DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 381 SO 012 594

AUTHOR	Sanders, Beverly
TITLE	Women in American History: A Series. Book Two, Women in the Ages of Expansion and Reform 1820-1860.
INSTITUTION	American Federation of Teachers, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Women's Educational Equity Act Program.
PUB DATE	79
NOTE	80p.: For related documents, see SO 012 593 and SO 012 595-596.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Development Center, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02160 ($1.75 plus $1.30 shipping charge)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Authors; Blacks; Civil Rights; *Females; Feminism; Learning Activities; Occupations; Secondary Education; Sex Discrimination; *Sex Role; Slavery; *Social Action; Social Studies; *United States History; *Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

The document, one in a series of four on women in American history, discusses women in the ages of expansion and reform (1820-1860). Designed to supplement U.S. history textbooks, the book is presented in six chapters. Chapter I describes the "true woman," an ideal cultivated by women writers, educators, and magazine editors. The four virtues were piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Chapter II focuses on women in the economy. The diary of Frances Kemble, mistress of a plantation in Georgia, describes the physical sufferings of her female slaves. The roles of women in the industrial revolution, professions, and organized labor are also discussed. Chapter III, "Women and the Spirit of Reform," depicts the works of Frances Wright and Dorothea Dix in slavery, criminal, and mental health reform. Pioneers in education for women are also portrayed. Chapter IV concerns women in the abolition movement. The chapter contains sections on the activities of white and free black women in the fight against slavery. Chapter V discusses the movement for women's rights in terms of Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and Amelia Bloomer (who popularized the revolutionary and liberating wearing apparel for women). Chapter VI describes female editors and writers such as journalist Anne Royall, Margaret Fuller, "Godey's Lady's Book" editor Sarah Josepha Hale, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Emily Dickinson. Questions and suggested activities are provided at the end of each chapter. (KC)

Women in American History: A Series

Book Two

Women in the Ages of Expansion and Reform 1820 - 1860

by

Beverly Sanders

American Federation of Teachers

Women's Educational Equity Act Program

U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare
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Produced by the American Federation of Teachers under a grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, under the auspices of the Women's Educational Equity Act. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of Education or the Department, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

Printed and distributed by Education Development Center, 1979, 55 Chapel Street, Newton, MA 02160

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several teachers were most helpful to me during the class-testing phase of this project. I would like to thank Joshua Scherer, Susan Chan and Peter Janovsky of Seward Park High School, New York City; Jane Adair of the John Bartram School of Human Services, Philadelphia; and Sven Huseby of the Putney School, Putney, Vermont. They graciously allowed me into their social studies classes and shared with me the task of presenting the series material to their students. I am grateful to the students for their courtesy and enthusiasm during the lessons and for their patience in filling out the questionnaires.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Elvira Tarr of the Brooklyn College School of Education for reading portions of the series in an earlier form and offering useful advice for its improvement.

Finally, a special thank-you to Eugenia Kemble of the American Federation of Teachers for her encouragement and cooperation at every stage of the project.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Women in American History, a four-part series, attempts to fill a serious gap in the American history curriculum as taught in most United States high schools today. Surveys of the most widely used American history textbooks repeatedly turn up the astonishing fact that these books almost totally neglect the lives and achievements of American women. Although the revival of a feminist movement in the 1960's and 1970's has resulted in a proliferation of women's studies courses at the college level and a flood of books dealing with the history of women, very little of this material has been adapted to the secondary school level, except where individual teachers have initiated courses of their own.

During the year in which I developed the series--a process that included visiting several schools and testing the material in the classroom--I realized that the average social studies classroom was unaffected by the growing and much publicized interest in women's studies. The same standard textbooks were still being used, and no supplementary material on women seemed to be available. (It should be said that some of the publishers of the venerable textbooks are producing auxiliary pamphlets on American minority groups, among whom women are included, to supplement their standard fare.) When quizzed, few students were able to name more than one outstanding American woman who had lived before 1900. (Their response was usually Harriet Tubman; black studies has made its mark.) Most of the teachers I worked with were eager to integrate material on women into their American history courses and were grateful for whatever material I could put directly into the hands of their students. Other teachers were indifferent and would be unlikely to teach such material unless they were directed to do so. The students were usually very interested, particularly in material that presented women as fighters for social justice, such as that relating to the antislavery speakers of the 1830's. As might have been expected, women students showed greater interest and enthusiasm than men. Yet the latter, even when openly hostile to women's claims for historical recognition, seemed stimulated by the material and eager to engage in discussion.

Each book in the series is a narrative of women's lives and accomplishments within a significant epoch of American history--an epoch normally studied in the standard history survey. There are, naturally, chapters devoted to women who were famous in their time, although many of these women had been virtually forgotten until the recent revival of feminism. Often the more well-known figures were reformers--abolitionists, temperance workers, crusaders for the mentally ill, etc.--reform work being the one public arena open to women, who were virtually barred from politics before the 20th century. Others earned fame and fortune in literary work, since writing was traditionally one of the few professions that could be practiced at home. There is, of course, considerable attention devoted to the women--women's rights advocates, suffragists, educators--who dedicated their lives to achieving equality for women.

It would be distorting women's history, however, to concentrate exclusively on the famous and the exceptional. Throughout our nation's history, most women, conforming to widely held religious and social views of their role, have lived anonymous lives as wives, mothers and unsung workers. Therefore, I have tried to devote roughly equal space to the lives and accomplishments of these "ordinary" women, whose names were not well known, but whose experiences have, fortunately, been recorded in diaries, letters, newspaper pieces and other documents that have been preserved. I hope each book sufficiently stresses that women have always been a vital part of America's labor force. On farms and in factories, women were there from the start: exploited and invisible, but making the wheels go round. Though the important economic role of women seems obvious, it was not always fully recognized and valued, especially during eras when it was popular to view the ideal woman as a nonworker, except for domestic chores. For each epoch, I have tried to show what conditions--economic, political, social and legal--advanced women toward equality with men or retarded their progress in that direction.

Although my intention was to produce a historical narrative and not a collection of documents, I have tried to include ample selections from primary sources whenever that seemed the best way to capture the flavor of certain periods and personalities. In my view, most secondary school textbooks offer too small a taste of primary sources, no doubt because the vocabulary and writing style of our 17th, 18th and 19th century ancestors are considered too difficult for the teenaged reader of today. To the contrary, I have found from my experiments with these materials that students will respond to authenticity when they find it, even if the language is difficult. Even slow readers will struggle through the rhetoric of an Angelina Grimké once they sense the woman's power and passionate devotion to an ideal of justice.

It has been noted that women's history generally falls into the increasingly popular disciplines of social and economic history, rather than the more traditional categories of political, diplomatic and military history. I would hope that exposure to the history of American women might awaken in high school students--male and female alike--an awareness that social and economic history exists and that it can have meaning for their lives. The emphasis in women's history on how people live and work might cause students to realize that history is about people like themselves--that their own lives, however obscure, contain the very stuff of history. The themes of women's history have, in my view, the potential for stimulating students' interest in history and for enriching and humanizing what for many young people might otherwise be a remote and abstract field of study.

The United States became a growing, changing and increasingly democratic republic in the period between 1820 and 1860, the earlier decades of which have come to be called the Age of Jackson. The country was expanding socially--immigration and the shake-up in the class structure; politically--universal white manhood suffrage; geographically--westward movement; and economically--the growth of industry, transportation and the cotton kingdom. The changes of the era were embodied in the dynamic figure of Jackson himself, the first president to come from a recently arrived group (the Scottish-Irish of an earlier generation), from the frontier and the rising lower classes. The historical Samuel Eliot Morison has aptly summarized the exuberant mood of this period:

> All in all, the United States was a pretty crude country in 1850 by present standards...Yet, with all their drawbacks, the Northern and Western states were a land where dreams of youth came true; where the vast majority of men were doing what they wished to do, without restraint of class or administration...The fun of building, inventing, creating, in an atmosphere where one man's success did not mean another's failure, gave American life that peculiar gusto that Walt Whitman caught in his poetry.[1]

These years of opportunity for the American man brought a changing, but not necessarily liberating, role for the American woman. Women on the frontier, on farms, and in immigrant groups shared the economic burdens of life with their men, in an overlapping division of labor, as American women had done in colonial times. But among women of old Yankee stock in the settled Northeast, two distinct roles emerged: the middle-class "lady" or "true woman" and the female factory worker.

In response to this dramatically changing society arose a spirit of reform, springing on the one hand from a discontent with social evils, and on the other, from the very patterns of enlightment--mass newspapers and magazines, public education, political parties--that characterize an open, expanding society. Out of this reform spirit protests arose during the 1830's and continued through the 1850's against the excesses of the growing society: the ills of the new industrial system; the institution of slavery, now more deeply entrenched by the growth of the cotton kingdom; and the inequities in the treatment of women. Ironically, it was the middle-class woman, rather than the exploited slave woman, factory worker or immigrant servant, who most keenly resented the inferior status of women and gave voice to her resentment. This was because she had lost her former economic status at the same time that society offered her new opportunities for education and self-expression.

In this period middle-class women, who owed their leisure time to the abundance of immigrant servants, displayed a notable talent for literary and propagandistic pursuits that ranged from active participation in various reform movements to prominent careers in literature and journalism. In some cases,

these writers, editors and reform leaders helped to reinforce attitudes that kept women in an inferior status and in a separate "sphere" from men. Others demanded legal, social and political equality with men.

The peculiar contradictions of the women's situation were noticed by the European visitors who came to observe and describe the American experiment in democracy. The writings of two such travelers, Harriet Martineau and Alexis de Tocqueville, provide a good starting point for a look at the daily lives of Americans, and particularly at the relations between men and women during the Jackson Era.

NOTES

1. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York, 1965) p. 475.

CHAPTER ONE

THE "TRUE WOMAN"

SEPARATE SPHERES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Some of the Europeans who came over to observe the young American republic noticed that sharp distinctions often were drawn between the sexes. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville, the Frenchman who observed American society in the 1830's, commented:

> In no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes and to make them keep pace one with the other, but in two pathways that are always different. American women never manage the outward concerns of the family or conduct a business or take a part in political life; nor are they, on the other hand, ever compelled to perform the rough labor of the fields or to make any of those laborious efforts which demand the exertion of physical strength.[1]

Another visitor in this period, Harriet Martineau, an Englishwoman, noted that many Americans believed "that there are virtues which are peculiarly masculine, and others which are peculiarly feminine...what are called the hardy virtues are more appropriate to men, and the gentler to women."[2]

Tocqueville was also surprised by the contrast between the independence of many American middle-class women before marriage and the strict confinement to which they submitted after marriage. The unmarried woman, he remarked, "makes her father's house an abode of freedom and of pleasure," while the wife "lives in the home of her husband as if it were a cloister."[3] However, he did not regard the role of dutiful wife as being forced on women by society. Rather, he thought that having been educated to understand their duties as wives, American women went into marriage open-eyed:

> they attach a sort of pride to the voluntary surrender of their own will and make it their boast to bend themselves to the yoke, not to shake it off.[4]

Harriet Martineau did not agree with Tocqueville that American women had such freedom of choice. Women chose marriage, she insisted, because it was the only role available to them:

> Wifely and motherly occupation may be called the sole business of women there. If she has not that, she has nothing.[5]

And she thought that much of the praise showered on women, and the courtesy shown them in public places, merely covered up woman's true oppression and lack of equality:

> While women's intellect is confined, her morals crushed, her health ruined, her weaknesses encouraged, and her strength punished, she is told that her lot is cast in the paradise of women.[6]

What had brought about such exaggerated differences between the sexes for many Americans? Why were women suddenly cherished for their weaknesses rather than for their strengths?

The idea of separate spheres for men and women was not new. The "ladies' books" of the 17th and 18th centuries had spelled out women's special virtues and duties. However, during the colonial and revolutionary periods, such books reached mainly very wealthy people who wanted to imitate the styles of the English aristocracy. They had little influence on most middle and lower-class women, who had an important role in the colonial economy. The economic and social changes of the Jackson Era separated the daily activities of men and women. At the same time, the "mass media" of the day--magazines, newspapers, and popular literature--spread the idea of separate roles for men and women to a large portion of the population.

The transformation from a household-centered economy to an industrial and market economy that occurred in many sectors of American life between 1820 and 1860 took men out of the home to engage in commerce or the professions or politics. Women were left behind in the home, which had lost its primary economic function now that all kinds of items, from candles to cloth, were no longer manufactured there. Men were caught up in the hustle and bustle of the marketplace and the law court. The influence of traditional forms of authority, such as the founding fathers and the churches, had declined. The mobility provided by westward expansion also caused anxiety and a sense of instability. People began to look to the home as a source of stability, serenity and moral values. And who was there at the center holding it all together? The woman, of course.

THE "TRUE WOMAN" OR THE VICTORIAN "LADY"

An image of the "true woman" came to be projected in popular literature aimed at women--magazines such as Godey's Lady's Book, sentimental novels and verse and gift books--as well as in ministers' sermons. Formulated in the early decades of the 19th century, this ideal of the "true woman" was a powerful influence on the behavior and self-image of American middle-class women throughout the entire century.

For the ideal or "cult" of "true womanhood" and the code of behavior it represented was above all a middle-class ideal. It was accepted as a kind of status symbol by the middle class, which was rapidly growing and becoming the dominant group in American society during the Jackson Era. Middle-class women could become ladies of leisure because large numbers of immigrant servants were available for menial household work. This was a result of a wave of immigration from Northern and Western Europe during the 1830's, through the

1850's, a migration stimulated by America's economic growth. Oddly enough, the ideal of true womanhood became the standard of femininity for all women, even though it did not reflect the lives of poor women, black or white, or indeed of any woman who worked out of necessity. Early female factory workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, and other places were expected to behave like young ladies and their lives were strictly supervised. Immigrant women, no strangers to hard work, were quite ready to become ladies when their husbands prospered.

The Womanly Virtues

According to the ideal of "true womanhood," a woman's four chief virtues were piety, purity, submission and domesticity.[7] Let us look at this cluster of qualities which we have come to call Victorian after the English queen who began her reign during this period, and who seemed to embody these traits in her own personality.

Piety or religion was thought to be a woman's special province, even though women could not be ministers of the mainstream churches. Women were thought to have stronger feelings and intuitions than men, who were supposed to be more rational and calculating, and these feelings brought them into closer contact with God. A woman was the best hope of salvation for her worldly husband.

Purity or innocence of mind and body was regarded as absolutely essential for a woman. Ladies' magazines and popular fiction cautioned young women to save themselves for their wedding nights. Madness, death and worst of all--prostitution--awaited the young woman who lost her virtue before marriage. In "Lucy Dutton," a popular story by Fanny Forester, one of the sentimental writers, Lucy, an innocent country girl, is seduced by an attractive city slicker. She bears a child, it dies, she goes mad at its funeral, and finally dies herself. "Poor, poor Lucy Dutton! The grave is a blessed couch and pillow to the wretched. Rest thee there, poor Lucy!"[8] A young woman's ability to maintain her chastity in the face of a man's assault on it proved her superiority to him, and could possibly save him from the temptations of vice.

On the other hand, married women were expected to be passive, clinging, and obedient. In return for submission to men, women, in theory, received support and protection. The submission of wife to husband was reflected in the common law, under which a married woman had no legal existence apart from her husband. One lecturer in the 1850's described the relation of woman to man this way:

> She feels herself weak and timid. She needs a protector. She is in a measure dependent. She asks for wisdom, constancy, firmness, perseverance, and she is willing to repay it all by the surrender of the full treasure of her affections.[9]

Wives were advised to bear their husbands' faults, even their infidelities, with quiet acceptance, repressing any harsh words or criticism. Wives were

also expected to submit, with religious fortitude, to such tragedies as the deaths of infant children. A "true woman" was timid and clinging, like a vine around an oak tree. Such a vision of female dependency naturally took for granted that a woman would always have a man to depend on, and ignored the plight of abused or deserted wives, widows and unmarried women.

Domesticity, the love of the home, was the fourth virtue crowning the "true woman." The home was her natural "sphere," and there she was expected to be completely fulfilled as a wife, mother and homemaker. She created an orderly, serene sanctuary to which her busy husband could retreat from the brutal competition of the business world. Child care was the most important aspect of home life for the Victorian woman. In the colonial household, both parents had shared child-rearing responsibilities with the aim of instilling in the child basic religious principles and getting him or her to become a working member of the household as early as possible. In the 19th century, on the other hand, the mother took on the major responsibility for both the physical care and the moral education of her children, attaching them to her by loving bonds. A perfect example in a popular book of the mother as moral guide and confessor to her children was the Marmee of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women. In general, 19th century child-rearing practices were tender and loving and recognized childhood as a unique stage of life, in contrast to the rather stern methods that prevailed in the previous two centuries, when children were viewed as unruly creatures requiring strict control.

