Atlantic Connections: Gender and Antislavery women in the United States and Britain

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By

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Atlantic Connections: Gender and Antislavery women in the United States and Britain

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The importance of antislavery activism in the rise of feminism in the US and Great Britain has long been acknowledged by historians of women in both countries. However, the historiography of antislavery women is missing important analytical elements: the role of class and attention to the words of the women themselves. Antislavery women were the first to advocate for their own rights to speak in public, participate in political debates and to challenge the ideology of separate spheres. The way in which antislavery women negotiated the restrictions on their own behavior reshaped the class-based gender roles that were being established in the first half of the nineteenth century. The way in which the middle class defined itself in each country limited how far antislavery women could bend gender roles. American women were able to make a case for their right to speak in public and participate in mixed-gender meetings much earlier than British women, mainly due to the fact that the middle class in America constructed itself in a racial and ethnic diametric. The letters, speeches and diaries of antislavery women illuminate how the leaders of the movement were able to challenge the boundaries of proper behavior and shift the margins of separate spheres to make advocacy for the slave permissible. In doing so, they realized the inequality they and all women lived under. The turning point for this realization was the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention in London, which brought together antislavery women from both sides of the Atlantic, forging and strengthening ties between individuals and groups of women involved in antislavery work. The networks created between 1840
and 1860 aided women in their antislavery work, but also supplied a support network that allowed women to circumvent the male-dominated antislavery movement in Britain and to exchange information about women’s rights as well as antislavery issues. The lessons learned in the antislavery movement provided a strong base for feminist assertions in the second half of the nineteenth century for both American and British women. Women’s rights activists drew on the skills and spaces their antislavery predecessors had carved out for women.
This dissertation by Stephanie J. Richmond fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in History approved by Laura E. N. Mayhall, Ph.D., as Director, and by Leslie Tentler, Ph.D., and Timothy Meagher, Ph.D., as Readers.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>BNA</td>
<td>British National Archives, Kew, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library, London, UK</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>Boston Public Library, Boston, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td>Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Library of Congress, Washington, DC</td>
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<tr>
<td>NYPL</td>
<td>New York Public Library, New York, NY</td>
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<td>RHL</td>
<td>Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, Oxford, UK</td>
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Introduction

Beginning in the first decades of the nineteenth century, women in both the United States and Britain participated in petition campaigns, wrote letters and pledged their spare time and money to a variety of causes. Radical religious groups opened the floor for many women to speak in semi-public settings for the first time; Unitarian and Quaker women were at the forefront of many of the earliest public reform movements. The efforts of the middle class to define themselves colored many of these reforming movements, with attention to creating a place for the middle class that was more refined than the working poor, but not inclined to the excesses of the elite. The antislavery movement captured by far the greatest amount of British and American women’s attention; although some women came to the antislavery movement with prior experience in reform, for many women, the antislavery movement provided their first taste of public political and social activism. Out of the active communities of women on both sides of the Atlantic grew an exchange of letters, ideas and visits that formed the base of the first transatlantic women’s movement.

The peak of the transatlantic antislavery movement came between 1830 and 1848; boosted by the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 in Britain, antislavery activists in the entire Atlantic world found new energy to tackle American slavery, and many pressed for immediate abolition in both the empire and the United States. It was also during these years that women came to participate fully in the movement in the US, with Angelina and Sarah Grimké speaking to mixed crowds in public meetings, women publishing political tracts and signing petitions to government. The crowning achievement of the transatlantic movement was the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention held in London, but “the woman
issue” rather than slavery was the center of this convention. Several dozen American antislavery activists travelled to London in June 1840 to attend the convention. Among the American delegates were women sent by a variety of women’s organizations and mixed-gender organizations from Boston and Philadelphia. Other women attended with their husbands, and many British women attended as visitors. The British & Foreign Antislavery Society, hosts of the convention, made a decision to refuse to seat the American women sent as delegates to the meeting, and instead, insisted that they sit in the Ladies’ galleries with the British women. The resulting discussion took over the entire first day of the convention, and brought what antislavery activists called “the woman question” to the forefront of antislavery discussion for the next several months.¹ Many historians of the American women’s movement place this debate as the genesis of the American women’s rights movement; the American women who attended were the same women who later organized the Seneca Falls convention.² The meeting also allowed antislavery women to meet one another face to face, and to travel to meet women with whom they had been corresponding prior to the convention.

After 1848, the movements in Britain and the United States diverged, pulled apart by differences in national politics. American antislavery activists continued to advocate for the

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end of slavery in the United States, although many antislavery women were pulled in multiple directions as they took up women’s rights as well as antislavery work. British antislavery activists moved on to many other reform movements; the political climate of Britain and Europe impacted which reform movements were most prominent. The French Revolution caused class anxiety in England; fears of violent rebellion by the working class captured middle and upper class Britons and efforts to come to a peaceful resolution to class conflict became all encompassing. Antislavery had been slowly declining in interest in Britain after slavery was outlawed in the Empire in 1834, and the revolutions of 1848 finally turned the remaining antislavery activists to other causes closer to home. American antislavery activists were less affected by the French Revolution, primarily because the American government was not threatened by a class-based revolution.

This dissertation will lay out the full arc of antislavery women’s activities, starting with the earliest women’s organizations in religious circles, and follow them though their rise to prominence in the reforming community and their decline after the events of 1848. Women’s increasing involvement in the public side of reform (gathering signatures, speaking in small and large meetings of women and men, writing to newspapers and to one another and generally overstepping the boundary between the public and private sphere) occurred at the same time as women participated in the antislavery movement. By following these women and their organizations, the divergence of the British and American women’s movements can be seen. The real question beneath the story of the transatlantic antislavery women’s community is: why and how did the women’s rights movements in Britain and the United States take such different forms and develop along very different
paths when their roots lay in the same middle class women’s reform and antislavery organizations? By asking this question, the shape of gender roles in the British and American middle class can be discerned and connected to issues of national and imperial identity.

Differences between class structure and major social divisions (class vs. race) in Britain and the United States help to explain why women’s rights developed at dramatically different paces but from the same roots in both countries. American society’s major division in the nineteenth century was along racial lines; class lines were blurrier, and the lack of an aristocracy and an emphasis in early American politics on the artisan and farmer created a middle class without a true working class until immigration created a visible working class in the late 1850s. The American middle class was more fluid and less easily threatened by change from within, allowing women to step outside of their sphere more easily. The British middle class was constructed along lines of opposition to the working and elite classes (and was heavily invested in separating itself from the working class in order to gain access to the political system), and therefore was more rigid and less likely to allow anyone to challenge its ideals without breaking entirely. British women’s rights activists were challenging a not only women’s status as dependants but a defining element of middle class identity in nineteenth century Britain.

