

The Intimately Oppressed

It is possible, reading standard histories, to forget half the population of the country. The explorers were men, the landholders and merchants men, the political leaders men, the military figures men. The very invisibility of women, the overlooking of women, is a sign of their submerged status.

In this invisibility they were something like black slaves (and thus slave women faced a double oppression). The biological uniqueness of women, like skin color and facial characteristics for Negroes, became a basis for treating them as inferiors. It seems that their physical characteristics became a convenience for men, who could use, exploit, and cherish someone who was at the same time servant, sex mate, companion, and bearer-teacher-warden of his children.

Because of that intimacy and long-term connection with children, there was a special patronization, which on occasion, especially in the face of a show of strength, could slip over into treatment as an equal. An oppression so private would turn out hard to uproot.

Earlier societies—in America and elsewhere—in which property was held in common and families were extensive and complicated, with aunts and uncles and grandmothers and grandfathers all living together, seemed to treat women more as equals than did the white societies that later overran them, bringing “civilization” and private property.

In the Zuni tribes of the Southwest, for instance, extended families—large clans—were based on the woman, whose husband came to live with her family. It was assumed that women owned the houses, and the fields belonged to the clans, and the women had equal rights to what was

produced. A woman was more secure because she was with her own family, and she could divorce the man when she wanted to, keeping their property.

It would be an exaggeration to say that women were treated equally with men; but they were treated with respect, and the communal nature of the society gave them a more important place. The puberty ceremony of the Sioux was such as to give pride to a young Sioux maiden:

Walk the good road, my daughter, and the buffalo herds wide and dark as cloud shadows moving over the prairie will follow you.... Be dutiful, respectful, gentle and modest, my daughter. And proud walking. If the pride and the virtue of the women are lost, the spring will come but the buffalo trails will turn to grass. Be strong, with the warm, strong heart of the earth. No people goes down until their women are weak and dishonored....

The conditions under which white settlers came to America created various situations for women. Where the first settlements consisted almost entirely of men, women were imported as sex slaves, childbearers, companions. In 1619, the year that the first black slaves came to Virginia, ninety women arrived at Jamestown on one ship: "Agreeable persons, young and incorrupt... sold with their own consent to settlers as wives, the price to be the cost of their own transportation."

Many women came in those early years as indentured servants—often teenaged girls—and lived lives not much different from slaves, except that the term of service had an end. They were to be obedient to masters and mistresses. Sexual abuse by their masters was common. According to the authors of *America's Working Women* (Baxandall, Gordon, and Reverby): "They were poorly paid and often treated rudely and harshly, deprived of good food and privacy."

In 1756, Elizabeth Sprigs wrote to her father about her servitude: "What we unfortunate English People suffer here is beyond the probability of you in England to Conceive, let it suffice that I one of the unhappy Number, am toiling almost Day and Night... with only this comfort that you Bitch you do not halfe enough...."

Of course these terrible conditions provoked resistance. For instance, the General Court of Connecticut in 1645 ordered that a certain "Susan C., for her rebellious carriage toward her mistress, to be sent to the house of correction and be kept to hard labor and coarse diet...."

Whatever horrors can be imagined in the transport of black slaves to America must be multiplied for black women, who were often one-third of the cargo. Slave traders reported:

I saw pregnant women give birth to babies while chained to corpses which our drunken overseers had not removed.... [p]acked spoon-fashion they often gave birth to children in the scalding perspiration from the human cargo.... On board the ship was a young negro woman chained to the deck, who had lost her senses soon after she was purchased and taken on board.

A woman named Linda Brent who escaped from slavery told of another burden:

But I now entered on my fifteenth year—a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl. My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import.... My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. The light heart which nature had given me became heavy with sad forebodings....

Even free white women, not brought as servants or slaves but as wives of the early settlers, faced special hardships. Eighteen married women came over on the *Mayflower*. Three were pregnant, and one of them gave birth to a dead child before they landed. Childbirth and sickness plagued the women; by the spring, only four of those eighteen women were still alive.