Dress and Hygiene

The clothing of the 19th century lady inhibited her bodily movements just as the ideal of "true womanhood" restricted her behavior. A woman was virtually a prisoner of her clothing: tight bodices over tightly laced corsets, or "stays," that squeezed the waist and frequently deformed the ribs and spine; long heavy skirts, often weighing several pounds, that swept the floors and streets and concealed the embarrassing fact that women had legs; and underneath it all, layers of petticoats. Many 19th century reformers, both women and men, strongly criticized women's clothing as unhealthy and unsanitary.

Historians studying the lives of 19th century women have come away with the strong impression that, on the whole, these women did not enjoy good health. Although there is not much statistical evidence to confirm this impression, the frequent remarks about health by both foreign travelers in America and by Americans themselves provides strong circumstantial evidence. It should be pointed out that men as well as women and children suffered ill health because of poor sanitation, nutrition and inadequate medical knowledge, but women's ailments frequently seemed to be directly related to female biology and psychology. Childbirth was a hazard at a time when doctors were still unaware of the dangers of infection, and ladylike modesty frequently prevented even strongminded women from seeking help for medical problems connected with the reproductive system. Moreover, a woman who was fashionably "delicate" came closer to the ideal of the passive "true woman" than a woman in robust health with a hearty appetite.

It is also possible that ill health provided women with an acceptable excuse for evading household responsibilities and the sexual demands of husbands. The excuse of poor health enabled some women--Harriet Beecher Stowe,

for example--to leave their families for months at a time to stay at health resorts, such as the water cure establishments that were very popular from the 1840's to the 1880's. At such a place a woman could relax, wear loose clothing, and follow a sensible regime of frequent baths, long walks and simple food.

PROPAGANDISTS OF THE IDEAL

A number of women writers, educators, and magazine editors played an important role in formulating the cult of "true womanhood" and in exploiting it in order to win power and status for women. These women seemed to have struck a bargain with men: we'll stay out of the business world, the professions and the political arena in return for absolute rule in the home. Man would place woman on a pedestal to be worshipped for her moral superiority, and women would happily accept the worship.

A woman who made it her mission in life to elevate the domestic role of women was the author and educator Catharine Beecher, the oldest daughter of Lyman Beecher, a prominent evangelical minister, and the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe. She was one of a number of thinkers, most of whom were men, who were trying to create a new social philosophy during the Jackson Era. According to Catharine Beecher's social philosphy, self-sacrifice, the submission of the self to the common good, was the highest virtue a person could possess, and thus the most appropriate equality for a moral leader. Since self-sacrifice was a virtue that came more naturally to women than to men, women were the natural moral leaders of society.[10] But this did not mean that women were to assert leadership in public life. Catharine Beecher accepted the home and family as women's exclusive sphere and believed that women could improve the larger society by their influence on husbands and children. "There is a moral power given to the woman in the family state," she declared, "much more controlling and abiding than the inferior physical power conferred on man."[11]

Perhaps even more influential than Catharine Beecher in promoting the idea of separate spheres for men and women was Sarah Josepha Hale, who, for over forty years, was the editor of Godey's Lady's Book, a magazine whose circulation reached 150,000 in 1860. Godey's provided the reader with advice on every aspect of domesticity: recipes for food, home medicines and cleaning mixtures, instructions on table setting and napkin folding, child psychology, sewing, knitting and needlework patterns, home decoration ideas and women's fashions.

In her editorials, Hale constantly proclaimed the God-given differences between the sexes: "The special gifts of God to men are mechanical ingenuity and physical strength. To women He had given moral insight...and the patience that endures physical suffering."[12] To Hale the role of wife and mother was holy. But her belief in the superior moral qualities of woman's nature led her to champion advanced education for women. Similarly, her concern for feminine modesty caused her to favor medical training for women so that there would be enough women doctors to treat women's ailments.

A number of women with a talent for writing fiction and verse spread the gospel of "true womanhood" to thousands of mostly female readers through sentimental poetry, stories and novels. The sentimental writer was particularly skillful at manipulating the readers' emotions, so that they would cry over the heroine in distress and rejoice at the happy ending. The most successful sentimental writers believed that women, because of their monopoly on feeling and intuition, had an easier route to salvation than men, who were worldly and rational, and they could help men find the path. It is likely, for example, that Lydia Sigourney, the poet and storywriter known to her vast readership as "the sweet singer of Hartford," believed that a person could be brought closer to God by weeping over one of her many poems on the death of children than by listening to a minister's sermon in church. Sentimental writers frequently depicted lonely orphans or defenseless young women overcoming all problems and dangers by virtue of Christian purity and self-sacrifice. The women in sentimental fiction were usually shown to be timid, dependent and tenderhearted. Women of talent--actresses, for example--either willingly gave up their own work to help their husbands' careers, or suffered bitterly for having competed with them.

The sentimental writers liked to present themselves to the public as totally feminine and uncompetitive, often claiming that admiring relatives had forced them into publishing their work. They insisted that they wrote automatically, almost unconsciously, the way a bird sings, and that their families and domestic chores were more important to them than literary success. Even though many literary women turned to writing to help support themselves and their families, they seldom admitted this economic motive publicly.[13]

One of the few female writers in the sentimental vein to express openly her resentment of men, her desire to be a literary success, and her satisfaction at having achieved it, was "Fanny Fern," the pen name of Sara Payson Parton. She expressed these "unfeminine" resentments in an autobiographical novel, Ruth Hall, which was strongly criticized for having "defiled the 'sacredness' of the home."[14] One notable writer, however, Nathaniel Hawthorne, admired Fanny Fern for being true to a woman's experience. He condemned most of the sentimental writers as a "d----d mob of scribbling women," who corrupted public taste and incidentally stole the literary market away from more serious writers. The popular female authors Hawthorne probably had in mind were Maria Susanna Cummins, Fanny Forrester and Grace Greenwood.

Even women writers primarily interested in serious social problems shared the domestic values of the sentimentalists. Lydia Maria Child and Harriet Beecher Stowe, both of whom wrote important books against slavery, filled their writings with praise of domestic life, and asserted the moral power of women. In Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, the most famous antislavery book of all time, all the morally superior characters, with the exception of Uncle Tom himself, are women. They suffer from slavery along with the slave, and are shown as a force for good within an evil system. The love of home life pervades the novel; the most tragic aspect for the slaves is that slavery denies them a real home and destroys families.

Despite economic and social developments that took more and more women out of the home, the ideal of "true womanhood" persisted throughout the 19th century. It influenced many of the courageous women who, at the risk of being called "unladylike," participated in the reform movements of the 1830's through the 1850's--temperance, abolition and women's rights. So influential was it, in fact, that some of the advocates of women's rights came to use the notion of women's moral superiority to justify their demands for equal education, improved legal status and women's suffrage.

NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835; paperback ed., New York, 1954) vol. II, p. 223.

2. Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (New York, 1837) vol. II, p. 233.

3. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, vol. II, p. 212.

4. Ibid., p. 223.

5. Ibid., p. 223.

6. Martineau, *Society*, vol. II, p. 226.

7. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly*, 18, (Summer 1966), p. 152.

8. Ibid., pp. 155-156. Quotation is from Emily Chubbock, *Alderbrook* (Boston, 1847), II. pp. 121, 127.

9. Ibid., p. 159. Quotation is from George Burnap, *Sphere and Duties of Women* (Baltimore, 1854), p. 47.

10. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (1973; paperback ed., New York, 1976) pp. 80-84.

11. Gail Parker, ed., *The Oven Birds: American Women on Womanhood 1820-1920* (paperback ed., New York, 1972) p. 151.

12. *Godey's Lady's Book*, January 1851, Editor's Table, p. 65.

13. Ann D. Wood, "The 'Scribbling Women' and Fanny Fern: Why Women Wrote," *American Quarterly*, 23, no. 1 (Spring 1971), pp. 6-9.

14. Ibid., p. 4.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. List the economic and social changes of the Jackson era that helped bring about the sharp division between the roles of men and women. According to Alexis de Tocqueville and other observers of 19th century America, what was the masculine "sphere" of activity? The feminine sphere?

2. Name the four chief virtues of the "true woman." Briefly define each. How was the idea of true womanhood communicated to thousands of American women?

3. Could all American women aspire to the feminine ideal of the true woman, or lady? Which women were excluded? Why?

4. The following adjectives describe character traits: passive, aggressive, dependent, independent, strong, weak, childlike, pure, reasonable, religious, intuitive, logical, modest. Under the headings masculine and feminine, list the adjectives that people in the 19th century would probably have put in each category. Now list the adjectives you would place in each category. Define sex stereotypes and explain how they affect human potential.

5. What were some of the reasons for the "delicate" health of so many 19th century women?

6. Identify Catharine Beecher and Sara Josepha Hale. Briefly describe the role of each in promoting the idea of a separate "woman's sphere."

Optional Activity

Magazine project: Since the 19th century, women's magazines have helped define women's role in society. They advise women on how to behave, dress, furnish their homes, cook, raise their children and handle their husbands. Analyze the content of a 19th century woman's magazine such as Godey's Lady's Book and that of a 20th century magazine such as McCall's. Ladies Home Journal or Redbook. Be sure to read a sampling of all the magazine's features--articles, fiction, editorial comment, advice columns, recipes, fashion, etc. Consider the following questions in a written or oral report accompanied by illustrations:

1) What is the ideal of womanhood as projected in the 19th century magazine? In the 20th century magazine?
2) Which features of women's magazines are still similar?

(A variation of this project would be a study of 20th century women's magazines, in which you would attempt to trace the changing images of ideal womanhood from decade to decade.)

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY

Harriet Martineau remarked on the economic opportunities opened to American women in the 1830's:

> One consequence...of the "chivalrous" taste and temper of a country with regard to its women is that it is difficult, where it is not impossible, for women to earn their bread. Where it is a boast that women do not labour, the encouragement and rewards of labour are not provided. It is so in America. In some parts, there are now so many women dependent on their own exertions for a maintenance, that the evil will give way before the force of circumstances.[1]

The dominant female image of the Jackson Era effectively ignored the lives of countless American women who were workers out of necessity, and who generally received meager compensation for their labors. It was as if American society avoided facing the fact that women worked outside the home and that an economic value could be put on their labor.

WOMEN ON FARMS AND IN DOMESTIC SERVICE

The rise of the factory system and the development of transportation and a market economy during the early 19th century were developments which would eventually transform the United States into an industrial nation. Before the Civil War, however, the majority of Americans still lived and worked on farms. Farm women worked along with their men more or less as women had always done in the preindustrial economy. Farm tasks were usually differentiated by sex--the men responsible for field tasks and building, the women in charge of the household--but their duties overlapped. Women usually helped care for the farm animals and milked the cows. A farm woman's burdens could be very heavy, and her health undermined by frequent childbearing, but there was no doubt that the economic survival of her family depended on her efforts as much as on her husband's. The lives of farm women differed according to the region--Northeast, West or South. By the early 19th century, the rocky New England farmland was already played out, and the sons of farmers were beginning to seek new agricultural opportunities in the West. The wives and daughters of New England farmers usually engaged in some kind of home manufacturing to supplement the family's income. It was these women who would be attracted to the early factories.

Pioneer women in the West experienced the backbreaking work, the dangers, the exhilaration and the loneliness of founding new homes on the edge of the wilderness. Their situation resembled that of the early settlers in the colonies, except that the 19th century pioneer woman was not separated by an ocean from the comforts and cultural amenities she had known. Alexis de Tocqueville, the French observer of American life, was impressed by the spirit of the pioneer women in the face of the drastic changes in their life circumstances:

> I have often met, even on the verge of the wilderness, with young women who, after having been brought up amid all the comforts of the large towns of New England, had passed, almost without any intermediate stage, from the wealthy abode of their parents to a comfortless hovel in a forest. Fever, solitude, and a tedious life had not broken the springs of their courage. Their features were impaired and faded, but their looks were firm; they appeared to be at once sad and resolute.[2]

If pioneer women suffered more than their men from the lack of housekeeping comforts and social life, they also fully shared in the triumph over adversity and were regarded as equals in the pioneering enterprise. Such women could usually handle farm tools and firearms as well as men. The scarcity of women on the frontier, as in the early colonies, also raised their value, and aroused in men a certain respect for their independence.

The wives of wealthy planters on Southern plantations often worked very hard, despite their status as genteel ladies. They supervised the work of the house slaves, were responsible for the production of slave clothing, and often served as nurse to sick slaves. A South Carolina plantation mistress left the following account of a busy day in December 1860:

> A Plantation life is a very active one. This morning I got up late having been disturbed in the night, hurried down to have something arranged for breakfast, Ham & eggs,...wrote a letter to Charles...had prayers, got the boys off to town. Had work cut out, gave orders about dinner, had the horse feed fixed in hot water, had the box filled with cork: went to see about the carpenters working at the negro houses...these carpenters Mr. Grimball told me he wished me to see about every day, & now I have to cut out the flannel jackets.[3]

The wives of small farmers in the South generally did more work with their hands than plantation mistresses, and sometimes even worked in the fields.

Slave women, along with slave men, comprised the bulk of the labor force on which the Southern economy rested. The development of the Cotton Kingdom, owing in part to the invention of the cotton gin, caused slavery to become more deeply entrenched than ever before, and committed the entire South to a defense of the "peculiar institution." Slave women worked as field hands, putting in the same long hours that men did and receiving little consideration during pregnancy and after childbirth. We have an extraordinary eyewitness account of the ordeal of the childbearing slave woman from the Journal of Frances Kemble, a gifted English actress who married a wealthy slave owner, Pierce Butler, and spent several months as the mistress of a large plantation in Georgia:

> The women who visited me yesterday evening were all in the family way, and came to entreat of me to have the sentence... modified which condemns them to resume their labor of hoeing

> in the fields three weeks after their confinement...Their principal spokesman...Mary...implored me to have a kind of labor given to them less exhausting during the month of their confinement...I told them that Mr. Butler had forbidden me to bring him any more complaints from them, for that he thought the ease with which I received...their stories only tended to make them discontented.[4]

To emphasize the physical sufferings of the female slaves, Frances Kemble recorded the names of women who came to her with complaints and requests in a single day:

> Fanny has had six children; all dead but one. She came to beg to have her work in the field lightened.
>
> Nanny has had three children; two of them are dead. She came to implore that the rule of sending them into the field three weeks after their confinement might be altered...
>
> Sophy, Lewis's wife, came to beg for some old linen... has had ten children; five of them are dead. The principal favor she asked was a piece of meat, which I gave her.
>
> Sally, Scipio's wife, has had two miscarriages and three children born, one of whom is dead...
>
> Charlotte, Renty's wife, had had two miscarriages, and was with child again. She was almost crippled with rheumatism, and showed me a pair of poor swollen knees that made my heart ache...
>
> Sarah...had had four miscarriages, had brought seven children into the world, five of whom were dead and was again with child. She complained of dreadful pains in the back, and an internal tumor which swells with the exertion of working in the fields...
>
> Molly...Hers was the best account...she had had nine children, and six of them were still alive...
>
> I ask these questions about their children because I think the number they bear as compared with the number they rear [is] a fair gauge of the effect of the system on their own health and that of their offspring. There was hardly one of these women... who might not have been a candidate for a bed in a hospital, and they had come to me after working all day in the fields.[5]

Slave women were subject to the same floggings as the men. Many of the slave women were house servants--cooks, maids, seamstresses and baby nurses. Although these jobs may have been lighter than the work of the field hand, the house servants had to endure an almost total lack of privacy, since they were constantly on call:

> Chambermaids and seamstresses often sleep in their mistresses' apartments, but with no bedding at all. I know of an instance of a woman who has been married eleven years, and yet has never been allowed to sleep out of her mistress's chamber.[6]

When the day's labor was done, the slave woman had the additional chores of caring for her family in the slave quarters. On the average, fewer slave women than men ran away, since they were far less likely to have a skill with which to support themselves in freedom, and far more likely to be tied down to young children.

In the North, domestic service was a major source of employment for white women and free negro women. As immigration from Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia dramatically increased during the 1840's and 1850's, however, immigrant women replaced native-born women as domestic servants.

WOMEN AND THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The industrial and economic changes that took men out of the home to earn their living also created new opportunities for women. However, the choices available to women tended to be limited, both in pay and in potential for advancement. There were hardly any women among manufacturers and business leaders. An exception was Rebecca Lukens, the owner and manager of an ironworks in Brandywine, Pennsylvania. It was not a business she had started. Following the pattern of the businesswomen of the 18th century, Rebecca Lukens took over the business only after her father, who had started it, and her husband, who had managed it, died. The fortunes of the ironworks, which produced boiler plates used in steamships and locomotives, were closely linked to the transportation revolution of the 19th century. Accordingly, Rebecca Lukens' greatest financial success occurred in the 1840's with the opening of the railroads.

Factory Workers

Although very few women were employers in industry, large numbers of women were employees in over a hundred industries during the first half of the 19th century. Edith Abbot, the pioneer labor investigator, amassed this surprisingly long list of industries in her study Women in Industry (1910), by using industrial census reports made by the U.S. government and various New England states during the 1820's and 1830's. Not only were women employed in large numbers of industries, but in industries carried on according to a variety of methods. Some were in factories, others in homes, shops and lofts under "sweating" conditions. The five industries employing the largest numbers of women were textiles, boots and shoes, cigar making, the clothing trades and printing and publishing.