**Historiography**

Since the rise of women’s history as a discipline in the 1970s, the roots of both British and American women’s activism in the political sphere have been firmly placed in
the antislavery movements of the early nineteenth century. American historians, in particular, have been quick to draw connections between women’s participation in the antislavery movement and the founding of the women’s rights movement. British historians have focused more on the connection between the reform acts of the early nineteenth century as the root of British feminism, and the historiography of British women’s participation in the antislavery movement is markedly smaller than the American historiography. Numerous historians of antislavery women, most notably Clare Midgley, have commented upon the interaction between British and American women on the issue of antislavery, and later on women’s issues, but few have taken a serious look at women’s interactions and correspondence over the course of the antislavery movement from the late


4 Attention to antislavery women in British historiography began with Clare Midgley’s Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870 (London: Routledge, 1992) and was followed with a flurry of works, most notably works on antislavery literature and women, including Moira Ferguson’s Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1680-1834 (New York: Routledge, 1992); Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring, eds., The Discourse of Slavery: Afra Behn to Toni Morrison (London: Routledge, 1994); Charlotte Sussman, Consuming Anxieties (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) and most recently, Christopher Leslie Brown, Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006)
eighteenth century through the opening of the American Civil War. The vast majority of works on antislavery women are biographies of the major players, such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the Grimké sisters. British women are very rarely the subject of entire monographs, and are usually relegated to one or two chapters in larger works on the antislavery movement, if they are given any attention at all.

A broader theme largely missing from nearly all of the American histories and most of the British is the role that development of the middle class played in the experiences of antislavery women in both countries. The same is true for works on gender and class; most works on women and the formation of the middle class focus on women’s role as consumers and homemakers rather than their participation in the public and political sphere. More recently, several works have been published which attempt to examine British and American women’s interactions, including Golden Cables of Sympathy by Margaret McFadden and Bonnie S. Anderson’s Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830-1860, but these tend to give a larger picture and delve into little detail about the interactions these women had and how they influenced one another’s political beliefs and actions. Nearly all of these works ignore the period before 1830.

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6 Margaret McFadden, Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth Century Feminism (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999); Bonnie S. Anderson, Joyous Greetings: The First
They look neither at the roots of the antislavery movement in the radical religious movements taking place during the Second Great Awakening, nor the development and dispersal of the movement into the larger philanthropic and political movements of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

**Antislavery women in Britain**

Clare Midgley’s *Women Against Slavery* was the first modern history of British abolitionism to examine women’s involvement as central not only to the success of the antislavery movement, but also to see it as a pivotal point in women’s history. Midgley’s work is heavily influenced by historians of American antislavery women. Her work filled an important void in the history of British feminism: she identified some roots of the British feminist movement outside the radical communities of the nineteenth century and locating women’s participation in the earliest days of the antislavery movement in the 1780s as one of the first places where non-elite women participated in politics and the public sphere. Working without the benefit of detailed biographies of antislavery women, on which her American peers in antislavery women’s history could draw on after the rise in popularity of women’s biographies in the 1970s, Midgley patches together a surprisingly detailed and far-reaching discussion of women’s growing participation in the antislavery movement. Her analysis points to how those experiences helped middle-class women to realize their own subservient position in British society and use the skills learned petitioning and proselytizing against slavery to promote their own cause.


In the wake of Clare Midgley’s *Women Against Slavery*, a small proliferation of studies on the writings and activism of women in the British anti-slavery movement have been published. Subsequent works on the topic have fleshed out Midgley’s conclusions and complicated them through further contextualization within British politics, religion, literary movements and economic trends in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The majority of these works deal with the literature of the anti-slavery movement and the ideas presented through contemporary fiction, political tracts and poetry. The authors’ focus on literature and their methodology and approach reveals the importance of literary analysis in the historical debate on anti-slavery. The chronological framing of these studies relies heavily on the publication dates of a few key texts, most notably Afra Behn’s *Oroonoko* in 1688 and the passage of the bill emancipating all slaves in British colonies in 1833. However, the English Civil War and the end of the slave trade in 1807 are also key turning points in the British anti-slavery movement. The position of the slaves and their agency in

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anti-slavery writings is a key point of debate in the analysis of anti-slavery texts, particularly when white women’s anti-slavery writings are juxtaposed with the memoirs of ex-slaves. Most historians see how slaves are positioned within antislavery texts to be the key to understanding how white middling class women saw themselves in relationship to slaves. Historians of anti-slavery have spent a considerable amount of time discussing how the anti-slavery movement and women’s participation in it challenged the public/private dichotomy and the ideal of domesticity in late eighteenth century Britain. Finally, many of these writers draw conclusions regarding the role of anti-slavery texts in the creation of the imperial mindset in the late nineteenth century. The discussion of anti-slavery women has opened up the debate on slavery in the British colonies and connected it more closely with broader debates on British culture and society in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by connecting antislavery with issues of gender roles, class formation and other political and social movements that impacted British culture. These debates have also contributed to the discussion of the impact of the empire on the metropole in a meaningful and provocative way.

Literature played a significant role in the anti-slavery movement, particularly for women. The novels and biographies women wrote about the lives of slaves reflected not only their concern over the conditions of slavery, but also their struggle with their own inferiority, subjugation and their own position in society. Literary analysis has been the main tool of

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historians focusing on anti-slavery women, and what they have found has complicated the study of the anti-slavery movement by connecting it directly to the concerns of white middle-class women in Britain. Ferguson’s *Subject to Others*, one of the first works to come out following Midgley, deals exclusively with women writers on anti-slavery and the direct connection between the discourse and community of anti-slavery women and the formation of the feminist movement in Britain. Ferguson’s approach combines literary analysis with biographical details and some limited psychological insight to expose the motivations behind the novels and tracts published by active anti-slavery women. The collection of essays edited by Carl Plasa and Betty Ring entitled *The Discourse of Slavery* tackles the documents from a variety of different angles. Literary analysis forms the basis of each of the essays’ approach, but the various authors are more specific in their use of feminist (Irigaray), anthropological (Foucault) and psychological theorists to further their analytical frameworks. The historians who contributed to the volume felt comfortable engaging in depth with particular theorists in other humanities disciplines, most notable with the complex and often counterintuitive French feminist Irigaray, but not with psychological theory outside of pop psychology and an examination of the more obvious signs of mental distress. Charlotte Sussman’s work, *Consuming Anxieties*, takes a more strict literary analysis approach. She examines major works of literature from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for their discussions of consumerism and colonialism. Sussman is much more interested in

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examining how the debate over consumerism changed over time to include protests against slavery and imperialism than she is in describing how gender and slavery interacted. The psychological analysis of antislavery literature was a popular method of analysis in the 1990s, although it has since fallen from favor.