All women were burdened with ideas carried over from England. English law was summarized in a document of 1632 entitled "The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights": "In this consolidation which we call wedlock is a locking together. It is true, that man and wife are one person, but understand in what manner.... Her new self is her superior; her companion, her master...."

Julia Spruill describes the woman's legal situation in the colonial period: "The husband's control over the wife's person extended to the right of giving her chastisement.... But he was not entitled to inflict permanent injury or death on his wife...."

As for property: "Besides absolute possession of his wife's personal property and a life estate in her lands, the husband took any other income that might be hers. He collected wages earned by her labor.... Naturally it followed that the proceeds of the joint labor of husband and wife belonged to the husband."

For a woman to have a child out of wedlock was a crime, and colonial

court records are full of cases of women being arraigned for “bastardy”—the father of the child untouched by the law and on the loose. A colonial periodical of 1747 reproduced a speech “of Miss Polly Baker before a Court of Judicature, at Connecticut near Boston in New England; where she was prosecuted the fifth time for having a Bastard Child.”

...I take the liberty to say, that I think this law, by which I am punished, both unreasonable in itself, and particularly severe with regard to me.... Abstracted from the law, I cannot conceive... what the nature of my offense is. I have brought five fine children into the world, at the risque of my life; I have maintained them well by my own industry, without burthening the township, and would have done it better, if it had not been for the heavy charges and fines I have paid.... [n]or has anyone the least cause of complaint against me, unless, perhaps, the ministers of justice, because I have had children without being married, by which they missed a wedding fee. But can this be a fault of mine?

The father's position in the family was expressed in *The Spectator*, an influential periodical in America and England: “Nothing is more gratifying to the mind of man than power or dominion.... I look upon my family as a patriarchal sovereignty in which I am myself both king and priest.”

A best-selling “pocket book,” published in London, was widely read in the American colonies in the 1700s. It was called *Advice to a Daughter*: “You must first lay it down for a Foundation in general, That there is Inequality in Sexes, and that for the better Oeconomy of the World; the Men, who were to be the Law-givers, had the larger share of Reason bestow'd upon them....”

Against this powerful education, it is remarkable that women nevertheless rebelled. Women rebels have always faced special disabilities: they live under the daily eye of their master; and they are isolated one from the other in households, thus missing the daily camaraderie that has given heart to rebels of other oppressed groups.

Anne Hutchinson was a religious woman, mother of thirteen children, and knowledgeable about healing with herbs. She defied the church fathers in the early years of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by insisting that she, and other ordinary people, could interpret the Bible for themselves.

She was put on trial twice: by the church for heresy, and by the government for challenging their authority. At her civil trial she was pregnant and ill, but they did not allow her to sit down until she was close to collapse. At her religious trial she was interrogated for weeks, and again she was sick, but challenged her questioners with expert knowledge of the Bible and

remarkable eloquence. When finally she repented in writing, they were not satisfied. They said: “Her repentance is not in her countenance.”

She was banished from the colony, and when she left for Rhode Island in 1638, thirty-five families followed her. Then she went to the shores of Long Island, where Indians who had been defrauded of their land thought she was one of their enemies; they killed her and her family. Twenty years later, the one person back in Massachusetts Bay who had spoken up for her during her trial, Mary Dyer, was hanged by the government of the colony, along with two other Quakers, for “rebellion, sedition, and presumptuous obtruding themselves.”

It remained rare for women to participate openly in public affairs, although on the southern and western frontiers conditions made this occasionally possible.

During the Revolution, the necessities of war brought women out into public affairs. Women formed patriotic groups, carried out anti-British actions, wrote articles for independence. In 1777 there was a women's counterpart to the Boston Tea Party—a “coffee party,” described by Abigail Adams in a letter to her husband John:

One eminent, wealthy, stingy merchant (who is a bachelor) had a hogshead of coffee in his store, which he refused to sell the committee under six shillings per pound. A number of females, some say a hundred, some say more, assembled with a cart and trunks, marched down to the warehouse, and demanded the keys, which he refused to deliver. Upon which one of them seized him by his neck and tossed him into the cart. Upon his finding no quarter, he delivered the keys when they tipped up the cart and discharged him; then opened the warehouse, hoisted out the coffee themselves, put it into the trunks and drove off.... A large course of men stood amazed, silent spectators of the whole transaction.

