resource is suggested by this description. However, the language describing these concerns with equitable distribution is marked by the evocation of a particular subject who *belongs* to Wyoming as one of "her citizens." Here, the propriety of "we the People of the State of Wyoming" conflicts with the assertion of equity that underlies the configuration of water rights. The entirety of Article VIII is devoted to articulating the structure for water management in the state, which includes the establishment of several districts managed by appointed officials. Not only has the appropriation of water itself contributed to the development of a statist identity for Wyoming, so too has the work of individuals within the water management system. In fact, the *History of Water Law* quotes *The Conquest of Arid America* published in 1899 observed the importance of Wyoming in the distribution of water throughout the west:²⁷

Wyoming's place as the [water] lawgiver of the arid region is due neither to geographical location or to superior natural resources; certainly it is not due to large population. It owes its commanding position solely to the character and ability of a few public men who happen to have found in this line of work their best opportunity for usefulness (Cooper).

Here again we see the citizen of Wyoming as a place where "a few. . . men" with a particular sort of work ethic and view toward equity as the iconic model of the statist

²⁷ By William E. Smythe, then chairperson of the National Irrigation Congress.

subject. It also suggests the process by which Native Americans are marginalized through both legislative and symbolic representations of state identity.

Despite the apparent desire to maintain a system of water distribution that balanced preservation of the resource with ethical distribution, the establishment of state ownership also enabled the state to ignore water claims made by Native Americans living on reservations in Wyoming for nearly 100 years after statehood. Because the state constitution stipulates that “Indian lands shall remain under the absolute jurisdiction and control of the [United States] Congress,” and rights to water are “declared to be the property of the state,” the Native Americans living on federally managed reservation lands are accorded the right to the *lands* on which they live but not the *waters* that run through them. This was further complicated by the passage of the Homestead Act by the United States Congress, which functionally established the requirements for settlers coming to take possession of parcels of land in western states for development and settlement. The sense of Wyoming, along with adjacent states, as vacant and in need of settlement underwrote the logic of the Homestead Act. The Act stipulates:

That any person who is the head of a family, or who has arrived at the age of twenty-one years, and is a citizen of the United States, or who shall have filed his declaration of intention to become such, as required by the naturalization laws of the United States, and who has never borne arms against the United States Government or given aid and comfort to its enemies, shall, from and after the first January, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, be entitled to enter one quarter section or a less quantity of unappropriated public lands, upon which said person may have filed a

preemption claim, or which may, at the time the application is made, be subject to preemption at one dollar and twenty-five cents, or less, per acre (Homestead Act).

The Act goes on to specify that a period of five years continual residence on the piece of land is required for the ultimate granting of title. Although the protection of “Indian Lands” suggested in the Wyoming State Constitution are also appended to the Homestead Act, but the landscape beguiled these distinctions and parties navigating the terrain routinely ignored or were simply unaware of the boundary lines that distinguished “Wyoming” from the “Wind River Reservation” that lay within the state’s borders.

The Wyoming State Constitution implicitly denies water rights to Native American groups by securing the right to request water access to the status of citizenship, from which Native Americans living on federally protected lands are explicitly denied. However, the tribes sought to access their rights to water on reservation lands through a series of appeals that would take until the late 1980s to work out in state courts. This conflict arose out of discord between the sense of propriety and agency ascribed to citizens of the state, one the one hand, and “Indians untaxed,” on the other. According to the *History of Water* report, this conflict put “the tribes... against the non-Indians [claimants] who had been encouraged by the US government to homestead under the 1905 Act.... As both parties could point to the federal government for creating the problem, both looked to the federal government for resolution, but none was forthcoming” (Cooper). Although the United States government is tasked with protecting Native Americans and honoring the treaties that the federal government enters with them, the placement of these individuals within states means that the these groups are

fundamentally denied many of the protections and modes of access organized by state governments. The Constitution of the State of Wyoming stipulates how access to labor, voting, and other crucial issues will be managed, and, in so doing, presents an image of what the “ideal citizen” of the state of Wyoming will look like. For those who do not identify with this place-based subjectivity, the state becomes a difficult space to navigate.

Westward Ho: Wyoming, The Frontier, and the National Imaginary

In the very year that Wyoming joined the Union as the forty-fourth state, the Census report effectively announced the closing of the frontier, and it was this announcement that inspired historian Frederick Jackson Turner to compose his seminal essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” Jackson Turner quotes the 1890 Census Report in the opening lines of his essay: “Up to and including 1880, the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier.... it can not [*sic*] therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports” (27). Because this announcement coincided with its accomplishment of statehood, Wyoming provided an ideal scene for playing out the narratives celebrating the “American” frontier’s formative influence on the nation and lamenting its closing. In *The American West: The Invention of A Myth*, David Murdoch describes the emergence of a particular sort of nostalgia among people living in the United States at this time, noting “an obsessive brooding about the loss of a world where special American values had flourished” (63). Murdoch goes on to assert that the cowboy in this final frontier landscape “became *the* lost world, epitomising

[sic] all that America had held most precious” (63). The values Murdoch describes as especially “American” are likely the same values described and lamented by Jackson Turner as the progress of “American-ness” observable in each successive frontier, where “[n]ot only would there result a more adequate conception of American development and characteristics, but invaluable additions would be made to the history of society” (34). The national character was honed as waves of pioneers faced each successive frontier. According to Jackson Turner, the mounting distance from “civilization” on the east coast allowed for European manners and habits to fall away, and the demands of the “uncivilized” landscapes allowed these genteel ways to be replaced by the qualities required for survival at the nation’s proverbial leading edge. In positing the positive attributes of frontier spaces and the people who inhabit them, his narrative helped shape the subject of Wyoming and the narratives that would emerge about the most appropriate way to capitalize on the vacant landscape and who would be most fit to carry out this project.

Noted Wyoming historian T. A. Larson notes in the “Preface” to the first edition of his *History of Wyoming* that “[h]ere in Wyoming, in an area of almost 100,000 square miles, a proud and enterprising people have labored mightily to come up with adequate responses to a host of tough challenges” (vii). Within 75 years of statehood, the idea of Wyoming as containing a coherent community is natural enough to serve as the premise for a celebratory history. Larson evokes the people of Wyoming to the space of the state as well as the rigors of the particular landscape that help draw the community together through shared labor in the face of “tough challenges” encountered in common. However, it was not the yearnings of a people preconceived as citizens of the state that motivated

the creation of Wyoming Territory out of lands viewed by many as “leftover” in the creation of adjacent territories and states and often described as “empty” when compared to richer lands further west and more developed states to the east. Addressing the inaugural legislature, the first Territorial Governor, John A. Campbell noted of the newly formed territory, “[f]or the first time in the history of our country, the organization of a territorial government was rendered necessary the building of a railroad. Heretofore, the railroad has been the follower instead of the pioneer of civilization” (qtd. Larson 36). Here, the railroad is personified as “the pioneer,” the agent to whom the action of building the railroad and settling the territory is ascribed. From this perspective, territorial status becomes an agency requisite to the purpose of completing the transcontinental railroad. Implicitly, this reading suggests once again the sense of lack that serves as the foundational assumption about Wyoming, both at the time the state was established and persisting even today.

The placement of Wyoming’s borders in legislative language effectively established the premise for the idea of statehood not only setting the scene but also creating the “body of rules” associated with place required for identification with the subject position of “Wyomingite.” Burke explains the ways that scenes and agents shape one another in his explication of the “scene-act” and “scene-agent ratios,” where he notes that “[t]he principles of consistency binding scene, act, and agent . . . calls for acts in keeping with scenes or scenes in keeping with acts—and similarly with the scene-agent ratio” (*Grammar* 9). In keeping with these ratios, those who will identify as Wyomingites must be agents consistent with the scene. The dominant reading of pre-statehood Wyoming presented the space as barren, devoid of both wealth and opportunity. It

follows that, within narratives that position Wyoming in these ways, the agents within this “container” are characterized by their labor and struggle. A “proud and enterprising people” are just the sort that would emerge from a landscape that demands agents who can “labo[r] mightily” for survival. The discourses of fragmentation that describe the space as it was distributed and experienced pre-1868 enabled the readings of the space as “empty” and “leftover,” and the active clearing of the space for settlement carried out during the Indian Wars established the conditions for transforming that desolate emptiness into hopeful vacancy. The declaration of Territorial status, and later statehood, carved out not only a physical space but also a discursive space in which a history could be composed that would further solidify the sense of Wyoming as a “natural” community inhabited by a people forged through shared struggle and collective narratives.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STORY OF “US”: COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND COMMUNITY IDENTIFICATIONS

[The] group is necessarily distinguished by a temporal order with a beginning, and the beginning is perceived as constituting the imagined community.

–Jeffery Olick, *States of Memory*

I never knew what a glorious and romantic state I was living in until I had been in Dr. Hebard’s class. Historically and romantically, Wyoming is worth knowing because Dr. Hebard taught us so.

–Former Student, *Inventing History in the American West*²⁸

From its Constitutional inception, the subject of the state is imagined in collective terms—“We the People of the State of Wyoming.” However, in order for identification as “We the People of the State of Wyoming” to persist over time, the experience of place-based subjectivity must be continually reaffirmed as a social position through acts of collective remembering. According to Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, such histories are part of “the cultural memory” of a group, and asserts that

[c]ultural memory has its fixed point; its horizon does not change with the passing of time.²⁹ These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formations (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). (129)

The symbolic force of such moments create opportunities for powerful figures to have an outsized influence on the composition of the group narrative, and a highly motivated individual can exert tremendous influence on the statist identification rendered through

²⁸ Quoted in Mike Mackey *Inventing History in the American West*.

²⁹ Assmann and Czaplicka distinguish “cultural memories” from “communicative memories,” which are “based exclusively on everyday communication” (126). For the purposes of this chapter, I focus exclusively on forms of “cultural memory,” though the assumption that such memories are distinct from the, typically oral, transmission of experiential memory is maintained.

historical narrative.³⁰ One such figure teaching, writing, and participating in various forms of activism in Wyoming around the time of statehood was Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard. The cultural memories cultivated by Grace Raymond Hebard, one of Wyoming's earliest intellectual figures, provide a socio-temporal dimension to the place-based statist identification evoked in State Constitution by providing narratives that offer current state residents an image of earlier state residents as related through their common experience as Wyomingites. In positing statehood as a founding moment and identifying the pioneers and early settlers as "forefathers" whose agency created the state, histories like Hebard's render statist subjects as kin. Through her work as a writer, teacher, archivist, and political activist, Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard exerted an immense influence on the narrative accounts of Wyoming throughout the early twentieth century. She also exercised considerable influence on the development of statist symbols, including helping to organize contests to choose a state flower and flag design and asserting her right to final approval over the state flag. As a result of her institutional position during the state's "founding moment," Hebard's influence in shaping the narratives about Wyoming is astonishing.³¹ For good or ill, Grace Raymond Hebard devoted much of her life to telling "the story" of Wyoming and Wyomingites. In the narrative she develops and many that would follow, Wyoming is the quintessential American West and the last of the frontier.

³⁰ For the purposes of this chapter, I am using the term "historical narrative" to apply to books presented as true and factual accounts of actual events. While Hebard's status as a historian has been questioned by some of her later academic critics, the fact that her books were presented and received as histories at the time they were written gives them the necessary imprimatur to have the effects I describe in this chapter.

³¹ For the purposes of this chapter, "founding moments" are historical moments transformed into a figurative "beginning" via narratives that assert such moments as part of the history of a place. Such moments are significant in establishing kinship bonds by establishing a timeline that connects the state's "forefathers" with modern day inhabitants of the state.

History and the Transformation from Citizen to Social Subject

Narratives are central to the social bonds that form with an imagined community. Histories that focus on the common struggles of early white settler pioneers striving toward progress in Wyoming render these individual actors as the state's founders by their actions in forwarding the cause of statehood. This creates an imagined common heritage for the statist community by depicting current residents as decedents of heroic fore bearers and inheritors of the yoke of continued progress and development of the state. In positing his "narrative paradigm," Walter Fisher suggests that narratives are the principle method by which individuals and groups make sense of the world. Expanding on Kenneth Burke's dramatic pentad, which investigates human actions in terms of motivations, Fisher asserts that "texts function (1) to give birth to—to gain acceptance of—ideas/images, *affirmation*; (2) to revitalize or to reinforce ideas/images, *reaffirmation*; (3) to heal or to cleanse ideas/images, *purification*; and (4) to undermine or to discredit ideas/images, *subversion*" (144). With the caveat that there is "overlap, of course," Fisher goes on to suggest that understanding the motivating forces behind the construction of particular narratives helps to reveal the "will dominate in perception" of the narrative. Imperative to Fisher's model is desire to understand how narratives shape people and their experience of the world. In her analysis of the construction of "American national identity," Lauren Berlant asserts that the symbols and narratives hail the national subject into a collective identification. Through their assertion of the meaningful connections among subjects across time, such narratives provide "a translation of the historical subject into an 'Imaginary' realm of ideality and wholeness, where the subject becomes whole by being reconstituted as a *collective* subject or citizen" (Berlant 24).

Historical narratives revitalize the idea of state citizenship, reaffirming the responsibilities and relationships that citizenship implies as they do so. However, such narratives rely on a fixed time horizon that organizes various events into a cohesive story and places agents in the narrative into generational relationships. Founding moments, like the Declaration of Independence or petitions for statehood, provide a framework for shared, historical time by establishing the conceptual beginning of the nation or state, respectively. This shared chronology is key to developing a sense of kinship because statist relationships are abstract.³² In the case of Dr. Hebard, the debt she asserts that modern inhabitants of the state owe to previous generations of Wyomingites helps to maintain the continuity of the community and supports the dominant narrative of western expansion as progress.

The relationship between memory and history is intricate, and the interdisciplinary field of memory studies acknowledges this complexity in the different definitions and constructions of memory as a social and personal phenomena that emerge in texts by authors in different fields. Astrid Erll offers a working definition that applies in all these settings when she says that ‘memory’ “is an umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts” (7). This broad definition is distilled from the work of Maurice Halbwachs, considered by many in the field to be the father of memory studies, who argues that what he calls “social frameworks” are essential to understanding the processes by which memory functions. For Halbwachs, all memory is social because human beings are inherently social animals. Astrid Erll describes this perspective saying:

³² I am using the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s definition of “kinship” given in 1b: “The recognized ties of relationship, by descent, marriage, or ritual, that form the basis of social organization.” This is related to but slightly different from the sense in 1a of a blood tie or common ancestry.

“through interaction and communication with our fellow humans[,] we acquire knowledge about dates and fact, collective concepts of time and space, and ways of thinking and experiencing” (15). While an individual might remember events, the act of sharing ‘memories’ either broadly or intimately places them in a defined chronological sequence that allows individual ‘memories’ to become meaningful and articulable as narratives. Not only does what is remembered in institutional spaces like history books support the relationship implied by the evocation of a shared past, it also assists with the erasure of problematic counter-narratives that give an account from an alternative perspective.

Erll suggests that “[c]ultural memory is not the Other of history. Nor is it the opposite of individual remembering. Rather, it is the totality of the context within which such varied cultural phenomena originate” (7). Her rejection of the binary between memory and history is shared by many who are informed by the works of Michel Foucault, who suggests that history is a construct that responds to the needs and knowledge of the present even as it attempts to represent and organize the past. According to Foucault, “historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves” (*Archaeology* 5). For Foucault, history (like the nation state) is a construct. There is no objective “past” that can be rendered as the “correct” version of history. Likewise history and the nation co-construct one another. Just as history can be used to attach meaning and significance to a particular moment, space, or narrative, nations—and/or individual US states—rely on history to assist in the construction of a particular subject position that links the individual to the collective nationalist or statist

identity. In *Invented Traditions*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger suggest the efficacy of history in creating group bonds. Hobsbawm notes that nations “invent traditions” to bolster allegiance and identification among national subjects: “all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cementer of group cohesion” (12). These traditions present the national subject as “naturally” and inherently identified with the nation state.

Through a similar process, state histories assert a chronology for the state and maintain a store of shared memories for its subjects. According to Erll:

[a] central function of remembering the past within the framework of collective memory is identity formation. Things are remembered which correspond to the self-image and the interests of the group. Particularly emphasized are those similarities and continuities which demonstrate that the group has remained the same. (17)

State histories serve crucial functions in the *reaffirmation* of statist identities by providing important “fixed points” like those described by Assmann and Czaplicka that support narrative accounts of “cultural memory.” Lyn Spillman suggests that what she calls “founding moments” are just this kind of fixed point. Founding narratives assert “[a] sense of shared experience through time [that] seems crucial to national identity” (Olick 161). Statehood represented an opportunity to canonize just such a founding moment because it provides a date that can be recorded and remembered and celebrated through ritual and symbolic gesture. However, the political importance of statehood covers over the arbitrary nature of state making. While the moment of statehood makes a convenient reference for celebrations of statist identity, it is as arbitrary as the placement of borders

or the selection of a state flower. While these moments are frequently used to anchor the statist identity that later emerges, the newly defined state is inherently a narrative vacuum. In her examination of narratives that posit Wyoming as iconic of western identity, Liza Nicholas notes that, in the year of statehood (1890), “the dominant story Wyoming would tell about itself was still up for grabs. The state was sparsely settled, with little or no industry, mining, or labor presence to influence its core narrative” (2). Wyoming was a distinct place, a US state with all the attendant judicial and territorial rights and responsibilities that entailed, but a dominant narrative about the place had yet to emerge. Entering upon this barren rhetorical terrain just after the turn of the century, Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard found herself in a unique position to document and shape the narrative of Wyoming and its founding moment.

