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A woman of her time: Dr Frances Woods and the intersection of war, expansionism and equal rights

Lisa R. Lindell

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‘STARTED TO MANILA’, headlined the *Oregonian* newspaper on 18 August 1898, ‘Two Portland Nurses Take Their Leave.’¹ Dr Frances Woods, along with fellow Portland, Oregon resident Lena Killiam, was on her way to the Philippines to serve in the Spanish-American War. Eager to take part, but knowing she would never be allowed to go as a woman doctor, Dr Woods grasped the option of volunteering as a nurse. ‘I feel just as patriotic and earnest as a man’, she declared. ‘But, you know, they have a way of turning aside lady physicians and giving men the first chances to go to the front. I wanted to go to the war from the first. This was my first chance and I gladly accepted it.’² Woods’ war service would help shape her world views and the course of her career, drawing her into the public arena as a lecturer and suffragist. Her attitudes and experiences were deeply entwined with the fabric of her times. Late nineteenth-century American thinking about the war and about citizenship turned upon perceptions of race, rights, gender, and patriotism. All of these ideas were bolstered by the experiences and image of a vigorous westward-expanding nation. As a white woman of privilege who viewed herself as a patriot and activist, Woods seized upon the emerging opportunities of her era and developed her own complex, often contradictory, perspectives toward the war, expansionism, and equal rights. A study of her life experiences and their intersection with the central political and gender issues of her day opens a unique and personal window on the America of the turn of the twentieth century.³

Third of ten children, Frances Jane Woods was born on 2 December 1864 to western entrepreneur James Moses Woods and his wife Martha Stone Woods. She grew up in Nebraska City, Nebraska, where her father owned a large farm and raised stock. Frances Woods’ family roots reached back to colonial America, including a great great grandfather who commanded a Virginia regiment during the Revolutionary War. Her enterprising family embodied the spirit and followed the course of American westward expansion. Woods’ maternal grandfather’s roving led him from Kentucky to Missouri to the California gold fields. In 1876, Woods’ father struck out for the Black Hills of Dakota Territory, outfitting a wagon train, carving out a trail, and establishing a freighting operation as the gold rush boomed and prospectors and settlers increasingly appropriated Native American lands. In Deadwood, James Woods opened the Miners’ and Mechanics’ Bank, that town’s first monetary institution. In 1889, he moved his family to nearby Rapid City, having purchased several thousand acres in the area. There, he ran a large-scale ranching operation and partnered for a time with his brother Dr William Woods, bringing herds of twenty thousand cattle from Texas in a single season. From 1890 to 1894, he served as Rapid City’s mayor.⁴

Like her father, Frances Woods displayed ambition

and energy. Her drive for higher education was also fed by the example of her mother, an 1856 alumna of Christian College of Columbia, Missouri. In 1882, Woods graduated from that same institution. Nine years later, she entered medical school, following the path opened by women such as Elizabeth Blackwell, who in 1849 became the first American woman to receive a medical degree. By the end of the nineteenth century, women comprised around five percent of the profession in the United States. Not until the 1970s would the percentage of women pursuing medicine increase by any significant degree.⁵

Woods attended the Woman’s Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where she completed a three-year course of study. The college, founded in 1850 as the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, was the first medical school established exclusively for women. Men were ineligible to enrol until 1969. When Woods was a student, about half of American women studying medicine attended all-female schools, but that figure declined precipitously as most women’s medical colleges closed their doors in the early twentieth century. While increasing coeducational opportunities brought welcome benefits, the women’s school experience had distinct advantages of its own, creating a sense of female solidarity and professional identity, with women faculty members serving as role models. Woods graduated in May 1894, scoring near the top of her class of fifty-two women.⁶

Upon graduation, Woods interned at the Memorial Hospital in Worcester, Massachusetts, and at the New England Hospital for Women and Children (founded in 1862 for the clinical education of women physicians and also the home of a pioneering training school for nurses). Woods then headed west to Portland, Oregon, where she served as resident physician and nurse at St. Helen’s Hall, a girls’ boarding school.⁷ Woods’ choice of work at an institution and her focus on female health paralleled the route taken by many women physicians as medicine became increasingly specialised. The reformist impulses of the Progressive Era, especially as related to the welfare of women and children, further motivated women in medicine.⁸ Historian Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez observes in *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine*, female doctors were able to ‘pursue a career and reform society without overstepping too far the bounds of accepted propriety’.⁹