The first factories were the New England cotton and woolen mills and shoe factories, and the first factory workers, or "operatives," were mostly young New England farm women, whose family farms were no longer prospering. Children were also among these early workers. There was a strong demand for the labor of women because so many of the young men from New England preferred to be farmers or craftsmen, or were lured by the promise of cheap land in the West or by the commercial opportunities in the growing cities. The shift to the factory or mill was not a dramatic one for farm women who had already been spinning and

weaving cloth at home. Furthermore, the mills, built of stone, wood or brick, were located in the countryside overlooking rivers and streams from which they drew water power.

The factory owners hired agents to recruit young women from the rural areas of Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire. The jobs offered the women a respectable way to escape from the restrictions of home, a chance to earn money for their own education and a change from isolated rural life.

In the mill towns the workers lived a regimented existence under what became known as the "Waltham System." They lived in factory-owned boarding houses or dormitories where a curfew was observed. They were obliged to attend church and could be punished or thrown out for drinking or other "bad conduct." The mill town of Lowell, Massachusetts, had a reputation for being a "model" town with excellent dormitories, flowerbeds on the factory grounds and a literary magazine, The Lowell Offering, to improve the minds of the young women. It is likely that the good reputation of Lowell and other mill towns owed more to their having as workers women of unusual intelligence than to any superior qualities of the mills or dormitories. A number of the mill women worked as schoolteachers other times of the year, and many of them became teachers after they left the mills.

Lucy Larcom, a woman from Lowell who started working at age 11, and in her later years became a teacher and writer, was typical of this breed of factory worker. She described both the attractions and drawbacks of factory life in her autobiography, A New England Girlhood. The factory scene could be pleasant, with the window filled with geraniums and the young women moving gracefully back and forth at the spinning frames. But then the strict overseer intruded, snatching away the Bibles of those who liked to read on the job. Best of all was Larcom's growing sense of self-respect:

> I was every day making discoveries about life, and about myself...I loved quietness. The noise of machinery was particularly distasteful to me. But I found that the crowd was made up of single human lives, not one of them wholly uninteresting if separately known...
>
> Even the long hours, the early rising, the regularity enforced by the clangor of the bell were good discipline for one who was naturally inclined to dally and dream, and who loved her own personal liberty with a willful rebellion against control...
>
> The Girls who toiled together at Lowell were clearing away a few weeds from the overgrown track of independent labor for other women. They practically said, by numbering themselves among factory girls, that in our country no real odium could be attached to any honest toil that any self-respecting woman might undertake.[7]

Although young women like Lucy Larcom did find some aspects of mill life pleasant at first, and though the mill owners did their best to spread the "myth" of the happy factory worker, the reality of Lowell and elsewhere was not so pleasant. The women earned, on the average, two dollars a week plus board. In the dormitories they were often housed six in a room, two to a bed. The average working day was twelve to fifteen hours. When economic conditions worsened, the owners resorted to speedups and wage cuts. Such conditions eventually led to strikes and the beginnings of labor organization. Starting in the 1840's and 1850's, young New England farm women were gradually replaced in the factories by immigrant men and women from Ireland, Germany and Canada. The new immigrants, eager to make their way in their new country, were less likely to complain about the low wages, long hours and speedups that more and more employers were beginning to use to maximize production.

The mill and factory jobs, whatever their drawbacks, were among the more desirable industrial jobs available to women. Larger numbers of women, especially in cities like New York and Boston, were employed in the light manufacturing that was carried on in homes, shops and lofts. Garment making was the largest of these light industries in response to the increased public demand for ready-made clothing. Glove and hat making and the sewing of shoes were other enterprises employing the labor of women. Working conditions in these industries were generally worse than in the factories and the wages so low that women could barely support themselves on what they earned. It should also be noted that women were usually paid a quarter of what men would get for the same or similar work. Women could not always qualify for the work that men could get. Moreover, it was difficult for women workers to receive training for skilled trades or to rise to supervisory positions. For example, in the shoe and boot industry, men received a long apprenticeship when they were boys, and learned all the processes involved in making the finished product. Women, on the other hand, though they played an important part in the development of the industry, were employed almost exclusively in sewing or binding.

> The women carried on a single, narrowly defined part of the work, for which little or no skill was required and for which they were never apprenticed; the men knew the trade and had been rigidly held down to a long period of training.[8]

In the printing trades, active hostility to women workers by men kept women from becoming all-around "journeymen" printers.

Early Labor Organization among Women

Periodically during the 1820's and 1830's, women in factories and shops rose up in protests against wage cuts, long hours and speedups. They would stage strikes and marches and form labor organizations that fell apart after a few days. Harriet Hanson Robinson, a mill worker, described the mood of a "turnout" in 1837, which completely shut down the Lowell mills:

> My own recollection of this first strike...is very vivid. I worked in a lower room, where I had heard the proposed strike fully...discussed. I had been an ardent listener and naturally

> I took sides with the strikers. When the day came on which the girls were to turn out, those in the upper rooms started first, and so many of them left that our mill was at once shut down. Then when the girls in my room stood...uncertain what to do, asking each other, "Would you?" or "Shall we turn out?" and not one of them having the courage to lead off, I... became impatient, and started on ahead, saying with childish bravado, "I don't care what you do, I am going to turn out, whether any one else does or not," and I marched out and was followed by the others.
>
> The agent of the corporation...took some small revenge on the supposed ring-leaders...
>
> It is hardly necessary to say that so far as results were concerned this strike did no good. The dissatisfaction of the operatives subsided, or burned itself out, and though the authorities did not accede to their demands, the majority returned to their work, and the corporation went on cutting down wages.[9]

The pattern of wage cut or speedup, meetings and speeches, a strike and a procession through town, a flash of angry militancy and occasional violence, all followed by a steady trickling back to work and the blacklisting of the leaders, was repeated in many factory towns.

During the 1840's, the labor agitation of women and men was focused on the goal of the ten-hour day. It was at Lowell that the first significant labor organization of women--the Lowell Female Labor Reform Association (LFLRA)--was formed in 1845. Its leader was Sarah Bagley, a mill worker, who, like Lucy Larcom, had enjoyed factory life at first, and had even contributed an article on its pleasures to the Lowell Offering. However, like many of the other workers in the 1840's, she had become disgusted with the deteriorating working conditions. Bagley's founding of the LFLRA coincided with an investigation by the Massachusetts legislature into labor conditions--the first governmental investigation of its kind in the United States. With the help of the members of the association, Bagley collected signatures on petitions describing the conditions in the mills and calling for a ten-hour working day. She also testified before the legislature on the mills. Shortly after this appearance, she left the mill and devoted herself full time to labor organization until 1847. She helped organize branches of the LFLRA in other towns and edited a labor journal, Voice of Industry. She regarded the Lowell Offering, from which she was now barred, as a mouthpiece for the "cotton lords." Her organization joined with the New England Workingmen's Association in an attempt to achieve the ten-hour day. All this activity ultimately failed. The Massachusetts legislature rejected the workers' petition and accepted the arguments of the mill owners. The LFLRA eventually petered out, and Sarah Bagley left the labor scene to become, it is thought, the first woman telegraph operator in America.

The time was not yet ripe for permanent and powerful labor unions of men or women. However, it was especially difficult to organize women workers

because they tended to see their jobs as a temporary occupation before marriage and not as a lifetime commitment. The following lines of a popular mill workers' song undoubtedly express the real desires of most factory women:

No more shall I work in the factory
To greasy up my clothes,
No more shall I work in the factory
With splinters in my toes...

No more shall I see the super come
All dressed up so fine;
For I know I'll marry a country boy
Before the year is round.

It's pity me, my darling,
It's pity me, I say,
It's pity me, my darling,
And carry me far away.[10]

WOMEN IN PROFESSIONS

In colonial America women had practiced medicine and midwifery, acted as attorneys and participated in business and trade. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, certain occupations, most notably medicine, became professionalized. Special education and training were required for entry to the profession and licensing procedures, including a license examination, were adopted by state legislatures. As a result of professionalization, women were totally excluded from an occupation which they had practiced during a period when they had been able to be trained informally, the main requirement being an aptitude for the "healing arts."

It took much of the 19th century before the "regular" doctors established complete dominance over the health care profession. They had active rivals in the popular health movement which flourished in the mid-19th century along with other reform movements, and in which women played an active role. Popular health practitioners promoted water cures as well as diet, exercise and dress reform. Their gentle remedies and emphasis on preventive care may well have done far less harm than the more drastic "heroic" methods of the regular doctors. These methods included bleeding, leeches, and the use of powerful drugs containing mercury.

Harriot Hunt (1805-1875) was a well-known example of a female physician who achieved success outside the medical establishment of the day. She had lost confidence in regular doctors when she saw how their painful methods failed to cure her tubercular sister. After a period of study with an English couple--medical practitioners who had succeeded in curing her sister--she and her sister started a practice, mainly among women and children. They tried to develop a science of prevention and were successful with patients suffering from chronic illnesses that conventional doctors had been unable to cure. The

sisters' treatment consisted of sympathetic nursing and careful attention to bathing, diet, exercise, rest and sanitation. Realizing that a major cause of illness was women's ignorance of their own bodies, Harriot Hunt gave lectures on human physiology to her female patients.

In 1847 and 1850, when she was already quite well known for her medical work, she asked for permission to attend lectures at the Harvard Medical School. Both times she was turned down, once by the governing board and then by the students. A contemporary of Harriot Hunt, Elizabeth Blackwell, eventually succeeded in gaining admittance to a regular medical school and thus becoming the first "regular" woman physician in the United States. The overwhelming difficulties she faced in order to reach this goal were a measure of the extent to which the regular medical profession had succeeded in excluding women.

A similar process of professionalization followed by the exclusion of women occurred in the field of law.

Between 1820 and 1860, elementary and secondary school teaching became a profession, but, unlike law and medicine, one that women would enter with relative ease--except as administrators--and eventually come to dominate. Women had always taught in "dame schools" and other kinds of elementary schools in colonial times. The rise of the "common school" in the early 19th century, as a byproduct of Jacksonian democracy, population growth and westward expansion, created an enormous demand for teachers. At the same time, female seminaries, academies and normal schools opened up, offering women a better education as well as actual teacher training. Large numbers of women, particularly in the Northeast, needed the work. Young women with a spirit of adventure seized the opportunity to leave New England, where there was a surplus of women, to teach in the West, when teacher recruitment programs for the West got underway.

Influential educators such as Catharine Beecher and Horace Mann claimed that school teaching was a natural extension of woman's domestic sphere, and that women were specially gifted by nature to be teachers. As Horace Mann expressed it in his report to the Boston Board of Education in 1845:

> Is not woman destined to conduct the rising generation, of both sexes, at least through all the primary stages of education? Has not the Author of nature pre-adapted her, by constitution, and faculty, and temperament, for this noble work?...
>
> By inspiring nobler desires for nobler objects, she can break down the ascendency of those selfish motives that have sought their gratification in her submission and inferiority. All this she can do, more rapidly and more effectually than it can ever be done in any other way,...by training the young to juster notions of honor and duty, and to a higher appreciation of the true dignity and destiny of the race.[11]

It should be pointed out that during the first half of the century, factory work competed favorably with teaching in terms of salary. In 1847, Horace Mann reported that women in many mills and factories earned six and seven times as much as women teachers. The fact that a woman teacher would be paid 30 to 50 percent of a male teacher's salary caused economy-minded school boards to favor the hiring of women. Having fewer occupational choices than men, women flocked into teaching, although a good many of them resented the wage difference. By the end of the 19th century, 63 percent of the nation's teachers were women. For the cities the figure was over 90 percent.[12]

NOTES

1. Martineau, *Society*, vol. II.

2. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, vol. II, p. 214.

3. Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (paperback ed., Chicago, 1970 p. 32. Quotation is from *Meta Morris Grimball Diary*, 29 December 1860.

4. Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, John A. Scott, ed. (1863; paperback ed., New York, 1975) pp. 222-223.

5. Ibid., pp. 229-231.

6. Weld, *American Slavery as It Is*, p. 56.

7. W. Elliot and Mary M. Brownlee, eds., *Women in the American Economy: A Documentary History 1675 to 1929* (paperback ed., New Haven, 1976) pp. 157-158. The excerpt is from Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* (Boston, 1889).

8. Edith Abbot, *Women in Industry: A Study in American Economic History* (1910; hardcover reprint, New York, 1969) p. 154.

9. Eve Merriam, ed., *Growing Up Female in America: Ten Lives* (1971; paperback ed., New York, 1973) pp. 308-309. The excerpt is from Harriet Hanson Robinson, *Loom and Spindle* (New York, 1898).

10. Ibid., p. 310. Excerpt is from "Song of the Girl Factory Worker."

11. Brownlee, *Women in American Economy*, pp. 268-269. Excerpt is from Horace Mann, Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Education (Boston, 1845).

12. Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," *Mid-Continent American Studies Journal* October 1969), p. 10.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. In what respects did western frontier women repeat the experiences of early colonial women?

2. Judging from the diary entry on p. 14, how would you characterize the average day of a plantation mistress? Judging from the entries in Frances Kemble's diary, pp. 14-15, what were the severest hardships endured by the slave women who worked as field hands?

3. Why was there such a strong demand for the labor of women in the early textile factories of New England? What might have been the attractions of the job for a New England farm woman in the 1830's? The drawbacks?

4. List the five industries employing the greatest number of women workers.

5. What conditions prevented women from becoming skilled workers or supervisors in the industries in which they worked? Why did labor organization among women generally fail? Do any of the conditions that led to failure still exist among women workers?

6. What professions largely excluded women in the 19th century? Why? What professions opened up to women on a large scale? Why? According to Horace Mann, p. 21, why were women uniquely suited to be schoolteachers?

Optional Activity

Family Work Record: What kind of work do you hope to be doing ten years from now? What kind of work is done by the members of your family now, and what kind did they do in the past?

Going back to your grandparents' generation, make a chart listing the kinds of work the men and women in your family have done. Include aunts and uncles, as well as parents and grandparents. Include housework and child rearing as work. Note the kinds of jobs men have held in contrast to the kinds of jobs women have held. What changes in work have taken place from one generation to the next? Try to obtain the information by interviewing the different members of your family.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN AND THE SPIRIT OF REFORM

The economic, social and political changes taking place in the early decades of the 19th century were accompanied in the North and the Midwest by a reform spirit that inspired a number of men and women to reach for perfection in American life by doing away with social evils. Although the reformers were a minority of the population, their ideas received much publicity and contributed to the moral growth of the nation. Only the South, whose leaders were increasingly committed to a defense of slavery, was for the most part closed off to reform agitation.

The reform spirit blossomed in many forms: there were evangelical religious revivals and camp meetings, particularly in the region of western New York State, and certain religious groups founded separate self-sufficient communities; temperance advocates crusaded against strong drink and moral reform societies against prostitution; those interested in the care of the handicapped started schools for the blind and deaf and asylums for the mentally ill; there were movements for peace, Indian rights, abolition of slavery and women's rights; and some men and women turned their backs on the larger society and sought a more perfect way of life in utopian communities run on socialist principles, where work and property were shared in common.

For the most part reformers did not have political power, although they tried to influence officeholders in Congress and in state legislatures through speeches and petitions at legislative hearings. Reformers held public meetings, conventions, lectures and debates to promote and publicize their views, and such gatherings offered the general public not only moral uplift, but entertainment and excitement in an era before mass entertainment existed. The reformers also published their ideas in their own journals and newspapers and their activities sometimes received coverage in the popular press.

Women played a surprisingly prominent role in reform movements. It was the one public arena, aside from the theater, in which women could have a voice, barred as they were from politics and law. (To be sure, even within the various reform movements, women encountered resistance from men when they tried to step out of a secondary role.) Reform work became an important outlet for educated middle-class women, who, because servants were plentiful, had the leisure time to devote to cultural or reform activities. It was natural, in a period when women were regarded as morally superior to men as a result of the cult of "true womanhood," that women would actively crusade against the evils of drink and prostitution--blaming the latter evil on the double standard of sexual behavior which, while it expected purity in women, excused lustful behavior in men.

TWO PROMINENT WOMEN REFORMERS

Though most women reformers worked along with men in reform societies, two prominent female reformers of the 19th century made their mark as individuals--Frances Wright and Dorothea Dix.

Frances Wright (1795-1852) was one of the Europeans--like Harriet Martineau and Alexis de Tocqueville--who came over to observe the American experiment in democracy, and whose books are now an important source for a picture of life in 19th century America. Frances, or Fanny Wright, as she was known, came from Scotland. Her unusual independence probably owed something to the fact that she was orphaned at an early age, well educated and the heiress to a large fortune. Fanny Wright fell in love with the young American republic on her visit, and sang its praises in a travel book, Views of Society and Manners in America (1821). On a return visit in 1824, in the company of the aging Marquis de Lafayette, she decided to stay for good. Since she regarded America's major flaw as slavery, she promptly addressed herself to the problem of emancipating the slaves without causing social disruption. In a pamphlet published in 1825, she proposed that Congress set aside tracts of public land on which slaves would work to buy their own freedom. The profits of their labor would be set aside to compensate their owners. With characteristic vigor, Fanny Wright immediately set about translating her plan into reality by founding a biracial communal settlement called Nashoba in Tennessee, which she hoped would resemble the model community at New Harmony, Indiana, founded by the English reformer Robert Owen.