Grace Raymond Hebard: Daughter of the Plains, Founding Mother of Wyoming

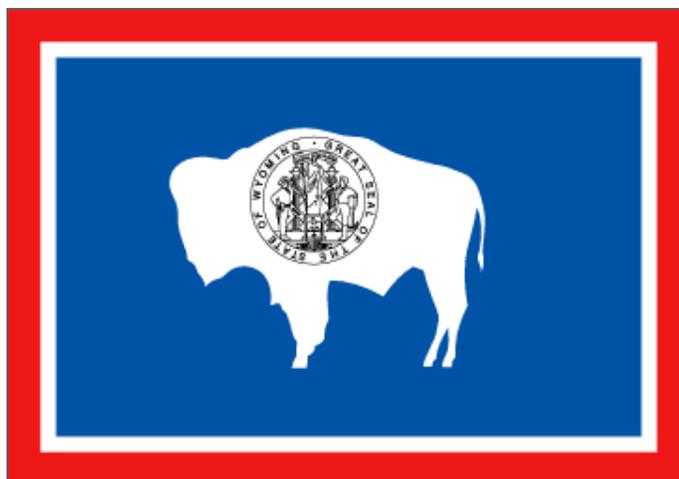
Dr. Hebard was a woman of uncommon perseverance and accomplishment, and the political and social influence she wielded during the early days of Wyoming Statehood is hard to over-state. Historian Mike Mackey describes her as “a very intelligent woman who came out of a time in America’s history when the accomplishment of females were often downplayed or even ignored. A lifelong suffragette, Hebard was determined to make her mark in life” (1). And it would seem she was quite successful in making her mark on Wyoming. According to the biography provided by the American Heritage Center, whose archives contain the collected papers and manuscripts generated during her impressive career, Hebard was a “University of Wyoming professor, historian, librarian, and champion of many causes.” Hebard was on

the University of Wyoming Board of Trustees from 1891-1903, was the first female member of the Wyoming Bar Association, taught in the Political Economy Department at the University of Wyoming, eventually serving as Department Head near the end of her career, and single-handedly established the University of Wyoming library from volumes she “found in some boxes” where she served as librarian from 1908-1919. (“Biography of Grace Raymond Hebard”) In addition to her service to the university, Hebard was a prodigious scholar, producing six books on Wyoming and the western United States and leaving an unfinished manuscript at her death in 1936. She was also a tireless advocate for women’s rights, and she recounts the passage of Wyoming’s suffrage amendment in a one act play entitled “Wyoming Day” that she co-wrote. Hebard’s work demonstrates a clear sense of investment in Wyoming’s identity and the narratives and symbols that would suggest the contours of that *ethos* both within and outside of the state. Perhaps her most enduring contributions to Wyoming’s legacy was her contribution to the state’s “official symbolism.”

Hebard was acutely aware of the power of symbols, and she devoted several years to compiling a compendium of state flags, flowers, and other official symbols. Such symbols are highly effective at communicating community unity through the use of metonymic representation. In the introduction to *Rhetorical Homologies*, Barry Brummett notes that “metonymies are present whenever a part of something stands in for the whole issue, object, or event” (22). Metonymies condense meaning, making ideas more easily deployable, often through applying symbolic devices. Patriotic symbols like flags are spaces where metonymy is often employed in the interest of promoting unity among an imagined community through the construction of a shared symbolic

iconography. In *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, Lauren Berlant describes the process by which political subjects form personal identifications with nationalistic identities. Berlant argues that “[w]e are all bound together because we inhabit the *political* space of the nation, which is not merely juridical, territorial (*jus soli*), genetic (*jus sanguinis*), linguistic, or experiential, but some tangled cluster of these. I call this space the ‘National Symbolic’” (5). Individual US states are also a complex political space, and the emergence of a State Symbolic takes place in this fraught socio-political context. References to the State Symbolic, then, include not only representations of statist identity, but also the process of metonymic substitution that allows for these symbols to stand in for more complex articulations of demographic or cultural identifications within a given state. Because such symbols help to annul contestation over the dominant narrative within a particular state, they are often sites where *purification* of such narratives is attempted. Wyoming’s flag—a striking image of a white bison³³ ensconced in colors of the US flag—is a space in which competing narratives of the state are awkwardly incorporated into a symbol portending unity.

³³ In the American West and particularly among Native Americans in the region, the American Bison is still commonly referred to as the “buffalo,” as it was in the early twentieth century when Wyoming’s flag was designed. Although I use the term “bison,” much of the source material refers to the “buffalo” in the image.



*Figure 1: The Wyoming State Flag*³⁴

Although the design of the Wyoming flag is credited to “Wyoming’s Besty Ross,”³⁵ Verna Keyes, the contest Keyes’s design won and the idea of a state flag in the first place is credited to Hebard. According to a retrospective published in the Casper Tribune in 1911, “Grace Raymond Hebard . . . thought up the design contest” and continued to exert control over the symbol when she reversed the orientation of the bison in Keyes’s original design so that it appears as it does on the flag today, with face turned toward the flagpole (Conner). And it was Hebard who publicized the flag, sending it along with letters to officials in each state requesting images or descriptions of their state’s official symbols in return. Her efforts to canonize³⁶ the flags and symbolic pantheon of all of the states suggest that Hebard saw an opportunity not only to publicize Wyoming’s new

³⁴ Image courtesy of *50States.com*.

³⁵ This appellation occurs frequently in news articles about her both from the time of the flag’s debut and in retrospective articles published in later years, with particular frequency in the years leading up to the Wyoming State Centennial Celebration in 1990. Keyes remained in Wyoming until her death in 1992.

³⁶ In her collected papers at the American Heritage Center, there is evidence that Hebard hoped to create a book from the state flags, flowers, and other materials she was gathering. In letters to her from other state’s librarians, there are references to this book project as well as to the fact that Hebard enclosed images of the Wyoming flag, flower, and occasionally other articles in her requests to them. However, there is no evidence that such a book was ever produced by Hebard. However, 1994 volume *State Names, Seals, Flags, and Symbols* cited throughout this work is a similar project and represents the continued interest in the codification of such materials. That book also chronicles complex articulations of history in other state’s with contested histories. See, for example, the section on the Georgia Flag in that book.

symbols by way of sharing them with other state's librarians and archivists, but also to capitalize on the growing interest in such articulations of statist identity.³⁷

Eric Hobsbawmm and Terrance Ranger note the importance of “entirely new symbols” like flags in creating the sense of history and common cause required to evoke commitments to nationalist causes (7). Flags not only offer a symbolic representation of unity, they also support the creation of collective memories. Building on Hawlbachs, Erll notes that in order to bridge the gaps between generations, collective memories need tangible articles and places to sustain them: “collective memories, whose temporal horizons [can] reach back thousands of years, thus transcend the horizon of living memory, and therefore need objects and topographical sites of memory to provide structure” (18). Representative objects like flags are laden with symbolic meaning and so transform themselves readily into such objects of memory. The Wyoming state flag offers a symbolic gesture toward a coherent statist identity, but the simplicity of the image veils a convoluted symbolism that attempts to honor and acknowledge Wyoming's “original inhabitants” as well as its heroic “settlers” without regard for the latter's violent displacement and containment of the former. To give a sense of the contemporary sense of the flag's symbolism and its relationship to the dominant narrative of Wyoming circa 1917, below is an extended description of the intended symbolism by the flag's designer, Verna Keyes:³⁸

³⁷ Between 1905 and 1920, twenty-two states passed their first laws officially adopting a flag. Within the next ten years, another ten states adopted flags. (Shearer and Shearer 73-97).

³⁸ The official “legend” of the flag's creation, as told by Ms. Keyes, holds that the design of the flag appeared to her in a dream, fully realized and almost exactly as she presented it in the 1917 contest which was held to select a state flag. Often referred to as “Wyoming Betsy Ross,” Keyes was an active participant in celebrations of Wyoming culture and history.

The Great Seal of the State of Wyoming is the heart of the flag. The seal on the buffalo represents the truly western custom of branding. The buffalo was once ‘monarch of the plains.’ The red border represents the Red Men, who knew and loved our country long before any of us were here; also, the blood of the pioneers who gave their lives in reclaiming the soil. White is an emblem of purity and uprightness over Wyoming. Blue, which is found in the bluest of blue Wyoming skies and the distant mountains, has through the ages been significant of fidelity, justice, and virility. And finally, the red, the white, and the blue of the flag of the State of Wyoming are the colors of the greatest flag in all the world, the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America (“Wyoming Pamphlet”).

The language of the flag legend clearly identifies and celebrates a particular agent as representative of “the People of the State of Wyoming,” and in its symbolism reaffirms much of the exclusive nature of this community seen in the language of the Constitution.

Keyes stresses the importance of the seal of the state in her description of the flag. As her description makes clear, the seal pre-dates the flag by several years, formally adopted in 1893 via state legislation and described in great detail therein.³⁹ In its symbolism, the seal represents the “People of the State” through the depiction of three figures. A female figure is featured prominently on a pedestal, flanked by a banner with the state’s motto—“Equal Rights.” According to the legislation, the figure is “modeled after the statue ‘Victory of the Louvre,’ from whose wrists shall hang links of a broken chain, and holding in her right hand a staff from the top of which float a banner with the

³⁹ The State Seal was revised in 1921, and newspaper clippings in the Hebard Collection at American Heritage Center suggest there was a dispute about whether or not the depiction of the “Victory of the Louvre” in the original design was “lewd.”

words ‘Equal Rights’ thereon, all suggesting the political position of woman in this state” (qtd. Shearer and Shearer 67). The female figure is flanked by two male figures “typifying the livestock and mining industries” and two pillars ensconced in banners that read “Livestock” and “Grain” in front of a cowboy who stands in for the livestock industry and “Mines” and “Oil” in front of the miner who symbolizes the mining industry. Each pillar supports a lighted lamp, “signifying the light of knowledge” (qtd. Shearer and Shearer 67).



Figure 2: Great Seal of the State of Wyoming⁴⁰

While the two male figures on the seal are literal representations of individuals who work in the industries that this representation suggests are as crucial to the state as its democratic impulse toward equality, the female figure represents an ideal.⁴¹ There were many women who worked to achieve suffrage, Grace Raymond Hebard among them, and countless women whose labor helped build the political and intellectual institutions of the state as well as the ranching and mining industries. The image becomes a metaphorical

⁴⁰ Image courtesy of *StateSymbolsUSA.org*.

⁴¹ See the “Winged Victory of Samothrace” at *Louvre.fr* for more information about the sculptural reference for the figure on the seal.

celebration of the symbolic victory that “Equality” represents rather than a testament to the practice of equality in daily life that the figures of the working men suggest for the industries they represent. This may be a result of the fact that, despite the many political accomplishments for women made in Wyoming, women remain underrepresented in powerful political positions within the state.⁴² While it is true that in 1924 Wyoming elected the first female governor in the United State, Nellie Taylor Ross, since her term ended in 1927, no other women have served in that office. Wyoming has never elected a woman to serve in the Senate and only one woman, Barbara Cubin, has ever served as Wyoming’s representative in the House. In 1986, state historian T.A. Larson noted that “the ‘woman’s place is in the home’ philosophy dies hard in cattle country.... [P]erhaps the 21st century will see many more women in leadership roles on ranches, in industry organizations, and in government” (Sandoval, Larson, and Roripaugh 18). Although there are a number of women who serve in the Wyoming State House and other political positions, the highest offices remain the virtually exclusive property of white men, many of whom rose through the ranks of the ranching and mining industries depicted on the seal. The figurative representation of female empowerment on the seal evokes the symbolic experience of equality in the state, and the contrast to the literal political power of the mining and livestock industries suggests once again the tension between the apprehension of equality in the state and the experience of exclusion experienced by women and other minority groups within the state.

Although the seal is purportedly the “heart of the flag,” it is the larger figure of the white bison that is visually dominant in its stark contrast to the blue background. Like

⁴² See the “Wyoming the Equality State” page on the *Women of the West Museum*’s website for a detailed accounting of the various political “firsts” achieved by women in Wyoming.

the seal, the bison is a complex symbolic figure that privileges a masculine, settler perspective on Wyoming's pre-settlement history. Prior to the nineteenth century, bison were among the state's numerous and charismatic "mega-fauna" and were hunted by many groups of Plains Indians. According to Winona LaDuke, "In 1800, 40 million buffalo [sic] roamed the North American plains. They were the most numerous grazing animals on earth" (140). The bison, particularly as represented by the "white buffalo," hold significance for the Sioux who use the animals for subsistence but also as part of sacred practice. According to Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux healer who lived from 1863-1950: "it was the White Buffalo Cow Woman who in the beginning brought to us our most sacred pipe, and from that time, we have been related with the Four-Leggeds and all that moves. Tatanka, the buffalo is the closest four-legged relative that we have, and they live as a people as we do" (qtd. LaDuke 143). The flag's most striking design element is a potent symbol both of Wyoming's pre-settlement landscape and of the religious beliefs of the "original inhabitants" who hunted there. However, the animal is "branded" with the state seal; the "older brother" of the Oglala Sioux treated as a common cow and forced into the service of the settler narrative.

In contrast to the erasure of the Native American, the "Wyomingite" is imbued with particular attributes of character, gestured toward in the color scheme designed to evoke "purity and uprightness" as well as "of fidelity, justice, and virility." This agent is connected with the specific rigors of labor in Wyoming through the evocation of the state's agricultural and mining industries. The grammatical awkwardness of the reference to "reclaiming the soil" emerges due to the juxtaposition of that description with the first half of the sentence about the original Wyoming natives, here the "Red Men." The lack

of obvious referent makes it unclear whether the pioneers were “reclaiming” the land from nature by way of cultivation and mining, or “reclaiming” it from the “Red Men.” The Native Americans are granted rightful status as the original inhabitants of the land by their evocation in the opening clause, yet they are never granted agency grammatically, remaining the object of the sentence in which the “red” of the flag is the subject. In addition, the “red men” are erased from the landscape by the balance of the sentence, which introduces the pioneers whose role in contributing to this expurgation remains vague at best. Where these inhabitants who “knew and loved” Wyoming before it was “The State of Wyoming” have gone is a mystery if it is not somehow related to the process of “reclaiming” that establishes the pioneers as the land’s rightful inhabitants. The final moment of the narrative finds Wyoming swept into the embrace of the Union, represented by “the greatest flag in all the world, the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America.” This succinct history of the state and the evolution of its “proper” subject—marked by gender, race, and labor—illustrates how the state comes to function not only as a community of affinity within the United States but also as a scene and agent that gives way to particular sorts of acts and agencies. The awkward fusion of homage and elision in the description of this design mirror the attitude expressed toward Native Americans in the narrative of the state’s founding and clearly connects that narrative to a broader celebration of the lost frontier.

The Making of An Ideal Citizen: Hebard's Version of Wyoming's Origins

Another of Hebard's remarkable accomplishments was the 1904 publication of a textbook for use by students in the state; her first book, *The Government of Wyoming* was in circulation within fifteen years of statehood.⁴³ Wyoming historian Mike Mackey discusses Hebard's influence and controversial body of work in his book *Inventing History in the American West: The Romance and Myths of Grace Raymond Hebard*, and says of Hebard's textbook:

in spite of its shortcoming, Hebard's *Government of Wyoming* went through eleven editions and was highly praised by teachers and politicians in the state. The success of that book within Wyoming led Hebard to produce her four major 'historical' works, and it was those books that led to most of the criticism of Hebard as an historian. (21)⁴⁴

Her work's popularity as a school text suggests Hebard's success in cultivating a narrative of Wyoming for Wyomingites. However, Mackey's critique of Hebard's work is echoed by many trained in history in the early to mid-twentieth century. While it is clear that Hebard's research was, in many respects, progressive in attempting to recount the experiences of Native Americans, women, and other figures often absent in the

⁴³ Remarkably, this was not the first history of the state of Wyoming, having been predated by Charles Griffin Coutant's 1899 *History of Wyoming*. Even at that early date, the history of the state exceeded a single volume, with Volume 1 only managing to get as far as the 1868 Territorial Act. Interestingly, Coutant was a journalist and "engaged in literary work" before coming West to work on establishing railroad routes. His experience in the state and ability to write well were his key qualifications for authoring the history, according to an introduction by pioneer and journalist Judge J.H. Hayford.

⁴⁴ These include: book *Sacajawea: Guide and Interpreter of Lewis and Clark*, *Washakie: Chief of the Shoshones*, *The Pathbreakers from River to Ocean*, and *The Bozeman Trail*. Her 1932 book *Sacajawea*, which receives the bulk of the criticism that Mackey implicates, was released in new editions printed in 2002 and again in 2012 despite debates over her sources and interpretation of events beginning at 1957 *Pathbreakers* and *The Bozeman Trail* have both been digitized and re-released in 2014, and Hebard's *Washakie: Chief of the Shoshones*, originally published in 1930, saw its most recent reprinting in 1995.

historical records, the over-arching narrative positions Wyoming inextricably in the sweep of the frontier hypothesis and its narrative of expansion as progress. Hebard's adaptation of the frontier narrative as part of Wyoming's founding moment helped cement the link between these narratives for students of the state's history.

Hebard's *Government of Wyoming* is one of the earliest textbooks on Wyoming's history and government, and it is presented in three parts: "Part I: The History of Wyoming; Part II: The Constitution of Wyoming; Part III: The Administration of Affairs in Wyoming." The author notes in the "Preface" that the text is intended for classroom use, with "the contents of Part II...particularly recommended to the teachers and pupils who are preparing for an examination on the subject of the Government of Wyoming." However, she goes on to say that, "the different parts of the book may be used as three separate text-books. While closely related, they are not dependent on one another" (Hebard "Preface"). As a result, the language of the text is very approachable, and Hebard includes a number of primitive "infographics" including many images of the early state, a number of timelines that trace particular events relevant to her version of state history, and several maps from different eras. Writing the history of the state within two decades of statehood presents Hebard with the task of transcribing living memory, her own and others, into the historicized cultural memory of the group. However, in doing so, she applies the strategies of "invented tradition" in positing a history that exceeds the existence of the Territory and State of Wyoming.