It has been pointed out by women historians recently that the contributions of working-class women in the American Revolution have been mostly ignored, unlike the genteel wives of the leaders (Dolly Madison, Martha Washington, and Abigail Adams, for example). Margaret Corbin, called “Dirty Kate,” Deborah Sampson Garnet, and “Molly Pitcher” were rough, lower-class women, prettified into ladies by historians. While poor women, in the last years of the fighting, went to army encampments, helped, and fought, they were represented later as prostitutes, whereas Martha Washington was given a special place in history books for visiting her husband at Valley Forge.

When feminist impulses are recorded, they are, almost always, the

writings of privileged women who had some status from which to speak freely, more opportunity to write and have their writings recorded. Abigail Adams, even before the Declaration of Independence, in March of 1776, wrote to her husband:

...in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make... [d]o not put such unlimited power in the hands of husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention are not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound to obey the laws in which we have no voice of representation.

Nevertheless, Jefferson underscored his phrase "all men are created equal" by his statement that American women would be "too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics." And after the Revolution, none of the new state constitutions granted women the right to vote, except for New Jersey, and that state rescinded the right in 1807. New York's constitution specifically disfranchised women by using the word "male."

Working-class women had no means of recording whatever sentiments of rebelliousness they may have felt at their subordination. Not only were they bearing children in great numbers, under great hardships, but they were working in the home. Around the time of the Declaration of Independence, four thousand women and children in Philadelphia were spinning at home for local plants under the "putting out" system. Women also were shopkeepers and innkeepers and engaged in many trades.

Ideas of female equality were in the air during and after the Revolution. Tom Paine spoke out for the equal rights of women. And the pioneering book of Mary Wollstonecraft in England, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, was reprinted in the United States shortly after the Revolutionary War. She wrote: "I wish to persuade women to endeavor to acquire strength, both of mind and body...."

Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, so many elements of American society were being transformed that changes were bound to take place in the situation of women. In preindustrial America, the practical need for women in a frontier society had produced some measure of equality; women worked at important jobs—publishing newspapers, managing tanneries, keeping taverns, engaging in skilled work. A grandmother, Martha Moore Ballard, on a farm in Maine in 1795, in twenty-five years as a midwife delivered more than a thousand babies.

Now, women were being pulled out of the house and into industrial life, while at the same time there was pressure for women to stay home

where they were more easily controlled. The idea of "the woman's place," promulgated by men, was accepted by many women. It became important to develop a set of ideas, taught in church, in school, and in the family, to keep women in their place even as that place became more and more unsettled. The woman was expected to be pious. One female writer said: "Religion is just what woman needs. Without it she is ever restless or unhappy."

Sexual purity was to be the special virtue of a woman. The role began early, with adolescence. Obedience prepared the girl for submission to the first proper mate. Barbara Welter describes this:

The assumption is twofold: the American female was supposed to be so infinitely lovable and provocative that a healthy male could barely control himself when in the same room with her, and the same girl, as she "comes out" of the cocoon of her family's protectiveness, is so palpitating with undirected affection [that]...she is required to exert the inner control of obedience. The combination forms a kind of societal chastity belt which is not unlocked until the marriage partner has arrived, and adolescence is formally over.

When Amelia Bloomer in 1851 suggested in her feminist publication that women wear a kind of short skirt and pants, to free themselves from the encumbrances of traditional dress, this was attacked in the popular women's literature. One story has a girl admiring the "bloomer" costume, but her professor admonishes her that they are "only one of the many manifestations of that wild spirit of socialism and agrarian radicalism which is at present so rife in our land."

The woman's job was to keep the home cheerful, maintain religion, be nurse, cook, cleaner, seamstress, flower arranger. A woman shouldn't read too much, and certain books should be avoided.

