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## **Feminine or Feminist: Issues Surrounding Women's Addresses at the First National Conservation Congress**

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Oral Presentation 2.3

**FEMININE OR FEMINIST: ISSUES SURROUNDING WOMEN'S  
ADDRESSES AT THE FIRST NATIONAL CONSERVATION CONGRESS**

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This paper is a portion of a larger research project. The project as a whole focuses on women in the early conservation movement and their perceptions of the land. I use Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis to define what the unsettled West symbolized for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While Turner ignores the position of frontier women almost entirely, his thesis is applicable to their experiences and perceptions. By considering Turner's thesis from a feminist standpoint, I prove that the West symbolized greater freedom and more possibilities for women than they had previously experienced. Hence, women's participation in the conservation movement arose from their desire to maintain this unsettled land as a symbol of their freedom from constraining traditions.

Many scholars have argued that women became involved in the conservation movement as an extension of their roles dictated by the ideals of true womanhood, which dictated that a woman's domain was the home, and her primary roles were as a mother and a wife. The conservation of natural resources for future generations would be a primary concern for a mother. While I believe that many women in the conservation movement supported certain aspects of this traditional ideal, most women also supported many feminist ideals. In this paper, I analyze three speeches given by women at the First National Conservation Congress in 1909, through which I prove that women maintained a balance between traditional ideals and modern feminist views, as a way of most effectively gaining rights in the movement. When the American frontier was declared closed in 1890, women found the possibility for equality gone; the conservation movement allowed them to search for new freedom of beliefs and expression, while permitting them to stay safely within the boundaries of true womanhood.