More recent works on antislavery in Britain have incorporated the questions and discussions engendered by works on women’s participation in the antislavery movement into the larger history of antislavery, religion and reform in Britain. Brown’s *Moral Capital* places great importance on Hannah More’s involvement in the earliest creation of the antislavery movement as the root of Victorian ideals of woman as a vessel for morality. The role of More and Elizabeth Bouverie, the benefactress of the Barnham Court days of the Clapham Sect, in setting the tone for women’s participation in the antislavery movement in Britain cannot be underestimated. Both More and Bouverie were instrumental in shaping the writings of the Barnham Court group, and their dedication to both religion and to philanthropy embodied the ideal Victorian women, and particularly the kind of woman who engaged in antislavery reform. Religion plays a large role in Brown’s analysis of the antislavery movement, and the role of the Quakers in shaping the antislavery movement in Britain is central to his work. British Quakers had a policy against involvement in politics outside of their own religious communities. The engagement in the antislavery debate was a departure from the norm, and the interaction between American Quakers and their British

14 Hannah More (1745-1833) British poet and member of the Clapham Sect.
16 Ibid, 342-44.
brethren is essential to understanding why British Quakers deviated from their usual seclusion to engage in the politics of antislavery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. The American Revolution, Brown argues, created the first opening for discussion of slavery in the Quaker community, and that discussion did not start in England. American Quakers began the Quaker involvement in antislavery movements, but British Quakers were instrumental in powering the movement through their publications, including newspapers, which were widely read in British cities.\footnote{Ibid, 293-305.} Religion and women’s involvement have become a large part of the new dialogue on the antislavery movement, changing the dynamic that has dominated historical study of the topic for the last century.

Writings on women and the anti-slavery movement in the last twenty years have filled many volumes with strong analysis and new questions that struggle to deal with gender, class and cultural change in the final years before slavery ended in the British and then American worlds. The debate over slavery was far ranging and grappled with issues of gender, consumption, literary device and ultimately, the fate of the British Empire in the nineteenth century. Women’s participation in this debate allowed them access to a public sphere where their moral superiority and sentimentality rendered them more powerful than their male counterparts. However, many of the works written on these women in the last several decades have opened questions that have yet to be resolved.

\textbf{Antislavery Women in the United States}

The modern historiography of antislavery women in the United States traces back to
Gerda Lerner’s works on the Grimké sisters and their ties to the early women’s rights movement.¹⁸ Second-wave feminist historians wrote numerous biographies of antislavery women, many of whom became deeply involved in the women’s rights movement and attended the 1848 Seneca Falls meeting.¹⁹ Most of these early feminists met through antislavery women’s organizations, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, who attended the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention. These early biographies drew heavily from the remaining personal papers of the leaders of the women’s rights movement, and their antislavery work was usually relegated to a few chapters in the beginning of each monograph, with greater time spent on the women’s work on gender issues.²⁰ Even Lerner’s works on the Grimké sisters follow this pattern, although she does spend significant time detailing the sisters’ conversion to antislavery (the Grimké family were slaveholders, and Angelina and Sarah grew up with slaves of their own) and their religious lives. Lerner carefully mines the sisters’ writings and speeches on antislavery for information on their emerging feminism.

As the biographies collected, a clearer picture of American antislavery women

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²⁰ This is particularly evident in Constance Burnett’s *Five for Freedom* and Dorothy Sterling’s *Ahead of her Time*, both of which examined the early involvement of these women in antislavery work, but spend the bulk of the book discussing their advocacy for women’s rights.
emerged, and the group began to be studied in their own right, rather than simply as the predecessors to the women’s rights activists. Beginning in the late 1980s, monographs on antislavery women in various states and cities began to appear. Jean Fagin Yellin wrote her monograph on antislavery women, *Women and Sisters*, in 1989, providing an early survey of the importance of antislavery groups in the rise of women’s activism and involvement in political activities.\(^{21}\) Yellin’s work reads much into the efforts of antislavery women to create a community of women that transcended lines of color and class, and attempts to show how elite men subverted antislavery women’s efforts to renegotiate gender lines. Her argument, in many ways, is in direct opposition to the central argument in this work. Although she is not entirely effective in her argument, Yellin’s methodology of close readings of antislavery writings to reveal changes in class-based gender roles is essential to later works on antislavery women and the rise of the feminist movement. Van Broekhoven’s *Devotion of These Women*, which chronicles the formation and efforts of the Rhode Island Antislavery society, argues that working class women played an important role in women’s antislavery societies in Rhode Island.\(^{22}\) Works like Van Broekhoven’s detail the internal workings of small antislavery women’s organizations, drawing on minute books and correspondence of members to reconstruct the whirlwind of meetings, letter writing campaigns, fairs and craft circles that filled the days of activist women. Although the background detail is interesting, few of these works on individual organizations manage to


\(^{22}\)Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, *The Devotion of these Women: Rhode Island in the Antislavery Network* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002)
transcend the details of antislavery activity to draw convincing larger arguments about how antislavery women effected change within their own social class. It is difficult to tell if this trend in histories of organizations is caused by the source material (i.e., these organizations made a conscious effort to appear as uncontroversial as possible), or if the historians compiling the works are not framing their subject more broadly to attain a larger argument that moves outside the immediate locale of their focus. Historians continue to publish works on individual antislavery groups; most recently, Beth Salerno published a work in 2005 arguing the importance of the women’s antislavery organizations to the effectiveness of the antislavery movement as a whole, drawing on a number of monographs on individual societies as well as earlier works on individual women and the rise of the feminist movement in the middle of the nineteenth century.23

The most recent works on antislavery women have attempted to connect all the individual monographs on antislavery work with a more theoretical and document oriented methodology. Susan Zaeske’s work on women and petitioning takes a strong look at the role of political activism and identity in the early nineteenth century. She argues that through the petition, women engaged with the government as citizens for the first time, and through the petition, historians can track changes in the way women related to the government and to their own roles as citizens of the United States. This change in women’s claim to political action caused a division in American antislavery organizations and brought women’s roles in

the movement to the forefront of discussion. Zaeske’s work draws heavily on cultural theory to describe how changes in women’s signature patterns indicate a changing identification with American citizenship and awareness of their role in society. Zaeske also engages with British histories of antislavery, making some careful comparisons between participation in the petition drives in Britain and women’s signing of petitions in the US. British women did not sign petitions due to their cultural positioning as creatures of emotion and not of political acumen. American women were also seen as creatures of emotion, but they seized the right to sign petitions as members of society and as wives and mothers, only signing with their own names rather than as the wife of their husband after 1840. Zaeske’s methodology allows for this close reading to make a larger argument that indicates how antislavery women were at the center of changing gender roles and class structures.