A sermon preached in 1808 in New York: "How interesting and important are the duties devolved on females as wives...the counsellor and friend of the husband; who makes it her daily study to lighten his cares, to soothe his sorrows, and to augment his joys...."

Women were also urged, especially since they had the job of educating children, to be patriotic. One women's magazine offered a prize to the woman who wrote the best essay on "How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism."

The cult of domesticity for the woman was a way of pacifying her with a doctrine of "separate but equal"—giving her work equally as important as the man's, but separate and different. Inside that "equality" there was the fact that the woman did not choose her mate, and once her

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marriage took place, her life was determined. Marriage enchained, and children doubled the chains.

The "cult of true womanhood" could not completely erase what was visible as evidence of woman's subordinate status: she could not vote, could not own property; when she did work, her wages were one-fourth to one-half what men earned in the same job. Women were excluded from the professions of law and medicine, from colleges, from the ministry.

Putting all women into the same category—giving them all the same domestic sphere to cultivate—created a classification (by sex) that blurred the lines of class. However, forces were at work to keep raising the issue of class. Samuel Slater had introduced industrial spinning machinery in New England in 1789, and now there was a demand for young girls literally, "spinsters"—to work the spinning machinery in factories. In 1814, the power loom was introduced in Waltham, Massachusetts, and now all the operations needed to turn cotton fiber into cloth were under one roof. The new textile factories swiftly multiplied, with women 80 to 90 percent of their operatives—most of these women between fifteen and thirty.

Some of the earliest industrial strikes took place in these textile mills in the 1830s. Women's daily average earnings in 1836 were less than thirty-seven cents, and thousands earned twenty-five cents a day, working twelve to sixteen hours a day. In Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1824, came the first known strike of women factory workers; 202 women joined men in protesting a wage cut and longer hours, but they met separately. Four years later, women in Dover, New Hampshire, struck alone.

In Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1834, when a young woman was fired from her job, other girls left their looms, one of them then climbing the town pump and making, according to a newspaper report, "a flaming Mary Wollstonecraft speech on the rights of women and the iniquities of the 'moneyed aristocracy' which produced a powerful effect on her auditors and they determined to have their own way, if they died for it."

Several times in those strikes, women armed with sticks and stones broke through the wooden gates of a textile mill and stopped the looms.

Catharine Beecher, a woman reformer of the time, wrote about the factory system:

I was there in mid-winter, and every morning I was awakened at five, by the bells calling to labor.... Then half an hour only allowed for dinner, from which the time for going and returning was deducted. Then back to the mills, to work till seven o'clock.... [I]t must be remembered that all the hours of labor are spent in rooms where oil lamps, together with

from 40 to 80 persons, are exhausting the healthful principle of the air...and where the air is loaded with particles of cotton thrown from thousands of cards, spindles, and looms.

And the life of upper-class women? Frances Trollope, an English-woman, wrote in her book *Domestic Manners of the Americans*:

Let me be permitted to describe the day of a Philadelphian lady of the first class.... She rises, and her first hour is spent in the scrupulously nice arrangement of her dress; she descends to her parlor, neat, stiff, and silent; her breakfast is brought in by her free black footman.... Twenty minutes before her carriage should appear, she retires to her chamber, as she calls it; shakes and folds up her still snow-white apron, smooths her rich dress, and...sets on her elegant bonnet...then walks downstairs, just at the moment that her free black coachman announces to her free black footman that the carriage waits. She steps into it, and gives the word: "Drive to the Dorcas Society."

At Lowell, the Female Labor Reform Association put out a series of "Factory Tracts." The first was entitled "Factory Life as It Is By an Operative" and spoke of the textile mill women as "nothing more nor less than slaves in every sense of the word! Slaves, to a system of labor which requires them to toil from five until seven o'clock, with one hour only to attend to the wants of nature—slaves to the will and requirements of the 'powers that be.'"