In the late nineteenth century, the field of medicine underwent unprecedented growth, both scientifically and professionally. The advances – including germ theory, antiseptic surgery, and anesthesia – and physicians’ progressively specialised roles created a strong need for trained nurses. The establishment of the first official nurses’ training programme at Saint Thomas’ Hospital in London in 1860 by Florence Nightingale after her service in the Crimean War, and the opening

of a number of nursing schools in the United States in the 1870s, propelled the field's rapid development. The declaration of war with Spain in April 1898 would greatly accelerate the nursing profession's advancement in the United States and lead to a radical change for Woods.¹⁰

Popular sympathy toward the struggles of Cubans and Filipinos against Spanish rule and ferment over the sinking of the *U.S.S. Maine* in the Havana harbour rallied support for the war. Gender politics may have been an even stronger contributing factor. A goal of many war advocates was to halt what they perceived as a trend toward effeminacy and decline in American politics. In *Fighting for American Manhood*, Kristin L. Hoganson studies how this perception and the growing presence of women in the public sphere challenged male notions of manliness and political authority. Adopting a martial posture, war promoters believed, would strengthen manly character and national credibility. In her study *Manliness & Civilization*, Gail Bederman explores late nineteenth-century conceptions of race and gender, nation and civilisation through the frame of Theodore Roosevelt's vision of male virility, character, and racial primacy. To 'win for themselves the domination of the world', declared the future President, Americans 'must boldly face the life of strife, resolute to do [their] duty well and manfully'. Roosevelt and other believers in character-building as manifested through vigorous force pointed to the Civil War and westward expansion as supportive examples. Models of European expansionism, particularly imperial Britain and its view of empire as a training ground for manhood, played their inspirational role as well.¹¹

Regardless of her gender, Frances Woods was resolved to follow the patriotic call. At the onset of the Spanish-American War, the army's medical personnel were exclusively male and extremely limited in numbers and, often, in experience. Although women had long worked in civilian hospitals and had served as nurses during the Civil War, strong resistance remained to their presence in the field. That situation soon began to change. With the enlistment of large numbers of soldiers and the escalating toll of injury and especially disease, the need for a well-trained force of nurses, including women, became critical. In consequence, US Army Surgeon General George M. Sternberg sought and received Congressional authority to appoint army nurses under contract without gender restriction. As applications from women poured in, Dr Anita Newcomb McGee, vice-president general of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, oversaw the selection process, carefully screening thousands of applicants. More than 1,500 women nurses served under contract during the war, stationed in the States and overseas, including in the Philippines, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and on hospital ships. The success of the contract nurse programme would give rise, in February 1901, to a permanent Army Nurse Corps.¹²

Traditional role perceptions, though, would be slow to change. Nurses' work was often sentimentalised or treated as secondary. 'Men who did acknowledge women's endeavors often refused to see them as having any bearing on women's roles as citizens', observes

Hoganson. 'Instead, men frequently interpreted women's wartime service as a sign of their ability to stand above politics as extrawordly angels and to inspire men to acts of heroism'.¹³ Kimberly Jensen addresses this continuing attitude in her study of American women in the First World War. She suggests that idealised images of women's selfless devotion served as a justification for denying nurses full and permanent military rank. Not until 1947 did American nurses achieve that recognition with commensurate pay and benefits.¹⁴

In the spring and summer of 1898, the logistics of selection were still in flux, and many female nurses who wished to serve found their options uncertain. Frances Woods' decision to pursue her objective through the Oregon Emergency Corps and Red Cross Society resulted in her being in the first group of female nurses sent to the Philippines. Women of Portland had organised the Oregon Emergency Corps on 26 April 1898 to support the Oregon soldiers and their families. The Corps' 1,500 members actively raised funds, sent supplies (including food, clothing, and books), and otherwise worked for the welfare of the troops. On 30 July, the Corps voted to unite with the National Red Cross Society, which allowed them to send volunteer nurses officially recognised by the Red Cross.¹⁵