Histories of American antislavery women and their organizations are certainly more prolific than British histories; however, their impact on the historiography of reform and of the cultural history of the nineteenth century is less substantial. Antislavery women’s history in the United States has kept itself mainly within the field of social history and, with a few exceptions and in the conclusions, has stayed on the fringes of cultural history. More recent works have attempted, like many recent works on women’s history, to engage with larger theoretical and historiographical debates on the nineteenth century.

Comparative Works on Antislavery Women

Two books have been published comparing American and British Antislavery women. Margaret McFadden’s *Golden Cables of Sympathy* is the only published monograph to tackle a comparative history of antislavery women. Her work relies heavily on Midgeley’s monograph in its discussion of British women. Her argument is simply to assert that a transatlantic community of women existed before 1860, and that it was effective as a support mechanism for antislavery women. In its entirety, the work does more to summarize the extant works on antislavery women in the US and Britain, but little to actually engage with the actual writings of antislavery women. The lack of attention to the letters, pamphlets and other writings of antislavery women makes *Golden Cables of Sympathy* feel extremely light in its analysis. Although useful as an overview of the Anglo-Atlantic antislavery movement, much room remains for further work on the transatlantic nature of the women’s antislavery movement.

The other work on women in the transatlantic antislavery movement is a collection of essays edited by Katherine Kish Sklar that came out of a 2002 Gilder Lerhman Center conference on antislavery and gender. This collection is essential to opening up questions around the issue of gender and antislavery, as well as the creation of the women’s rights movements in the United States and Great Britain. Although few answers arise from this collection, the myriad of directions that it points out for avenues of new research is profoundly useful to historians of gender and reform in the nineteenth century. The contributors add a significant amount of material in the debate over black women’s

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contributions to the antislavery movement, including essays on Harriet Jacobs and the women of Oberlin College. A few of the essays begin to frame the debate of antislavery in a transnational context, most notably those by Clare Midgley and a study of one woman’s networks by Sarah Forten. One essential difference between the overall tone of this essay collection, in comparison with McFadden’s monograph, is the efforts made to engage larger theories of cultural and social change and to challenge and rewrite the historical paradigms that have shaped the historiography of antislavery women.

The lack of work on antislavery in the transatlantic context is surprising. Slavery itself has long been discussed in a transnational context, beginning with David Brion Davis’ and Robin Blackburn’s studies of the rise of plantation slavery in the Americas, and continuing with Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*. Literary studies also have included studies of the flow of popular culture between Britain and the United States, and one of the most important antislavery novels, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, has been the subject of a number of works on its transatlantic success. The historiographies of slavery and of literature and philosophy have long established the existence of a transatlantic culture in the eighteenth and

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27 David Brion Davis’ works on slavery in the Atlantic world include *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); and *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), all of which examine slavery as an Atlantic institution and discuss the philosophical and moral implications it held in various nations. Robin Blackburn’s *The Making of New World Slavery* (London: Verso, 1997) argues that the institution of slavery was essential to the creation of the modern Atlantic economy. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) argues for the existence of a black Atlantic culture that transcends any one nationality. Works on slavery in the seventeenth and eighteenth century assume an Atlantic slave culture that included both white slave owners and slaves.

nineteenth centuries. Antislavery literature has only recently begun to build off of the works of other disciplines to examine the connections that bound the United States, Britain and France together in a common set of moral and philosophical debates that shaped and were shaped by the antislavery movement.

The historiography of antislavery women varies widely in its coverage, from detailed biographies of individual women, to institutional histories and essay collections focused on close document reading and theory. The goal of this dissertation is to draw together the theory-based work begun at the 2002 Gilder Lehrman conference and the close reading of correspondence and publications of the biographies of the 1970s to examine how antislavery women redrew the social and cultural boundaries that circumscribed their lives and made space for themselves to do the work that was so important to them.

Organization and Methods

This dissertation is laid out topically rather than chronologically, as many of the changes happen over decades and would be difficult to track in a text organized chronologically. Some topics, however, are defined by particular moments in the antislavery movement, and I have attempted to position each in order of chronological significance. Chapter 1 deals with creating gender roles. As this issue will guide the analysis of each chapter following, the first chapter contains a significant amount of historiographical background and discussion of the various theories of class formation that historians have been put forward in recent years. Chapter 2 looks at radical societies and early reform movements. Antislavery women and men often came to the movement from other reform
efforts, and the very earliest activists were radicals. Almost all antislavery activists took interest in other reform movements and learned and shared methods of promoting reform from movement to movement. Chapter 3 examines the role of religion in the formation of the antislavery movement, primarily charting the divisions within Quaker movements and how those discussions impacted antislavery organizations. Chapter 4 looks at the role of printed material in forming antislavery women’s networks. Women wrote newspaper columns, pamphlets and novels, and for many women, writing and reading was the their primary means of involvement in the antislavery movement. Chapter four also looks at the importance of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a piece of antislavery literature and that shaped the movement in the 1850s. These first four chapters thus examine those issues arising at the beginning of the antislavery movement, issues opening the way for women to challenge their position within the movement and thereby create the first movement for women’s rights.