Around that time, the *New York Herald* carried a story about "700 females, generally of the most interesting state and appearance," meeting "in their endeavor to remedy the wrongs and oppressions under which they labor." The *Herald* editorialized: "we very much doubt whether it will terminate in much good to female labor of any description.... All combinations end in nothing."

Middle-class women, barred from higher education, began to monopolize the profession of primary-school teaching. As teachers, they read more, communicated more, and education itself became subversive of old ways of thinking. They began to write for magazines and newspapers, and started some ladies' publications. Literacy among women doubled between 1780 and 1840. Women became health reformers. They formed movements against double standards in sexual behavior and the victimization of prostitutes. They joined in religious organizations. Some of the most powerful of them joined the antislavery movement. So, by the time a clear feminist movement emerged in the 1840s, women had become practiced organizers, agitators, and speakers.

When Emma Willard addressed the New York legislature in 1819, she told them that the education of women “has been too exclusively directed to fit them for displaying to advantage the charms of youth and beauty.” The problem, she said, was that “the taste of men, whatever it might happen to be, has been made into a standard for the formation of the female character.” Reason and religion teach us, she said, that “we too are primary existences...not the satellites of men.”

In 1821, Willard founded the Troy Female Seminary, the first recognized institution for the education of girls. She wrote later of how she upset people by teaching her students about the human body: “Mothers visiting a class at the Seminary in the early thirties were so shocked.... To preserve the modesty of the girls, and spare them too frequent agitation, heavy paper was pasted over the pages in their textbooks which depicted the human body.”

Women struggled to enter the all-male professional schools. Elizabeth Blackwell got her medical degree in 1849, having overcome many rebuffs before being admitted to Geneva College. She then set up the New York Dispensary for Poor Women and Children “to give to poor women an opportunity of consulting physicians of their own sex.” In her first annual report, she wrote:

My first medical consultation was a curious experience. In a severe case of pneumonia in an elderly lady I called in consultation a kind-hearted physician of high standing.... This gentleman, after seeing the patient, went with me into the parlour. There he began to walk about the room in some agitation, exclaiming, “A most extraordinary case! Such a one never happened to me before; I really do not know what to do!” I listened in surprise and much perplexity, as it was a clear case of pneumonia and of no unusual degree of danger, until at last I discovered that his perplexity related to me, not to the patient, and to the propriety of consulting with a lady physician!

Oberlin College pioneered in the admission of women. But the first girl admitted to the theology school there, Antoinette Brown, who graduated in 1850, found that her name was left off the class list. With Lucy Stone, Oberlin found a formidable resister. She was active in the peace society and in antislavery work, taught colored students, and organized a debating club for girls. She was chosen to write the commencement address, then was told it would have to be read by a man. She refused to write it.

Lucy Stone began lecturing on women’s rights in 1847 in a church in Gardner, Massachusetts, where her brother was a minister. She was

tiny, weighed about one hundred pounds, was a marvelous speaker. As lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society, she was, at various times, deluged with cold water, sent reeling by a thrown book, and attacked by mobs.

When she married Henry Blackwell, they joined hands at their wedding and read a statement:

...we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the 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....

She was one of the first to refuse to give up her name after marriage. She was “Mrs. Stone.” When she refused to pay taxes because she was not represented in the government, officials took all her household goods in payment, even her baby’s cradle.

After Amelia Bloomer, a postmistress in a small town in New York, developed the bloomer, women activists adopted it in place of the old whale-boned bodice, the corsets and petticoats. The Reverend John Todd (one of his many best-selling books gave advice to young men on the results of masturbation: “the mind is greatly deteriorated”) commented on the new feminist mode of dress:

Some have tried to become semi-men by putting on the Bloomer dress. Let me tell you in a word why it can never be done. It is this: woman, robed and folded in her long dress, is beautiful. She walks gracefully.... If she attempts to run, the charm is gone.... Take off the robes, and put on pants, and show the limbs, and grace and mystery are all gone.