Throughout the text and particularly in the history section, Hebard promotes a narrative that presents Wyoming not as a state with less than fifteen years of history to recount, but as an entity whose history unfolds alongside that of the world's great nations.

The first example of this is encountered in the timelines that open Chapter II. Among these is a list that describes the “Governments over Wyoming,” which dates from 1519 with an entry that describes a period of Spanish rule over “Wyoming” from “1519-1821.” The timeline includes periods that correspond to various moments in the European experience on the American continent, and, somewhat confusingly, several of these periods overlap. The overlap is explained in the “History of Wyoming” section which describes the process by which the United States acquired the various lands included in Wyoming in four separate transactions: The Mexican Secession of 1848, the Texas Annexations of 1845, the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, and the acquisition of Oregon Country in 1792 (*Government* 25). Following is a section that includes a list of “Rulers over Wyoming” that dates back to 1479 and, somewhat mysteriously, terminates in 1804 with no mention of the United States government. Hebard’s timeline give the appearance of the rise of a nation, and her narrative of Wyoming exceptionalism supports this contention through positioning the state among nations with no mention of the United States or other individual states emerging alongside Wyoming and included in the various acquisitions she mentions.

The logic implicit in these timelines and lists becomes explicit as Hebard offers an explanation of the process by which the lands included in Wyoming were acquired by the United States, a process she refers to as “the transactions made to give Wyoming a clear ‘abstract of title’” (*Government* 12). According to Hebard’s narrative:

[t]he titled interests of Wyoming in a measure begin with Columbus and end with the date of our Statehood, July 10, 1890, or from the period when the western hemisphere was discovered to that time when we took our

place in the Union as one of the States with self-government and a separate Constitution. (15)⁴⁵

In this case, Wyoming is presented both politically and culturally as a self-contained republic; in an example of the synecdoche of scene and agent, the citizens both *are* the state and are *contained within* the state. Kenneth Burke suggests that scenes, agents, acts, agencies, and purposes must all be “in alignment” so that in describing one or another element, the others can be inferred or understood to follow from that element and it from them. Thus, the act of “representation” is a kind of “synecdoche” in which one element is substituted for the others. Beyond Wyoming, however, Hebard offers a view of the individual state’s relationship to the federal entity of the United States that privileges the states, which she describes as “self-governed” and “separate.” Indeed, the United States is projected as a “Union” of independent republics that joined together because the will of the people determined that such a consubstantial relationship would suit their needs. The Union is merely a service to the “People of the State of Wyoming,” but, according to Hebard’s text, the existence of the community and the place in no way rely on the existence of the United States. The moment of statehood, then, is transformed into a founding moment that represents attainment of well-deserved recognition as an equal among other states, yet the existence of the community and its values is understood to transcend that moment. Despite Hebard’s suggestion that Wyoming transcends its formal recognition by the United States, July 10, 1890, her narrative uses statehood as a stable moment that can anchor the rest of her narrative about Wyoming and solidify the

⁴⁵ By “titled interests,” Hebard refers to the acquisition of title achieved by right of “conquest,” “discovery,” and/or “exploration.”

connections she draws among inhabitants constructed as kin through their common experience as fellow citizens of the state of Wyoming.

Hebard's construction of the "citizen of the state of Wyoming" begins on the very first page of the text with a dedication that reads, "In Memory of an Ideal Citizen." It is unclear whether Hebard intends to evoke the memory of a particular citizen whom she has measured as ideal or to evoke an imagined ideal. Whichever she intended, the text draws an image of the ideal citizen of Wyoming in opening Chapter VI "The Territory of Wyoming:" "Advanced civilization never is able to pay its debt to the explorer, the frontiersman, and the pioneer, all of whom make present conditions possible" (42). In this celebratory image, Hebard highlights the heroism of settlers, and, later in the same chapter, glosses the violence by which these settlers wrenched the land from Native groups in the region: "The years 1865, '66, and '67 were filled with bloody Indian wars and thrilling massacres" (43). Although she returns to "the Indian question" later in the chapter, this one sentence is the only mention of the "Indian Wars" that effectively cleared the state for white settlement. Her language in describing "thrilling massacres" suggests an excitement, and even entertainment value, to be found in these "bloody" exchanges. Like many of the pioneers, this language casts the white participants in the "Indian Wars" not only as heroes, but as daring thrill-seekers, finding adventure and massacring pesky Natives impeding on space that belongs to the People of the State along the way. Her later discussion engages the negotiations between the Native Americans and the United States Government, in which, she is careful to note, Wyoming is not a party.

Hebard's narrative is clearly drawing upon a narrative about western expansion first popularized by Federick Jackson Turner, whose "frontier hypothesis" provides the

raw materials for a celebratory image of Wyoming as the “quintessential West.” The gesture to kinship that links the modern Wyomingite who enjoys the “present conditions” in the state to the heroism of “the explorer, the frontiersman, and the pioneer” who literally and figuratively cleared the way for development. “Our” enjoyment of the privilege of being Wyomingites is expressly linked to these figurative forefathers through the evocation of debt. Just as a child owes his existence to the suffering of his mother in pregnancy and birth, so too the modern citizen of the state owes his comfortable enjoyment of the one-time vacant frontier to the sacrifices of the trailbreakers whose labors bore the modern state.

Hebard’s dedication to the heroic pioneer narrative extends into her other works as well. In *The Pathbreakers from River to Ocean*, she recounts the process of “developing” the western frontier in chapters that run from “The Early Explorers,” and “The Fur-Traders” through “The Missions” and “The Gold Discoveries,” and culminating with “Cows and Cowboys” and “The Railroads.” The structure of progress underlying this narrative maps Wyoming, with its cattle economy ultimately giving way to permanent settlements with the advance of the railroad, into the final stages of the frontier. Her “Preface” also asserts the intention for this book is to serve as a school text, claiming that “[t]he West, or that land situated between the Mississippi and the western coast, had not received its due attention in school book form” (*Pathbreakers* 11). Like Jackson Turner, Hebard believes that the frontier, and particularly the western frontier, played a crucial role in shaping the national character and deserves scholarly attention and historical note. As in her *Government of Wyoming*, Hebard suggests the power of the classroom. Of the early explorers East of the Mississippi, whom Hebard suggests have

received their due in textual homage, she notes, “their deeds have not only been recorded upon the pages of books but written in the hearts of the American youths” (*Pathbreakers* 11). In this dedication, Hebard not only suggests the power of narratives in shaping perceptions of the nation, but she also suggests the generational value of history.

Benedict Anderson notes the crucial role such narratives play in creating the “simultaneously open and closed” posture of nationalist communities: “The son of an Italian immigrant to New York will find ancestors in the Pilgrim Fathers. If nationalness has about it an aura of fatality, it is nonetheless a fatality embedded in *history*” (145-46). Likewise, in state histories, the linkage between “past” and “present” generations is palpable. The daily struggles of a previous generation become heroic actions undertaken for the benefit of the current community. It is the task of history and symbolism to continually reaffirm the identification that sutures the subject of statist discourse to the community that “We the People” evokes.

Purification: Hebard's Reconciliation of Native Injustice and Pioneer Righteousness

In the 1930s, Hebard’s work took a turn toward representing yet another subject that had not received “due attention:” accounts of the exploration and settlement of the West, and Wyoming in particular, from the perspective of Native Americans. Her 1929 book *Washakie: Chief of the Shoshones* offers a detailed account of the life of the last chief of the band of Shoshones who hunted along the Wind River in Wyoming for many generations. According to Hebard:

[h]ad Chief Washakie been an enemy of our government and its people, battling with bow and arrow, spear, tomahawk and rifle to maintain a

savage supremacy over the region now peopled with industrious workers, he would be better known. . . . Though a great warrior, as virtually every red leader must needs have been, he was an ally of the “Great Father” at Washington, a friend of the emigrant, the settler and soldier, a cooperator in the transition of the West from savagery to civilization (17).

More recent historians have criticized Hebard for the “partisanship toward Washakie” that her book espouses, and the 1996 “Bison Books Edition” of her text offers a section devoted to “Corrections” to the text based on the “more balanced approach or more careful research” of later researchers (ix).⁴⁶ However, Hebard’s attempts to preserve alternative perspectives not privileged by twentieth century historians offers an important insight from the perspective of historiographers critical of such pronouncements. For example, Richard O. Clemmer’s introduction to the 1996 edition lauds Hebard:

In an era when many Tribal historians are attempting to recover the histories of important individuals, following a long period when the accomplishments of Native Americans were dismissed or ignored, it is to Hebard’s great credit that she bucked the tide of her time and produced a record, remarkably little flawed by her own era’s prejudices, that stands more than sixty years later as definitive, authoritative, and ground-breaking (xx).

⁴⁶ One of the key complaints of critics is the degree to which Hebard relied on first-hand accounts by Dick Washakie, son of Chief Washakie, and other individuals she interviewed, often through interpreters. Her papers in the American Heritage Center Archive also contain hundreds of pages of letters between Indian Agents and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, contracts and other legal compacts between various groups of Shoshones and other tribes living on or near the Wind River Reservation, and many other documents filed by individual or groups of Shoshones, Bannocks, and other tribes requesting redress from the United States Government for various abuses and failures to adhere to treaties.

Historians accepting the “balanced approach” paradigm that asserts there is a true history to be “revealed” by proper research faulted Hebard for her inability to maintain a critical distance from her subjects. Despite the value of her work for recuperating such counter-narratives, Hebard’s interpretations also maintain their allegiance to the dominant narrative of the West and Wyoming’s role in developing the vacant frontier into the “civilized” nation. In many respects, Hebard presented a model for *purification* by rendering Washakie significant as an “ally to the ‘Great Father’” and contrasting him to more “memorable” figures who fought against colonization. Hebard presents an homage to counter-history strangely shot through with a persistent loyalty to the heroism of the pioneers. In this, she offers a kind of template for later narratives that would attempt to configure both sides in the struggles as heroic, sacrificing, and ultimately righteous. Although Hebard and those who adopt a similar posture may hope to recuperate the narratives they cherish, such acts of narrative *purification* can allow for exclusionary depictions of the past to persist.

Many representations of the Expansion Era that were popularized during the late twentieth century adopted a similar posture to Hebard’s. Roberta Pearson’s analysis of filmed representations of the “Indian Wars” from the 1990s demonstrates that representations of heroism on both sides are potentially harmful in allowing the consumer of these images to ignore or forget the material outcomes of the conflict for Native peoples. She asserts that these *purification* narratives work in the interest of commodification and rely on the illusion of false equivalency: “Rather than celebrating difference, this selling of the Native American constitutes one more marker of the amoebalike [sic] potential of commodified public memory for an incorporation that

appropriates and elides difference” (Pearson 192). Pearson suggests that attempts to represent alternative or marginalized perspectives on their own terms, without flattening the differences between the experiences of dominant and oppressed groups, are more useful in dismantling the dominant narrative. Clearly, Hebard was interested in constructing a history that attempted, as Clemmer described it, “to give a balanced account of ‘how things got the way they are,’” (viii) but she was also hampered by her unwillingness or inability to directly challenge the dominance of the narrative of Expansion as unsullied progress.

Wyoming as Microcosm: Negotiating Identity through Statist Narratives

In the state of Wyoming, narrative agents working in a variety of genre and media have collaborated and competed in producing a storehouse of “cultural memories” that begin with statehood, marking a host of “fixed moments” and depicting the actions of idealized agents of statist identity along the way. The work of Grace Raymond Hebard is inexorable from the context of the dominant narrative about Wyoming and the Expansion Era narrative of progress more generally. As her own work became a part of the fund of historical knowledge to be adapted to current needs, Hebard’s contributions continue to help shape the historical narratives about the state today. The complicated task of preserving the past while also meeting the needs of the present managed by cultural memories is as Jeffery Olick describes, “the pursuit of interests [which] always wor[k] in combination with the multivalent meanings that the past allows; neither the ‘inherent meanings’ of the past nor pure exigency in the present can explain why some pasts

endure while others die out” (7-8). The celebration of the Expansion Era notable in Wyoming’s historical narrative is a common thread that runs through many of the statist narratives in the western United States. However, the way this narrative has been incorporated into the historical and literary representations of these states is not monolithic. Many of the elements of this narrative, including the gendered and racialized components, are rehearsed through different stories in other states and regions. For example, attempts to reconcile the realities of slavery and the Civil War have a similar effect on representations of identity for southern and eastern states involved in that conflict. A clear example of this can be seen in the fraught history of the Georgia State flag, which underwent three redesigns in just two and a half years in the early 2000s. In that case, representing the statist identity became contentious when Georgians who celebrated the state’s participation in the Confederacy and those who saw this participation as a racist enterprise could not reconcile their views about incorporating elements of the Confederate Flag in the state banner.⁴⁷ Likewise, Chapter Four discusses the 1997 “50 State Commemorative Coin Program Act” and provides several examples of different states grappling with representing a statist identity that balances “traditional” and “modern” articulations of the statist subject. While the statist narratives at play have very different contexts and engage distinct group identifications, the ability of the dominant narrative to sustain despite its insufficiency are similar and can be observed in many cases. In all cases, symbolic representations of statist identity are supported by a complex of historical and literary narratives that shape perceptions of the state from without and experiences of belonging in the statist community within.

⁴⁷ For more information on the conflict leading up to the most recent revisions of the flag design, see *The State Flag of Georgia: The 1956 Change In Its Historical Context* as well as “State Flags of Georgia” in *Georgia Encyclopedia* for information on the changes post-2000.

CHAPTER THREE: WRITING THE PLAINS(MAN): *THE VIRGINIAN* AND THE WYOMINGITE

Narration implies...that the “people” judge the stories told for and about them and that they have a rational capacity to make such judgments.

–Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration*

In Wyoming, people study the sky like a captain and his crew a thousand miles from land. Hope sinks with the barometer. There’s no shelter in the landscape.

–Kevin Holdsworth, *Big Wonderful: Notes from Wyoming*

Statist communities are structured around imagined connections. Literature, in particular, plays an important role in creating access to these conceptual networks by allowing readers to form identifications with characters that animate the statist identifications asserted by law and rendered social through history. In the case of Wyoming, the pervasive representation of the space as “empty” has had a crucial impact on the ways the state is imagined both in popular discourse and politics. In Owen Wister’s 1902 western, *The Virginian*, Wyoming is constructed as the ideal “America” imagined in Jackson Turner’s “frontier hypothesis.” In Wyoming, according to Wister, men are men and justice comes at the end of a hanging rope. This text and the image of the state and its community presented in it have had a pervasive impact on the State Symbolic. In this chapter, I argue that *The Virginian* was crucial in gaining popular acceptance for the dominant narrative about Wyoming and the place of the cowboy in that narrative. The landscapes that Wister imagines and the characters he draws create idealized models that white settlers could identify with as the exemplary Wyomingite. While not everyone can be a cowboy hero, like the Virginian, he certainly can model the

habits and attitudes of the character in performances of the statist identity.⁴⁸ Although Wister's novel had a particular political agenda that extended well beyond Wyoming's borders, the image of the Wyoming cowboy established in the novel has been so deeply engrained in the collective identification of Wyomingites that Wister's initial critique of statehood is eclipsed by the glorification of the "proper" Wyoming cowboy many recognize in the novel's title character.

Wister's presentation of Wyoming functions as *affirmation narrative* in support of the exclusionary construction of Wyoming's vacancy as potential. In his narrative the Territory is ripe for development by the "right" kind of people, and the novel reveals the model Wyomingite from the perspective of Wister and other economically privileged men. Louis Owen's suggests that:

[t]he West that Owen Wister found and eternalized in the most famous western novel of all time, *The Virginian*, is not the West of Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce, not the unbounded world where native people moved freely. The West of *The Virginian* is a reality in which boundaries such as those surrounding Yellowstone National Park have been carefully constructed by men in power, where Indians have agents but not agency (73).

For Wister, Wyoming presented a narrative tabula rasa on which to write his version of the "American Dream." The significance of the narrative for a Wyoming audience, at least in part, derives from the idealization of Wyoming as a great state in its own right. The national popularity of this novel within its time and beyond suggests the appeal of

⁴⁸ The exclusive gender pronoun here is evocative of the very different treatment of women in the narrative and as part of the statist identity.

Frontier Narratives like the one crystalized in Wyoming narratives for a national audience as well. *The Virginian* illustrates the sort of place Wyoming is, and, by contrast, also highlights the attributes of urban lifestyles on the East coast that are defined in opposition to the coarse, unrefined habits of the Wyomingites in the novel.

The character of the Virginian—tall and handsome, strong and soft-spoken, clever and self-reliant—embodies all that is good about the West. Not just any cowboy, but *this* cowboy becomes the figure of lore and celebration in Wyoming’s narrative of self-identification. Thanks, at least in part, to Wister and his charismatic Virginian, Wyoming is popularly known as “The Cowboy State” and rehearses cowboy symbolism in many local and national spaces.⁴⁹ The University of Wyoming’s sports teams are the Cowboys and Cowgirls, respectively, and state symbolism from the license plates⁵⁰ to the 2007 statehood quarter feature a profile of a cowboy on a bucking horse, right hand waving a cowboy hat overhead.⁵¹ While ranching was significant to Wyoming’s economy in the Territorial period and in the years following statehood, the use of the cowboy as symbolic dates from the period following the publication of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian*, and, in many respects, grew out of the debate over the state’s future that novel reflects. For Wister, Wyoming was the perfect scene for rehearsing a utopian narrative of American Progress that championed capitalist values in a landscape free of the undesirable poor and immigrant classes Wister and many wealthy expansionists felt were impeding the urban

⁴⁹ On the matter of Wyoming’s nicknames, Shearer and Shearer note that “Wyoming has three nicknames currently in use[.] The Equality State... . Big Wyoming and the Cowboy State” (17). The Equality State is the most commonly used in official representations, but the other two are common colloquial references.