The middle four chapters examine the emergence of the woman’s rights movement within the antislavery movement. Chapter 5 is the climax of both the work and the antislavery movement. At the 1840s World’s Antislavery Convention, the issue of active women’s involvement came to a head in London, setting American women against British men, laying out the exact boundaries of acceptable women’s roles in England. This one event galvanized American antislavery women and stirred up serious controversy among British women as well. This moment also marked one of the first times British and American antislavery women met face-to-face. Chapter 6 is about the role of family and of correspondence in the antislavery movement. Many women joined the antislavery movement
through members of their family, and correspondence was the main way most antislavery women stayed in contact with their peers and friends. These connections created the network through which information and funds spread across the Atlantic and around each country. A similar division had occurred in America immediately before the World’s Antislavery Convention convened; Chapter 7 examines this division in its discussion of Garrisonian abolition and the role of women in the antislavery movement. The split in the antislavery community along the lines of those who supported and those who opposed Garrison and his politics of individualism mirrored the split among reformers who supported woman’s rights. The conservatives who split off used the issue of women’s active participation in mixed gender societies as an excuse to separate themselves from the Garrisonians, namely Abby Kelley’s appointment to a committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society. None of these challenges to perceived gender roles were met without resistance, and Chapter 8 details the violence and resistance to antislavery women’s public participation in the movement. Women’s public speaking and writing provoked physical violence and slander from antislavery and pro-slavery men and women. These three chapters contain the majority of the “action” in the dissertation. Women are actors in these chapters, not just writers. Women speak out to both each other and to their male peers; they defend their own actions and those of their friends, and they are acted upon by others, with words and rocks.

The final two chapters describe the demise of the British and American antislavery movements and examine where the women involved in the movements for the previous fifty years moved to next. Chapters 9 and 10 take on the last twelve years of the antislavery movement before the start of the American Civil War and the eventual end of slavery in the
Anglo-Atlantic world. 1848 brought significant changes to European politics with revolutions across the continent and challenges to the stability of traditional class structure in the modern world. The British antislavery movement broke apart as the original participants aged and turned their attention to causes that had more domestic salience. American antislavery women, for the most part, remained dedicated to their original cause, but with the threat of disunion and the increasingly political tone of antislavery in America, many turned their efforts to women’s rights or other reform efforts as well as continuing to advocate the end of slavery. Although some antislavery groups continued to agitate for equality for African-Americans until the end of Reconstruction in the United States, most antislavery women moved on to other efforts after 1865. This final section pulls together the issues examined in earlier chapters and attempts to connect them to the continuation of the women’s rights movements in both countries.

This dissertation examines antislavery women and the formation of women’s rights in a transatlantic context. Antislavery was a movement which drew on philosophical and religious ideas of humanitarianism and pacifism that were not confined to one country. Literature, newspapers and correspondence connected the two countries through ideas and created a common language of ideology and reform. Antislavery truly was an Anglo-American invention; activists on both sides of the Atlantic drew upon one another’s writings for ideas and language to support the cause. The institution of slavery that these women fought against was developed in an Atlantic context, when American was part of the British Empire. Antislavery, therefore, must be a transatlantic and transnational effort. It is not enough to simply compare the movements in the two countries, historians must also examine
the connections and how women in both countries used antislavery to understand their own position in society and to begin to challenge the social structures that held them in a second-class position. By examining British and American women both in comparison and in conjunction, a larger and more complex understanding of the social and cultural structures which shaped their words and actions can be found.

Antislavery women’s experiences and efforts to expand their own world and their own abilities in the cause of the slave changed the course of the history of the world. By insisting that they had the right and the duty to speak out, to publish their opinions and to engage in discourse on issues of race and freedom, they created a new reform movement, one that would change the status of women the world over. Not every woman who participated in the first women’s rights movement started as an abolitionist, but a large majority of the first women’s rights activists learned their public speaking and writing skills in the meeting halls of antislavery organizations. Antislavery women participated in the movement at a moment when women’s position in society was changing dramatically, and their efforts made a difference in where the lines eventually fell in the division between the public and the private. Although the connection between women’s rights and antislavery is more direct in the United States than in Great Britain, the movements’ challenges to separate spheres and ideals of women’s behavior were similar in both countries. The differences in the way the movements played out can be attributed to the structures of the middle class and in class-based politics in both countries. The words of these women provide a window into their efforts to change their world, both directly through antislavery, and indirectly through their own actions, making it acceptable for women to speak in public and participate in social
efforts outside of their homes.

Sources

The sources used in this dissertation include correspondence from a large number of antislavery women. For the American women, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, Maria Weston Chapman, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s papers were extremely useful as they are largely extant and collected and organized by professional archives. These women were both deeply involved in antislavery for much of their lives and also were very candid in their letters to friends and family. Unlike many other antislavery women, their papers were kept together and are mostly complete. These women were also the most vocal and had the widest range of contacts, allowing historians to use their papers to capture a broad picture of the antislavery movement within a single set of correspondence. The letters of other antislavery women are scattered among dozens of archives and libraries, or still in private collections, making accessing them much more difficult than the papers of the women cited extensively in this dissertation. Some of these women’s papers have been published in documentary collections, including those of Lucretia Mott, Sarah and Angelina Grimké and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The Boston Public Library and Friends Historical Society at Swarthmore College had the largest and most accessible collections of correspondence, including those of Maria Weston Chapman and the Massachusetts Antislavery Society.

British women’s papers were much more difficult to access. Besides Harriet Martineau’s correspondence, none of the British women’s papers have been published, and none were as well indexed or maintained as the collections of American antislavery women.
Letters from Elizabeth Pease, Anne Knight and Mary Ann Rawson are scattered amongst the collection of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society at the Rhodes House Library, and the Friends’ House Library in London also had a significant collection of Anne Knight’s papers. Unfortunately, due to travel constraints and access restrictions, the papers of the women’s antislavery societies at Leicester and Birmingham are not included in this dissertation. The largest source of British women’s letters was in the files of American antislavery societies and antislavery women; unfortunately it appears that few of the British women’s families saved their papers.