As a Red Cross volunteer, Woods was not under government contract. She nonetheless filed an application, secured endorsements, and received the approval of Anita Newcomb McGee, 'without which acceptance, there is no entering the army lines'.¹⁶ Although the selection requirements stipulated graduation from a nursing training school, McGee also considered women physicians in good standing as eligible. Woods persisted until she obtained the requisite permission from General Henry Clay Merriam, commander of the Pacific Coast and in charge of organising, supplying, and transporting the troops.¹⁷

Thus on 18 August 1898, with little advance notice, Woods found herself bound for the Philippines. Her travelling companion, Lena E. Killiam, was an 1893 graduate of the Hahnemann Hospital Training School for Nurses in Philadelphia, who had served as training school director and head nurse at the Portland hospital and also engaged in private nursing. The two were among a group of eleven commissioned women nurses, chiefly from California, sailing on the US transport *Arizona* from San Francisco to Hawaii and then on to Manila. Woods' charge required her to fulfil her Red Cross nursing duties wherever necessary, giving particular attention to the Oregon Volunteers.¹⁸

In May 1898, the Second Oregon and the First California volunteer regiments had become the first infantry units to embark for the Philippines, departing from the Presidio of San Francisco, where soldiers from throughout the United States gathered and trained for the war. When Woods set sail on the *Arizona* in August, the Oregon troops had recently arrived at Manila Bay and taken possession of the city with only token resistance, made possible through a decisive US naval victory in May under the command of General George Dewey. For the next several months, the Oregonians guarded the Spanish prisoners and policed the city.¹⁹

Even without war-inflicted injuries, the need for medical care was great. Disease and other illnesses ran rampant, and nurses' contributions would prove vital. Lieutenant George F. Telfer of the Second Oregon Volunteers provided a candid, first-hand view of the war experience in letters to his wife and family back home. The medical situation was a frequent topic. 'The lack of nurses and hospital supplies [sic] is the greatest scandal of the war', he wrote on 11 September 1898:

Think of a man sick with typhoid fever—with no nurse. Think of 50 fever patients in one room with *one* man to look after them—that man a soldier, knowing nothing about the care of the sick. Take this room at night—without lights—except what is afforded by a single candle—carried by the attendant. Think of the misery of it all. Then add to this a lack of mosquito nets—to keep off flies [sic] by day and mosquitos [sic] at night—nothing but the commonest food—none of the prepared foods ordinarily given the sick—even a lack of medicines. ... What we want is trained nurses.

This was a plea frequently voiced by those faced with the overwhelming care of the troops.²⁰

Lieutenant Telfer explained in his letters that hospitals were run by chief surgeons sent from Washington, with a staff of assistants: 'Our regimental surgeons do not have access to these hospitals', he wrote. 'They look after [the] sick in quarters and decide what cases should be sent to the hospital. When the man goes there—we lose all authority over him. We are allowed to visit him—but must ask permission of the surgeon in charge'.²¹ On 2 October, Telfer was happy to report that the Red Cross nurses from Oregon and California had arrived but noted with exasperation that the chief medical officer, whom he described as 'a weak old gentleman—way behind the times',²² had informed them that he had no use for them and they should not have come: 'So our men are dying at the rate of two a day as heretofore'.²³

Determined to serve as full-fledged nurses, Woods and Killiam worked to break down the resistance of the medical authorities. By persisting in visiting the hospital and the barracks and helping as needed, they ultimately attained official work assignments. Woods was placed in charge of a ward at the First Reserve Hospital in Manila, and Killiam worked in the special diet kitchen. The hospital, which had previously served as the Spanish military hospital, was built to accommodate from 800 to 1,000 patients. The Americans added several tent wards as space needs arose.²⁴

As the weeks progressed, Woods was among the enthusiastic advocates of a separate place to care for the Oregon soldiers who were convalescent or not seriously sick. In this regimental or 'sick in quarters' hospital, soldiers could receive more personal care, better food, and other home comforts. Other regiments, including California, had successfully established such hospitals for their own men. As Killiam explained in a letter to the Oregon Emergency Corps, some soldiers had such an

aversion to the general hospital that they 'will stay in the noisy barracks, and eat what and when they please until they are in a sad condition when sent to the hospital'.²⁵