⁵⁰ The license plates have featured the cowboy on a bucking horse since 1936. There have been a number of different color schemes and designs in that time period, but the cowboy and bucking bronco have been central to all.

⁵¹ This symbol also appears on street signs in Laramie and Cheyenne as well as some smaller towns and is present in many prominent spaces on the University of Wyoming campus.

East from achieving the full promise of a nation on the rise. In Wyoming, the cowboy became a symbol of the elite class despite his actual working class status.

Literature as Vehicle for Statist Identification

Perhaps unsurprisingly, literature plays a key role in many approaches to the study of nationalism and particularly those growing out of cultural studies. Benedict Anderson relies heavily on literature placed in the context of print culture to demonstrate the construction and negotiation of nationalist identity. Anderson asserts that the circulation of vernacular texts not only supported the imagined connections among readers through shared textual experience across time and space, but also created tangible networks of producers and readers as sellers and buyers. Thus, print texts in various genres supported both economic and conceptual linkages so that the works of “lexicographers, philologists, grammarians, folklorists, publicists, and composers... [were] linked, via that silent bazar [of the print market], to consuming publics” (75). Through literature, the subject is not only imagined as culturally linked to characters and other readers who identify with a particular identities, but also literally connected to other readers as well as the producers of such works via the market. Homi Bhabha also stresses the importance of literature in producing the “political subject.” Bhabha argues that “the force of writing, its metaphoricity and its rhetorical discourse, [is] a productive matrix [that] defines the ‘social’ and makes it available as an objective of and for, action” (34). Within this context, the *reaffirmation narrative* Wister offers takes on political and cultural significance as well as economic import. In the years after statehood, many

interests were motivated toward various “actions” in Wyoming, and establishing a convincing narrative was crucial to garnering popular support. Among them was Owen Wister, who represented a particular perspective about Wyoming and the United States that was articulated most clearly in *The Virginian*.

Published only twelve years after Wyoming achieved statehood and based on a series of visits that took place during the time directly before and after acceptance of the petition for statehood (1885-1900), Wister presents a romanticized image of life in Wyoming that a particular kind of Wyomingite could, and might even want to, identify with. The novel tells the story of the long simmering romance between a quintessential cowboy hero, named only as The Virginian, and a proper Eastern lady turned schoolmarm with an adventurous streak, Molly Wood. However, the tale takes long, moralizing detours with a nationalistic flavor. In chapters such as “Quality and Equality,” “The Game and the Nation” Acts 1-3, and a chapter that cunningly moralizes the events of the Johnson County War from the perspective of wealthy Cattle Barons entitled simply, “The Cottonwoods,” Wister presents an image of Wyoming as unspoiled paradise brought low by the desire of undeserving people to become “We the People of Wyoming.”⁵² For Wister, pre-statehood Wyoming was a charismatic land of limitless potential, provided that it could be peopled by the “right” kind of settlers. Although *The Virginian* represents, in many respects, the case against statehood made by wealthy cattle owners interested in profiting off the undeveloped land, the narrative has been

⁵² The Johnson County War refers to a conflict between small ranchers in southern Wyoming and wealthy cattle barons who, like Judge Henry in *The Virginian*, participated in the lynching of accused “cattle rustlers.” In many accounts of these events, the so-called “rustlers” were small ranchers whose claim to the unbranded cows in dispute were at least as reliable as the claims made by larger operations run by the barons and other absentee landlords. See Larson as well as the *Wyoming State Historical Society* webpage for more information about this period in state history.

appropriated by Wyomingites who saw their experience reflected and glorified in Wister's chivalrous working class cowboy hero. Wister relies on a stable sense of Wyoming as "cowboy country" to naturalize claims about what kinds of agents and actions are "proper" to the scene. The context in which Wister was working is decreasingly relevant to life in the state, but Wister's characterization continues to dominate narratives about the state produced throughout the twentieth century and continues to be a reference point in contemporary representations of Wyoming and Wyomingites.

Owen Wister's Wild West: Propriety and Place in *The Virginian*

For Wister, Territorial Wyoming represented a space in which nostalgic and romantic ideas about the West could be entertained in an appropriately "primitive" landscape.⁵³ Set in the late 1860's and early 1870's, *The Virginian* begins with description from the perspective of an unnamed first person narrator, who is "a stranger" in Medicine Bow, Wyoming, where the novel opens (2). Although his origins are unknown to the reader, his manner of speech and complaints of a long journey by train suggest that he has come from a city many miles distant from Wyoming Territory. Through the narrator, the reader takes in their first impression of the Virginian—described as a tall, black-haired cowboy, extremely handsome and speaking in a measured drawl—as he engages in playful bullying of a figure of local color called Uncle Hughey. The Virginian works Uncle Hughey to a fevered pitch with seemingly casual questions beginning with,

⁵³ Wister uses the term "primitive" to describe Wyoming's terrain and other elements of its social and economic development throughout his journals, and a number of characters, mostly wealthy urbanites visiting Wyoming in some capacity, use this term in *The Virginian* as well.

“Off to get married *again?*” (3). The narrator is entranced by the interaction and watches the entire spectacle unabashed. The jesting ends abruptly when Uncle Hughey storms out of the train station, and the narrator notices that “the tall man was looking seriously at me—as seriously as he looked at Uncle Hughey throughout their remarkable conversation” (7). Up until this moment, the Virginian has seemed a harmless, if slightly ornery, young man. The sudden transition to severity in both his aspect and the narrator’s response reminds the reader that the narrator is obviously out-of-place in Medicine Bow, Wyoming. This scene, a “great cattle land,” is no place for an outsider, and the cowboy immediately spots the narrator for what he is—a city boy, a tourist, a tenderfoot. Likewise, the narrator recognizes his position relative to the Virginian’s in the place. The playful tone of the recently observed conversation aside, the narrator perceives the Virginian as threatening and unfamiliar:

It was unsettling to see him staring at me, his thumb still hooked in his cartridge belt. I recalled some terrible tales about people who had traveled to the West. Was I about to be invited to dance on the platform to the music of pistol shots aimed at my feet? ‘I reckon I am looking for you, seh,’ the tall man now observed. (7)

The narrator, en route to meet a man referred to only as Judge Henry, soon realizes the this tall, black-haired cowboy is his friend’s “trustworthy man” (10).⁵⁴ As their acquaintance progresses, the narrator’s sense of himself as out of his element increases.

⁵⁴⁵⁴ Judge Henry comes to symbolize the reason and fairness of the impromptu nature of justice in Wyoming Territory, but his experience as a judge in a formal setting are never made clear in the novel. While his wealth and access are evident, and his title unquestioned, it is never clear that he is an actual agent of the law in Wyoming Territory.

Not only has the narrator's luggage been misplaced, but he soon learns that the town of Medicine Bow is over 250 miles from Judge Henry's ranch. The journey will take several days, every mile of which will be traveled by wagon across the prairie with only the stern-faced Virginian for company. Vulnerable, displaced, and uncertain of what's to come, the narrator attempts to ingratiate himself to the Virginian, hoping for an apt ally in the destitute plain. In an effort to break the ice on the way to dinner, the narrator asks the Virginian if there are lots of "oddities" like Uncle Hughey in Wyoming: "Yes, seh, there is a right smart number of oddities around. They come in on every train.' As the only person who had come in on the last train, I dropped my method of easiness" (9). Although the early days of their relationship are strained by the narrator's awkward attempts at familiarity, the Virginian's unflinching loyalty to his employer compels him to take great care in tending the narrator's needs. In turn, the narrator's earnest interest in and continual efforts to master the various skills required to hunt, fish, ride, camp, and survive in Wyoming eventually earn him the Virginian's trust and friendship. The narrator's transformation from tenderfoot to capable agent, up to the challenge of survival in the Wyoming wilds, is seen by many as a foil for Wister's own take on Wyoming and the West. Literary critic James Folsom argues in *The American Western Novel* that "Wister organizes the reader's perceptions into the meaning of the novel [is] by means of a first-person narrator modeled on himself" (107). The novel is told by the first person narrator through the first seven chapters, but the reader's experience begins to transition when the narrator's first trip to Wyoming comes to a close. The narrator announces that "[n]o land ever cast its spell upon a man's heart more than Wyoming had enchanted mine" (63). In his heart, the narrator has become a

Wyomingite, and with this change of heart comes a change of narrative perspective to a more ambiguous, semi-omniscient narration that provides a much deeper examination of the central characters thoughts and feelings.

As the romance between the Virginian and Molly Wood becomes the focus of the text, the narrator is present at certain moments, and at others gives an explicit account of the manner of his acquiring with certain bits of information about the blossoming romance. For much of the rest of the novel, however, the narration is omniscient, describing intimate scenes between Molly and the Virginian with insight into both character's thoughts. Often, these scenes of introspection demonstrate greater reflection than either character exhibits. For example, one description notes of the campsite selected by the Virginian for the first night of his honeymoon with Molly notes: "it had by no means come home to him how deep a hold on him the island had taken. He knew he liked to go there, but it was not his way to scan himself, his mind, or his feelings" (385). Although the narrator's identity is never expressly noted to have changed, it is clear that this depth of knowledge exceeds that of the character who embodies the narrator in the early chapters. The change seems a practical one in the interest of accommodating the intimacy of the narrative. Not only does this perspective allow the narrator to transcend any limitations on perspective, it also allows deeper insight into the Virginian and Molly who serve as the ideal Wyoming couple in the novel. Their love of the landscape and fitness for life in it, regardless of the outcomes of statehood and other economic turmoil stirring in the background of the tale, marks them as the state's "natural" inheritors. But before they can collect this inheritance, both characters must undergo an ordeal, appropriately faced alone in the empty landscape. To accomplish this, the narration

necessarily offers insights into their experience that are beyond the capacity of the narrator character.

The love story, like that of any good romance, is fraught; Molly's high station and presumptuous Eastern family make her reticent to give in to her dashing black-haired suitor. Despite his immediate attraction to Molly, The Virginian must prove himself to her intellectually and emotionally while simultaneously achieving economic suitability through his determination, hard work, and self-reliance. Molly Wood's family name is esteemed enough in Vermont that she feels pressure to find a "suitable match" for her social station. Her family's lack of wealth only serves to further this pressure as Molly's only recourse to financial stability for herself and family is through marriage to a wealthy suitor. But despite her deep sense of duty, Molly cannot forsake her heart and accept the proposal of a wealthy suitor she does not love. Instead, she escapes West, preferring to work as a teacher for the ranch children of Bear Creek Wyoming over marriage to a gentile but unappealing suitor. During her time in Wyoming, Molly is aggressively pursued by a number of cowboys and deflects them in turn with ease, making her a great site of salacious gossip among the cowboys and a source of speculation among the mothers of her young charges. However, when the Virginian sets about his courtship, it is with the same methodical determination that characterizes his work for the Judge and his card playing. He seeks to earn the lady's favor by borrowing and reading great works of literature and, in exchange, providing Molly a gentle horse and teaching her to ride during occasional visits to Bear Creek. After a long and determined romance, the Virginian proposes to Molly, and she, in anguish, decides she cannot accept his proposal either, resolving in despair to return home. In direct opposition to the first proposal,

Molly feels that she cannot follow her heart because her lover is neither appropriately cultured nor financially stable to garner the approval of her family. She is resolved to reject the Virginian when the novel takes a sudden turn.

Molly's anguish unfolds unbeknown to the Virginian, who is on an errand for the Judge. In the course of a detached chapter describing concurrent events from his perspective, the outstanding qualities that elevates the Virginian above the typical mean cowboy are illustrated through opposition to a poor, small-time rancher. The Judge has sent his trusty man to fetch back some borrowed horses from a greedy man called Balaam who owns a small property a few days ride from Bear Creek. Representative of the worst of the range, Balaam is introduced to the reader in a scene where he literally drags horses to water and attempts to make them drink. In attempting to negotiate a narrow, difficult pass, the man's cruelty and ignorance are made clear as he stubbornly abuses a very good horse. Upon seeing the horse, Pedro, cruelly maimed, the Virginian dismounts, beats the man senseless, and goes about getting the remaining animals reorganized. But the delay has led to the men being separated in a dense wood near dark. This scene—just following one in which Balaam tricks one of the novel's most pathetic characters out of his one true love, the horse whose injury and ultimate death leads to the conflict—leaves the reader with no question that the beating was a fine example of frontier justice. If there was any doubt to the victim's character, the chapter closes with Balaam abandoning the Virginian despite the eerie feeling of an ominous presence lurking in the woods and signs of an "Indian attack" found in the trail. This chapter serves to foreshadow a lynching scene later in the novel that nearly destroys the Virginian's engagement to Molly, but the Virginian's righteousness in the act is hard to deny in the beating of Balaam where his

ambivalence about the lynching is palpable. In these scenes, the narrative suggests that an important part of being a good cowboy is distinguishing honorable and dishonorable violence.

Back at the ranch, with her cabin packed and her rejection letter already in the post to the Virginian, Molly sets out for a final ride. Several miles from the ranch where she lodges, Molly discovers her cowpuncher near death. Having been abandoned by Baalam, the Virginian is attacked by “savage Indians” and barely escapes with his life thanks to the wit and strength of his horse, Monty. With astonishing bravery and strength, Molly helps the man ride to safety and nurses him back to health in her own cabin. Despite the fact that he has already gotten her rejection letter, their romance is rekindled during the weeks of his recovery. Their wedding and honeymoon camping in the Wyoming mountains are luxuriously described in the novel’s final chapter, while Wister’s closing pages meditate briefly on the closing of the range, the coming of the train, and the “civilizing” of Wyoming that would follow. Although Wyoming was never the nostalgic cattle kingdom of Wister’s fantasy, the narrative’s impact on the ways Wyoming would be represented in both local and national mythology would be long felt.

There’s Cowboys and then there’s *Cowboys*: Negotiating Agency in *The Virginian*

When the narrator of Owen Wister’s *The Virginian* descends from the train into the dusty streets of Medicine Bow, Wyoming, he reports that, much to his dismay, the town has very little in the way of modern convenience and most remarkably appears to

have no hotel.⁵⁵ Only a few hundred words into the novel, Wister's narrator reports that, from where he stands, the romantic images of Wyoming vistas that drew him westward are nowhere to be found: "I could not see the antelope shining among the sagebrush or the great sunset light of Wyoming.... I was muttering half-aloud, 'What a forsaken hole this is!'" (3). In these short lines, Wister's narrator sums up the dueling images of the state he will present throughout the novel: on the one hand, Wyoming is peaceful, scenic, and fascinating in its strangeness. On the other hand, it is hostile, dangerous, and filthy. This duality is key to understanding the drama Wister enacts: as a vacant space in which wealthy Eastern gentlemen can repair and recuperate from the rigors of modern life, Wyoming is an unspoiled paradise. However, as an outpost of the frontier whose meager towns were slowly filling with hopeful yet destitute wagon loads of pioneers, Wyoming's idyllic vacancy was threatened by the import of chaotic squalor from impoverished immigrant neighborhoods in the very cities Wister and his ilk hoped to escape. This dichotomy is dramatized in the novel and provides a lens on the political and social concerns motivating Wister in his portrayal. Liza Nicholas asserts that, on the one hand, Wister "gloried in the wildness of Wyoming's open spaces, but Wister openly disapproved of any attempts by westerners to 'civilize' either themselves or their environment. He despised the egalitarian attitude exhibited by Wyomingites" (5). In contrast to Hebard, who celebrates the pioneers as heroes, Wister describes the unwashed masses crawling across the plains in their miserable wagons as a blight on the landscape. The scenery of Wyoming, as represented by Wister, becomes a "fitting container" for the agents who inhabit the territory and the motivations that bring them West. On the one

⁵⁵The Virginian Motel was constructed in Medicine Bow between 1901 and 1911 and was named after the novel that depicted the town in somewhat less than charitable terms. It remains open today as one of the tiny boom town's few attractions.

hand, the place has potential to be a fitting container for Wister and his peers to rest and relax in the healing open air. Patricia Nelson Limerick describes a broadly shared understandings of the West as restorative “[f]or much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the minds of many Americans, the West held the power to bestow or restore health” (1). Wister suggests the curative properties of “western air and sunshine” as well as western labors on his narrator, who gradually evolves from a helpless, child-like charge to a competent rider, capable of crossing long distances without chaperone. However, the curative properties of Wyoming’s clean air and sunshine cannot be maintained in the presence of unwashed cowboys and the folks living in the mean little towns like Medicine Bow. Indeed, the more the scene is filled with such agents of change, the more the scene is likely to be made in their image. Burke’s has asserted that actions require scenes, and scenes shape not only actions but also the actors who undertake them: “If an agent, in keeping with his nature as an agent (scene-agent ratio), he may change the nature of the scene accordingly (scene-act ratio) and thereby establish a state of unity between himself and his world” (19). With Wyoming recently cleared of Native Americans, the scene was effectively set for Wister’s idealized western drama to play out. However, the steady, if slow, invasion of pioneers threatened to make Wyoming in their own image as they claimed small pieces of the open range for homesteads.