She brought slaves who were to work alongside whites in Nashoba and eventually earn their freedom. Preferring to spend time at New Harmony, Fanny Wright left an overseer and her sisted Camilla in charge of Nashoba. Mismanaged from the start, the colony failed and cost Fanny Wright much of her fortune and her good reputation. The crops did poorly and the overseer left in charge during Wright's frequent absences scandalized the public by openinly practicing and advocating "free love." By 1828, Nashoba had fallen apart. Frances Wright, undaunted, freed the Nashoba slaves, settled them in Haiti, and calmly turned to the cities, with their growing numbers of workers, for her next reform efforts.

The passage of universal manhood suffrage in most states during the 1820's had brought white men of all classes into the political process, and new political organizations were being formed, particularly in the cities. Settling in New York City in 1829, Fanny Wright began a career as a lecturer, speaking out on every controversial issue of the day. In her lectures and writings, which appeared in The Free Enquirer, a paper she published with Robert Dale Owen, the son of Robert Owen, Wright condemned capital punishment, criticized the churches and called for equal education for women, fairer married women's property laws, liberal divorce laws and birth control. Her radical views caused many newspapers to attack her as "a female monster whom all decent people ought to avoid."[1] The unheard-of spectacle of a woman on the lecture platform shocked the public and the press, but her ideas on public education appealed to many of the city's workers.

With Robert Dale Owen, Fanny Wright proposed a national system of free state boarding schools which would teach industrial skills, a plan which had some support from workers who were now making demands for free public education. She even ventured into Jackson Era politics during the spring and summer of 1829 when she, Owen and Thomas Skidmore organized a workers party that actually gained one seat in the New York State legislature.

Although Fanny Wright was unquestionably a trailblazer for women's rights, and was recognized as such by the women's rights leaders of the 1840's, she neither founded a women's rights organization, nor provided a direct path by which other women could follow her into public life. Her free spirit and her radicalism were too far ahead of the times. And since she was the first woman in America to lecture in public before audiences of men and women, for years to come public speaking by women would be associated with radical views, and aspiring women speakers would be branded "Fanny Wrightists."

Fanny Wright's reform activities were the natural expression of an independent spirit whose self-confidence grew out of her unconventional upbringing and independent wealth. Dorothea Dix (1801-1887), a very different sort of person, found in reform work a release from the restricted existence of a "ladylike" New England single woman. Her remarkable career began in 1841 when she was thirty-nine years old. Momentarily idle because of poor health, she had been a teacher and schoolmistress noted for her strictness, and had also published religious poetry. One day she was invited by an acquaintance to teach a Sunday school class to a group of women inmates in a jail in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She discovered to her horror, on that frosty Sunday, March 28, 1841, that among the prisoners in the jail were insane women, dressed only in a few filthy rags and kept in unheated quarters. It was very common at that time for mentally ill persons from poor families to be confined in jails or poorhouses along with criminals. When Dorothea Dix complained to the jailer about the lack of heat, she was told, "Mad folk don't know hot from cold."[2] When her personal efforts to improve matters by bringing warm clothes, blankets and food the following week were met with indifference and hostility by the jailers, she prepared an outraged report on conditions which was presented to a local court and brought about improvement. From then on, she was launched on a one-woman crusade to investigate and reform the treatment of the mentally ill.

Familiarizing herself with the most up-to-date views on the treatment of the insane, she undertook an eighteen-month investigation of every jail, poorhouse and asylum housing the insane in Massachusetts, filling notebook after notebook with the horrors she observed. She received encouragement in her work from eminent reformers such as Samuel Gridley Howe, noted for his work with the blind, and Horace Mann, the educator. In 1843, Dorothea Dix prepared a "memorial" based on her findings to the Massachusetts legislature. Since it was "unladylike" for a woman to speak in public, the memorial was presented by Dr. Howe. Beginning with an apology for having departed from her usual "views of what is womanly and becoming" because of her urgent sense of duty, she quickly gets to the point:

> I proceed, Gentlemen, briefly to call your attention to the present state of Insane Persons confined within this Commonwealth, in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience!...[3]

The vivid, but simply told, descriptions of her journals found their way into the memorial:

> Lincoln. A woman in a cage.
> Medford. One idiotic subject chained, and one in a close stall for seventeen years.
> Williamsburg. The almshouse has several insane, not under suitable treatment...
> Granville. One often closely confined; now losing the use of his limbs from want of exercise.[4]

After much debate, during which Howe, Mann and others supported her cause, the legislature voted the necessary funds to improve existing mental health facilities.

Spurred on by her victory, Dorothea Dix carried her crusade to other states--Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and eventually to much of the South. In every state she followed the pattern of investigation, memorial to the legislature and recommendations for new hospitals. In many places she became personally involved in the design of the new hospital. Her efforts were usually successful on the state level, but she was deeply frustrated in her attempt to persuade Congress to set aside public land from which the income would be used for the care of the insane.

From time to time Dorothea Dix interested herself in related reforms such as the treatment of prisoners and the care of the blind, but her overwhelming commitment was to the mentally ill. She was honored everywhere in America and Europe for her devotion to this single cause. While personally favoring such reforms as temperance and women's rights, she avoided a public involvement with them, fearing to jeopardize her cause by association with the more controversial reform movements of the day. Unlike Fanny Wright, Dorothea Dix never laid herself open to the charge of being "unladylike," shrewdly allowing male reformers to put her case before governmental bodies and the general public. Her career illustrated the extent to which certain reform activities could be pursued without violating the ideal of "true womanhood."

PIONEERS IN EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

The first area of progress for women was education. During the 1820's and 1830's, a handful of women, less radical but more practical than Frances Wright, founded schools that offered young women a more challenging academic program than any yet available. Before this time, the course of study offered at most young women's schools had consisted of fine needlework, French, dancing, music and some form of religious instruction. The pioneer women educators had to contend with the widely held belief that women's brains were smaller than men's and that they would sicken and die if forced to study such "masculine" subjects as science, mathematics and Latin and Greek.

Emma Hart Willard (1787-1870) disagreed with the view that women were incapable of learning mathematics and science. With her father's encouragement, she had taught herself geometry at age thirteen, and she was interested in all the so-called masculine subjects. While still in her teens, she began what was to become a lifelong career of teaching, keeping up her studies at the same time. She soon became keenly aware of how limited were the courses offered in the female seminaries of the time. In Middlebury, Vermont, where she married a doctor sympathetic to her views on education, Emma Willard opened a school in her own home, in which she tried to introduce young women to the scientific and classical studies usually given only at men's colleges. Since she was refused permission to attend classes at nearby Middlebury College, she taught herself the collegiate subjects so that she could teach them to her students.

Moving to New York State, Emma Willard tried to persuade Governor DeWitt Clinton and the state legislature to support a system of schools for young women. Although this first lobbying effort failed, she did produce a notable pamphlet arguing the case for improved female education. When the Troy, New York, Common Council voted public funds for the building of a female academy, Emma Willard opened the Troy Female Seminary in 1821. (Though the school was built with tax money, it was not free, and most of the students were from wealthy families.) The curriculum included mathematics and science courses comparable to those offered in men's colleges. The sciences offered were chemistry, astronomy, physiology, mineralogy, geology and zoology. Willard also offered the "ornamental" studies--dancing, drawing, French, Italian--as well as religious and moral instruction. The Troy Seminary was an educational and financial success for its founder, who also earned money from the textbooks she wrote. By the 1830's, she had over three hundred students. Before long, she had introduced teacher training, and many of her graduates entered that profession which was now opening up to women.

Though Emma Willard firmly believed in women's intellectual capacities, she accepted the prevailing view that a woman's most important role was that of wife and mother. Therefore she never supported the demands for political and social equality with men that would be voiced by one of her most famous graduates--Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Like Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher (1800-1878) accepted the ideal of "true womanhood," and viewed education as a means of enabling women to perform their domestic role with professional skill. As a lively, intelligent child and young woman, Catharine Beecher took after her aggressive father rather than her retiring, genteel mother. Although being female prevented her from becoming a minister like her father and seven brothers, she ultimately became a kind of missionary at large to American society and to American women in particular.

As part of her lifelong campaign to make the domestic duties of women equal in stature to the worldly affairs of men, Catharine Beecher was perpetually planning schools and systems of schools with "domestic science" as an important part of the curriculum, for which she tried to enlist public support. She headed a female seminary in Hartford, Connecticut, from 1823 to 1827, and when her family moved west, she founded the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati, which lasted from 1833 to 1837.

Catharine Beecher recognized the problems of the unmarried woman, like herself, who needed to support herself by respectable work outside the home. Her solution was simply to enlarge the domestic sphere to include school teaching; the teacher molding her young pupils was the natural extension of the mother morally instructing her children. She envisioned teaching as a profession dominated by women at a time when men teachers were still in the majority. Ambitious on a national scale, Beecher developed a scheme for normal schools in the West (now the Midwest) and directed a program which recruited young women from the Northeast to teach in the West. Although many of her schemes never got out of the planning stage, and some of her schools closed for lack of funding, she lived to see school teaching become a woman's profession. Since she disapproved of factory work, the other large-scale occupation open to 19th century women, she hoped that widespread teacher training would attract women away from factory jobs.

Catharine Beecher's work as an educator was not confined to schools. She reached an even larger audience of women with her manuals on homemaking. Her Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841), which covered in minute detail every aspect of home management, established Catharine Beecher as a national authority on the home and brought her financial independence as well. The Treatise guided the American woman in the principles of food preparation and table etiquette, general hygiene and first aid, the care of infants and the management of young children, the design and construction of houses, interior decoration, laundering and housecleaning and many other matters. Beecher's emphasis on system and order suggests that she sought to help women feel in control of their lives. "Instead of attempting some such systematic employment of time, and carrying it out so far as they can control circumstances," she declares, "most women are rather driven along by the daily occurrences of life, so that instead of being the intelligent regulators of their own time, they are the mere sport of circumstances."[5] She then suggests various systems by which women could organize their tasks by the hours of the day and the days of the week and delegate chores within the family.

Eventually an enlarged edition of the Treatise, called The American Woman's Home (1869), was published with Harriet Beecher Stowe as coauthor. At a time when many Americans were placing a great value on home life, yet, because of increasing mobility, could not count on receiving traditional household knowledge from parents and grandparents, Catharine Beecher's works on the home filled a deeply felt need for standards in a changing time. In addition, her original designs for rooms and household appliances were an important step in the direction of more efficiency in the home.

Catharine Beecher did much to advance the cause of women's education and to make life easier for the average housewife at the same time that she reinforced the notion of strong sex differences and accepted the subordinate social status of women. She declared that in America "opinion" and "practice" had established

> that women have an equal interest in all social and civil concerns; and that no domestic, civil or political, institution, is right, that sacrifices her interest to promote that of the other sex. But in order to secure her the more firmly

> in all these privileges, it is decided, that, in the domestic relation, she take a subordinate station, and that, in civil and political concerns, her interests be intrusted to the other sex, without her taking any part in voting, or in making and administering laws.[6]

Thus, she publicly opposed women who spoke out on important public issues such as abolition and women's rights.

Mary Lyon (1797-1849), a gifted teacher at some of the best female academies in the 1820's, seemed to be following in the footsteps of Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher when she founded Mount Holyoke Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts. But Mount Holyoke was the first woman's school to offer a curriculum that was comparable to the offerings in the best men's colleges--a curriculum that would prepare women for more than domestic duties or elementary school teaching. Mary Lyon's dream, realized after several years of tireless fund raising all over New England, was a school with high academic standards, a selective admissions policy, and a large enough endowment for it to become a permanent institution not dependent on a single wealthy backer. She particularly wanted to attract the needy woman who longed for an education she couldn't afford. "During the past year," she wrote to her mother, "my heart has so yearned over the adult female youth in the common walks of life, that it has sometimes seemed as if there was a fire shut up in my bones."[7]

In order to keep fees down and develop a group spirit at Mount Holyoke, Mary Lyon introduced a domestic work system whereby the students shared in the housekeeping chores of the school. Such a system was also a way of showing the outside world that domestic skills were not being neglected in the pursuit of higher education. Mount Holyoke opened the way for the other women's colleges like Vassar, Smith and Wellesley, which were founded after the Civil War.

Oberlin College, founded in Ohio as a seminary in 1833, holds a special place in the history of women's education because it was the first institution to offer a college-level education to all comers without regard to race or sex. From 1837 on, Oberlin was dominated by abolitionists. Among Oberlin's first female graduates were Lucy Stone, a future leader of the women's rights movement, and Antoinette Brown, the first woman to become a regularly ordained minister.

NOTES

1. Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (1944; paperback ed., New York, 1962) p. 211.

2. Dorothy Clarke Wilson, *Stranger and Traveler: The Story of Dorothea Dix, American Reformer* (Boston, 1975) p. 97.

3. Ibid., p. 97.

4. Ibid., p. 122.

5. Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841; paperback reprint ed., New York, 1977) p. 148.

6. Ibid., p. 4.

7. Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, p. 33.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. List as many examples as you can of reform movements in the 19th century. How did 19th century reformers get their ideas across to the public?

2. Why was Frances Wright clearly ahead of her time? Why did the general public so strongly disapprove of her?

3. What was the state of care for the mentally ill when Dorothea Dix began her reform work? List her major accomplishments in this field. How do you account for her remarkable success in achieving her goals almost single-handedly?

4. Briefly describe the contribution of each of the following to the advancement of education for women: Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, Mary Lyon.

5. How did Catharine Beecher use the ideal of "true womandhood" to promote the goal of improved education for women?

Optional Activity

Women in reform movements: Women's participation in reform movements is an important theme in the history of American women from the early 19th century to the present. Do a comparative study of a 19th century and a 20th century woman reformer. What incidents in the women's lives motivated them to become reformers? In either case, did the reform activity concur with feminist beliefs?

CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SLAVERY

THE RADICAL ABOLITIONISTS

The abolition movement of the 1830's was the most significant of all the reform movements, dealing as it did with the most crucial issue facing the United States--that of Negro slavery. The abolitionists tried to arouse a largely hostile public to the moral evils of slavery. Unfortunately, the refusal of Southerners to tolerate free discussion of the issue, combined with the concern of Northerners to hold the Union together at all costs, closed off any rational solution to the problem until civil war, the most costly and irrational solution, finally settled the question.

The new era of abolition opened in 1831 simultaneously with the uprising in Virginia led by the slave Nat Turner, in which 57 whites were killed. The rebellion was suppressed by heavy force, many blacks were executed without trials, and repressive measures passed to prevent future insurrections. In the same year as the Nat Turner revolt, a young man named William Lloyd Garrison began publishing the abolitionist weekly, The Liberator, and was among the founders of the New England Antislavery Society. Garrison, probably more than any other person, was responsible for the radical, idealistic--some would say fanatic--nature of abolition in the 1830's. A sympathetic English observer of the antislavery struggle called this period the "martyr age" of abolition because the abolitionists constantly risked mob violence in order to spread their message.

Women were active in the abolition movement from the early 1830's. Garrison believed in the full participation by women in the cause and was responsible for attracting various outstanding women into the movement and defending their rights as women to work for the cause.

Prudence Crandall: Educator and Abolitionist

A woman who contributed an important early chapter to both women's educational progress and abolition was Prudence Crandall (1803-1890), who came from a Connecticut family of Quaker background. She opened a female boarding school in Canterbury, Connecticut, in the fall of 1832, and when a "pious colored female" applied to the school, she admitted her. When the townspeople tried to force her to oust the student, she closed the school. In April 1833, after consulting with Garrison, who helped her to attract girls from black families in Boston and New York, Prudence Crandall again opened a school, this time with seventeen black pupils. The enraged people of Canterbury stopped at nothing in their efforts to close the school. Storekeepers would not allow Crandall or the children to buy anything in the town. Others smeared the door and steps of the school with manure and polluted the well. An old vagrancy law was revived making it against the law for a student from one state to attend school in another, and the Connecticut legislature rushed through a law making

the school illegal. Prudence Crandall was arrested and spent a night in jail. Despite such harassment, she kept her school open for a year and a half, until an attempted burning of the school and attacks on it with iron bars finally compelled her to close. This episode, which occurred in New England and not the South, was an important revelation of the intense racial prejudice existing in the North, as well as of the violent hostility aroused by any kind of abolitionist agitation.

Antislavery Societies and Petitions

The very first antislavery societies formed in the 1830's were all male, but before long, women were either trying to join them, or forming ones of their own. In 1833, when Garrison organized a convention in Philadelphia to form a national body, the American Antislavery Society, a number of women attended, but were not permitted to join the society or sign its declaration. One of these women was the noted Quaker Lucretia Mott, soon to play an active role in both abolition and women's rights. After the convention was over, Mott and other women founded the Philadelphia Female Antislavery Society, the first such group.