I have quoted extensively from the correspondence of the women listed here because they were passionate and eloquent in their defense of the slave and their commentary on women’s rights and roles in society. Unfortunately, the sources for this dissertation were limited by the difficulty of finding materials from British antislavery women outside of the collections kept by national societies and churches. Newspapers, literature and pamphlets have helped to fill in the activities of antislavery women. These sources, scant as they might be, allow for an examination of women’s antislavery activities through the eyes of the leaders of the movement. These women were clearly unique in their dedication to their cause, and their ideas and thoughts drove the organizations they led. Although the rank and file might not have felt as strongly or spoken as loudly for the slave or for women, the words of the movements’ leaders give us insight into the emotions and ideals driving women to work for freedom for others and for themselves.
A Note on Identification of Individuals

I have given the basic identifiers (nationality, life dates and major contributions) for each antislavery individual who appears in the text the first time their name appears. For non-antislavery individuals mentioned, such as other reformers discussed in Chapter 2, I have attempted to describe them in the text. For the most notable antislavery women, short biographies appear in Appendix A.
Middle Class Gender Roles: Creating Separate Spheres and Women in Public

Central to the tumult over women’s participation in the antislavery movement was the creation of the Victorian middle class. The middle class strove to define a new identity for themselves, something opposed both to the perceived excesses of the nobility and to the violence of the working class. Davidoff and Hall’s seminal work *Family Fortunes* examines the ways in which British middle class men and women shaped their own world to create a new social position which emphasized the separation between the home and the world and categorized all things as belonging to one sphere or the other.\(^1\) Other historians have studied American class formation in the early nineteenth century and come to similar conclusions.\(^2\) Women’s position within the middle class worldview was squarely in the home. Women were discouraged from working for payment, or participating in politics; instead they embodied the ideal of the home and were to control family consumption rather than production. Antislavery women and other reforming women challenged these slowly consolidating gender roles by participating in the public sphere at the same time as they justified their work within the new norms. Antislavery men had either to resist women’s

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\(^2\) See Mary P. Ryan’s *Cradle of the Middle Class: The family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) for a discussion of the formation of the middle class in the American North during the early federal period. She argues that class consciousness was “hopeless entangled with questions of family and gender” (p. 12). Christine Stansell’s *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1987) examines the role both working and middle class women played in class formation in antebellum New York City, and although she focuses mainly on working class women, her study of the interaction between women of both classes reveals interesting tensions between them. Other works on American working class women include Amy Gilman Srebnick’s *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), which examines working class women’s sexuality and the threat that it appeared to be to the middle class. Most of the recent work on class formation in the United States has been focused on working-class identity in cities, particularly in New York.
efforts to support the cause, or to find ways to incorporate antislavery women’s work into the cause and into middle class respectability in a way that did not challenge middle-class mores. In doing this, antislavery men and women created a debate that changed not only the course of antislavery, but also the shape of the middle class, and eventually, the laws of nations.

Davidoff and Hall’s *Family Fortunes* examines the construction of the middle class in England through the lens of gender. They argue that:

The English middle class was being forged at a time of exceptional turmoil and threatening economic and political disorder. It is at such times that the endemic separation of social categories which exaggerate differences between groups, including men and women, produces intensified efforts to create a ‘semblance of order.’

The creation of rigid definitions of proper behavior for men and women helped middle-class people feel more secure in a time when their world was rapidly changing and to define themselves against changes in politics and the unstable economy. Antislavery work fit into this world both in an effort to create change, and as an extension of middle class philanthropic efforts. Davidoff and Hall argue that the myriad philanthropic efforts that bloomed in the first half of the nineteenth century were linked to middle-class attempts to impose their world view on other classes, most notably on the poor. Unlike domestic philanthropic efforts, which focused mostly on poor law reform and prison reform, antislavery work focused Britons on people who lived outside of their world, especially after slavery was ended in the empire in 1833. In doing so, antislavery opened the door for its female activists to look outside of British society, and eventually to question the constraints

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which forced them to take a secondary place in the movement.

American historiography on the creation of the middle class has focused more strongly on the gendered aspects of the middle class than on discussion of class as a separate historiographical debate. With the notable exception of Mary Ryan’s *Cradle of the Middle Class* and a few other works following her book, none of which were particularly influential in American historiography, work on class in the nineteenth century has been mainly relegated to studies that either discuss class in the context of gender and race, or focus on the creation of a working-class culture in the late nineteenth century. Whether this lack of recent historiography has to do with the explosion of social and cultural history in American historiography since in the 1980s, or if it is an unconscious rejection of the Marxist trend in history that was embraced by historians in the 1960s and 70s, the vast majority of work on middle class formation in America was written prior to 1975 and is long out of print and often unavailable. The majority of work on class focuses on New York, either city or state, giving the historiography of class in America a distinctly urban tinge, that may not hold true

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4 A flurry of works on the creation of the middle class in the first half of the nineteenth century were published in the 1980s, however, few of them have had a lasting impact on the study of gender in the nineteenth century outside of Mary Ryan’s study of Oneida, New York, Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). John S. Gilkerson, in his study of the rise of the middle class in Providence, Rhode Island, argues that organizations were central to middle-class identity, and participation in them cemented a ideology that shaped behavior and class boundaries. John S. Gilkerson, *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986). In 1989, Stuart Blumin published his *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), which argued that the middle class in America defined itself through the type of work men did and the separation of work from home. He focuses fully on urban populations and does not focus on the social and cultural elements that grew to define the middle class. More recently, historians have announced that the study of class is back in vogue in American history; however, few works have specifically focused on class formation as a methodology. For a more recent study of class and reform work, see Scott C. Martin’s *Devil in the Domestic Sphere* (DeKalb: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2008) which examines the early temperance movement and the disconnect between the idealized woman of separate spheres ideology and the ultimate failure of moral suasion in ending alcoholism and drunkenness in American society.
for the rest of the country, or even the rest of the Northern states. Some work has been done on the middle class in other locations, mainly Midwestern, and those works tend to focus on ethnicity and immigration and how non-Anglo-Americans become middle class, and at the same time, become American. In some ways, the history of American culture is the history of the American middle class; at any point in time, the vast majority of Americans considered themselves to be middle class, despite their fiscal reality. Most of the focus on class in American historiography is on how individual groups become part of the middle class, and on how ethnic groups become white, and hence, Americanized. Middle-class identity in America in many senses is American identity. With this caveat, reading works on the formation of the middle class in American historiography requires a significant amount of reading between the lines of works that are not, on the surface, about class. Like many historians of women, this work attempts to integrate the analytical aspect of class into the study of antislavery women to see what can be gathered from a different perspective on what is, at its core, gender history.

The earliest antislavery women were almost exclusively writers. Hannah More, the first well known British female abolitionist, published *The Slave Trade: A Poem*, in 1788 at the behest of William Wilberforce and his compatriots in the Parliamentary campaigns against slavery of the late 1780s. More’s poem emphasizes religious opposition to slavery.

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5 The historiography of becoming middle class in immigration studies is long and very thorough. David Roediger’s *Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991), is perhaps the most well known, but other works like Thomas Winter’s *Making Men, Making Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), on the role of the YMCA as a tool of middle class integration play an important role in the development of class theory in American history. It is important to note that these works on class focus on the second half of the nineteenth century and assume that a white, native-born middle class already exists.