Wister’s visits to Wyoming began in 1885 during the height of the cattle baron era when large operations owned by an extremely wealthy few, often members of the European aristocracy, dominated the open range. However, an extremely harsh winter in 1886-87 caused huge losses, and this combined with the 1894 Carey Land Act encouraging settlement created the conditions for conflict between large landowners and

new settlers.⁵⁶ Wyoming author and literary critic John Nesbitt notes on the Wyoming State Historical Society website that “Wister’s 1885 host, Frank Wolcott, led the cattlemen on their 1892 invasion of Johnson County to kill rustlers and small ranchmen in what came to be called the Johnson County War.” By contrast, the Virginian comes West as a laborer on the cattle drives that brought many cowboys along with the “little doggies” home to Wyoming.⁵⁷

Although the cowboy made a convenient symbol, the actual presence of cowboys who hoped to advance beyond the position of part-time laborer was an anathema to Wister. The advance of permanent settlements would break up the open land and require a realignment of practices that would be costly to operations like those of Frank Wolcott and others with whom Wister appears to sympathize. For Wister and others like him, their “ideal Wyoming [was] conveniently paused right after the Indians had been subdued and before the settlers and their civilizing agenda invaded their pure and sanctified space” (Nicholas 5). Wister’s tale acknowledges that the frontier has already closed, and, in some respects, *The Virginian* is more elegy than vision. If all cowboys could have been like The Virginian—humble and loyal, a man who knows his place and follows the rules set out for his advancement—perhaps Wyoming could have maintained forever locked in a backward gaze.

When *The Virginian* was published in 1902, Wyoming’s population still hovered around 92,000 (DeBoer 53). Despite the successful acquisition of statehood, increasing

⁵⁶ For more on this period, see T.A. Larson’s *History of Wyoming*. Patricia Nelson Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest* offers a broader discussion of Western history that accounts for the violence and racism that characterized this period in the region and is a useful supplement to Larson.

⁵⁷ Motherless calves on cattle drives were known as “little doggies.” The well-know cowboy ballad “Get Along Little Doggies” includes a refrain that goes, “Whoopie Ti Yi Yo ,get along little doggies, you know that Wyoming will be your new home.” This song refers to the cattle drives that brought calves north in spring to fatten on Wyoming’s open grass ranges en route to processing plants in the northwest, most notably Chicago.

the population remained a key political and social concern. However, the configuration of the appeals to would-be settlers was a source of some contention, with different interests anchored to different visions for the future of the state. The *Park County Enterprise* evoke a sense of who the right sort of people to “fill up” Wyoming’s void spaces that is in direct opposition to Wister when they remark that: “there are thousands of worthy families in the large cities, many of them thrifty foreigners, who little realize the opportunities that await them in this great commonwealth” (qtd. Nicholas 39). However, Wister and others who prized the open ranges as an escape from the troubles and stress of Eastern cities hoped, to the contrary, that Wyoming would never fill up, and, if it had to, would be peopled with obedient and loyal company men like the Virginian and wealthy, sportsmen like himself. Through the figure of The Virginian, Wister attempts to mollify the internal conflict of the cattle barons who, on the one hand, relied on such labor to maintain their dominance over the West’s political structure and fortunes being made on free grazing land, and, on the other hand, resented the presence of such undesirables in their playground. In *Becoming Western*, Liza Nicholas describes the contradictory experience of many of the “Lords of the Plains” stating:

Although such barons professed a love of the rugged Wyoming life, they denied themselves little while roughing it in the primitive West. They called the cowboys “cow servants” and spent the off-season in the Boston brownstones or the south of France. They were seasonal westerners, for the most part, who wanted to observe and experience the West’s ruggedness without having to endure its hardships or be defined by the region’s lack of refinement. (10-11)

According to Wister's own journals, his hopes for Wyoming were tied to his understanding of the place as one designed for a particular sort of agent: "Every man, woman, and cowboy I see comes from the East—and generally from New England, thank goodness. If that's the stock that is going to fill these big fields with people, our first hundred years will grow to be only the mythological beginnings in the time to come" (Kemble Wister 33). *The Virginian* depicts the suspended Wyoming Wister imagines: both a paradise proper to the recreational and economic needs of the elite Eastern class and a landscape whose primitiveness is a danger to the "refinement" of those who live too long, too close to the land. Not only do unfit agents of the Wyoming narrative Wister attempts to create fail to appreciate its beauty, they denigrate it by their very presence in the place, particularly in numbers sufficient to alter the experience and vision of those Wister considers more appropriate agents.

In *The Virginian*, the various sorts of cowboys Wister describes serve to illustrate his perspective on who belongs in Wyoming and who deserves to leave the state or end up hanging by the neck from a cottonwood tree. The narrator is repeatedly struck by the Virginian's wit and manners, and equally surprised to note the utter lack of these traits in the other cowboys they encounter. Characters like Shorty and Trampas serve as the narrative's "black hats;" they are cowboys who sneak and thieve between stints working for a respectable boss.⁵⁸ They represent a challenge to Wister's dichotomized Wyoming, a place where the open plains are interrupted only by picturesque ranch estates peopled by obedient "cattle servants" and reclining barons. As the narrator and Virginian head away from Medicine Bow at the beginning of the novel, the narrator gets his first glimpse

⁵⁸ In Western novels and films, the villains are often identified by their black cowboy hats and the heroes by their white cowboy hats.

of the Wyoming of his imaginary: “We passed the boundary line of Medicine Bow, thick heaps of tin cans and mounds of bottles cast out of the saloons. In a moment we were in the clean plains, with the prairie dogs and the pale herds of antelope. The still air bathed us, pure as water and strong as wine. Sunlight flooded the world” (Wister 38). This description gives a sense of the mutuality of the shaping relationship engaged between scenes and agents: on the one hand, the scene of Wyoming impacts agents within it through its curative nature as well as the challenges presented by the landscape and the opportunity to prove oneself by overcoming them. On the other hand, the “heaps of tin cans and mounds of bottles” also suggest that the landscape is manipulated by the unfit agents within it as well. The trash pile on the prairie at the outskirts of town is more than mere careless littering; rather, the rough cowboys the narrator observed in the saloon the previous evening are to blame for the litter; like the trash, these rough men are a blight on an otherwise pristine landscape. In kind with the town itself, a “forsaken hole,” the men who would carelessly cast bottles asunder are a stain on Wyoming and unfit to be Wyomingites.

While the early sections of the novel describe the dichotomy between good and bad cowboys and take pains to illustrate the refined morals and humanity of the Virginian, the later sections demonstrate how these values are applied when the lack of infrastructure and political order lead to vigilantism. Near the end of the novel, the narrator and the Virginian prepare to rendezvous for a hunting trip. Arriving at the appointed location two days early, the narrator interrupts the Virginian acting on behalf of Judge Henry and lynching a group of accused cattle thieves. One of the thieves, Steve, was introduced as a friend of the Virginian in the novel’s opening scene’s in Medicine

Bow. Despite his erstwhile friendship with Steve, the Virginian carries out the “sentence,” though he is clearly anguished by the act. In both his willingness to apply the Judge’s justice and his distress at taking men’s lives, the Virginian is a model Wyoming cowboy. As they prepare to leave the site of the lynching for their hunting trip, the Virginian mulls the events leading up to the hanging with the narrator:

You have a friend, and his ways are your ways. You travel together, you spree together, and you suit each other down to the ground. Then one day you find him putting his iron on another man’s calf.⁵⁹ You tell him fair and square that those ways have never been your ways and ain’t going to be your ways. Well, that does not change him any, for it seems he’s disturbed over getting rich quick and being a big man in the Territory. And the years go on, until you are the foreman of Judge Henry’s ranch and he—is dangling back in them cottonwoods. What can he claim? Who made the choice? (Wister 316).

The Virginian’s retelling of events reduces the complexity of the situation into a simplistic binary—Steve is a thief, and Judge Henry the victim. The man’s alleged crime leaves him dangling serenely in a stand of cottonwoods, and the strangely placid scene suggests all is right with the world.

⁵⁹ The practice of rounding up unbranded calves running on the open range and dividing them among the owners of cattle in the area was managed by the Wyoming Stock Growers Association from the late 1860s. The practice of rounding up such calves in advance of the WSGA roundup to kick start a small operation of one’s own was seen as a way for many cowboys to advance economically at little costs to the owners of large operations. Owners of legitimate small operations were often accused unfairly of rustling in this fashion, and disagreements about managing the practice ultimately turned violent and eventually gave way to the Johnson County War. Several smaller ranch owners were murdered by squads hired by the barons under the auspice of vigilante justice against “rustlers,” or cattle thieves, though none of the men received trial and no proof was offered of their guilt.

In addition to his novel's rendering of class conflict in Wyoming Territory, Wister's journals from October 1889 further suggest his sympathy with the perspective of wealthy "part-time Westerners:" "Sat yesterday in smoking car with one of the gentlemen indicted for lynching the man and the woman. He seemed a good solid citizen, and I hope he'll get off" (91). For Wister, good citizens are wealthy citizens with the right to protect their interests by any means necessary. The *Virginian's* ultimate acceptance of the rightness of the lynching supports the logic by which those who are not proper to the space can and should be violently expunged. Even to a cowboy, even to a friend, the justice that supports killing a man for branding a cow of disputed ownership is both implicit and crystal clear. The *Virginian's* internal conflict is not over the reasonableness of the act; rather, it is a symbol of his refinement and compassion despite his close contact with Wyoming and the rough ways of labor in the landscape. In the end, his guilt is absolved by the eerie appearance of a note from Steve acknowledging his own guilt from beyond the grave and assenting to his fate as justice served. Like his ability to read works of literary merit or win the affections of a proper lady, the *Virginian's* anguish at inflicting human suffering is yet another bit of evidence suggesting the he is the exception, not the rule, when it comes to cowboys.

Men will be Men and Ladies will Ride Side-Saddle: The Rules in Cattle Country

Wister's Wyoming was a container fit for the upper-class Anglo man, and anything less was a blot on his pristine prairie paradise. Nicholas notes that "Wister derided much of the settlers' determined existence that he encountered in Wyoming," and, quoting from Wister's letters notes his disgust with "wom[e]n riding straddle" as

well as “women who swore and went without stockings” (5-7). According to Wister’s letters, like “Poles,” “Indians,” and cattle rustlers, women were not fit agents in cattle country (qtd Nicholas 5-7). Women who lived full time in Wyoming were particularly at constant risk of becoming the kind of women that Wister so despised, so maintaining her identity as a proper Eastern lady in the wilds of Wyoming is the task set before the story’s heroine, Molly Wood. In the novel, proper women arrive in Wyoming as wives; the opening scene in which the Virginian teases Uncle Hughey introduces this idea as the title character lists at length the various women trucked to Medicine Bow as the old man’s betrothed. Besides Molly Wood, the only women who appear in the narrative are the wives of ranch owners and shopkeepers. The implication that women are a kind of sexual property in the state is made clear in the many advances upon Molly as well as a vignette describing the Virginian’s sexual conquest of young woman who is the pretty wife of a merchant in Medicine Bow.

By contrast to the peril and presumed availability of unattended women and the wives of lower class men, the proper wives of wealthy landowners represent the force of civilization in the West of the novel. Their tidy homes are often set in opposition to the wild landscape: “The wives of Bear Creek were few as yet. Homes were scattered here and there. The schoolhouse was only a speck in a vast world of elk and bear and uncertain Indians” (73). The women, and the children they forthrightly bear for their husbands, represent the slow spread of civilization in the country. With them come not only children and schoolhouses, but also permanent settlements in place of open range. The idea that Molly Wood, a virginal well-born lady, could arrive safely in a place like Bear Creek is the first sign that the empty wilds of Wister’s ideal Wyoming is receding

even as the tale unfolds. But Wister's descriptions of upper-class ranch wives and the lovely homes and families they martial contrast starkly with the descriptions of working class women in the towns. The force of their character exerts itself on the landscape to "civilize" it, like the exemplary Judge Henry's wife, who, we are told exerted her "influence [in] and about the house at once. Shade trees were planted, flowers were attempted, and to the chickens was added a much more troublesome turkey" (51). The arrival of women and children marks an inexorable closing of the frontier for Wister, who waxes nostalgic in the voice of the Virginian about the West of his and the narrator's imagination, already fading like a prairie sunset: "[f]olks come easy and they go easy. In settled places, like back in the States, even a poor man mostly has a home. So if you want him, you can find him. But out here on the sagebrush, a man's home is apt to be his saddle blanket" (39). Set in contrast to "the States," Wyoming here is a space apart. The spread of civilization through the vacant space is inevitable, Wister seems to concede, so the novel takes up the task of demonstrating a new ideal made possible by the union of Molly and the Virginian and the potential they represent for the development of Wyoming in the era of statehood.

Wister's Virginian may be a model man, but it is neither his charms nor his success that win over Molly Wood. The Virginian's masculinity is constructed as hindrance to the relationship, as one more bit of evidence that he is below Molly's station. Molly does not recognize herself as part of the community of Wyoming. She has been on something of a "western sojourner." Similar to Wister's routine visits to the state, Molly is *in* the state but loathes the idea of potentially being seen as *of* the place. She lives in a "cozy log cabin" decorated with the "trophies of the frontier," but she is

ostensibly there educating “Wyoming’s youth” in the skills of civilization: reading, writing, and sums. Her high stature is proved when the Virginian, universally agreed by the novel’s female characters to be the best man in the state, decides to pursue her. For Molly, however, the best of the savages is still not good enough; though she loves him, their union would be represent a dramatic lowering of her status. However, the incursion of an even greater Other—the violent natives who, the story suggests, are not sufficiently contained on reservation lands—proves to Molly that, like the Virginian, she can exist in the state while somehow managing to maintain her refinement of character and manners. Not only are she and the Virginian rendered equal in their opposition to the “Indian Other,” but Molly, after being forced to engage in activities unbecoming of a woman of her station in order to save her lover, quickly returns to her careful presentation of pampered eastern femininity. As he recovers in her cabin, Molly is precise in avoiding the appearance of immodesty and swoons prettily at the Virginian’s sweet words. Molly Wood puts necessity over gentility in a moment of crisis just as the Virginian does when he follows through with the lynching of Steve despite his distaste for the action. And, just like the Virginian, she reverts immediately to type at the close of the action.

In order to complete her union with the Virginian, Molly must find a way to transition into life in the West. However, she must do this without sacrificing the cultural and social morays that Wister so carefully demonstrates make her superior to ladies of Wyoming stock. The union of Molly with the Virginian represents the possibilities for the West as a space in which upper-class white settlers can prove their “natural” superiority of character through dominance of the landscape. Nicholas notes that Wister and his contemporary, painter Frederick Remington, were particularly interested in Wyoming

and the possibilities offered by the landscape: “Wyoming... represented for both men an uncorrupted space in which they could imagine and create the sort of cultural icon needed to thwart the power of the problematic, ‘un-American’ [urban] working classes and their bothersome politics, especially populism” (4). If Wyoming must be filled with people, at least they ought to be the “right kind” of people to maintain the political and social arrangement Wister and Remington benefited from. For Molly to become a Wyomingite but stay a lady requires her to find a way to exert her independence and individualism without being sullied by the state’s crudeness.

Rescuing her lover allows Molly Wood to prove herself up to the tasks of life in this transformational scene yet still lady-like enough to maintain her dignity and station. Even her method of rescue is couched in her status as she commands the delirious man to turn his horse toward safety with a rebuke of poor manners: “[a] gentleman does not invite a lady to go out riding and then leave her” (266). Later, as he recovers in her cabin, the Virginian explicitly addresses the conundrum of maintaining “lady-like” manners in the hostile environs of “Wyoming country:” “[o]nce, I thought love must surely be enough.... And I thought if I could make you love me, you could learn me to be less—to be more your kind . . . [but] [t]his is no country for a lady” (279). Molly proves him wrong when she saves him without so much as soiling her skirts. Her actions prove her a deserving recipient of the adornments of Wyoming life that she has so recently packed away in her cabin. As the Virginian recovers in her bed, Molly Wood unpacks her things, decorating her cabin afresh with the ornamentations of the prairie. Her place in the novel, the ideal wife of the perfect cowboy, is sealed through this demonstration that, like the Virginian, Molly is a *purifying* influence on Wyoming.

The implied Indian attack, made evident by the Virginian's grievous injuries and fevered mutterings, is the only moment in the narrative that allows evidence of Native Americans as more than an ominous, unseen presence. In her union with the Virginian, Molly figuratively participates in the final erasure of the "Indians" by the encroaching civilizing influence of women and children.⁶⁰ The accomplishment of the Virginian's driving motivation throughout the novel, asserted again and again when he tells Molly "I will make you love me," is accomplished through a change in agency signified by their marriage. Before the wedding can take place, Molly and the Virginian must reconcile their differences in values crystalized in the lynching. The circumstances of the hanging leave the audience with the sense that Judge Henry, who despite his nomenclature does not appear to be an acting judge in the Territory of Wyoming in the narrative, has acted as judge, jury, and executioner in the case, and has appointed his trusty man as headsman. This scene is pivotal in demonstrating the Virginian's loyalty to his employer; unlike Molly Wood who must demonstrate her independence to earn her place as a Wyomingite, the Virginian must earn his place through service.

Unlike the men he is assigned to hang, the Virginian is the sort of cowboy who plays by the rules and, in so doing, earns his own way to prosperity. Perhaps paradoxically, his independence relies on his sense of propriety of place both spatially and in class terms. Despite the necessary and righteous nature of the duty, the residents of Bear Creek conspire to keep the lynching a secret from Molly, concerned that her eastern sensibilities will prevent her from understanding the necessity for this particular form of western justice. She learns of the events interrupting her young charges at play in the

⁶⁰ According to DeBoer, there were 9118 people in Wyoming in 1870, only 17% of whom were women over the age of 10. Ten years later, there were over twice this number and the male to female ratio was just over 2:1.

schoolyard. As she “broke up this game [with] general protest from Wyoming’s young voice,” one youngster reports of the context for their game. Revealing the conspiracy to keep her ignorant of her lover’s dark deeds, another boy yells “[y]ou promised your mother you’d not tell” (338). The community’s decision to keep this secret from Molly illustrates their belief that the young woman must be protected from the roughness of life in Wyoming. Once she has learned of it, Molly must accept the “Cattle Country” logic that recognizes such vigilantism as justice, or she must forsake her lover and return home to Bennington, Vermont. Judge Henry himself offers the moralizing lesson that brings Molly around to the logic that undergirds the Virginian’s vigilantism: “in Wyoming, the law has been letting our cattle thieves go for two years. We are in a very bad way, and we are trying to make that way a little better until civilization can reach us” (365). The People must protect the state from the blight of crime until the acquisition of statehood brings with it the political and social structure necessary to maintaining a “civilized” lifestyle. Despite her horror at the idea that her lover would kill a man who was not threatening his life, Molly is helpless to refute the judge’s logic. Reluctantly, she comes to accept the necessity of the act and share in the community’s recognition of the Virginian as heroic and honorable.