Two other notable women who publicly championed abolition in the early 1830's were Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) and Maria Weston Chapman (1806-1885), both wives of abolitionists. In 1833, Child, a successful author of historical fiction, children's literature and books of household advice, published An Appeal in Favor of That Class of American Called African, a moving but scholarly book, which presented a history of slavery and vividly described its evils. She also gave many examples of the prejudice and the discriminatory laws that prevented the advancement of free Blacks. The book was important in attracting a number of men, most notably the orator Wendell Phillips, to the abolitionist cause. It also destroyed Child's career as a popular writer, and caused her to be excluded from proper Boston society.

Maria Weston Chapman, the wife of a prosperous Boston merchant, also became a social outcast when she and her husband became followers of Garrison. In 1832, she was among the founders of the Boston Female Antislavery Society and the editor of their annual report. The Society circulated petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and tried to organize educational facilities for Boston's free Blacks. A famous example of Maria Chapman's courage in the face of an angry mob occurred on October 21, 1835, on the occasion of an interracial meeting of the Boston Female Antislavery Society, at which Garrison was to be the main speaker. A hostile mob forced its way into the hall and disrupted the meeting. Theodore Lyman, the mayor of Boston, who had arrived to disperse the mob and prevent violence, begged the women to leave:

> Mr. Lyman: Ladies, do you wish to see a scene of bloodshed and confusion? If you do not, go home.
>
> Mrs. Chapman: Mr. Lyman, your personal friends are the instigators of this mob; have you ever used your personal influence with them?

> Mr. Lyman: I know no personal friends; I am merely an official. Indeed ladies, you must retire. It is dangerous to remain.
>
> Mrs. Chapman: If this is the last bulwark of freedom, we may as well die here as anywhere.[1]

Then, at Chapman's direction, each white woman took a black "sister" by the hand, and two by two, they walked calmly down the stairs, out of the building and made their way through a jeering crowd that included "gentlemen of property and standing from all parts of the city." Maria Chapman remained a firm supporter of Garrison in all his disputes with other abolitionists, and he regarded her as one of the few "suggestive, creative, executive minds" in the movement for her work as organizer, fund raiser and editor.

By the mid 1830's, many women were involved in abolition work organizing antislavery societies, writing propaganda, editing movement journals, running stations on the Underground Railroad and collecting signatures for antislavery petitions to Congress. The abolitionists tried to force discussion of the slavery issue on the nation by flooding Congress with petitions. Since women couldn't vote, their right to petition governmental bodies was the one political weapon open to them, and they used it eagerly. In response to the heavy flow of antislavery petitions, the House of Representatives, beginning in 1836, passed "gag rules" which prevented the petitions from being heard. Ex-President John Quincy Adams, now a representative from Massachusetts, saw the gag rule as a violation of the basic right to petition Congress guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. Starting out merely to defend the right of his own constituents to petition Congress, Adams soon found himself fighting the gag rule and presenting the antislavery petitions that began to flow in to him from all over the North. Since many of the petitions came from groups of women, a fact which angered some Southern congressmen, Adams also found himself the defender of the right of women to petition Congress. The following is a sample of the petitions piling up on Adams' desk:

> The undersigned, women of Massachusetts, deeply convinced of the sinfulness of slavery, and keenly aggrieved by its existence in a part of our country over which Congress possess[es] exclusive jurisdiction in all cases, whatsoever, do most earnestly petition your honorable body immediately to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and to declare every human being free who sets foot upon its soil.
>
> We also respectfully announce our intention to present the same petition yearly before your honorable body, that it may at least be a "memorial of us" that in the holy cause of Human Freedom "we have done what we could."[2]

Behind the petition campaign is the unsung story of quiet courage and tedious hard work done by thousands of anonymous women--women who risked the disapproval of their menfolk and their neighbors by knocking on doors to collect signatures for an unpopular cause. Abolition work gave many women the skills and the taste for organization that would eventually prove useful in the cause of women's rights.

The Grimké Sisters: Women's Rights and Abolition

The nature of women's participation in abolition was dramatically changed by the arrival in the North of the Southern-born Grimké sisters, who electrified the movement and the general public by being the first women to speak in public to audiences of men and women. Sarah (1792-1873) and Angelina (1805-1879) were from South Carolina, the daughters of John Faucheraud Grimké, a wealthy Charleston slave owner and judge. As a child of twelve, Sarah Grimké had attempted to teach her personal slave to read:

> ...I took an almost malicious satisfaction in teaching my little waiting-maid at night, when she was supposed to be occupied in combing and brushing my long locks. The light was put out, the keyhold screened, and flat on our stomachs, before the fire, with the spelling-book under our eyes, we defied the laws of South Carolina.[3]

They were discovered, the slave almost whipped and Sarah severely scolded by her father for such a sin, at which time she realized her utter powerlessness to help the slaves. Sarah was further frustrated when her natural interest in studying law, like her brother, was discouraged because she was a girl. At age thirteen she found a new purpose in life by becoming the godmother to her newborn sister Angelina, the youngest child in the family. As they grew up, they would both reject slavery and the way of life of the well-born Southern lady. First Sarah, and several years later, Angelina, came North, where they spent several years among the conservative branch of the Philadelphia Quakers.

Angelina was the first to enter the ranks of the abolitionists by joining the Philadelphia Female Antislavery Society in 1835. She was soon attracted by the writings of Garrison. In 1836, she publicly identified herself as an abolitionist by publishing a pamphlet entitled An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South. Soon she was giving parlor talks on slavery to small groups of women in New York City. Both sisters were then trained to be abolitionist agents by Theodore Dwight Weld, an outstanding antislavery worker and orator. The sisters began a New England tour in 1837, with Angelina, the more eloquent speaker, doing the lion's share of the speeches. Their audiences of women kept growing so that soon meetings had to be transferred from private homes to churches. The spectacle of two well-bred, pious Southern women, who had known slavery at first hand, lecturing in vivid detail on its evils, was a powerful public attraction; before long, men, along with women, were attending the Grimké meetings.

The cries of outrage were not long in coming. One of the first attacks on the Grimké sisters came from the pen of Catharine Beecher early in 1837. In a pamphlet entitled An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females, addressed to Angelina Grimké, Beecher opposed the participation of women in abolition societies and objected to women's petitioning Congress, since in her view the subordination of women to men was ordained by God. She argued that women could best exert their moral influence on men from within the home, rather than from a lecture platform.

Angelina Grimké responded to these arguments in a series of Letters to Catharine Beecher, published first in abolitionist papers and later in book form. She defended the theory and tactics of the radical abolitionists and exposed the racial prejudice at the heart of the gradualist approach to emancipation. Angelina Grimké stoutly insisted on women's right to petition Congress and have a voice in making the laws of church or state:

> The right of petition is the only political right that women have: why not let them exercise it whenever they are aggrieved?
>
> The fact that women are denied the right of voting for members of Congress, is but a poor reason why they should also be deprived of the right to petition. If their numbers are counted to swell the number of Representatives in our State and National Legislatures, the very least that can be done is to give them the right of petition in all cases whatsoever;...If not, they are mere slaves, known only through their masters....
>
> Now I believe it is woman's right to have a voice in all the laws...by which she is to be governed, whether in Church or State: and that the present arrangements of society...are a violation of human rights, a rank usurpation of power.... If Ecclesiastical and Civil governments are ordained of God, then I contend that woman has just as much right to sit in solemn counsel in Conventions, Conferences, Associations and General assemblies, as man--just as much right to sit upon the throne of England, or in the Presidential Chair of the United States.[4]

Angelina Grimké was here proposing full political equality for women more than ten years before the first women's rights convention. She saw clearly that the fight against slavery would start women on the road to their own emancipation.

> The discussion of the rights of the slave has opened the way for the discussion of other rights, and the ultimate result will most certainly be the breaking of every yoke, the letting the oppressed of every grade and description go free,--an emancipation far more glorious than any the world has ever yet seen.[5]

The Grimké sisters' appearances before mixed audiences also provoked expressions of outrage from the New England clergy. In July 1837, the Council of Congregationalist Ministers in Massachusetts issued a "Pastoral Letter," in which they protested against the "unwomanly behavior" of female lecturers without mentioning the sisters by name. Similar in spirit to Catharine Beecher's Essay, the Pastoral Letter warned of the "dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury," and attacked the woman who "assumes the place and tone of men as a public reformer" rather than exercise her "mild, dependent, softening influence" in the privacy of her home.[6] The ideal of "true womanhood" was being pitted against the ideal of women's natural rights as human beings and citizens.

> It was rumourd that an eminent, wealthy, stingy Merchant (who is a Batchelor) had a Hogshead of Coffee in his Store which he refused to sell to the committee under 6 shillings per pound. A Number of Females some say a hundred, some say more assembled with a cart and trucks, marchd down to the Ware House and demanded the keys, which he refused to deliver, upon which one of them seazd him by his Neck and tossd him into the cart. Upon his findings no Quarter he delivered the keys, when they tipd up the cart and discharged him then opend the Warehouse, Hoisted out the Coffe themselves, put it into the trucks and drove off.[6]

There were individual women who performed daring acts as spies, couriers and midnight riders. One such heroine--a female counterpart of Paul Revere--was sixteen-year-old Sybil Ludington of Fredericksburg, New York, the daughter of a colonel in the militia. On the night of April 26, 1777, after receiving word of a British attack on Danbury, Connecticut, a military supply base for the patriots, Sybil Ludington rode forty miles on horseback, banging on the doors of houses to arouse the militia to come to the rescue of Danbury. Unlike Paul Revere, she completed her mission safely, although the militia were not in time to save Danbury.

A quieter, but equally daring act was allegedly performed by Lydia Darragh, a Quaker woman well known as a nurse, midwife and "layer out of the dead" who was living in Philadelphia during the British occupation of that city from September 1777 to June 1778. During that period she was known to have nursed the sick among refugee patriots outside the city. On the night of December 2, 1777, a room in her house was requisitioned by General Howe, whose headquarters were across the street, as a council chamber. As one version of the story goes--there are conflicting versions--Lydia Darragh overheard the British plotting an attack on Washington's army encamped nearby. The next day, using the pretext that she was going to buy flour, she received a permit to pass through British lines, and walked several miles out of town until she managed to get the message to the Americans, enabling them to withstand the attack when it came.

No one knows exactly how many women disguised themselves as men and fought as regular soldiers in the Continental army. Although there are only a few women of whom we have records, there were probably many more. The most famous of these women fighters, Deborah Sampson Gannett (1760-1827), enlisted in the army in May 1782, under the name Robert Shurtleff. After fighting in several engagements, she was wounded in a skirmish near Tarrytown, New York. Her identity was discovered only after she was hospitalized with a fever. She was discharged in 1783. In the 1790's, after she had married and had three children, she published a somewhat exaggerated version of her story and gave lectures about her wartime experiences. Eventually she received a pension from both the federal government and the state of Massachusetts, for her services.

We should not forget that the Revolutionary War was, in a sense, a civil war. About ten percent of the population remained loyal to the British. Loyalists were particularly strong in areas such as New York City,

By speaking out in public on a controversial issue, and by doing it spectacularly well, the Grimké sisters awakened the women's rights issue in the heart of the abolition movement. When attacked for speaking in public, they felt compelled to defend their rights as women to speak out for themselves as well as on behalf of the slaves. Within the abolitionist movement itself, voices were raised against them suggesting that the women's rights controversy was detracting from the main issue of slavery. When two of their closest friends, Theodore Weld and the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, pleaded with the sisters not to jeopardize the antislavery cause by raising the women's rights issue, Angelina responded:

> Why, my dear brothers can you not see the deep laid scheme of the clergy against us as lecturers?... If we surrender the right to speak in public this year, we must surrender the right to petition next year, and the right to write the year after, and so on. What then can woman do for the slave, when she herself is under the feet of man and shamed into silence.[7]

Sarah Grimké forcefully attacked the ideas in the Pastoral Letter in a series of articles later published as a pamphlet, Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman (1838). A thorough student of the Bible, Sarah refuted the scriptural arguments for woman's inferiority, declaring that God had created woman as man's equal:

> I ask no favors for my sex. I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed for us to occupy.[8]

Opposition to them from within and outside the abolitionist movement could not stop the Grimké sisters from speaking out. They won the approval of other women in the movement and were an inspiration to future speakers such as Abby Kelley Foster and Lucy Stone.

A highlight of Angelina Grimké's career was an appearance before a committee of the Massachusetts legislature held in February 1838, on the subject of antislavery petitions. Faint with emotion, she spoke for two hours, the first woman to appear before a legislative body. Capturing the audience with her clear expressive voice and earnest manner, Angelina began by asserting the American woman's right to be a citizen, concerned with political matters. When she spoke of slavery, her voice shook with emotion:

> I stand before you as a southerner, exiled from the land of my birth by the sound of the lash and the piteous cry of the slave. I stand before you as a repentant slaveholder. I stand before you as a moral being and as a moral being I feel that I owe it to the suffering slave and to the deluded master, to my country and to the world to do all that I can to overturn a system of complicated crimes, built upon the broken hearts and prostrate bodies of my countrymen in chains and cemented by the blood, sweat and tears of my sisters in bonds.[9]

Another successful appearance followed a few days later, and Angelina, elated at the excitement that she aroused, declared in a letter, "We abolition women are turning the world upside down."[10]

One of Angelina's last speeches was delivered at an antislavery convention held in Philadelphia in May 1838. It was two days after she had married her co-worker Theodore Weld in a ceremony at which Negroes were among the invited guests, and in which the groom denounced the legal powers of a husband over a wife. The convention was held in Pennsylvania Hall, a brand new building designed for public meetings. With a howling mob surrounding the building and interrupting her speech, Angelina Grimké Weld was undaunted:

> What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the leveling of this hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is a good... institution? What if the mob should now burst in...and commit violence upon our persons, would that be anything compared with what the slaves endure? No. no; and we do not remember them...if we shrink in the time of peril, or feel unwilling to sacrifice ourselves, if need be, for their sake.[11]

The next evening, after another session of the convention, an angry mob burned the new hall to the ground.

Although the demands of private life soon prevented the Grimké sisters from giving speeches, they continued to work for the cause. They were tireless in circulating antislavery petitions and, perhaps more significantly, they helped Theodore Weld gather thousands of factual items on slavery for a documentary pamphlet, Slavery as It Is. Published in 1839, it ultimately served as a source for Harriet Beecher Stowe when she came to write Uncle Tom's Cabin.

BLACK WOMEN IN ABOLITION

Though the white women caught up in the struggle against slavery sometimes compared their legal status to that of the slave, it goes without saying that in the period before the Civil War white women did not suffer the kind of depression endured by black men and women, slave and free. Despite their oppression, many black women fought their own battles in the antislavery crusade as public speakers, writers and "conductors" on the Underground Railroad.

Maria Stewart (1803-1879), a free black woman who gave several speeches in Boston during the early 1830's, was perhaps the first black woman to speak in public on behalf of her people. In her speeches, three of which were printed in Garrison's The Liberator, Stewart argued that the lot of the free black was little better than that of the slave:

> ...Such is the horrible idea that I entertain respecting a life of servitude, that if I conceived of there being no possibility of my rising above the condition of a servant, I would gladly hail death as a welcome messenger. O, horrible idea, indeed! to possess noble souls aspiring after high and honorable acquirements, yet confined by the chains of ignorance and poverty to lives of continual drudgery and toil. Neither do I know of any who have enriched themselves by spending their lives as house-domestics, washing windows, shaking carpets, brushing boots, or tending upon gentlemen's tables.[12]

She urged free blacks to better themselves through education, hard work and religion. She asked, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?" and suggested that the answer lay in self-help and mutual support within the black community.