The hospital finally came to fruition, with space made by clearing rooms in the regiment's headquarters and monetary contributions from the Oregon Emergency Corps. In December, Woods transferred to work in the new hospital quarters. A few weeks later, the *Oregonian* reported that there were now over thirty patients attended by Woods and the regimental surgeons. Final statistics indicated a daily average of seventy-one Oregon soldiers sick in quarters, with a high of 135 on 2 January 1899. In a letter to the *Rapid City Daily Journal*, Woods described a death from typhoid fever, the first in the new quarters. She compared the soldier's 'home-like' experience, surrounded by his captain, lieutenant, and friends, with the more impersonal treatment he would have received at the division hospital.²⁶

Attending funerals, visiting gravesites, and writing letters of condolence to loved ones constituted a significant part of Woods' duties. The extent to which she was able to use her medical knowledge and training as a physician in her hospital duties is unknown. Captain Sandford Whiting, assistant surgeon of the Second Oregon Volunteers, did commend her ability 'as a physician and a practical nurse'. In her nursing role, Woods received praise from the medical and military officers with whom she served and the enlisted men for whom she cared. 'She was as faithful and attentive to each member that comes under her care as if he was right at home and cared for by his own people', attested Colonel Owen Summers, commanding officer of the Oregon Volunteers.²⁷

Woods found Manila Bay 'beautiful', but the sorry state of local sanitation provoked her ire. Sanitation and 'municipal housekeeping' were becoming popular causes of late nineteenth-century Progressive Era reform. Woods was disparaging of what she perceived as the indolence and 'sloppiness' of the natives, as contrasted with the 'modern push and energy' of Americans.²⁸ 'The Pasig river is a large sewer that nature has provided for these shiftless people', she declared, deploring 'the awful filth of the town' resulting from 'disease germs ... allowed to multiply and flourish for 300 years without molestation'.²⁹ She facetiously proposed taking three million scrubbing brushes to the entire population.³⁰ Woods' judgements failed to take into account that some of the conditions stemmed from the period of Spanish rule, the war itself, and other circumstances beyond the Filipinos' control. Her views reflected elitist attitudes toward race and class. Like other privileged Americans, Woods saw herself as a representative of a superior civilisation.

The Spanish-American War formally ended in December 1898, but in the Philippines the conflict was far from over. Tensions were high, and the United States' denial of independence to the islands after Spain's transfer of sovereignty stirred up anger and a sense of betrayal on the part of the Filipinos. In early February 1899, fighting broke out near Manila between American soldiers and Filipino nationalist forces, marking the beginning of the Philippine-American War. With the

Battle of Manila churning out the war's first heavy casualties, Woods returned to the First Reserve Hospital, where the many wounded were brought from the front and her services were most needed.³¹

With the intensification of hostilities, American attitudes and soldiers' conditioning increasingly issued in racial slurs and a disregard for the lives of the Filipino people. The acquisition of the Philippines was viewed by many Americans as a natural extension of America's westward expansion and experience with its native peoples, with the Filipinos deemed even more 'uncivilised'. An *Oregonian* headline depicting the Filipinos as 'Worse Than Indians' was typical.³² To American expansionist eyes, the natives were manifestly unfit to rule themselves, with no legitimate claim to the land they inhabited. Woods shared that sense of white American mandate. She pronounced the Philippine Islands a paradise for men with capital, declaring the soil the richest she had ever seen, with bananas, mangoes, and other fruit growing without cultivation. There were fortunes to be made for those running sugar, rice, or coffee plantations, she asserted, and the mountains were filled with gold, silver, and lead, waiting to be mined. Her ranching background elicited visions of vast cattle operations with Americans as overseers. Such ambitions were a predictable progression of the story of conquest and subjugation begun in the American West.³³ America's imperialist ventures operated, of course, within a broader framework of empire. Rudyard Kipling's poem 'The White Man's Burden: the United States and the Philippine Islands', published in February 1899, exhorted American men to take on the duties of colonisation and civilisation as had Britain and other European nations. The poem became a favourite with American imperialists to justify occupation of the Islands.³⁴