In the end, the Virginian is taken on as Judge Henry’s partner and settles, for the first time, in his own house with his pretty new wife. Although the couple sets about the transformation of the landscape required to make a home for themselves and their children soon to come, it is not without some mournful sadness on the part of the Virginian. The advancement of civilization, defined as domesticity and institutional stability in the novel, progresses figuratively with the transition of *the* Wyoming cowboy

into the settled and domestic lifestyle that statehood enables. The Virginian foreshadows the ending of the frontier, accomplished through the acquisition of statehood, as he describes the economic and social changes on the horizon: “‘The natural pasture is getting eaten off,’ he explained. ‘We’ll soon have big pastures fenced, and hay and shelter for the winter. What we’ll spend in improvements, we’ll save in wages. I am well fixed for the new conditions’” (394). In a half sentence that shows the cowboy as merely a column on a ledger sheet, the Virginian prophesies the end of the way of life that forged his own character. Not only is he prescient in foreseeing the shape of things to come, his is also prudent in having ensured that he is “well fixed” for the future. And with the whiff of happily-ever-after of children to come and cozy old age glossed, Wister closes the novel with a sleepy gesture toward the death of the cowboy and the end of the frontier.

From Scene to Purpose: Political Context and Imagining a Community

One is hard-pressed to avoid the dominant narratives about the states with which the individual identifies, particularly if the individual resides in the state.⁶¹ The simultaneous recognition of these narratives combined with the experiential knowledge of their incompleteness can lead to complex reactions: on the one hand, the authorized narrative presents a familiar image of “home;” on the other, the visceral rejection of the representation due to its haunting incompleteness. Wald describes this element of the US American experience through the lens of Freud’s description of the *unheimlich* (loosely,

⁶¹ Because residence and national citizenship are the sole requirements of state citizenship, living in a particular state is the primary way in which the relationship between the state and the individual is mediated. However, if one is born in a particular state, this too forms an important node of identification. Witness, for example, the racialized drama around Barack Obama’s birth enabled by the “exotic” locale Hawaii represents in the US American imaginary. The answer to the question “where are you from” is often illustrative of the complex ways in which different individuals forge relationships with particular states as well as other kinds of identities.

in English, the “uncanny”), “the uncanny sends us home to the discovery that ‘home’ is not what or where we think it is and that we, by extension, are not who or what we think we are” (7). The experience of the uncanny, as described by Freud, is an eerie, unsettling eruption that causes the distinction between familiar and unfamiliar to temporarily collapse. One of the definitions that Freud meditates on is the distinction between what is hidden and what is kept in the open: “Uncanny is what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open” (132). The uncanny reveals the binary between home and not-home, secret knowledge and shared knowledge, and shatters it: “*Heimlich* thus becomes increasingly ambivalent, until it finally merges with its antonym *unheimlich*. The uncanny . . . is in some way a species of the familiar” (134). Because they are familiar, shared knowledge, narrative engagements with the State Symbolic are like the *heimlich*; incomplete, but familiar in their repetitive insistence. However, the presence of suppressed voices and histories, the secrets that remain hidden behind the familiar story haunt these representations.

The literary Wyomingite would certainly have had cause to encounter Wister and his Virginian, but the impact of the novel in helping to construct the *ethos* of the West embodied in a particularly Wyomingite way of living and behaving is much more pervasive. A 1956 review of the novel by Elizabeth Coatsworth notes that “*The Virginian* sold 300,000 copies in the first five months, reached the million mark by 1920, and is still popular today” (235). In *The Virginian*, the West and the western were elevated to the status of high art. Writing for *The Wyoming Historical Society* website, John Nesbitt notes:

[Wister] wrote about a subject matter that up to that time had been the fodder of dime novels, but he approached it with a literary prose style and moral seriousness. He believed in the West, especially Wyoming, as a place where individuals could find rejuvenation, escape the confines of the East and realize their potential. Although Wister saw this ideal as fading, and portrayed it in elegiac and nostalgic terms, it is an ideal that many Wyoming people still believe in and that the rest of the world often sees as inherent in the state.

The respect granted the novel by the literary community not only generated a significant readership, it also increased the desire of Wyomingites to identify with the representation. In *The Virginian*, Wyoming was the scene for a serious story about the trajectory of the nation. Wister's novel participates in the imagination of Wyoming as a distinct place that is home to an insular community in which those who belong and those who do not can be clearly identified and demarcated. What emerges from Wister's alternately loving and scornful characterizations is a stark dichotomy between those with agency in this landscape and those without. The collection *Reading The Virginian in the New West* investigates the many experiences of disjunction for those reading the narrative from a perspective that acknowledges the violent excision of Native Americans that rendered the space vacant both literally and narratively before Wister's arrival. Similarly, the polarized representation of Wyoming's women as either uncouth squatters or highborn ladies strikes a particularly dissonant note with the state's proclaimed status as "the Equality State." However, revisions of this history are often met with equal reservation; although the image of the Cowboy State is a pernicious one, it is as familiar as old boots, and many

Wyomingites are loath to see this history “tainted” by the “revisionism” of literary works that break with the tradition established in *The Virginian* and histories of the “New West” that challenge narratives of heroic survival on a hostile and vacant plain.

The cowboy’s role in Wyoming’s representational identity is Janus-faced: on the one hand, he is a familiar touchstone and revered mythical figure. On the other hand, the cowboy’s totemic status makes it difficult to project an image of Wyoming as fully part of the modern world. This version of statist identity is not limited to audiences in the United States but has also become an iconic symbol of US Americana to foreign audiences as well. In *The American West: The Invention of a Myth*, David Hamilton Murdoch asserts that the cowboy myth as propagated in Western novels and films has international currency. He argues that “the conquest of the West is deemed to have special—indeed, crucial—significance . . . as a national epic[,] it was held to have enshrined an experience whose effects . . . made Americans different from other people” (viii). Perhaps no character is more essentially American than the cowboy,⁶² so the continued promotion of Wyoming as “the cowboy state” taps into a long standing association with American nationalism writ large.⁶³ Part-and-parcel of maintaining this myth is the denial of the complex processes that gave rise to the region; the political and economic influences of wealthy corporate interests, the dismissive murder and displacement of Native Americans and other undesirable, and the impacts of land management choices on the landscape itself. The seductive ubiquity of the cowboy myth proves a powerful cover for these issues; promoting the duplicitous image of the cowboy

⁶² This image maintained despite the fact the first cowboys lives and worked in Latin America. Murdoch himself notes that the first cowboys in the United States learned the trade from Mexican *vaqueros*.

⁶³ Both George W. Bush and Regan appealed to cowboy images when running for president, despite dubious claims to the cowboy experience. Their selection of this image suggests the power of appeals to cowboy lifestyles and values in political rhetoric.

allows an alternative in which the West is still a paradise and the westerner an ideal American.

For people outside the West, and indeed outside of the United States, the “wild West” of the cowboy stories is a familiar fantasy that is easy to imagine tucked away in the plains and mountains of Wyoming. Harder to imagine are the realities these fantasies cover over, and harder still to understand is the desire of people most palpably affected by the inadequacy of the myth to release it and accept a more viable model of development. For people in Wyoming, the desire of urbanites to “play cowboy” on once productive lands is part of a complex relationship to the uncanny figure of the cowboy. The cowboy might be uncanny, but at least he presents an image that offers an ideal with familiar opportunities and the hope that someday the cattle kingdom could return, or, at least, a new compellingly romantic statist identity can arise to replace it.

CHAPTER FOUR: TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY STATISM: REPRESENTATION
AND REVISION

When Western historians yielded to a preoccupation with the frontier and its supposed end, past and present fell apart, divided by the watershed of 1890. But Western reality followed other patterns.

--Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first line and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration, its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

--Michel Foucault, *Archeology of Knowledge*

In a letter dated December 24, 1910, Owen Wister responded to Grace Raymond Hebard's request that he review an unnamed manuscript for her.⁶⁴ In his letter, Wister notes that:

I shall be glad to read [the manuscript], but with the very clear understanding that I do not accept the position of criticizing it. After all, I have been at most a constant visitor to Wyoming during the last twenty-five years, but I have not been a citizen of the State and while I may have become sufficiently acquainted with the life to write about it without too many mistakes, it is really not safe for you to trust me as a guide.

(American Heritage Center, Acc #400008, Box 47 Folder 27)

Despite reservations about his own expertise, Wister has been and remains an icon of Wyoming symbolism and narrative through the resonance of *The Virginian*.⁶⁵ Hebard's

⁶⁴ Hebard's letter to Wister is not contained in the collection, and Wister never mentions the title of the manuscript. However, the dates suggest that the manuscript was probably for her book *The Pathbreakers*, first published in 1912.

⁶⁵ This reverence is highlighted at the institutional level: The archival space where Hebard's collected material and the rest of the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center archival collections are made available to patrons is called the "Owen Wister Reading Room." In it, Wister's desk reposes

request is acknowledgement of the power of *The Virginian*'s representation of the state and Wister's role in shaping this identification, and her own work engages the vivid image of the state that Wister drew for a national audience as she writes the story of Wyoming for Wyomingites. The representations of the statist identity in *The Virginian* and Hebard's body of work have fundamentally shaped Wyoming's dominant narrative, symbolism and *ethos*. However, in the twenty-first century, these works participate in a dynamic conversation about the symbolic sufficiency of these tropes to contemporary Wyomingites.

Within twenty years of her death, Hebard's work was being qualified like this "Bison Books Introduction" to a 1996 edition of *Washakie*, "Hebard's partisanship toward Washakie and her antipathy to Washakie's ostensible enemies...led her to make some interpretations that have been corrected in recent years either by a more balanced approach or more careful research." (xi) In a similar vein, the introduction to a collection entitled *Reading the Virginian in the New West* evokes the paradoxical effect of Wister's novel: "Yet while Wister closed his frontier novel looking forward to a New West, *The Virginian* ironically initiated a backward looking tradition, the formula western, as repeating—and perhaps as deadly—as the Winchester rifle" (xi). These critical conversations reveal the depth of the impact of the frontier narrative on cultural representations of Wyoming even as they attempt de-center those narratives. Whether in the form of *reaffirmation*, *purification*, or *subversion*, narrative representations of Wyoming's statist community inherently grapple with the images of the statist

solemnly in quiet a corner, adorned with an image of the writer sporting a rugged looking beard and a note suggesting that this was the very desk where the pages of *The Virginian* were produced

community engrained in the collective conscious through the narratives forwarded by narrative titans of the state's "founding moment."

This chapter examines two relatively recent symbolic representations of Wyoming to demonstrate that, despite wide recognition that the narratives featuring the vacant Wyoming landscape peopled with the "knights of the range" and their herds are outdated at best and deeply flawed at worst, they continue to maintain their dominance in Wyoming's State Symbolic. Whether in works attempting to challenge and subvert this narrative or representations reaffirming it, articulations of Wyoming's statist identity are forced to address the image of the cowboy and the hostile landscape that is his natural place. Priscilla Wald remarks that nationalism "emerges in the dynamic tension between reading and writing—or expressing and creating—an identity" (119). Statist identities are a "contingency," as Gellner reminds us of nationalisms, and, as such, they require maintenance. The "dynamic tension" Wald identifies is a result of rhetorical actions that continually shape identifications over time. However, because statist narratives also participate in the representation of US nationalism, the exigencies shaping these articulations are complicated when they need to appeal to a broad national audience as well as an insular state audience. In attempting to decenter a statist narrative, a critic is faced not only with the challenge of convincing the statist community of the need for a change; she must also address the complex relationship between articulations of statist identity and the integration of these narratives into the fabric of US nationalism.

“I Just Can’t Quit You:” Ambivalence and the “New” West(ern)

Despite his continued ubiquity in Wyoming, the cowboy’s iconic dominance has been a matter of debate for over thirty years. In a 1979 address to the Wyoming State Historical Society, historian Peter Iverson delivered a talk entitled: “Wyoming: Still the Cowboy State?” In it, Iverson muses that “times have changed” and perhaps it is time for Wyoming’s iconography to catch-up: “Ironies abound. As someone recently suggested, the ranchers are something like the Indians now: fighting a society that seems to know increasingly less about them, fighting a culture that feels as though their land can be put to some higher, better use... . The Indians did not vanish. They changed” (6). Despite wide acknowledgment of long decline of ranching, the cowboy remains an emotionally poignant cultural symbol in and of the state. However, there is increasing pressure on the statist narrative to “change,” as Iverson suggests the “Indians” did in the face of shifting material circumstances. In her account of two Wyoming born cowboys working the ranges in the socio-economic conditions of Wyoming in the late 1960s to early 1980s, Annie Proulx offered a revised version of the cowboy narrative for a modern audience. First serialized in *The New Yorker* and later anthologized in the collection *Close Range: Wyoming Stories*, the short story “Brokeback Mountain” received modest acclaim in the literary community. However, the 2005 film adaptation of the story brought much more attention to the narrative both within Wyoming and throughout the United States. Proulx’s account challenges many aspects of the romanticized image of the cowboy; she demonstrates the economic challenges routinely faced by “hired men” on ranches and other agricultural workers. Proulx also creates a dynamic image of the challenges to personal and family life that seasonal, migratory work that pays too little and offers

neither job security nor employment brings with it. However, much of her careful research and thoughtful critique went unnoticed as a result of the story's most formidable challenge to Wyoming's cowboy iconography: in "Brokeback Mountain," the cowboys are lovers, and their sojourns in the mountains are about pleasure as much as work as they share their love of Wyoming and one another on the open range. Despite all this, though, the story offers a landscape entirely void of Native Americans and the women in the story in no way share in the larger experience of liberation being experienced in other parts of the United States during the 1960s and 70s. The cowboys might be subversive, but the Wyoming they live in remains the same, static picture summed up by a mute and faceless cowboy astride a horse frozen forever in the arch of a bucking leap.

In her revision of the cowboy narrative, Proulx highlights many of the paradoxes of the cowboy as a symbol for Wyoming and life in the western United States writ large. Describing the cowboy as the "archetypal American Hero," David Murdoch identifies several attributes often associated with cowboys and frontier folk, who are understood to be "hardy, optimistic, egalitarian, impatient of intrusive authority...[demonstrating such] values [as] individualism, self-reliance, and democratic integrity" (5). The cowboys in this story, while less idealized than the Virginian, retain many of these attributes. Both men work hard to support their families, and certainly express impatience at the "intrusive authority" of their bosses, spouses, and parents. Their optimism is somewhat tinted by the lens of perpetual poverty, but they otherwise seem like decent guys with whom the audience should be able to identify. While this narrative subverts representations of sexuality, its depiction of gender norms and the relationship between economic achievement and sexual/social desirability maintains continuity with the

dominant narrative offered in *The Virginian* and other literary texts that followed its model. Consistent with the other stories in the collection, “Brokeback Mountain” presents an image of Wyoming as cowboy country in tones very familiar to any reader of western literature, and, in so doing, implicitly supports the continued symbolic exclusion that this narrative establishes. Proulx’s cowboys might challenge gendered norms, but they are painted in the same hues as Shorty and the tall Virginian with the jet black hair.

The first page of *Close Range* features one of several superb watercolor images that illustrate the book, a cowboy in fringed chaps leading a horse by the bridle across a plain awash in sunset gold. From the set of his hat to the particular turn of his mustache, this man is the striking image of the cowboy in the pages of *The Virginian*: a man at home in the landscape of the unidentifiable plains, facing their implacable dangers alone with his horse yet unperturbed by the solitude. Despite this soothing opening image, the stories in the collection highlight the brutality of Wyoming life. There are eleven tales collected in *Close Range*, nine of them feature characters who live and/or work on ranches; all of these focus on male characters. The two remaining stories are about life in town and feature female narrators. All of the stories feature characters hardened by lives of tremendous struggle, and many of them engage in unspeakable acts that demonstrate a coarse attitude toward human life. Following a very short vignette about a wife cutting through the roof of her ranch house to discover the rotting corpses of her husbands’ many “paramours” and a story about a dust up in the street that leads to a shoot out of Shakespearean proportions leaving all involved dead in a ditch, “Brokeback Mountain” comes as something of a reprieve, and the image that introduces the text promises as much. The watercolor image that introduces “Brokeback Mountain” is a close up of a

cowboy and horse in profile. The man looks straight ahead over the top of a magenta neck scarf, a feather in his cap and a long walking stick in hand. The horse, only visible from the neck up, follows in a halter not meant for riding. The pair are dappled with snow against a dark background; their destination is not visible but the calm certitude in both sets of eyes suggest they know where they are going and how to get there. This traditional image of the cowboy carries with it all of the implications about character Murdoch outlines, and the reader begins the narrative prepared for a familiar story.