Not surprisingly, some of the free black women in abolition had received a decent education as children and came from families active in the movement. Frances Watkins Harper (1825-1911), who was a poet and teacher as well as an abolitionist, was born of free black parents in Baltimore and educated by an abolitionist uncle, who conducted a school. By the early 1850's, she had published a volume of poetry, taught school in Ohio and Pennsylvania and worked with the Underground Railroad. As a lecturer for the Maine Antislavery Society, she made a double appeal to her audience as a lecturer and a poet. Frances Harper's stories and poems were published in antislavery journals, earning her money which she used to aid fugitive slaves. These lines from one of her poems, "The Slave Auction," convey the bitter theme of the separation of families in slavery:

> And mothers stood with streaming eyes,
> And saw their dearest children sold;
> Unheeded rose their bitter cries,
> While tyrants bartered them for gold.
>
> And woman, with her love and truth-
> For these in sable forms may dwell-
> Gaz'd on the husband of her youth,
> With anguish none may paint or tell.[13]

Other notable free black women who helped their people through teaching, writing, editing and lecturing, were Sarah Mapps Douglass, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Sarah Parker Remond and Charlotte Forten. These women were from a relatively privileged group of black people in America. Charlotte Forten (1837-1914), the daughter and granddaughter of wealthy and influential black abolitionists, kept a journal in which she recorded her experiences as a student, a teacher and an abolitionist in Salem, Massachusetts, during the 1850's, and later as a teacher of freed slaves in the South during the Civil War. The early sections of the journal reveal the painful effects of racial prejudice on a sensitive, intelligent young woman:

Wednesday. Sept. 12. 1855 To-day school commenced. -Most happy am I to return to the companionship of my studies, -ever my most valued friends. It is pleasant to meet the scholars again; most of them greeted me cordially, and were it not for the thought that will intrude, of the want of entire sympathy even of those I know and like best, I should greatly enjoy their society. There is one young girl and only one... who I believe thoroughly and heartily appreciates antislavery, --radical anti-slavery, and has no prejudice against color. I wonder that every colored person is not a misanthrope. Surely we have everything to make us hate mankind. I have met girls in the schoolroom-they have been thoroughly kind and cordial to me,-perhaps the next day met them in the street-they feared to recognize me; these I can but regard now with scorn and contempt,-once I liked them, believing them incapable of such meanness. Others give the most distant recognition possible... These are but trifles, certainly, to the great public wrongs which we as a people are obliged to endure. But to those who experience them, these apparent trifles are most wearing and discouraging;...Oh! it is hard to go through life meeting contempt with contempt, hatred with hatred, fearing, with too good reason, to love and trust hardly any one whose skin is white, however lovable, attractive and congenial in seeming. In the bitter, passionate feelings of my soul again and again there rises the questions "When, oh! when shall this cease?"[14]

The efforts of slave women to resist, to escape and to help their fellow slaves is an even more heroic struggle than that of the free black women, although many of their efforts went unrecorded. There were numerous examples of slaves hiring themselves out and saving their money to buy their own freedom and that of their children. In one such case, a woman from Kentucky

> had bought herself by washing and ironing of nights, after her mistress' work was done. During seven long years she did not allow herself to undress except to change. Her sleep was little naps over the ironing board. Seven years of night work brought the money that procured her freedom.[15]

Once free, the woman continued to work night and day to free her son and daughter.

The most celebrated person in the annals of fugitive slaves is Harriet Tubman (1820?-1913), who was born a slave in Maryland and escaped to Pennsylvania in 1849 when she was around thirty years old. During the ten years before the Civil War, she is said to have made as many as nineteen trips into Maryland as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, and to have rescued as many as three hundred slaves, earning the nickname Moses. Although slave owners had a $40,000 price on her head, she was never caught and never lost a "passenger."

Another former slave who achieved fame in her time was Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883). Born a slave in New York State, she had been sold several times before slavery was abolished in that state in 1828, and two of her children had been sold away from her. She spent several years as a wandering preacher, staying with different religious groups. Though she could neither read nor write, Sojourner Truth had a thorough knowledge of the Bible and great natural eloquence as a speaker. During the 1840's, she came to the attention of the abolitionists, who, recognizing her gifts, arranged for her to lecture alongside such noted abolitionist speakers as Frederick Douglass.

When the women's rights movement got underway in the 1850's, Sojourner Truth was a welcome speaker at conventions, where between speeches she sold her life story, The Narrative of Sojourner Truth. Her unique powers as an orator can be seen in the following passage from a speech with which she electrified a women's rights gathering in Akron, Ohio, in 1851:

> "Dat man ober dar say dat womin needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gibs me any best place!" And raising herself to full height, and her voice to a pitch like rolling thunder, she asked, "And a'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm!" (and she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power). "I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man--when I could get it--and bear de lash as well! And a'n't I a woman? I have born thirteen chilern, and seem 'em mos' all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'n't I a woman?"[16]

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE AND UNCLE TOM'S CABIN

In the 1830's and early 1840's abolition was a vigorous though unpopular reform movement, most of whose members were regarded as fanatics, outside the mainstream of American political life. During the 1840's and 1850's, however, the sectional conflict between North and South deepened, mainly over the issue of the extension of slavery into the new western territories. Antislavery sentiment gradually became politically respectable, if not popular. Though the major parties, the Democrats and the Whigs, kept hands off the slavery issue, a third party developed, first called the Liberty and later the Free Soil Party, which fielded presidential candidates and represented the antislavery viewpoint, though usually not to the satisfaction of the radical abolitionists. The Compromise of 1850, with its stiffened Fugitive Slave Act, made many Northerners feel that their sovereignty was being violated, and aroused in them a feeling of resistance to slavery.

The mood of resistance was given powerful emotional support from the novel Uncle Tom's Cabin. First serialized and then published in book form in 1852, Uncle Tom's Cabin sold a remarkable 300,000 copies in its first year. It became a sensation throughout America and in Europe, turning its author, Harriet Beecher Stowe, into a national and international celebrity. The novel, which powerfully dramatized the evils of slavery, had the effect of uniting Northerners emotionally against that institution. In the years leading up to the Civil War, the book was read by more and more people, reaching even more after it was adapted as a play, and performed all over the country.

Among Southerners, Stowe and Uncle Tom's Cabin provoked rage as well as an outpouring of books and articles seeking to refute her point of view and criticize the novel. It is ironic that Stowe, a moderate on the slavery question, probably did more to promote the abolitionist cause than any other individual. She had played no part in the organized abolition movement, while her sister Catharine Beecher had publicly attacked female abolitionists like the Grimké sisters for their "unfeminine behavior." Stowe's personal acquaintance with slavery was meager--one visit to a Kentucky plantation, glimpses of fugitive slaves in Ohio and an exposure to Theodore Weld's Slavery As It Is. Yet her powerful imagination and narrative skill enabled her to blend the facts she knew with a powerful religious vision into a story whose mythic characters--Uncle Tom, Little Eva and Topsy--became part of the American consciousness. Legend has it that when Harriet Beecher Stowe met President Lincoln, he greeted her as "the little lady who made this big war."

NOTES

1. *William Lloyd Garrison 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children* (New York, 1885) vol. II, p. 15.

2. Harriet Martineau, *The Martyr Age of the United States* (1839; hardcover reprint, New York, 1969) pp. 28-29.

3. Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (1967; paperback ed., New York, 1971) p. 23. Quotation is from Sarah Grimké's diary, 1827.

4. Ibid., pp. 186-187. Excerpt is from Angelina Grimké, *Letters to Catharine Beecher* (Boston, 1838) pp. 112-113, 119.

5. Ibid., p. 187.

6. Ibid., p. 189.

7. Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, p. 48. Excerpt is from a letter of Angelina Grimké to Theodore Weld and John Greenleaf Whittier, August 20, 1837.

8. Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters*, p. 192. Excerpt is from Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes* (Boston, 1838) p. 10.

9. Ibid., p. 8. Excerpt is from speech of Angelina Grimké, *The Liberator*, March 2, 1838.

10. Ibid., p. 1.

11. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. I (1881; reprint New York, 1969) pp. 334-336.

12. Bert James Loewenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., *Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life* (paperback, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1976) p. 193. Excerpt is from Maria W. Stewart, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart* (Boston, 1835) pp. 51-56.

13. Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps, eds., *The Poetry of the Negro 1746-1970* (1949; paperback ed., New York, 1970) p. 14.

14. Charlotte Forten, *The Journal of Charlotte Forten*, Ray Billington, ed. (1953; paperback ed., New York, 1961, 1967) p. 74.

15. Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (paperback, New York, 1973) p. 40. Excerpt is from Laura S. Haviland, *A Woman's Life-Work, Labors and Experiences* (Chicago, 1889) pp. 234-236.

16. *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. I, p. 116.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. The episode of Prudence Crandall's school is a good starting point from which to discuss the role of women in radical abolitionism. What does this episode reveal about 1) the attitude of most northerners toward black people, 2) the attitude of northerners toward abolitionists and 3) the role of women in the antislavery movement?

2. Briefly describe the role of each of the following women in the abolitionist movement: Lydia Maria Child, Maria Weston Chapman, Lucretia Mott, Frances Harper.

3. What were Angelina and Sarah Grimké's unique contributions to the abolitionist cause? How did the Grimké sisters respond when they were attacked for "unwomanly" behavior?

4. Describe the different kinds of efforts by black women, slave and free, to rescue themselves and other slaves from bondage.

5. How did publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin in 1852 help the cause of abolition? Do you think the novel could have had the same impact in the 1830's? Explain.

Optional Activity

Women in the antislavery movement: Do research, using at least two sources, to present a biographical sketch of a woman active in the antislavery movement. If possible, use one primary source--containing the actual words or writings of the woman you choose.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MOVEMENT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

FROM ABOLITION TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Grimké sisters were the first to awaken the women's rights controversy in the heart of the antislavery struggle, but it was not until the 1840's that a separate movement for women's rights emerged with strong ties to the abolitionist movement. At the World Antislavery Convention held in London in 1840, women delegates were denied seats on the convention floor and asked to sit in a curtained-off side gallery. William Lloyd Garrison and other members of the American delegation vigorously protested this exclusion of the women, but were overruled. One of the female delegates outraged by the proceedings was Lucretia Mott, well known as both a Quaker minister and an active abolitionist. Another of the women present, though not as a delegate, was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the recent bride of Henry Stanton, an abolitionist delegate. The two women spent the days in London earnestly discussing the wrongs done to women. How unjust it was for hard-working abolitionists to be barred from the convention on the basis of sex! They covered every topic, from the biblical arguments used to justify the inferior status of women to the legal disabilities under which women suffered. And they resolved, when they returned home, to hold a convention to promote the rights of women.

Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) came from two traditions of feminine equality: she was a Quaker raised on the island of Nantucket. The Quaker religion accepted the equality of men and women in spiritual matters; the Nantucket women were accustomed to handling business and trade during the long absences of their men at sea. While still in her teens, Lucretia worked as a teacher and soon discovered that women teachers earned less than men. By 1840 she had led a public life for over twenty years, first as a Quaker minister, then as the founder of the first female antislavery society. She also managed to combine this public work harmoniously with marriage, the care of five children and superb housekeeping. Though forceful in her views and firmly devoted to her principles, Lucretia Mott always appeared gentle and serene. Her quietly dignified manner and the constant presence of her husband, James Mott, at her side lent respectability to all her public appearances and to the various causes she supported. As she and Elizabeth Stanton strolled the streets of London, Mott's carefully thought-out views made a great impression on the other woman.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) had grown up dissatisfied with the limitations of womanhood. She was the daughter of a prominent judge in New York. When her one brother died, and she tried to comfort her grief-stricken father, he responded, "Oh my daughter, I wish you were a boy!" Even when she tried to fill her brother's place by studying Greek and learning how to jump a fence on horseback, she could not win her father's approval. Years later, she recalled her frustrated efforts:

> Two prizes were offered in Greek. I strove for one and took the second. How well I remember my joy in receiving that prize. There was no sentiment of ambition, rivalry, or triumph over my companions...One thought alone filled my mind. "Now," said I, "my father will be satisfied with me." So, as soon as we were dismissed, I ran down the hill, rushed breathless into his office, laid the new Greek Testament, which was my prize, on his table and exclaimed: "There, I got it!" He took up the book, asked me some questions about the class, the teachers, the spectators, and evidently pleased, handed it back to me. Then, while I stood looking and waiting for him to say something which would show that he recognized the equality of the daughter with the son, he kissed me on the forehead and exclaimed, with a sigh, "Ah, you should have been a boy!"[1]

As a teenager passing the time in her father's law office, she learned from the law students studying with Judge Cady how it was possible for women to lose their property and the custody of their children under the laws. The students liked to tease her by reading to her "the worst laws they could find."

> One Christmas morning I went to the office to show them, among other of my presents, a new coral necklace and bracelets. They all admired the jewelry and then began to tease me with hypothetical cases of future ownership. "Now," said Henry Bayard, "if in due time you should be my wife, those ornaments would be mine; I could take them and lock them up, and you could never wear them except with my permission. I could even exchange them for a box of cigars, and you could watch them evaporate in smoke."[2]

Though she was educated at Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary, one of the best female schools of the time, Elizabeth was disappointed at not going to a college like the young men of her acquaintance. Through a cousin, Gerrit Smith, a wealthy reformer, she was introduced to a circle of prominent reformers, including the abolitionist Henry Stanton. They were married in May 1840, after the minister agreed, at her insistence, to omit the word "obey" from the marriage ceremony. The trip to the World Antislavery Convention in London was their honeymoon journey.

Eight years passed before Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton actually carried out their plan to hold a women's rights convention. Mott was caught up in family responsibilities and antislavery work. Stanton was enjoying her first years of married life in Boston, an exciting place to be in the 1840's. It was the center of reform, literature and culture, where Stanton was able to meet such figures as Emerson and Hawthorne, and become close friends with Garrison and Whittier. When, for Henry Stanton's health, the family, which now included three sons, moved to the small town of Seneca Falls, New York, Stanton's life changed dramatically. Suddenly she was

living the life of an average middle-class housewife in a small town. Even though she had servants, her days were filled with household cares and children's illnesses. With her husband frequently away on business, she felt isolated with only the servants and children to talk to. Most of all, she missed the cultural excitement of Boston. Thus in July 1848, when she received an invitation to see Lucretia Mott, who was visiting in a nearby town, she went eagerly and poured out her "accumulated discontent" to Mott and three other women gathered around the tea table. Moved by her outburst, they all decided then and there to hold a convention the following week in Seneca Falls, to discuss the "social, civil and religious rights of woman."

One woman's discontent would not have been enough to launch a reform movement if the groundwork had not been laid by the economic and social changes of the first four decades of the 19th century. Such schools as the Troy Seminary, Mount Holyoke and Oberlin were producing educated women who were beginning to question their lack of legal and political rights. Since men of all classes had enjoyed the right to vote for over twenty years, it should not be surprising that a number of educated women began to resent their own lack of suffrage. Many women had acquired organizing skills in reform movements such as temperance and abolition. They knew how to conduct meetings, speak in public and collect signatures on petitions.

Some progress had also been made in improving the property rights of married women. As early as 1836, the first petition for a Married Woman's Property Bill was presented to the New York legislature by Ernestine Rose, a Polish-born Jewish immigrant who became a dedicated worker for abolition and women's rights. Although the bill was rejected at first, Rose and other women worked for it year after year. It finally passed in April 1848, three months before the Seneca Falls Convention, and before long other states were beginning to change these laws. It should be noted that an important reason for the passage of the Married Woman's Property Bill was that it was backed by wealthy men, interested in protecting the inheritances of their wives and daughters. The bill gave protection mainly to women of wealth and property, and not to women who worked for wages, and whose husbands had the legal right to take their earnings and spend it as they pleased.

There were intellectual influences at work in America in the 1840's, preparing women to think about their place in society and their relations with men. One such influence was Margaret Fuller, writer, editor, friend of the New England writers Emerson and Thoreau, and perhaps the most intellectually gifted American woman of the 19th century. In Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845), the first American book to discuss at length woman's place in society, Margaret Fuller argued that a woman must develop as a whole person and not just in relation to a man; that she must have education and employment to enable her to be self-reliant and to develop self-respect:

> We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man. Were this done, and a slight temporary fermentation allowed to subside, we should see crystallizations more pure and of more various beauty...

> Yet, then and only then will mankind be ripe for this, when inward and outward freedom for Woman as much as for Man shall be acknowledged as a right, not yielded as a concession. As the friend of the negro assumes that one man cannot by right hold another in bondage, so should the friend of Woman assume that Man cannot by right lay even well-meant restrictions on Woman.[3]

Finally, it was fitting that women should start demanding their rights in a year of nationwide and worldwide change, which included revolutions in Europe and the discovery of gold in California. Ferment was in the air when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her friends summoned American women to Seneca Falls.

The Seneca Falls Convention

On the morning of July 19, 1848, wagonloads of women began streaming into Seneca Falls headed for the Wesleyan Chapel. Some three hundred women and forty men attended the convention. Although the newspaper announcement had said that men would be barred the first day, the women relented, and they were admitted. Ironically, James Mott, Lucretia's husband, chaired the proceedings, because it was still unheard of for a woman to hold such a position. Lucretia Mott, the most experienced speaker, gave the opening speech explaining the purpose of the convention. She was followed by a nervous Elizabeth Stanton giving her first public speech.

Stanton read the Declaration of Sentiments that she and the other organizers had drawn up in the days preceding the convention. Modelled on the Declaration of Independence in form and language, the document declared "that all men and women are created equal" and that "the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman." It then went on to list the political, legal and social grievances of women. There followed a series of resolutions, the ninth of which was the daring demand for the right to vote, a demand which many at the convention, including Lucretia Mott, deemed too controversial. Stanton, cured of her stage fright, then delivered her first speech, a remarkably polished one for a beginner. It was the start of a lifelong career as a speaker and writer. The following day, when the convention voted on the resolutions, only the demand for the vote was not passed unanimously, although Stanton did have the strong support of Frederick Douglass. At the close of the convention one hundred men and women signed the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. One of the signers, a young farm girl named Charlotte Woodward, was the only woman present that day who lived to vote for president in 1920 when women were finally granted suffrage.