In the spring of 1899, even as the fighting persisted, the discharge of the volunteer regiments commenced. The terms of enlistment for the volunteers had expired, and the arrival of regular army troops allowed them to begin returning home. The regiments were released in the order in which they had arrived in the Philippines. Thus, in June 1899, the Oregonians were among the first of the troops to leave the islands. Given the opportunity to enter the army as contract nurses at a salary of fifty dollars a month, Woods and Killiam sent applications to Washington, D.C. and both were accepted. However, while Killiam went on to serve as an army nurse, Woods opted to return to the United States. She sailed with the Oregon troops on the *Newport*, reaching San Francisco on 12 July and Oregon shortly thereafter. Described by acquaintances as 'thinner in flesh' (she weighed just ninety-three pounds upon her return), with a complexion 'considerably browned', Woods was otherwise in good health.³⁵

Upon her return to the United States, Woods began to receive invitations to share her wartime experiences. In early August of 1899, she travelled to Rapid City, South Dakota, reuniting with her family. From there, Woods embarked on a busy lecture tour. The positive popular reception of her narration doubtless boosted her confidence level to continue to perform on the public

stage. On 11 August, she spoke at Rapid City's Library Hall. The local paper promoted her as the only woman lecturer who was a Red Cross nurse in the Philippines. The next week, Woods spoke in the nearby Black Hills towns of Deadwood and Lead. She attracted the largest audience that had ever gathered in the opera house for a lecture, the Deadwood paper reported. In her talks, Woods invoked themes of patriotism, civilisation, and religion. The government should send 75,000 soldiers to achieve a quick end to the insurrection, and bring order out of chaos, she declared: 'Then, God grant that as expansionists or nonexpansionists, we in deed and in truth, may prove ourselves a Christian nation'.³⁶ The newspapers undertook to pin down her stance: 'Miss Woods evidently tries to steer clear of expressing an opinion on the question of expansion', observed the *Deadwood Pioneer Press*, 'but her glowing description of the resources of the islands ... with her faith in the omnipotence of the flag, leads us to think with her keen sense of observation and opportunities to know the truth that she must be an ardent expansionist'.³⁷

Over the next few months, Woods lectured in Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri. In Lincoln, Nebraska, in September 1899, she addressed a crowd of around 7,000 at the annual Grand Army of the Republic reunion. In her talk, she aligned herself squarely with the notion that war built character and could inspire national greatness. She sought to relate service in the Philippines to that in the Civil War: 'Rise up, you people of Nebraska,' she exhorted, 'and honor these men as you have not honored ... men since the civil war. For they have taken your burden upon them, and offered themselves a living sacrifice to their nation's honor'. Debate over the war was fruitless, she argued. Rather, it was important to speedily complete what had been started - 'to fight with all the force and strength within us' to inspire the Filipinos with awe and respect. 'The effect of this war has been great upon the individual and upon the nation', she continued:

As a nation, we are dealing with problems for the solving of which we have neither rules nor experience. Our diplomats, financiers and statesmen are grasping and generating thoughts as new to them as warfare to a raw recruit. Therefore, though it is true that we have had few men in the Philippines in proportion to those who fought in some of the battles of the civil war, this Philippine insurrection is tremendous in its importance. The men who have fought in it have dipped their sword points in human blood, and written therewith one of the most important pages of American history.³⁸

There was perhaps a bit of irony in Woods stepping into the public sphere to promote the vital role of male strength and character when it was that very public activity by women which men were afraid was eroding their manliness.

As Woods shared her war experiences and honed her message, she increasingly directed her focus toward

the place and role of women. She described being struck by what she styled the free and independent life of women in the Philippines. 'I know that is a startling statement', she acknowledged,

but it is the land of feminine and masculine equality. We have heard so much lately of down-trodden women ... But ... the women ... seem to have things very much their own way. True it is not always a very desirable way, but it is theirs, and that is the greatest comfort to both masculine and feminine humanity. You do not see ... that double standard of morality that tries the soul and temper of the average American woman. ... The women do not vote, but neither do the men, so there are no odious comparisons. ... The women are not excluded from any occupations. ... There seemed to be a friendly partnership in home, shop and field. The woman quite as frequently holds the purse strings and the balance of power, smokes the cigars and drinks the vino as does her husband.³⁹