The opening flashback shows us Ennis Del Mar awaking from a dream in a familiar Wyoming setting: “wind rocking the trailer, hissing in around the aluminum door and window frames” (253). In the next scene, the reader goes back in time to meet the story’s lead characters, Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist. The short biographies Proulx offers are typical of Wyoming in the mid twentieth-century—young men from struggling ranches hoping to make names for themselves. They meet as shepherders working above a ranch in the mountains of northern Wyoming in 1963.⁶⁶

They were raised on small, poor ranches in opposite corners of the state, Jack Twist in Lightening Flat up on the Montana boarder, Ennis del Mar from around Sage, near the Utah line, both high school dropout country boys with no prospects, brought up to hard work and privation, both rough-mannered, rough-spoken, inured to the stoic life. (Proulx 254)

The “traditional” cowboy upbringings described in the introduction strikes many common notes—the cowboys are born dirt poor and early acquainted with hard work, both are constantly seeking their big chance to make it big, yet both also express a deep

⁶⁶ Although I will develop the point later, it is worth noting that there are no mountains call the Brokebacks in Wyoming. This fictitious range of the novel is explicitly described as situated in the Bighorn mountains, and other ranges discussed in the book are accurately placed and described.

reverence of and love for the land. Likewise, the early descriptions of their acquaintance read list-like: the men, their character described in the same tones as their equipment, all rattled off in the style of stage directions:

The sheep trucks and horse trailers unloaded at the trailhead and a bandy-legged Basque showed Ennis how to pack the mules, two packs and a riding load on each animal ring-lashed with double diamonds and secured with half hitches, telling him, “Don’t never order soup. Them boxes a soup are real bad to pack.” Three puppies belonging to one of the blue heelers went in a pack basket, the runt inside Jack’s coat, for he loved a little dog. (256)

Proulx’s style requires readers to imagine between the lines; grammatically, the difficulty of packing a box of soup is equal to the evocative description of Jack’s tenderness toward the runt puppy.

However, the abrupt initiation of a fraught intimate relationship between the men just a few pages into the tale is jarring for a reader accustomed to the particular ebb and flow of a cowboy narrative and lulled by the subtlety of Proulx’s style. Not only are the lovers both men, but their first intimacy is matter-of-fact, emotionless: “Ennis jerked his hand away as though he’d touched fire, got to his knees, unbuckled his belt, shoved his pants down, hauled Jack onto all fours and, with the help of the clear slick and a little spit, entered him. Nothing he’d done before but no instruction manual needed” (259). Like the details of their meal earlier in the evening, the description renders the intimacy in a matter of fact tone. The developing sexual relationship is no more worth reflection than a can of beans chased down with cans of warm, cheap beer. However, following

their first intimate encounters in the mountains, the passion is displaced on the landscape and Proulx's descriptions of the men suggest a deep repression of their feelings for each other: "[t]here were only the two of them on the mountain flying in the euphoric, bitter air, looking down on a hawk's back and the crawling lights of vehicles on the plain below, suspended above ordinary affairs and distant from tame ranch dogs barking in the dark hours" (260). The land remains wild and beautiful, full of the hope and possibility of young men with an endless future. For these cowboys, the essential emptiness of the terrain enables not only their labor but also their pleasure.

As their relationship develops, Proulx translates their love to the scene in which it occurs—even the air is euphoric as the men are liberated from the constraints of labor and community. But in their words, they remain “no queers” in their lives, they continue to go through the motions of marrying, making babies, and scraping out a living, performing to the heteronormative expectations of the community. Descriptions of the violence both men fear would certainly ensue if people were aware of the relationship haunt the text in hints and suggestions. The pleasure they take in one another is enabled by the landscape and their belief that the plains will keep their secret through its remoteness and emptiness, obscuring them from judgment. The idea of the landscape as vehicle for expression of emotions that challenge heteronormative norms is common in what David Bell describes as “gay literature,” works that represent and reflect on same sex relationships. Bell's discussion of the “homosexual rural” quotes at length from Byrne Fone's survey of gay literature to describe a particular narrative of homosexual

romance played out in rural landscapes.⁶⁷ According to Byrn, such texts can “suggest a place where it is safe to be gay... where homosexuality can be spoken of without reprisal, and where homosexual love can be consummated without concern for the punishment or scorn of the world” (Bell 169). The landscape in “Brokeback Mountain” suggests just this kind of “safe space” for Ennis and Jack; in the safety of the mountains, they surrender to themselves and one another. This safe landscape maintains many of the curative properties observed in *Wister*—the men use the space to escape the trials of their lives and recover from the emotional and physical rigor of being cowboys.

This *subversion narrative* remains very much placed in Wyoming: physically in the stunning landscapes Proulx draws, economically as the men struggle to make ends meet on a ranch laborer’s wages, and socially as both men abhor their attraction to each other and, perhaps more pressingly, the relationship’s potential challenge to their very identity as “real” cowboys, Wyoming cowboys. Early in the story, the men exchange some of the only words in the novel about the nature of their relationship:

They never talked about the sex, let it happen, at first only in the tent at night, then in the full daylight with the hot sun striking down, and at evening in the fire glow, quick, rough, laughing and snorting, no lack of noises, but saying not a goddamn word except once Ennis said, ‘I’m not no queer,’ and Jack jumped in with ‘Me neither. A one-shot thing. Nobody’s business but ours’ (260).

This conversation suggests that the men, at least initially, see the relationship as an aberration—as part of the experience in the landscape; growing out of the situation and

⁶⁷ Well aware of the contingency and complexity of both of these terms, Bell devotes several paragraphs of this chapter spelling out his reasons for employing the terms “homosexual” and “rural.” Throughout, he reminds readers to read both terms “broadly.”

not out of a desire for a “queer” relationship. Their love of Wyoming drives them to ecstasy, but as cowboys, they continue to acquiesce to heteronormative expectations of their lives “in town.” Both men marry, have children, and dream of one day having enough money for a modest ranch of their own. But their dreams are unachievable on dual fronts: economically, the ranch work that both men rely on locks them into a subsistence existence. Socially, they are acutely aware of the reality that their relationship will ostracize them from the land and work they love. Jack announces this reality mournfully one day as they discuss the fantasy of a life together: “Two guys living together? No. All I can see is we get together once in a while way the hell out in the back a nowhere—’... ‘It don’t happen in Wyomin and if it does I don’t know what they do, maybe go to Denver” (269). Hidden by the landscape, the relationship is “nobody’s business” but “coming out” in town brings with it risks implied by repeated references to the “tire iron” that symbolizes the inherent risk of violence faced by openly gay men in Proulx’s Wyoming. The idea that Wyoming is the kind of space in which a man can do certain things and not others is consistent with the idea of an exclusionary community with distinct parameters. Here, that community is a distinctly homophobic one that maintains such identifications through violence. The rest of *Close Range* establishes the idea of violence as a routine part of life in Wyoming and particularly for cowboys. In a story entitled “The Blood Bay,” a Montana cowboy, ill-prepared for the extreme rigors of a Wyoming winter, freezes to death alone near a creek one winter night. The next day, a group of cowpuncher discover the corpse in the snow and one of them notices “[t]hat can a corn beef’s wearin’ my size boots” (92). The man slides out of the saddle and attempts to rob the dead man, only to find that the boots are frozen solid to the corpse. Not to be

deterred, the ingenuitive cowboy takes out a bowie knife, cuts off the man's legs just above the boot tops, thaws the boots behind a stove as they camp that night, and unceremoniously discards the legs in a corner after securing both socks and boots the following morning leaving his companions to believe that he has been eaten by an ornery, spoiled horse who shared their accommodations the previous evening. Such disregard for life plays out again and again in Proulx's "Wyoming stories," leaving the impression that for such people as these, smashing the skull of someone for being a "queer" would present little moral quandary.

Her portrayal of the cowboy's economic life, while focusing less idealistic characters than the *Virginian*, retains the dichotomy that cowboys "love of . . . labor" is what keeps them returning to seek ranch work, not the absence of other opportunities or lack of education she acknowledges in the introduction. Unlike the hands on Judge Henry's ranch, who enjoy year-round employment, room, and board, Jack and Ennis are seasonal labors with little money. The toughness of the work has changed little in the decades that separate the representations and the resilience of cowboy's "love for low-paid, long-houred [sic] ranch work" remains key to their willingness to put up with the many disadvantages of the work over more stable employment (Proulx 269-70). Both men's love of the work portrayed in "Brokeback Mountain" is clearly tied to his appreciation for Wyoming's open ranges as well as his travel companion as they work their way across many of Wyoming's alternating mountains and plains moving livestock from one seasonal pasture to another. The cowboy's love of his work in the landscape is a familiar trope from *The Virginian*, where even those who don't rise through the ranks as the *Virginian* does are afforded a decent living and the freedom to pursue other

opportunities where they arise. In Wister's novel, characters like Shorty, a young man with a talent for training horses, demonstrate that those who do not profit by their work as cowboys fail to do so as a result of their own ignorance and avarice. Shorty refuses an offer by the Virginian to train horses for Judge Henry for a regular salary, opting instead to follow the story's lead bad guy, Trampas, on a life of horse thievery and poker games that leaves Shorty penniless, horseless, and eventually a rotting corpse on the open prairie.

In Proulx's telling, however, the cowboy's love of the land is a curse, binding him in servitude to a wealthy ranch owner to whom he is expendable. Later in life, Jack recounts for Ennis an encounter he had with the ranch owner they worked for during their first summer on Brokeback Mountain. Following the first summer they spend on Brokeback Mountain, Jack returned to seek further employment: "Joe Aguirre's in the office and he says to me, he says, 'You boys found a way to make the time pass up there, didn't you,' and I give him a look but when I went out I seen he had a big-ass pair of binoculars hangin off his rearview" (267). The man declines to rehire him saying, "you guys wasn't getting paid to leave the dogs babysit the sheep while you stemmed the rose" (267). Aguirre seems to suggest that he will not hire Jack again on account of his work ethic. Indeed, in the retelling of that summer, the reader learns that Jack and Ennis lost track of a number of sheep, exacerbating the tension with Aguirre who the reader knows to have been spying on the men at the time. However, the fear of homophobia frames the story through the men's own sense that openly living such a lifestyle would be dangerous. At one point, after a long separation and, caught up in their passion, the men embrace and kiss in public. Afterward, they discuss the risks and possibilities for their

relationship, and Ennis remarks ominously that if they “do that in the wrong place we’ll be dead” (267). At the close of the story, Ennis learns that Jack has died in an accident, but he can’t shake the feeling that he had been murdered by someone who knew of Jack’s sexuality and had “got him with the tire iron” (277). Despite the men’s birth on small Wyoming ranches, wholehearted embrace of the cowboy lifestyle, and dedication to living the “right kind” of lifestyle for “Wyomin,” they struggle to maintain a sense of belonging in the community.

Although Proulx subverts the sexual construction of the cowboy, her narrative suggests that, while our ideas about cowboys and their relationships might have been wrong, much of the rest of the construction of gender represented in Wister and other Westerns remains intact. Her female characters remain silent and undeveloped; women who, like Molly Wood are accessories to the men who people the narrative. The women she portrays certainly live hard lives and survive many struggles, but they do so as observers and victims. For example, Ennis’s wife Alma enters the narrative as a passive object, a mere vessel through which Ennis can prove his manhood: “In December Ennis married Alma Beers and had her pregnant by mid-January” (262). After the birth of a second daughter, Alma begs Ennis to stop ranch work so that they can live in town, using her sexuality to bolster the case: “‘I guess,’ said Ennis, slipping his hand up her blouse sleeve...he rolled her over, did quickly what she hated” (263). After years of knowledge about his relationship with Jack contributing to her misery at their dismal economic situation, Alma confronts Ennis. He rebuffs her violently, leaving “her with a burning bracelet” about the arm and storms out. Alma leaves the narrative without another word, her singular act of agency resulting in the implied responsibility of raising their two

children alone while Ennis waits for his daughters to “g[e]t the sense and years to leave Alma” rather than make any efforts to support his children (271). The girls disappear from the narrative with their mother, and the reader closes the story not knowing how these women made their way in a country so inhospitable to their sex. There is no hint of the “Equality State” in “Brokeback Mountain.” In this depiction of twentieth century Wyoming, the roles for women and men remain clear; men are to work hard and be “men who are men” (Wister) and ladies are either good wives or abandoned ones. As subversive narratives go, Proulx’s project was modest in challenging the dominant narrative. However, the objections of many readers to her representation suggests the fundamental role of cowboys and the gendered image of the state they present to identifications with Wyomingite identity.

Landscaping Authenticity: From Agent to Scene

All the furor over the sexual relationship in “Brokeback Mountain” caused a more familiar point of discernment for Wyoming readers to go relatively undiscussed: there are no Brokeback Mountains in Wyoming. According to an ABC news article, the Wyoming Tourism Board reported that, according to Proulx, “it’s a love story about the Big Horn Mountains in eastern Wyoming” but the story goes on to acknowledge that the range does not include anything called the Brokeback Mountains. In a meditative rejection of the “obsession” with authenticity demonstrated by local critics of literature set in Wyoming, Lee Clark Mitchell notes that “[l]iterary truth is not geographic truth, after all, but serves a larger, metonymic, often psychological role . . . taking native materials and

transforming them, without necessarily having lived them” (102). Mitchell’s cynicism toward local demands for “authenticity” is well-placed; the authenticity of any given experience is both tenuous and necessarily partial. But Mitchell’s defense reveals the power of representations irrespective of their “accuracy” as judged by the locals of Any Town, Wyoming. In his defense, Mitchell quotes at length from chronicler of the West Richard Ford, who says, “I think landscape is inert, and that we attribute to it qualities, strengths that we say affect our lives. If our explanations persuade us and others, then the relationship to landscape which we’ve advanced becomes true” (100). While this framing makes sense from the perspective of the writer, it denies the powerful interplay among representations and the ability of narratives to exert influence on the experience of life within a particular place. The “inert” landscape is animated by the story, made “real” in the reader’s eye; it is brought to life in her imagination, made in the image of the persuasive presentation. The power of literature, then, is the same enunciative force that shapes laws and draws constitutions: the word makes belief and belief shapes action. The power of stories for imagining—and thus creating—stable communities is in their ability to resonate with readers. Fisher asserts that narrative power is a function of the story’s ability to tap into audience experience and expectation: “the coherence and fidelity of stories and character depend on their confirmation by experience. Wish, desire, hope, and fantasy will not sustain them forever” (154). The power of certain cultural myths in shaping the experience of a people within a particular state are supported by texts that *reaffirm* that community’s dominant narratives or attempt to *purify* or *subvert* them.

Many Wyoming readers responded negatively to Proulx’s story, which offered a familiar scene in which a story of the secret romance between two otherwise highly

traditional cowboys unfolds, though expression of the discomfort was muted until the film was released in late 2005. The success of the film, which grossed over \$83 million and was nominated for eight Oscars and won three, brought with it much popular discussion about the film's content from within Wyoming and beyond. (*Box Office Mojo*) Beth Loffreda reports in an article about the response in her University of Wyoming classrooms after the release of the film version of *Brokeback Mountain*:

I was teaching a queer theory course [in the] winter [of 2005-06], and my students reported a few things. For one, a group of University of Wyoming students started a page on Facebook devoted to decrying the very idea of gay cowboys; impossibility, they claimed, since cowboys are irrefutably the apotheosis of American masculinity in all its heterosexual splendor.

(170)

These student responses suggest the continued sense of investment many feel in the cowboy as symbolic of the state's attitudes and values. Proulx's error is a sin against the foundational myth. Her depiction of a same sex relationship between cowboys stuck readers as inaccuracy; like claiming that *Brokeback Mountain* is in the Wind River Range, the depiction of cowboys engaged in a sexually intimate relationship wasn't just subversive, it was *false*. As members of the community being represented, Wyomingites feel entitled to critique or reject representations of both the physical and the cultural space of the state. As "We the People of the State of Wyoming," the community serves to police the authenticity of representations, whether historical, fictional, or otherwise. However, the story also enters into a complex political terrain in which Wyoming was center-stage in a debate about homophobia and violence.

“They” Say, “We” Say: Mediating Statist Identities

As Owen Wister’s iconic novel demonstrates, ideas about what a statist community looks like are often produced and consumed by a reading public that extends beyond the borders of the state. Reviews of Annie Proulx’s *Close Range: Wyoming Stories* demonstrate the degree to which stories shape people’s understanding of a place in lieu of first-hand experience. One reader, who posts on a book review website called *Goodreads* as “Trin,” says that the book “should be subtitled ‘Why Not to Live in Wyoming’” and many seem to echo this sentiment as they describe “the hard life in Wyoming” wherein the place and the people become synonymous in their harshness and inhospitable nature. Angie describes “[a] cold, hard, barely populated landscape that seems to require a person to be overly prideful or act like you are. A required meanness because of scarcity” and concludes by saying “Reminds me that my small existence is much, much better than I usually think. Thank you Mom & Dad for not raising me in WY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (“Close Range”). These responses suggest the continued currency of narrative presentations of Wyoming as vacant space in which cowboys roam but do not reside. One reader, “Aerin,” posts an all-too-familiar experience with Wyoming as empty and vast:

I’ve driven through Wyoming several times, always as part of a cross-country road trip, and though I’ve never stayed for long—not even for the night, that I recall—Wyoming epitomizes for me that feeling that I so miss when I’m not road tripping: The sense of being all alone in a vast emptiness of road and sky and natural wonder. (*Goodreads*)

These reading publics are linked to the statist community through their consumption of literature that participates in imagining the community. Additionally, the economic linkage forged by their consumption of literature by a self-identified Wyoming writer contributes to the continued apprehension of Wyoming's statist identity as readable both within the state and without. Like Molly Wood's Vermont family, these readers seem convinced by the representation of a coherent community, shaped by a landscape whose trials and temptations have been submitted to or over-come. Although Proulx's story challenges the dominant construction of cowboy masculinity, it also contributes to the continued configurations of exclusivity in the state by creating these characters as aberrations in stark opposition to the hateful people who populate the landscape of and narratives of her *Wyoming Stories*.