Although the Seneca Falls Convention definitely started a movement, it did not create a permanent organization for women's rights. No such organization was formed before the Civil War. However, starting in 1850, women's rights leaders held conventions almost yearly until the Civil War. These meetings had what today we would call a "consciousness-raising" purpose. They

served as forums for the discussion of such issues as the legal status of women, divorce and marriage, and the role of women in the churches and the professions. The annual meetings drew new recruits into the cause--women who were ready to embark on the difficult task of collecting petitions in different states to improve the legal status of women. Most important, new leaders emerged who would join Elizabeth Stanton in directing the movement.

This was the beginning of organized feminism and the leaders of the movement came eventually to be called feminists. Feminism now means a belief in the political, economic and social equality of the sexes; and a feminist is anyone, male or female, who actively promotes that goal.

Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone

Two women who were not present at the Seneca Falls Convention, but who subsequently became totally identified with the women's rights movement, were Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone. Like many of the women reformers, Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) came from a Quaker background and old New England stock. Born in Massachusetts, she grew up in upstate New York and eventually made Rochester her home. Her father, a fairly prosperous farmer and mill owner, appreciated the intelligence of Susan and her sisters and made sure that they had a reasonably good education for the time. As a young woman she had worked as a teacher, discovering to her disgust that women teachers were paid less than men for the same work.

The Anthony home was a visiting place for such men as Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, and Susan was soon attracted to reform work, especially abolition and temperance. She chose temperance at first, but her work for temperance societies soon convinced her that a woman needed a "purse of her own" in order to work effectively for any reform. She had been both interested and amused at her parents' and sister's account of the first women's rights convention. A turning point in her life came when she was introduced to Elizabeth Stanton in 1851. Stanton not only drew Susan Anthony into the cause of women's rights, but also convinced her of the central importance of the vote for women. It was the beginning of both a lifelong friendship and a political partnership.

The two women complemented each other perfectly: Stanton was married with seven children to care for, whereas Anthony chose not to marry, and was willing to devote most of her waking hours to the movement. Stanton was a gifted thinker and writer--even something of a philosopher--as well as an effective orator; Anthony, an adequate speaker who improved with practice, had a genius for organization with all the necessary mastery of detail, a zest for campaigning, and a readiness to travel anywhere and any time for the cause. In later years Elizabeth Stanton looked back with delight on her energetic partnership with Susan B. Anthony:

> whenever I saw that stately Quaker girl coming across my lawn, I knew that some happy convocation of the sons of Adam was to be set by the ears, by one of our appeals or resolutions. The little portmanteau, stuffed with facts, was opened, and there we had:...false interpretations of Bible texts, the statistics of women robbed of their property, shut out of some college, half paid for their work, the reports of some disgraceful trial; injustice enough to turn any woman's thoughts from stockings and puddings.[4]

Susan B. Anthony's skill at organizing conventions and petition campaigns prompted one male reformer to call her the "Napoleon of the women's rights movement." Her first ambitious undertaking, in the winter of 1854-55, was a campaign to collect signatures to a petition before the New York legislature asking for three improvements in the law: control by women of their own earnings, the mother's custody of children in case of divorce, and the right to vote. Like a modern political organizer, Anthony assigned captains to conduct the door-to-door canvassing in each county of the state. By tirelessly traveling to every corner of the state, holding meetings, selling pamphlets to pay her expenses, enduring bitterly cold weather, bumpy roads, uncomfortable lodgings and terrible food, she collected 6,000 signatures. As a climax to this effort, she shrewdly planned a women's rights convention in Albany while the legislature was in session. At this time Stanton addressed a Joint Judiciary Committee of both houses of the legislature on the legal disabilities of women. The legislators ridiculed the women's demands and the bill failed to pass. Undaunted, Susan B. Anthony repeated the exhausting petition campaign in the following years. Victory came at last in 1860, when the legislature passed a law giving women the right to own property, keep their own wages, sue in court and inherit at the husband's death what the husband would inherit at his wife's death.

Whereas Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony all had fathers interested in educating their intelligent daughters, Lucy Stone's father did his best to discourage his daughter's hopes for higher education. When Stone (1818-1893) was born, on a farm in western Massachusetts, her mother exclaimed, "Oh dear! I am sorry it is a girl. A woman's life is so hard." As a child Stone was intensely aware of the heavy burdens on a farm woman--the dairy work, the household chores and the cares of a large family. Despite her father's opposition, she was determined to get an education. From the age of sixteen she alternately worked as a teacher to earn money and continued her own studies until she could qualify for college. At the age of twenty-five, Lucy Stone proudly entered Oberlin College in Ohio, the first institution of higher learning to admit both women and blacks. She graduated with honors in 1847 at age twenty-nine, having had several conflicts with school authorities over her outspoken attitudes on women's rights. She was the first Massachusetts woman to earn a college degree.

Inspired by such women as the Grimke sisters and Abby Kelley Foster, Lucy Stone became a professional lecturer for the American Antislavery Society. From the beginning she impressed audiences with her sweet, bell-like voice,

her intensely serious manner and her courage in dealing with hostile mobs. Like the Grimke sisters, she began to introduce the subject of women's rights into her abolitionist speeches. When the Society objected, she worked out a compromise whereby she lectured during the week on women's rights and during the weekends on slavery.

Lucy Stone had planned never to marry, objecting as she did to the absolute legal power of a husband over a wife. She was persuaded to change her mind by Henry Blackwell, a young reformer whose unusual family was totally committed to women's rights. (His sisters Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell were pioneer women doctors.) At their wedding in May 1855, the couple read aloud a protest against the marriage laws which began:

> While acknowledging our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such present laws of marriage, as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise, and which no man should possess.[5]

Henry Blackwell renounced all legal and economic power over his bride. After marriage she continued to call herself Lucy Stone, and ever since, women who retain their maiden names after marriage have been known as "Lucy Stoners."

THE PUBLIC IMAGE: BLOOMERS

A number of women supported feminism in their capacity as editors of reform journals. Amelia Bloomer, the wife of a reformer and the deputy postmistress of Seneca Falls, was the editor of a temperance paper, The Lily. She published articles by Elizabeth Stanton and began writing on women's rights as well as temperance. Similar journals published by women were Paulina Wright Davis' The Una, Jane Swisshelm's The Pittsburgh Visiter and Anna McDowell's Woman's Advocate.

Amelia Bloomer's name is remembered today mainly for a style of clothing that she publicized, though she didn't originate it. It was to be expected that women who wanted political, legal and social emancipation would sooner or later want to exchange the restrictive clothing of the day for a more comfortable and practical style of dress. The women's rights leaders attempted to do just that by adopting the "bloomer costume." This fashion, consisting of a loosely belted tunic, knee-length skirt and full, Turkish-style pantaloons, was first worn by Elizabeth Smith Miller, the daughter of reformer Gerrit Smith and a cousin of Elizabeth Stanton. When Stanton realized that while wearing the style a woman could walk up the stairs and

hold a baby and a lamp at the same time, she speedily copied the outfit for herself and enjoyed the ease of movement with which she could now perform her housework. Amelia Bloomer was next to wear the costume and she sang its praises in The Lily.

Suddenly, she received hundreds of letters from women all over the country asking for the pattern, and the style caught on overnight, becoming known as "bloomers." Other women's rights leaders such as Susan Anthony and Lucy Stone also adopted the new garment, as did some of the mill workers at Lowell, Massachusetts. Unfortunately, the general public and the newspapers were not ready for a revolution in women's fashions. People stared at the bloomer wearers on the street, small boys jeered and sometimes eggs and rocks were thrown. The newspapers ridiculed the style and published cartoons caricaturing the wearers as ugly, aggressive, cigar-smoking women. Sometimes close relatives of the bloomer women were ashamed to be seen with them. Ministers in their pulpits denounced the "bifurcated garment" as a violation of the commandment "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man."

Elizabeth Stanton was the first to give up the bloomer costume after wearing it for two years. She decided that the physical comfort did not make up for the mental anguish of public ridicule and she feared that the fuss over bloomers was harmful to the women's cause. A majority of women did the same. American women would have to wait until the early years of the 20th century to find liberation in fashion.

The sarcasm and ridicule directed by the press at the bloomer outfit was typical of the reaction of the press and public to all feminist activity from Seneca Falls on. Cartoons in the newspapers depicted grotesque scenes of role reversal: bossy-looking women stepped out for business while cowed-looking men resentfully rocked the cradle and did the laundry. Women demanding their rights were seen as "mannish" women or sour spinsters, eager to see men washing the dishes, mending the stockings and cleaning the house. Interestingly, these housekeeping and child-care roles, which were supposed to be woman's sacred destiny, were seen as degrading when performed by men. The press also liked to depict women's rights leaders as frustrated, unattractive women who couldn't catch a man. The truth was that almost all the best-known feminist leaders were wives and mothers whose husbands supported them in their work. The one exception, Susan B. Anthony, who was single by choice, was constantly the target of caricatures depicting her as a dried-up, grouchy spinster.

The following excerpt from an editorial in the New York Herald in 1852 conveys the tone of angry mockery that was typical of much of the criticism of the feminists:

> What do the leaders of the Woman's Rights Convention want? They want to vote, and to hustle with the rowdies at the polls. They want to be members of Congress, and in the heat of the debate to subject themselves to the coarse jests and indecent language...They want to fill

> all other posts which men are ambitious to occupy--to be lawyers, doctors, captains of vessels, and generals in the field. How funny it would sound in the newspapers, that Lucy Stone, pleading a cause, took suddenly ill in the pains of parturition and perhaps gave birth to a fine bouncing boy in court![6]

New York State legislators, when obliged in 1856 to consider petitions demanding legal and political equality for women, responded with tongue in cheek that men were really the oppressed sex, since "ladies always have the best place and choicest titbit at the table. They have the best seat in the cars, carriages and sleighs; the warmest place in the winter and the coolest place in summer...A lady's dress costs three times as much as that of a gentleman; and...with the prevailing fashion, one lady occupies three times as much space in the world as a gentleman."[7]

Another common argument of the opposition to women's rights was that voting would lead to disharmony between husband and wife, causing a breakdown of family life. These arguments were used repeatedly throughout the 19th century to oppose women's suffrage. And echoes of them are heard today in the opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment.

Harder for the feminists to accept than male opposition was the hostility of women themselves--the women who slammed the door in their faces when they tried to present a petition. These women declared that they had all the rights they wanted, thank you, and that they were glad that they had husbands to look after their interests. The feminist leaders sought to reach these women to make them aware of their inferior legal status and of the dangers of being totally dependent. The clergy also joined in the chorus denouncing the women's rights movement, and some women were frightened away from the cause by charges that the feminists were defying divine law.

The noisy opposition to women's rights did have the positive effect of bringing the movement publicity and renown far beyond what the women on their own could have accomplished, and it probably attracted many women to the movement as well. During the years before the Civil War, the movement spread from the Northeast to the West--Ohio, Wisconsin, Missouri and Kansas. Migrating eastern women, such as Clarina Howard Nichols, carried the banner of women's equality to the West. The Civil War would put an end to the open-ended "sounding off" period of the movement. After the war, the issue of suffrage would come to the fore and new organizations would be formed to pursue this single goal. The leaders formed in the Seneca Falls decade--Elizabeth Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone and others--would guide the movement for most of the century.

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897* (1898; paperback ed., New York, 1971) p. 23.

2. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

3. Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1855; paperback reprint ed., New York, 1971) p. 37.

4. Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, p. 165.

5. *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. I, p. 261.

6. Ibid., p. 854.

7. Ibid., p. 629.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. Why did the organized movement for women's rights grow directly out of the abolition movement?

2. In what sense did one woman's discontent lead to the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York? Briefly describe at least three developments of the early 19th century that paved the way for the convention.

3. What were the similarities and differences in the backgrounds of the following four women's rights leaders: Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone? What motivated each woman to become a fighter on behalf of other women?

4. Why do you think Elizabeth Stanton modeled the Declaration of Sentiments on the Declaration of Independence? Read the Declaration carefully (see Appendix, pp. 67-69). According to this document, what were the political, social, legal and economic grievances of women? What were the goals of the women as expressed in the list of resolutions? Have American women now achieved these goals?

5. What were the concrete goals of the first organized campaigns undertaken by the women's rights movement in the 1850's? Why was Susan B. Anthony called the Napoleon of the movement?

6. How do you account for the failure of women's rights leaders to convert masses of American women to the "bloomer" costume? In your view, was the reform of women's clothing an important issue? Why did Elizabeth Stanton and most of the other women's rights leaders eventually give up the new costume?

Optional Activity

Women's clothing, past and present: Do clothing research, and present an illustrated report on the changing styles of women's clothing from one era to another. Try to relate the style of women's clothing in a particular period to the events of that period and the status of women at that time.

CHAPTER SIX

WOMEN OF INFLUENCE: EDITORS AND WRITERS

The literary career was one of the few routes to fame and fortune open to women in 19th century America. A literary marketplace was coming into being--mass newspapers; popular magazines; political, literary and reform journals; sentimental novels--in which women with a talent for the pen could compete and frequently emerge on top. Since writing could be done at home and published under a pen name, if modesty demanded, women writers were not as easily charged with unladylike behavior as were the first women doctors, lawyers and lecturers. Furthermore, women could learn the craft of writing and editing informally, without undergoing the kind of professional training and state licensing procedures required for the professions of law and medicine. Women writers with reform interests dedicated their literary talent to their favorite causes, writing pamphlets and articles or editing reform journals and newspapers. Many of the most successful "authoresses" of sentimental domestic fiction and poetry, along with the editors of the popular ladies' magazines, played an important role in popularizing the ideal of "true womanhood." The growing numbers of middle-class women with leisure time were the main consumers of this popular literature.

WOMEN OF THE PRESS

Although journalism was mostly a man's trade during the early 19th century, a number of women of unusual talent, strength and independence carved out unique places for themselves in this field. Today we are familiar with Washington-based journalists whose business it is to supply their readers with Washington gossip--political and personal news from the nation's capital. One of the originators of this brand of Washington journalism was a woman, Anne Royall (1769-1854), whose career as a writer began when she was in her fifties and spanned the era of Jackson and several of his successors.

Born before the American Revolution, Anne Royall, in personal style, was more the vigorous, outspoken woman of colonial and revolutionary times than she was the 19th century Victorian "lady." In her youth she experienced both the hardships and the excitement of life on the Pennsylvania frontier, where she also received some rudimentary schooling. She eventually married a Virginia gentleman farmer, Captain William Royall, a revolutionary war veteran, in whose home Anne's mother was a servant. Although she lived in some luxury during her marriage and for about ten years after Royall's death in 1813, his relatives eventually legally voided his will, leaving her penniless at the age of fifty-four. It took her over twenty years of persistent effort to persuade Congress to grant her a pension as the widow of a revolutionary war soldier.

In the meantime, Anne Royall turned to writing to support herself. Traveling by steamboat, stagecoach or on foot, she visited almost every good-sized settlement in the North, South and West during the 1820's, and

then published her sharp impressions of people and places in a total of ten travel books, which sold fairly well. In 1831, during Andrew Jackson's first term, she moved to Washington and began, with the help of another woman, to publish a weekly newspaper, Paul Pry, which specialized in Washington gossip and political commentary. Members of the House and Senate grew accustomed to seeing Royall, in a cheap plaid coat, carrying a green umbrella, briskly peddling her papers in the halls of Congress. And any politician failing to buy might expect to find himself under attack in the next issue of Paul Pry. In 1836, she started another Washington newspaper, The Huntress, which she continued to publish until her death in 1854.

Royall's papers were a lively reflection of the changes in American political life brought about by Jacksonian democracy. Men in public office were no longer necessarily from the old first families. They were just people and, as such, fair game for the political writer. Anne Royall also sounded off in her editorials on the most controversial political issues of the moment. She supported Jackson in his stand against the Bank of the United States and against nullification, but she did not support any political party. She criticized the postal system and was in favor of Sunday mail. She considered herself a watchdog on the lookout for corruption in high places, and was not afraid to report it even if her facts were not always verified. Her paper was filled with brief pen-pictures, both favorable and unfavorable of Washington men and women. Those persons she liked were invariably described with a "pen dipped in honey," while those she disliked were so thoroughly blasted that John Quincy Adams, one of her admirers, called her "a virago errant in enchanted armor."[1]

Anne Royall was one of the few women of her day to be tuned in to the mainstream of political events and to be well acquainted with major political figures. She was not a reformer, and disliked being mentioned in the same breath with female editors who were in favor of abolition and women's suffrage. Like many male editors, she ridiculed the bloomer costume:

> We think bloomers indelicate, unbecoming and highly inconvenient. Do our sisters intend to part with their last and best treasure--modesty; that grace of symmetry in motion, the sweet rounding waist, the unspeakable charm of a swelling bosom.[2]

She also attacked Harriet Beecher Stowe for presenting an inaccurate picture of the South in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Anne Royall was always her own woman, undisturbed that some people regarded her as a crank. After her death one Washington newspaper wrote of her, "She was a woman of considerable literacy attainments and benevolence, and of strict integrity."[3]

Like Anne Royall, Jane Swisshelm (1815-1884), a Pennsylvania woman, supported herself through journalism; but unlike Royall, her publishing ventures were on behalf of reform causes, particularly abolition and women's

rights. Jane's stormy marriage to a man who tried to dominate her and control her property aroused in her a strong interest in women's legal rights. It infuriated her, for example, that when she left her husband for a period in order to nurse her dying mother, and he sued the mother's estate for the cost of his wife's nursing care, he was legally within his rights. Her loathing for slavery was aroused after she observed male slave owners in Louisville, Kentucky, living exclusively off the labor and the sale of the offspring of their female slaves.