6 William Wilberforce (1859-1833) British Member of Parliament and antislavery activist. Credited as the
insisting that slaves have souls and that it was the duty of good Christian Englishmen to free
the slaves and convert them to Christianity.\textsuperscript{7} By the time \textit{The Slave Trade: A Poem} was
published, Hannah More was already a well established poet and comfortable within the
literary circles of late eighteenth-century Britain. Her one poem on antislavery was prompted
by the male leaders of the antislavery movement, although More was apparently moved
sufficiently by her meeting with Wilberforce to oppose slavery publicly, something she had
never spent much time considering before 1788. More did little to aid the antislavery cause
beyond her poem and a handful of personal letters which survive. Women poets were
relatively common in the 1780s; literary women wrote much of the popular fiction available
in Britain in the late eighteenth century. Women rarely took action other than writing and
reading antislavery literature.\textsuperscript{8} They did not organize or come together; they read and wrote
for ladies magazines. In the late eighteenth-century, women had very little actual
involvement in the antislavery movement, although many were introduced to it through
magazines like \textit{The Lady’s Magazine} or through their families.\textsuperscript{9} They did not, therefore,
participate actively in the movement. More’s position in the very earliest political movement
was a small one, and one that did little to challenge the boundaries of acceptable behavior for
late eighteenth-century women.

Although More’s writings in 1788 were not particularly surprising, since she had
been writing poetry for years, by the 1820s, women’s antislavery writings were a rarity. In

\textsuperscript{8} J. R. Oldfield, \textit{Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, 141.
the intervening thirty years, the actions of women had become more circumscribed. The salons and coffee houses which women of the arts had frequented in the eighteenth century were closed, and middle-class women were more and more confined to the home and family. Elizabeth Heyrick published her pamphlet, Immediate Not Gradual Abolition, in 1824 to wide acclaim.\textsuperscript{10} When men read the pamphlet, they were astounded to discover it had been written by a woman.

He [Anthony Swain] says he had met with a pamphlet “Immediate not Gradual Abolition” with which he was very much pleased, written by Elizabeth Heyrick of England. He thought it very powerful and cogent, the style being superior. ‘Is it possible,’ exclaimed Anthony, ‘that any woman could write in that manner?’ I believe it was part of an edition of 200 copies the expense of which was defrayed by the proceeds of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Sewing Society.\textsuperscript{11}

Although Heyrick had been writing pamphlets for over twenty years at the time of the publication of Immediate Not Gradual Abolition, the pamphlet was originally published anonymously and her name only attached after the first circulation. The vehemence and vitriol of her language was the most compelling element of the pamphlet. Heyrick’s passion for antislavery shocked many readers when they discovered the author was a woman. Heyrick’s call for immediate abolition was new and exciting in 1824. The pamphlet remained exciting for well over a decade, constantly being reprinted by ladies’ antislavery

\textsuperscript{10} Elizabeth Heyrick (1769-1831) British pamphleteer and antislavery activist, the first woman to publish an antislavery pamphlet and the first to call for immediate emancipation. The pamphlet was so widely distributed that there are extant copies in nearly every collection of antislavery papers, and the pamphlet has been made available online through Google Books. Elizabeth Heyrick, Immediate Not Gradual Abolition (London, 1824) Available from Google Books. http://books.google.com/books?id=VyYCAAAAYAAJ&ots=o0SY_rNbdC&q=immediate%20not%20gradual%20abolition&pg=PA1#v=onepage&q&f=false Accessed 20 September 2010.

\textsuperscript{11} David Sellers to Mary Pennock Sellers, 1832, in Sarah Pennock Sellers, David Sellers and Mary Pennock Sellers (Philadelphia: unnamed publisher, 1928), 44-5.
societies on both sides of the Atlantic. Women took her call to arms to heart, and one ladies’ society even wrote, “Men may propose only gradually to abolish the worst of crimes, but why should be countenance such enormities…I trust no Ladies’ Association will ever be formed with such words attached to it.” Heyrick’s pamphlet became a call to arms for antislavery women, and Heyrick’s strength of conviction led other women to seize the cause of antislavery as their own. Women embraced the cause of immediate abolition, while most male readers were simply shocked at the strength of a woman’s words and her strong support of so political a cause.

Women’s embrace of the antislavery cause was easily incorporated into their characterization as sentimental and motherly figures in middle-class ideology. The earliest women’s antislavery groups were entirely female and focused on raising money and supporting men’s initiatives, as well as doing things like ransoming slave families, supporting schools and other charitable works. For the most part, men were encouraged to see the women’s sympathy for the slave, but they dwelled on the women’s feelings rather than their actions.

I am glad to find that there is a Ladies’ Society connected with us—for they are capable of great things—their hearts are full of the milk of human kindness. (Hear.) They never hear a tale of woe that it does not wring their bosoms, and cause the tear of pity to flow from the eye. Where is the mother and daughter who are not affected at such tales of woe as those to which we

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In an early nineteenth-century Irish meeting, the ladies were applauded for their sentimentalism and their ability to sympathize with the slave. They were depicted as mothers of humanity, full of the “milk of human kindness.” They cried and “wrung their bosoms” at the tales of slavery’s cruelties. They were mother and daughter, seen as members of a family. Their capacity to sympathize with the slave was the important part of their participation. The men said that the women are “capable of great things” but focused instead on their emotions rather than their actions. This depiction of women placed them solidly as the center of the family, as creatures of emotion.