The narrative terrain that Proulx entered with "Brokeback Mountain" was one in which expressions of masculinity in Wyoming were already a subject of considerable debate. One month before the collection was released, jury selection began for the trial of Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson—the two men later convicted of the October 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, an openly gay sophomore at the University of Wyoming. The Shepard murder and the trial that followed placed Wyoming prominently in the national conversation in a way that the state had not experienced since the turn of the last century when the extension of suffrage and role of the state in the closing of the frontier created focus on the cultural and social make up of Wyomingites. This new narrative placed the masculinity expressed in the "Cowboy State" center stage in a discussion about homophobia in the United States generally, and the experience of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer (LGBTQ) in

rural states and regions in particular. Mary Gray notes in the introduction to *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* that “[t]he 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard in the college town of Laramie Wyoming (population 27,000), brought to the fore that city-based queer-youth social movements seemed able to do little more than pity and demonize those living outside of urban centers” (xiii-xiv). As Gray suggests, in the rush to pathologize Wyoming and Wyomingites lead to a further marginalization of LGBTQ living in these areas. Although the role of the masculinized dominant narrative of the state deserved critical attention in that moment, critiques that simply rehearsed them in seeking to place blame missed a crucial opportunity to revise this narrative in ways that would better serve those marginalized by it.

In the aftermath of the national response to Matthew Shepard’s death and the trial that followed, Beth Loffreda notes that “there are always other ways to think about cowboys. In October 2005, Spectrum threw a drag show at the Cowboy Bar in downtown Laramie. If you want a spot that enshrines Laramie’s wish to cling to a mythic regional past, the Cowboy would work fine for such a purpose” (170). Although Loffreda laments the slowness with which institution changes have occurred, her optimism is buoyed by open subversion of the state’s foundational myths. Readers are able to recognize Wyoming’s statist identity, articulate its contours, and accept or reject the values ascribed to community. There are still cowboys in Wyoming today; there is also racism, sexism, and homophobia. As Iverson suggested thirty-five years ago, the cowboy is changing, and the people of the Cowboy State are deeply invested in just how that change will shape the narratives they tell about and to the community. *Subversion narratives*, like “Brokeback Mountain” present an opportunity to negotiate and re-frame statist

identifications, and responses to these texts in classrooms and other public spaces enable individuals to call the presumptions underlying representations of the statist community into question. Such conversations capitalize on literature as a “productive matrix” wherein readers can work to “defin[e] the ‘social’ [making] it available as an objective of and for, action” (Bhabha 34) through their responses to such literary representations.

Despite the complex discursive negotiations of collective identity occurring in the subtext of virtually ubiquitous expressions of statist identities, the condition of belonging in such a community is rarely highlighted in an explicit fashion. In this way, statism functions in a fashion described by Michael Billig as “banal nationalism,” which he defines as “ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced” (6). Billig goes on to describe these ideological habits as “unnamed and, thereby, unnoticed” (6). Because very few individuals participate fervently in the production and dissemination of statist identities, for most citizens of the state, participation in the ideological project of statism is a matter of accepting particular norms. The fact that such identifications are trafficked in the form of narrative and symbol makes mounting a subversive challenge to statist norms all the more complicated. Both Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard and Annie Proulx’s attempts to challenge the dominant narratives of the State of Wyoming were unable to entirely escape from the homogeneous perspective they hoped to correct. Further, both women met significant challenges to their work and it’s “accuracy” in portraying particular “facts.” These works and later narrative accounts of life in Wyoming necessarily find themselves addressing the question of how the lifestyle they portray engages with the image of the “cowboy state.” Narratives about Wyoming inherently find themselves grappling how to represent cowboys and the

vacancy narrative that frame Wyoming. Historical accounts like the works of T.A. Larson, works engaging the concept of the “New West” like those offered by Patricia Limerick, William Travis, the cultural critics anthologized in Susan Kollin’s *PostWestern Culture*, and literature about Wyoming—from the ranch memoir, like Teresa Jordan’s *Riding the White Horse Home*, to the counter-culture narratives of authors like Karol Griffin in *Skin Deep: Tattoos, the Disappearing West, Very Bad Men, and My Deep Love for Them All*—all grapple with the dominant narrative of statist identity. Despite these many articulations of the need to reconsider Wyoming’s place based identity and the rhetorical construction of who belongs in the community that resides there, the cowboy remains a touchstone because of its familiarity both within the state and its readability as part of the National Symbolic.

The Statehood Quarter Series: Making Heads and Tails of Nation and State

The 50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act, signed by President Clinton in 1997, “provided for the redesign and issuance of a circulating commemorative quarter dollar coin for each of the 50 States beginning in 1999” (United States Mint). According to the legislation authorizing production of the coins, their purpose is: “(A) to honor the unique Federal republic of 50 States that comprise the United States; and (B) to promote the diffusion of knowledge among the youth of the United States about the individual States, their history and geography and the rich diversity of the national heritage” (50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act). In its language, the Act acknowledges the Janus-faced nature of national identity in the United States; on the one hand, each state is a “Republic” unto itself, with its own “history and geography,” and yet, perhaps

paradoxically, each contributes a piece to the greater project of the “national heritage.” On the fore, the coins are identical, featuring the profile of George Washington, familiar on the face of the quarter for over five decades before the issuance of the new series. The words “United States of America,” “Quarter Dollar,” “Liberty,” and “In God We Trust” all also appear on the front of the coin. (United States Mint) These symbols draw on the symbolic force of unity implied by Lauren Berlant in her reading of the Statue of Liberty. George Washington symbolizes the “stability as a point of national identity . . . indivisible, like America” (Berlant 23). Through Washington and the other “founding fathers,” the states and their inhabitants are wrapped in a kind of kinship, brothers and sisters in the national family. Although each state is subsumed within the United States, like children of the same parent, the existence of other states does not diminish the uniqueness and individuality of any other state. Thus, the 50 State Commemorative Coin Program Act presented an opportunity for each state to highlight the uniqueness of their individual community while also acknowledging their existence as part of a greater national Union. To ensure the symbolic double imperatives placed upon the State Quarters were met, the authorizing legislation provided some basic guidelines: “Because it is important that the Nation’s coinage and currency bear dignified designs of which the citizens of the United States can be proud, the Secretary shall not select any frivolous or inappropriate design for any quarter dollar minted under this subsection” (50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act).⁶⁸ As is the case in establishing a state constitution or a state flag, the people of the state are tasked with the symbolic articulation of their

⁶⁸ There were also a number of specific prohibitions against particular design features, but the process of selecting the design and the designs themselves were at the discretion of each state, with the caveat that the Secretary of the Treasury retained the right to veto any design deemed unfit. For more information, see the “50 States Commemorative Coin Program Act,” Public Law 105-124.

community. However, unlike symbols growing out of state legislation, the coins demanded acceptable representations not only of state identity but also as a component of national identity.

Although each state was allowed to present their own design, the Secretary of the Treasury had the ultimate authority to approve or deny and replace designs submitted by individual states deemed “inappropriate” or otherwise unfit. Given this arrangement, the states had a clear incentive to present something that would meet the approval of the Secretary, and many selected very simple, featuring traditional iconography. Wyoming’s bucking horse and cowboy (discussed in detail below) as well as Georgia’s peach surrounded with laurels, are evidence of this conservative impulse. Although not all designs were simple, the caveat that the designs should be “dignified” and not “frivolous” meant that most states played to familiar iconography that would be recognizable both within and outside of the state. This symbolic accessibility is crucial to the successful articulation of a statist identity; as Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm suggest, the ability to recognize one’s fellows and distinguish them from “others” is key to the maintenance of an imagined community. Whether with elaborate, detailed designs or through a simple, spare iconography, the quarters demonstrated the diversity of the nation by showcasing the diversity of the states that compose the United States. The coin commemorating the state of Texas, for example, features the distinct outline of the state with a single star overlaid and the inscription “The Lone Star State.”



Figure 3: Texas Statehood Quarter⁶⁹

The United States Mint’s description of the coin notes that “[p]robably the two most recognized symbols of Texas are its unique shape and the lone star that is represented on the State flag.” This symbolism suggests that Texas is interested in maintaining a consistent *ethos* and repurposes many elements of its dominant narrative to do so. The lone star appears on the state seal as well as on the state flag, indicating these symbols are familiar to Texans, and the outline of the state suggests a kind of autonomous identity. The official Pledge of Allegiance to the Texas flag suggests the primacy of Texas statist identity over national identity: “Honor the Texas flag; I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one and indivisible” (Shearer and Shearer 94). The phrase “one nation, under God, indivisible” is lifted from the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States and reorganized so that Texas is the “one” and allegiance to the Union, when required, is secondary. Likewise, Texas is rendered “indivisible,” implying that nations may rise and fall, but Texas will prevail. In that image, the state is not the eastern neighbor of New Mexico or the southern fellow of Oklahoma; Texas is an island, a sovereign space that has participated in various national forms but identifies first and foremost in statist terms.

⁶⁹ Image courtesy of the United States Mint.

Like Texas, Wyoming’s coin offers a familiar image of the state’s identity. Under the requisite state name and year of statehood, the image of a man astride a bucking horse, back arched, right arm raised to wave a cowboy hat overhead, is emblazoned on a field of polished sliver.



Figure 4: The Wyoming Statehood Quarter⁷⁰

Next to the horseman, the words “The Equality State” and below “E Pluribus Unum” and “2007” (the year of minting) finish the design.⁷¹ Unlike some coins, Wyoming’s quarter is sparse; it has no background and features a single image.



Figure 5: Illinois Statehood Quarter⁷²

⁷⁰ Image courtesy of the United States Mint.

⁷¹ Each coin was minted for one year, and five coins were released each year between 1999 and 2008. See the United States Mint “50 State Quarters” for more information.

⁷² Image courtesy of the United States Mint.

Illinois's quarter, by contrast, features a nearly full body image of Lincoln, an outline of the state, a silhouette of a farm and a city in the background, and two bits of text reminding viewers that the state is both the "Land of Lincoln" and the "21st State ~ Century." The nod toward Illinois's importance and relevance both to US history and to the nation's future, suggested by the somewhat awkward phrasing of "21st State ~ Century," is highlighted by the background images of city and country. By contrast, Wyoming's design does little to assert the relevance of its cowboy and equality status in the new millennium. Despite its simplicity, the quarter is evocative of many of the tropes that shaped the articulation of the state's communal identity. The mint's description of the coin asserts that "The outline of the bucking horse and rider represent Wyoming's Wild West heritage" (United States Mint). The image selected was one of four designs submitted; of the four, two featured images of Yellowstone Park, and, in addition to the design selected, the fourth option was "another depiction of the bucking horse and rider" (United States Mint). The cowboy remains a symbol of the state's economic and cultural significance to the Union, frozen in the moment of Manifest Destiny and the narrative of heroic pioneers that "won" the West from the cowboy's unacknowledged counterpart: the "Indian." The blank field in the background suggests the fiction of emptiness that predicated and excused the violent process by which the state was "cleared" for settlement.

The assertion of "Equality" on basis of the limited extension of franchise to white women over 130 years ago provides cover for the continued slowness of changes in cultural attitudes toward gendered and racial diversity. The odd symbolic union of the cowboy and the suffragette in the bleak and empty landscape is rendered timeless, and

the narrative continues to plod awkwardly along despite the long growing knowledge that the economic and social world the cowboy symbolizes is decreasingly relevant and increasingly romanticized as a part of a founding narrative. Although the state's symbolism is recognizable both within and without, they also ring empty as the state faces a new millennium in which natural gas and tourism are much more relevant than "dudes" and "little doggies."

CONCLUSION

The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation.

–Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration*

On the prairies there appeared the Phantom Horse of the West, the Ghostly Horse of the Plains, the Vision Horse of the Lakota Nation, the Rainbow Horse of the Navajo, the Iron Horse of the railroad companies, the Great White Horse Silver of the Lone Ranger, the White Steed of the Prairie....It is no more possible to capture him than it is for us to recapture our lost innocence.

–Stan Steiner, qtd. Theresa Jordan, *Riding the White Horse Home*

Perhaps no moment highlights the experience of statism more explicitly than the approach of election season. Every four years, Iowa voters are swept from Midwestern obscurity onto the national platform as pundits and candidates alike pontificate on the whims and worries of the statist community. During campaigns for state and federal offices alike, banners and mailers, yard signs and bumper stickers evoke the citizen of the state as a stable, reliable, and identifiable subject of discourse. Blue states, red states, and purple states are qualified and quantified in terms of community proclivity as chattering classes speculate on national outcomes through the potential configurations of House and Senate that result from electoral choices at the state level. The rhetorical appeals to voters within states rely on constructions of the statist community and its shared values as they vie for positions of political power within the state and beyond. The relations these appeals evoke are built on the same sense of statist identification that this project has examined. Further, I have argued that, precisely because they operate as subtexts to the more critically engaged process of “American Nationalism,” the degree to which individuals are constructed as citizens of a state warrants critical attention. Despite narratives that portend homogeneity of experience, the People of the State are as diverse

as the states of the Union. Understanding how nationalism, regionalism, and statism impact the experience of individuals requires an understanding of the various levels at which these identifications operate as well as the ways such interlocking narratives of identity support and contradict one another.

Chapter One examined the state of Wyoming to argue that states are constructed as places in order to anchor the statist identity. In that case, the transformation of the landscape through discursive construction of statehood is reflected in the rhetorical transformation from descriptions of “empty” space to a “vacant” place. This rhetorical presentation not only helped to cancel the acts of violence that enabled white settlement of the state, it also supported the creation of an idealized citizen of the State of Wyoming that is deeply gendered, raced, and classed. Later narratives of statist identity, including those endorsed by Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard and Owen Wister would further exploit the concept of vacancy in their narratives celebrating Wyoming as a place in which the American ideal could (and in the case of Hebard did) play out. Chapter Two demonstrates the significance of histories in constructing fixed points that can be ritualized and celebrated as significant to both past and present residents of the state. This conception gives way to narratives like those offered by Dr. Grace Raymond Hebard, which support the experience of communal identity through cultural memories that link settlers and modern inhabitants through the presumption of progress. Because modern conditions are perceived as inherently superior to the primitive conditions encountered by settlers, this orderly narrative supports a shared cultural memory and also suggests a debt owed to the founders for sacrifices in the name of future generations. While this experience of historical unity supports the sense of community engagement encountered

by those who identify with the subject of statist discourse, it further marginalizes those who disidentify with the “ideal citizen” that is the agent of this narrative.

Like Hebard’s work, Wister’s *The Virginian* develops a vision of the Frontier Hypothesis that is tailored to political and social context of Wyoming in the early twentieth century. As Chapter Three demonstrates, Wister’s story tells a self-consciously statist tale, but his motivations are shaped by his vision of American potential in the post-frontier era. For Wister, Wyoming’s vacancy provided an opportune stage on which to dramatize the ideal path to progress for the United States, and the currency of his narrative in the early twentieth century demonstrates the resonance of the particular frontier narrative that has dominated Wyoming’s statist narrative for a national audience. John Adams’ assertion that the diversity of the American experience is reflected and recorded in the diversity of state histories suggests that state histories not only serve to support identification with statist communities, they also create a space in which metonymic representations of statist identities become a collective representation of the nationalistic identity of the United States. As Chapter Four demonstrates, the persistence of statist symbols arises from the reproduction of these images and narratives in a national context as well as within the State Symbolic. Statist and nationalist identities are consubstantial: the Union exists because individual states assent to being united. Likewise, the states exist because the Union consents to their creation and acceptance as states.

National narratives are inherently adapted in the socio-political contexts of each state in the production of statist narratives and symbols. Examining the ways statist narratives incorporate elements of the national narrative reveals how trends are

incorporated into statist discourses. One could easily recognize much of the discourse about the Expansion Era in the construction of the statist identity in other states in the western United States, and certainly the figure of the cowboy has been significant in much of the West and Southwest, as the history of ranching encompassed much of the region during the time period surrounding Wyoming's formation as a Territory and early years as a state. These complex over-laps suggest that statist identities are not only immensely significant to the experience of individuals living within these states, they also provide metonymically simplified points of reference for individuals examining the state from without. Because statist identities are maintained or challenged through rhetorical engagements with narrative and symbolic representations, critical engagements with these narratives are imperative to critical awareness. For example, when geographer William Travis rightly calls for a realignment of priorities in western development patterns, he fails to acknowledge that his suggestion to "imagine and enact an alternative regional vision" is couched in an understanding of westerners and western development as viewed from Colorado's Font Range (9). His assertion that the West in an increasingly urban zone may be factually correct based on the criteria he offers, but his easy dismissal of "extraction industries," including ranching, fails to acknowledge that this economic shift is also a cultural and narrative one. In the case of Wyoming, recognizing the self-conscious exclusivity of the statist narrative is crucial to interventions that attempt to contextualize or challenge the dominance of particular tropes. Memoires like Jordan's *Riding the White Horse Home* and Kevin Holdsworth's *Big Wonderful* extol the virtues of a landscape that is described in stark contrast to the urban, with pride in the opposition: "Wyoming, home to nearly as many antelope as people, has the smallest human

population in the United States, and most Wyomingites would like to keep it that way,” says Holdsworth (23). Whether or not the sentiment is as widely shared as Holdsworth describes, his description makes clear the degree to which the statist community is constructed as exclusive, even to the exclusion of close neighbors and fellow westerners.

Part of the reason for the ascension of the modern nation-state was the efficacy of this political-social formation in structuring the experiences of individuals within the space of the nation. While the material need for consideration of issues related to sustainability face the entire nation, and the West in particular on matters of water and resource development, such calls must necessarily reckon with statist narratives that construct the interests of individuals living in various states along political and social lines. Not only do such narratives play a key role in the ways individuals operate within the space of the state, they also impact the ways that The United States conceives of itself as a nation of many peoples. Understanding how statist narratives are formed and function is crucial to grasping the ways that nationalism plays out in a country conceived as a union of Republics precisely because the history of the nation is a quilt pieced from the statist narratives of its component parts.

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