Besides fostering notions of superiority, American expansionist reach provided women like Woods the opportunity to encounter and learn from other races and cultures. In her study of women, race, and imperialism in American history, Louise Michele Newman writes that white feminists were 'not ... able to look to primitive societies as a model (the racism in social evolution was too blinding), but they did appreciate that primitive women maintained a measure of economic independence and personal autonomy that civilized women had lost'.⁴⁰

As Woods' views developed, women's rights and suffrage became her central emphasis. Her reputation as a public lecturer provided her a ready platform to speak on this topic increasingly close to her heart. Woods joined the American suffragist movement at a transitional time in its history. By the turn of the twentieth century, women were enfranchised in four states (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho), all in the western United States. As with the medical profession for women, women's suffrage had achieved a measure of respectability. Five decades on from the groundbreaking Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the cause had broadened and taken on a more moderate cast. Fitting into the mainstream, however, often meant avoiding taking countercultural stands on racial issues and discrimination. In her study of the suffrage movement in the American West, Rebecca J. Mead asserts that, 'Unwilling or unable to resist contemporary racist attitudes, white suffragists ... helped to reinforce them'.⁴¹ The same sense of cultural superiority embedded in America's expansionist mindset extended to the self-perception of the elite white women who filled suffrage's ranks. As exemplars of social evolutionary development, white women activists could position themselves as more deserving of full citizenship and autonomy than less educated or 'civilised' classes or races.⁴²

Privileged women's ideologies of race, class, and citizenship were clearly impacted by the experience of

empire, as scholars of colonial history worldwide have shown. Encounters with colonised peoples led both to efforts to consolidate and to reform existing policies and attitudes. As Ann Laura Stoler observes in her comparative study of empire, 'Racial discrimination and social reform ... were not contradictions but complementary political impulses created out of the same cloth'.⁴³

Woods' perspective encompassed these seemingly opposing impulses, as is evidenced in her attitudes toward the Filipinas. While she viewed her position as one of superiority – 'Yes, these women are certainly independent, but I saw none with whom I cared to exchange places', she wrote⁴⁴ – she yet allowed for the potential of eventual equality through the influences of civilisation and education. In the spring of 1900, she conceived a plan to establish 'a sort of college settlement' in Manila and wrote to Clara Marshall, dean of her alma mater, the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, seeking women physicians for the project. 'Do you know of any doctor who would like to go out?' she asked: 'She would have all the "experience" she wished. The natives would receive her with open arms. ... I believe for the glory and advancement of our sex it would pay medical women to start this settlement themselves, though my idea was to have an English school as its backbone'. The project, though, never materialised.⁴⁵

In 1900, Woods, now based in Des Moines, Iowa, travelled through Iowa establishing suffrage clubs with Mary Garrett Hay, a national organiser for the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).⁴⁶ In October, Woods was elected state organiser for women's suffrage at the convention of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association. There, she gave a talk describing her conversion to the cause while serving as a Red Cross nurse. She had seen much to accomplish, she relayed, much that she could have done better if she had a vote. 'I found then, as I had not before, that woman must have political liberty before she can have liberty of conscience. The colonel of the regiment knew I would have no vote for him for governor and so far as influencing him was concerned, I could only work through some other man'. Woods urged organisation and 'constant work' in the suffrage cause 'until it became dearer to its supporters than anything else'.⁴⁷

As suffragism entered its second generation, the movement had begun adopting more modern campaigning techniques. Woods, like her colleagues, generally used these open tactics, welcoming discussion and debate. In the spring of 1901, working now as a national suffrage organiser for NAWSA, Woods traversed Kentucky, Arkansas, and Ohio, lecturing, forming clubs, and helping to introduce suffrage legislation. There is no record of Woods addressing racial issues during her suffrage work in the South.⁴⁸ Speaking at a women's suffrage convention in Sandusky, Ohio at the end of April 1901, Woods declared that all women desired the vote, if they only knew it. The ballot was needed alike by women out in the world earning their own living and by women carrying out philanthropic work. Most certainly, it was needed for the home. 'If the women would teach their children better citizenship', Woods contended, 'they

must themselves be citizens. If they would have a high place in their own homes they must wield an influence that has a power [at the] back of it'.⁴⁹