Jane Swisshelm began her newspaper career in the early 1840's by contributing articles on capital punishment, slavery and women's rights to different newspapers in Pennsylvania. Her first paper, the Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter, started in 1848, was devoted to abolition and women's rights. Her articles in it on married women's property rights were said to have influenced the governor of Pennsylvania to support this reform, which passed the Pennsylvania legislature in 1848. After getting a divorce in 1857, she moved with her one child to St. Cloud, Minnesota, where she started another antislavery paper, the St. Cloud Visiter. She soon got into trouble for criticizing President James Buchanan and her paper was suspended after a lawsuit. By this time, however, Swisshelm had gained a public following among antislavery people, and was able to start a new paper, as well as embark on lecture tours in which she denounced her political enemies and championed her favorite causes.

Owing to the lack of education and financial resources, free black women had even fewer opportunities than white women to become journalists or editors. As might be expected, those black women who did enter the field worked on behalf of their people, slave and free. The first black woman to publish and edit a newspaper on the American continent was Mary Shadd Cary (1823-1893), who had been born free in Wilmington, Delaware. Like other outstanding free black women of that period, Mary Shadd came from a family devoted to abolition and to the advancement of free blacks. Educated in a Quaker school, Mary Shadd became a teacher at age sixteen and taught school at various times throughout her life. After 1850, when many slaves fled to Canada as a result of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, she moved to Windsor, Ontario, and became a leader of these emigrants. Shd founded a school for them and in 1853 was involved in the founding of a weekly newspaper called the Provincial Freeman, dedicated to helping this refugee community. Although her title was publishing agent, Mary Shadd was recognized as the actual editor during the four years of the paper's existence.

MARGARET FULLER: "CITIZEN OF THE WORLD"

"Margaret Fuller possessed more influence upon the thought of America, than any woman previous to her time."[4] This was the judgment of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony on one of the most remarkable American women of the 19th century. Her influence was exerted through her books, her journalism, her conversation and her genius for friendship.

During the 1840's and 1850's, New England, particularly Boston--including Cambridge, Concord and Salem--was the center of an extraordinary flowering of literature and philosophy. Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), growing up in Cambridge, received a rigorous classical education from an ambitious, domineering father. Consequently, as a child and young woman, she was a high-strung, intellectual prodigy. After her father's death in 1835, she undertook the support of her family and the education of her younger brothers and sisters. By the late 1830's, she was close friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Ripley, Bronson Alcott and other members of the Concord circle of writers and thinkers.

From 1838 to 1844 Fuller held "Conversations," a series of scholarly talks, in Elizabeth Peabody's West Street Bookshop in Boston, attracting an audience of the most eminent men and women. Her topics included art, mythology, education, and woman and her rights, and those who attended found Fuller's performance as a speaker as exciting as that of a great actress. For two years she served as the editor of The Dial, the quarterly journal of the group known as the Transcendentalists. She also spent time at Brook Farm, the utopian community founded by George Ripley, but she refused to live there. (In The Blithedale Romance, Nathaniel Hawthorne's fictional treatment of the Brook Farm experiment, the important female character Zenobia is allegedly based on Margaret Fuller.) Though Fuller was widely admired for her intellect, many people, including her close friends, were often put off by her forceful and demanding personality. She realized that she needed a wider scope for her powers than New England.

In 1843, Fuller broadened her horizons by traveling to the northern Mid West--mainly Illinois and the Great Plains. Her first book, Summer on the Lakes in 1843 (1844), based on this tour, was filled with keen observations on the new settlers of the West and presented a sympathetic view of the Indians as they were in the process of being driven from their lands. Horace Greeley, the newspaper editor, admired the book so much that he invited Fuller to join the staff of his New York Tribune. She thus became the first woman to be part of the regular working press. "When I first made her acquaintance," Greeley wrote in his memoirs, "she was mentally the best instructed woman in America."

In her work for the Tribune, Fuller developed her powers as a literary critic and, more important, became interested in the social problems of New York City. She visited Blackwell's Island and Sing Sing, and was particularly concerned about the plight of women in these prisons. In her next book, Woman in the Nineteenth Century (1845), Fuller developed ideas about women's place in society that were to exert an important influence on the leaders of the women's rights movement. She argued that women, just as much as men, needed to fulfill themselves spiritually and intellectually and were entitled to worthy employment. "But if you ask me what offices they may fill," she wrote, "I reply--any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea-captains, if you will."[5] She asserted that women were entitled to have an equal voice with men in forming the laws in controlling their own property.

Margaret Fuller became a full-fledged "citizen of the world" in 1846 when she sailed for Europe and found herself known and welcome among intellectual circles in London and Paris. Among those she met whose liberal ideas stirred her were Giuseppe Mazzini, the Italian patriot exiled in England, the French writer George Sand, and the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. But it was in Italy that Margaret Fuller, for the first time, found her life flowing with the tide of great historical events. Caught up in the revolutionary movement of 1848, Fuller sent vivid accounts of the revolutionary struggle back to the New York Tribune and called for American aid to the democratic forces in Italy. During this period of turmoil, she seems to have found personal fulfillment in her marriage to Giovanni Angelo Ossoli, a young Italian nobleman of revolutionary sympathies to whom she bore a son.

During the spring of 1849, while the Roman republic was under seige by French forces, Fuller ran an emergency hospital and helped carry supplies to her husband's outpost. After the Republic was overthrown in July 1849, the Ossolis fled Rome for Florence where Margaret worked on a history of the Roman revolution. In 1850, with some forebodings, she set sail for America with her husband and child. Within sight of America, their ship was wrecked off the coast of Fire Island, not far from New York harbor. The bodies of Fuller and Ossoli were never found. It is tantalizing to imagine the role that Margaret Fuller, fresh from her firsthand experiences of war and revolution, might have played in the infant women's rights movement and in the intellectual life of America.

SARAH JOSEPHA HALE: THE LADY FROM GODEY'S

Today we are becoming more aware of the role played by the mass media--television, movies, mass magazines--in promoting sex-role stereotypes and reinforcing the notion that distinctly different character traits and activities are appropriate for men and women. The power of women's magazines to shape the self-image of American women began early in the 19th century. From the 1830's to the 1870's, Godey's Lady's Book, under the editorship of Sara Josepha Hale (1788-1879), guided the lives of thousands of middle-class women. Though there were other magazines of a similar type, Godey's was probably the most influential. The magazine's monthly mixture of fashion plates, poetry and fiction, recipes, household hints and health advice along with Hale's editorials obviously had wide appeal.

Hale, a woman of some literary talent, had been a contented wife and mother with no thought of a career, when her husband's death in 1822, shortly before the birth of her fifth child, forced her to seek a livelihood. Like other successful women of the 19th and 20th centuries, Hale made a career out of advising other women to stay home and fulfill themselves as wives and mothers. The ideal of "true womanhood" received its fullest expression in the columns of Godey's. Sarah Hale disapproved of women's speaking in public and disagreed with the goal of political equality with men advanced by the women's rights movement. And she willingly accepted the rule of her publisher, Louis Godey, that all controversial topics, such as slavery, be excluded from the pages

of the magazine. It is only fair to point out, however, that Hale promoted certain reforms, such as higher education for women and the training of more women doctors, which contributed to the advancement of women. She also advised women to eat properly, exercise regularly, and wear sensible clothing.

THE "SCRIBBLING WOMEN"

In 1855 Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote angrily, "America is now wholly given over to a d----d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash--and I should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed." Hawthorne was referring to a group of women writers whose books sold by the thousands during the mid-19th century, and who earned far more money from their writings than did Hawthorne, Melville, or Emily Dickinson, writers now acknowledged as the giants of American literature in that period.

In their novels, sketches and poetry, these women writers, the domestic sentimentalists, appealed above all to the soft emotions. Maria S. Cummins, the writer that Hawthorne probably had in mind, began her best-selling novel The Lamplighter (1854) with a scene in which a lonely little orphaned girl in a city slum is befriended by an elderly lamplighter. In the course of the novel she gave the readers scenes of slum and society life, cleared up the mystery of the heroine's parentage, and reunited separated lovers. Other successful writers in the sentimental vein were Catharine Sedgwick, Elizabeth Wetherell (pseudonym for Susan Warner), Fanny Fern (pseudonym for Sara Payson Parton), Fanny Forrester (pseudonym for Emily Chubbock) and Lydia Sigourney, popularly known as the "sweet singer of Hartford."

The heroines of sentimental fiction were usually virtuous young women, or sometimes neglected little girls, who overcame all obstacles on the road to happiness, love and wealth by a combination of innocence, religious piety and self-sacrifice. Sigourney wrung the hearts of her readers with poems and sketches dwelling on the deaths of angelic children. Some of the writers were able to inject realism into their works. Fanny Fern, for example, in her autobiographical novel Ruth Hall, presents the plight of a widow with children to support, no means of earning a living and unsympathetic relatives, a not-unusual situation in the 19th century. The heroine, Ruth Hall, like Fanny Fern herself, turns to writing to support herself, and wins literary fame and fortune in spite of her relatives, who do everything possible to discourage her. The suffering of women and children, the glorification of dying and death--these were the favorite themes of the "scribbling women" and their mass audience through most of the 19th century.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) shared some of the attitudes of the sentimental writers. She liked to dwell on the deaths of little children and she glorified the home and motherhood. When she combined these attitudes with

a deeply felt religious vision of sin and redemption and took slavery for her subject, the result was Uncle Tom's Cabin, proof that the product of woman's pen could influence the course of history. Of course Uncle Tom's Cabin does not offer any practical solution to the problem of ending slavery, except to suggest that the freed slaves, like Eliza and George, might settle in Africa, and to prophesy that a violent day of judgment might be on hand for America. Stowe preferred to dwell on the specacle of the saintly slave Uncle Tom and the saintly frail child Little Eva softening those about them by their example of Christian love, suffering and self-sacrifice.

Religious evangelism came naturally to Stowe as a member of the famous Beecher family. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a dynamic revivalist preacher and all of her seven brothers were clergyman, including the eminent Henry Ward Beecher, who was also an abolitionist. Her eldest sister, Catharine Beecher, preached the gospel of the home to American women. Harriet Beecher married Calvin Stowe, a Biblical scholar and educator, and bore seven children, one of whom died in infancy. During the 1840's, in order to help out with the family finances, she began to write and publish sketches and stories.

When the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 aroused Northerners to a fuller awareness of the realities of slavery, Stowe's family, who thought highly of her literary talent, urged her to write on the subject. Drawing on her own brief personal contact with slavery, as well as on written accounts of the South and slavery, she wrote her melodramatic but undeniably powerful narrative of "life among the lowly." She always claimed afterward that she was just the "instrument" through which God wrote the book.

Uncle Tom's Cabin was criticized in its own time by radical abolitionists for presenting the South too favorably, and by Southerners for being inaccurate and exaggerated. In our time American blacks have objected to the character of Uncle Tom, the saintly slave, whose response to his condition is to turn the other cheek and hope for a better life in the next world. Despite its faults, however, the novel still has the power to grip the reader with its panoramic view of America from Louisian to Canada, its gallery of vivid characters black and white, and its plot that traces two alternating journeys: Eliza's and George's flight northward to freedom, and Uncle Tom's travel southward into deeper bondage.

In response to Southern criticism Stowe wrote A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853) in which she assembled documentary evidence for the incidents described in the novel. She took several trips abroad, where she was treated like a celebrity and presented with a gold bracelet in the form of a slave's chains. The outbreak of fighting in Kansas over the slavery issue prompted her to write another antislavery novel, Dred (1856), in which a fugitive slave plots a rebellion. Harriet Beecher Stowe continued writing for most of her life, since her family came to depend upon her earnings. Her next four novels, the most successful of which was The Minister's Wooing (1859), all drew on her own and her husband's memories or childhood in New England. These works, which contain quirky local characters using quaint Yankee expressions, and whose heroes and heroines struggle with their Puritan heritage, are outstanding early examples of American regional or "local color" writing.

EMILY DICKINSON: NEW ENGLAND POET

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) is regarded today as the finest woman poet in English and perhaps the greatest American poet. In her own time she was unpublished and unknown, while writers of sentimental verse became rich and famous. Like Margaret Fuller, Emily Dickinson came from a distinguished Massachusetts family with a dominating father. Both were women of genius, but each realized her genius in a totally different way: Fuller in work and action, Dickinson in solitary artistic creation. Whereas Fuller moved beyond the confines of New England to the West, to New York City and eventually to Europe, where she experienced love, marriage, motherhood and revolution, Dickinson spent almost her entire life in Amherst, Massachusetts, and by the late 1860's had become almost a recluse in her father's house. Her quest for self-realization was an inward one. She explored her own soul and dramatized its struggles in poetry.

Emily Dickinson probably began to write verse by the early 1850's, several years after she spent a year at Mount Holyoke Seminary. It was a year in which she stubbornly resisted the experience of religious conversion so eagerly promoted by Mary Lyon, the founder of the school. By 1858, she was starting to recopy her poems and bind them together with thread into neat packets. In April 1862, she sent four poems to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an essayist and critic who had recently published a "Letter to a Young Contributor" in the Atlantic Monthly, asking for new contributions from talented young writers. An intelligent man of conventional poetic taste, Higginson was not really sure whether Dickinson's works were poems at all, and advised her against publication, though he asked her to send him more. Higginson became her friend, via the mails, for life, but it is likely that this early exchange of letters with him convinced Emily Dickinson that she was destined to live the life of an artist whose works would be unrecognized during her own lifetime.

The years between 1862 and 1865 saw her greatest outpouring of poetry, although she continued to write for most of her life. In the 1,775 poems that she left behind to be published after her death, Emily Dickinson grappled with the religious doubts and moments of mystical experience that she shared with other New England writers of her time. Some of the poems reveal the poet examining the workings of her soul. Others deal with the themes of death, love, nature, fame and immortality.

Touched as he was by her "beautiful thoughts," Higginson was baffled by Dickinson's verse because she was a poetic innovator, and seemed to be breaking the rules of conventional poetry. She used simple hymn like verse forms, but achieved variety through the use of unusual rhythms, off-rhymes and the interior repetition of sounds. She chose words with striking originality, often using them in unusual contexts or as different parts of speech. She drew attention to significant nouns by capitalization, and marked pauses by the use of the dash.

The following poem suggests Emily Dickinson's confident dedication to her art, as well as her awareness that she would not know fame in her own lifetime:

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me--
The simple News that Nature told--
With tender Majesty

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see--
For love of Her--Sweet-countrymen
Judge tenderly--of Me[6]

NOTES

1. Bessie Rowland James, *Anne Royall's U.S.A.* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1972) p. 204.

2. Ibid., p. 356.

3. Ibid., p. 388.

4. *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. I, p. 801.

5. Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 174.

6. Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Compléte Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (One-volume edition, Boston, 1955) p. 211.

Questions for Inquiry and Discussion

1. List several reasons why significant numbers of women were able to enjoy successful literary and journalistic careers in the 19th century, while so many other professions were closed to them.

2. Briefly describe the contribution of each of the following women to the field of journalism: Anne Royall, Jane Swisshelm, Mary Shadd Cary and Margaret Fuller.

3. As writers, editors, publishers or journalists is print or on television, what women in our time influence the way people think? Consider such women as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Barbara Walters, Margaret Mead, Dorothy Porter, and Katherine Graham. Which women have devoted their careers to the progress of women toward full equality in our society?

Optional Activity

The poetry of Emily Dickinson: Read a number of the poems of Emily Dickinson and make a selection of about five that you admire. Briefly introduce each poem, making note of the theme, poetic devices, images and choice of words. Do research on Emily Dickinson's life, and present a brief biography along with the poems.

Appendix

Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions

Seneca Falls Convention, July 1848

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind require that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course..

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government,...

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men--both natives and foreigners...

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master--the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given...--the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate position,...

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored,...to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation--in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

Resolutions

Whereas, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that "man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness."...therefore,

Resolved, That such laws as conflict,...with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature and of no validity,...

Resolved, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no...authority.

Resolved, That woman is man's equal--was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.

Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach,...in all religious assemblies.

Resolved, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy and refinement of behavior that is required of woman,...should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.

Resolved, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert, or in feats of the circus.

Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her Creator has assigned her.

Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.

Resolved, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.

Resolved, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is...the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking...; and this being a self-evident truth..., any custom or authority adverse to it,...is to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind.

[Elizabeth Cady Stanton had drafted all the above resolutions. At the last session Lucretia Mott offered the following:]

Resolved, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce.

[All the resolutions, with the exception of the ninth, which demanded the right to vote, were adopted unanimously.]

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Note on an important primary source for Pamphlets Two, Three and Four:

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