Women, after becoming involved in other movements of reform—antislavery, temperance, dress styles, prison conditions—turned, emboldened and experienced, to their own situation. Angelina Grimké, a southern white woman who became a fierce speaker and organizer against slavery, saw that movement leading further:

Let us all first wake up the nation to lift millions of slaves of both sexes from the dust, and turn them into men and then...it will be an easy matter to take millions of females from their knees and set them on their feet, or in other words transform them from babies into women.

Sarah Grimké, Angelina’s sister, wrote:

During the early part of my life, my lot was cast among the butterflies of the fashionable world; and of this class of women, I am constrained to say, both from experience and observation, that their education is miserably deficient; that they are taught to regard marriage as the one thing needful, the only avenue to distinction....

She said:

All I ask of our brethren is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed us to occupy.... To me it is perfectly clear that whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do.

Sarah could write with power; Angelina was the firebrand speaker. Once she spoke six nights in a row at the Boston Opera House. She was the first woman (in 1838) to address a committee of the Massachusetts state legislature on antislavery petitions. Her talk attracted a huge crowd, and a representative from Salem proposed that "a Committee be appointed to examine the foundations of the State House of Massachusetts to see whether it will bear another lecture from Miss Grimké!"

Speaking out on other issues prepared the way for speaking on the situation of women: Dorothea Dix, in 1843, addressed the legislature of Massachusetts on what she saw in the prisons and almshouses in the Boston area:

I tell what I have seen, painful and shocking as the details often are.... 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!

Frances Wright was a writer, founder of a utopian community, immigrant from Scotland in 1824, a fighter for the emancipation of slaves and for birth control and sexual freedom. She wanted free public education for all children over two years of age in state-supported boarding schools. She expressed in America what the utopian socialist Charles Fourier had said in France, that the progress of civilization depended on the progress of women.

I shall venture the assertion, that, until women assume the place in society which good sense and good feeling alike assign to them, human improvement must advance but feebly.... men will ever rise or fall to the level of the other sex.... Until power is annihilated on one side, fear and obedience on the other, and both restored to their birthright—equality.

Women put in enormous work in antislavery societies all over the country, gathering thousands of petitions to Congress. In the course of this work, events were set in motion that carried the movement of women for their own equality racing alongside the movement against slavery. In 1840, a World Anti-Slavery Society Convention met in London. After a fierce argument, it was voted to exclude women, but it was agreed they could attend meetings in a curtained enclosure. The women sat in silent protest in the gallery, and William Lloyd Garrison, one abolitionist who had fought for the rights of women, sat with them.

It was at that time that Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott and others, and began to lay the plans that led to the first Women's Rights Convention in history. It was held at Seneca Falls, New York, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived as a mother, a housewife, full of resentment at her condition, declaring: "A woman is a nobody. A wife is everything." She wrote later:

My experiences at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul.... I could not see what to do or where to begin—my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion.

An announcement was put in the Seneca County Courier calling for a meeting to discuss the "rights of woman" the 19th and 20th of July. Three hundred women and some men came. A Declaration of Principles was signed at the end of the meeting by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men. It made use of the language and rhythm of the Declaration of Independence:

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 they have hitherto occupied...

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....

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....

Then came the list of grievances. And then a series of resolutions. Women's conventions in various parts of the country followed the

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one at Seneca Falls. At one of these, in 1851, an aged black woman, who had been born a slave in New York, tall, thin, wearing a gray dress and white turban, listened to some male ministers who had been dominating the discussion. This was Sojourner Truth. She rose to her feet and joined the indignation of her race to the indignation of her sex:

That man over there says that woman needs to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches. . . . Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles or gives me any best place. And a'nt I a woman?

Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And a'nt I a woman?

I would work as much and eat as much as a man, when I could get it, and bear the lash as well. And a'nt I a woman?

I have borne thirteen children and seen em most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And a'nt I a woman?

Thus were women beginning to resist, in the 1830s and 1840s and 1850s, the attempt to keep them in their "woman's sphere." They were taking part in all sorts of movements, for prisoners, for the insane, for black slaves, and also for all women.

In the midst of these movements, there exploded, with the force of government and the authority of money, a quest for more land, an urge for national expansion.

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