Woods next turned her efforts to the open spaces of the West, where suffrage efforts had found their most receptive environment. In the fall of 1901, she agitated in Kansas, where she followed a rigorous schedule, holding meetings and lecturing throughout the state, with a marathon stint in which she visited sixteen towns in as many days.⁵⁰ In October 1902, NAWSA sent Woods to Arizona Territory. She visited all but one of its counties, setting up some twenty clubs and giving numerous public lectures in which she invited audience members to sign a petition urging legislators to enfranchise women.⁵¹ In Phoenix, Woods spoke on 'Woman's Position in the Modern World'. Women had once been producers in their homes just like their husbands, she stated, but trade and mechanisation had altered conditions to the point that the home was no longer used to produce what was needed. To obtain the necessities of life, many women had to go out to earn a living. 'She has not gotten out of her sphere, but the sphere has left her'. And, for those not compelled to earn a living, they had an obligation to go out to work for humanity, able to carry the work to completion by venturing outside their 'proper place'.⁵² Woods headed a committee, formed in January 1903, to plead the cause of suffrage with the members of the Arizona territorial legislature. Her organisational and legislative efforts seemed to bring promising results. In March, the legislature successfully passed a suffrage bill. The victory, though, was short-lived, as the governor quickly vetoed the bill. (A suffrage amendment would ultimately pass in Arizona in November 1912).⁵³

Woods continued to actively organise in the West over the next few years. In the Oklahoma and Indian territories, her speeches before press, labour, farmers', and veterans' associations drew large audiences, new allies, and a growing sense of confidence. 'There can be no doubt of our ultimate success', stated the movement's territorial president Kate Biggers, crediting Woods with strengthening the suffrage clubs and arousing broad public interest.⁵⁴ Despite the well-organised campaign, Oklahoma women would have to wait more than a decade before gaining enfranchisement. In November 1918, the state finally adopted a suffrage amendment.⁵⁵ Nationally, the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote passed in the United States Senate on 4 June 1919 and was ratified in August 1920.

The strain of national organising work began to take a toll upon Woods' health, causing her to resign her position around 1908. For the last five decades of her life, she remained largely out of the public eye, residing for much of that time in Tucson, Arizona, where she found the climate greatly beneficial. She died on 7 October 1959 in Tucson at the age of ninety-four and was buried in Nebraska City, Nebraska.⁵⁶

Frances Woods' spirit evoked the aspirations and ambition of the young and expanding country she was part of. Her societal status, determination, and taste for adventure enabled her to make the most of the emerging options of her era and parlay a public career out of her war experience and passion for women's

rights. Contemporary readers, with an awareness of the fraught history of the ideologies of race and gender, will recognise that her path was one layered with complexity and paradox. While Woods shared in her era's broadly held cultural assumptions, she yet bent them to her own experiences. She displayed racialist and classist views and effectively endorsed expansionist/imperialist policies, but also celebrated the independence of women anywhere, regardless of race or class. Filipina women, in her estimation, were not inherently lesser, but in need, rather, of America's civilising influence and drive. Woods' dedication to suffrage and women's rights was unswervingly strong and sincere. It cohabited, however, with a deeply ingrained sense of cultural superiority and mandate that clearly aligned itself with that of 'civilised' white Americans and their position of authority in an expansionist nation. She was a woman shaped by the tensions and contradictions embedded in late-nineteenth-century American imperialist concepts of civilisation and notions of democracy.

Notes

1. *Oregonian* (Portland, OR), 18 Aug. 1898.
2. Quoted in *Hawaiian Gazette* (Honolulu, HI), 2 Sep. 1898. For background on women and medical service in early American wars, see Mercedes Graf, *On the Field of Mercy: Women Medical Volunteers from the Civil War to the First World War* (Amherst, NY, Humanity Books, 2010); Mary T. Sarnecky, *A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Kimberly Jensen, *Mobilizing Minerva: American Women in the First World War* (Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 2008).
3. For analysis of gender and politics in America at the turn of the twentieth century, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998); Kristin L. Hoganson, "'As Badly off as the Filipinos": U.S. Women's Suffragists and the Imperial Issue at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Women's History*, 13 (Summer 2001), 9-33; Allison L. Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870-1929* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).
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5. O. A. Carr, ed., *Memorial of J. K. Rogers and Christian College* (St. Louis, John Burns Publishing Co., 1885), 210, 228; Regina Markell Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), 47-9, 234; Ellen S. More, *Restoring the Balance: Women Physicians and*



Dr Frances Woods in the graduating class of 1894.

Image courtesy Legacy Center Archives, Drexel University College of Medicine, Philadelphia.

the Profession of Medicine, 1850-1995 (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999), 5.

6. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 May 1894; Archives and Special Collections, Drexel University College of Medicine, Philadelphia [hereafter ASC/DUCM], *Forty-Third Annual Announcement of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1892); ASC/DUCM, *Minutes of the Faculty Meetings, Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia*; Steven J. Peitzman, *A New and Untried Course: Woman's Medical College and Medical College of Pennsylvania, 1850-1998* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2000), 1, 90-3, 112, 121; Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science*, 111, 122-3, 245.

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10. *Ibid.*, 261-2; Sarnecky, *A History of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps*, 24; Philip A. Kalisch and Beatrice J. Kalisch, *The Advance of American Nursing* (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1995), 36, 67-75, 103-4. See also Sandra Beth Lewenson, *Taking Charge: Nursing, Suffrage, and Feminism in America, 1873-1920* (New York, NLN Press, 1996).

11. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 10, 140, 204; Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170-215; Theodore Roosevelt, 'The Strenuous Life', in *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (New York, Century Co., 1901), 20-1. Writing in the *North American Review*, British colonial administrator and colonel Sir

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13. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 128-9.

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17. *Report of the Commission Appointed by the President to Investigate the Conduct of the War Department in the War with Spain*, Senate Doc. 221, 56th Cong., 1st sess., 1900, 8 vols., 1:725; *Oregonian*, 23 Aug. 1898; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, 11 Aug. 1899; *Daily Journal* (Salem, OR), 6 Sep. 1899; George Thomas Little, comp., *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Maine*, vol. 1 (New York, Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1909), 190.

18. Thomas Lindsley Bradford, *History of the Homœopathic Medical College of Pennsylvania; the Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, Boericke & Tafel, 1898), 566; *Oregonian*, 18 and 23 Aug. 1898; *Hawaiian Gazette*, 2 Sep. 1898. The group consisted of Dr Rose Kidd Beere from Denver, Colorado,

and eight women nurses (including one doctor) from California. *A Record of the Red Cross Work on the Pacific Slope*, 33-36; Wilbur Fiske Stone, ed., *History of Colorado*, vol. 4 (Chicago, S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1919), 37.

19. See *The Official Records of the Oregon Volunteers in the Spanish War and Philippine Insurrection*, comp. C. U. Gantenbein, Adjutant General (Salem, OR, W.H. Leeds, 1902).

20. George F. Telfer, *Manila Envelopes: Oregon Volunteer Lt. George F. Telfer's Spanish-American War Letters*, ed. Sara Bunnett (Portland, OR, Oregon Historical Society Press, 1987), 49-50. Chaplain James Mailley of the first Nebraska Volunteers wrote in September 1898: 'Our greatest need ... is neither medicine or food, but skilful nursing. It is here that the hospital is crippled most. There are few trained nurses; in the strict sense of the term, none. The War Department should have sent a few female nurses to Manila. They are sadly needed'. James Mailley, 'With the Army at Manila', *The Independent*, 50 (10 Nov. 1898), 1317.

21. Telfer, *Manila Envelopes*, 93.

22. *Ibid.*, 72.

23. *Ibid.*, 59.

24. *Oregonian*, 24 Nov., 1 Dec. 1898, 1 Aug. 1899; *Rapid City Daily Journal*, 21 Jan. 1899; *Report of the Surgeon-General of the Army to the Secretary of War for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1899* (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1899), 100, 109.

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39. Quoted in *Omaha World Herald*, 22 Oct. 1899.

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MISS FRANCES WOODS—A NEBRASKA CITY GIRL WHO SERVED AS NURSE IN THE PHILIPPINES.

*Dr Frances Woods in Omaha Daily Bee
December 1899'*

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