The earliest actions of antislavery women were focused on education and spreading information on antislavery. Women’s organizations raised money to pay to publish pamphlets for distribution, subscribed to antislavery newspapers for circulation amongst the society’s members, and helped the men’s organizations raise money. By the end of the 1830’s, women began to venture out on to the street to spread their information. Mary Ann Rawson, one of the officers of the Sheffield Ladies Antislavery Society, wrote to Elizabeth Pease,

In conformity with your plan, we have divided the town into fifty districts, of each of which a lady has taken charge, and promised to visit every house, or to find some suitable agent to supply her place. Our objects are, to lead Anti-Slavery works and distribute tracts—to promote the sale of the “Emancipator” which I think of great importance, to collect subscriptions and

15 Mary Ann Rawson (1801-1887) British antislavery activist. Elizabeth Pease (1807-1897) British antislavery activist, pacifist and women’s rights supporter.
especially to urge the duty of signing petitions to parliament. We are not thinking of taking round the petition ourselves, but hope to find suitable persons in each of our districts to carry the petition from house to house for signatures. The gentlemen of this town are either so much engaged, or so very cool in the cause, that the engagement of every thing is left to our little Association, and we are very fully occupied. Sometimes it seems very weary work to try to do any good—there are so many conflicting interests and feelings to meet, and I think we have been peculiarly tried by the secession and violent opposition of our friends connected with the State church. Still, in the midst of difficulty, it is a privilege to be permitted to do even a very little on the side of right.\footnote{Mary Ann Rawson to Elizabeth Pease. March 2, 1838 MS A 1.2 v 41 p. 28 BPL.}

The Sheffield Ladies Antislavery Society was to become one of the most active and successful ladies antislavery societies in Britain. Sheffield men were not nearly as involved, although they did have their own antislavery association of significant size. The women’s effort to spread antislavery news and information to every house in Sheffield was a large one, and it meant most of the fifty women who signed up to take a section had to ask several men to take the petition around. Interestingly, the Sheffield women did not take petitions around themselves, which had been one of the most important tasks of antislavery women in the very earliest days of the antislavery movement in Britain. Despite their restraint in not asking for petition signatures from the men of the homes they visited, they must have met with some opposition and quite a bit of disinterest, as Rawson’s comment about “conflicting interests and feelings” indicates that there was some resistance to their activism. Religious tensions in the community apparently divided the town, and Anglicans, in particular, apparently were violent in their resistance to antislavery activities in the city. The women picked up the antislavery work the men had left undone and made a serious effort to revive antislavery
sentiment in Sheffield.

When women did venture to speak in public, they were often attacked and called unwomanly or immoral for standing in front of mixed gender crowds and drawing such attention to themselves. Angelina Grimké, the first white American woman to speak to mixed audiences, was widely criticized for her actions. When her fiancé, Theodore Weld, told one of his friends they were to be married, the friend was rather shocked and Weld wrote to Angelina about the conversation they had.

Nine tenths of the community verily believe that you are utterly spoiled for domestic life. A man of whom I hoped better things of who really has great respect for your principle and character said he did not believe it possible for a woman of your sentiments and practice as to the sphere of woman to be anything but ‘an obtrusive noisy clamourer’ in the domestic circle “repelled and repelling”. He said he could admire your talents and your principles for he did believe you honest, but it was impossible for a man of high and pure feeling ever to marry you. He said that nature recoiled at it. It seemed to be no small comfort to him that a woman of such principles about the sphere of woman and of such most repulsive practice would be forced to remain single as long as she lived. It was nature’s penalty for the violation of one of her purest laws, thus holding you up as a beacon to warn from such unnatural violation of constitutional instincts all other females. Now Dearest, I do suppose that a large majority of the men who profess to be abolitionists feel just about so in their hearts, though they don’t speak it out.19

Even antislavery men who supported and praised the Grimké sisters for their antislavery work considered them unwomanly and unsuited to women’s duties. Their breech of the

17 Angelina Grimké Weld (1805-1879) American antislavery activist.
18 Theodore Weld (1803-1895) American antislavery activist.
woman’s sphere made the sisters and others like them unsuitable for marriage, and their lack of marital prospects was punishment for their actions. By speaking in public, men and women believed that women violated their natural tendencies, and this violation made them unfit to be wives, and by extension, mothers. Although men may have admired Angelina Grimké, most were unwilling to see her as a marriageable woman, and instead saw her as some sort of vulgar and unsexed person. Other antislavery women also saw Angelina’s outspokenness as a barrier to her marriage. Anne Warren Weston told Angelina that she probably would never marry, and Angelina admitted herself that she was reconciled to never marrying before she met Weld, and enjoyed the freedom that the previous lack of romantic attention gave her. Angelina Grimké was the first antislavery woman to speak in public and to gain notoriety for doing so, and as a result the reaction to her marriage was perhaps the strongest. Notably, she retired from public speaking upon the event of her marriage, although she remained active in the cause through her letters and teaching at the school she and her sister, Sarah, ran along with Theodore Weld.

Men were not the only ones to express their dislike of women’s public participation in the antislavery movement. Anne Knight’s correspondence is filled with her staunch support of women’s right to work on antislavery issues and with some of her friends and family’s opinions to the contrary. Knight was very outspoken in her arguments that women had the

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21 Sarah Grimké (1792-1873) American antislavery activist and sister of Angelina Grimké
22 Anne Knight (1786 – 1862) British antislavery activist and Quaker.
right to speak in public and support causes they held dear. In her correspondence with Maria Weston Chapman, Knight wrote:

Ah that thou hadst not married! that thy “proper sphere” at this juncture though wd. have been nature’s recess instead of reason’s exercise! Ah me, it has postponed the question we had wanted all the senses of the emphatic author of right & wrong in Boston at the Freemason’s Tavern the clamour grew lessened again[st] it, the advocacy louder there were many I believe ashamed at the part they took I believe & they cannot deny the equality of talent as well as worth of their wives sisters daughters there ideas discussed often among us are helping the cause we tell them in beginning that they must take off their grandmother’s night caps & throw them to the “things that love night” they good naturedly comply & enter on the subject with a smile we tell them we are not the same beings as fifty years ago no longer “sit by the fire & spin” or distill rosemary & lavender for poor neighbors—appoint committees for them to visit in sickness, old age, maternity, missions, Bibles, reporting to the men sitting in their public meetings, uniting with them in association, committees, then comes our great & mortal conflict, the dreadful monster slavery must be grappled with & who is sent out to do it ‘not man not the stronger vessel with his nervous & brawny arm & the great caliber of his stentonian voice the force threatening of his blackbeard & mustachioed this eyalike man threaten or command—not we the sons of Mars the sons of thunder Boanergean not them! Who then? Some fierce dragon more horrible still? No! guess again! Cerberus? No. weak slender untrained for the work modest tender woman! & when she appeals to the man against such unheard folly & atrocity to the weaknesses James Cropper has said it is no use talking Anne the menace goes to sleep & it is impossible to rouse them you must go forth at another time & place to the same appeal Thomas Clarkson our veteran hero made the same reply!24

23 Maria Weston Chapman (1806-1885) American antislavery activist from Boston.
24 Anne Knight to Maria Weston Chapman, 8 April 1840, MS A 9.2 v. 13 p. 49. BPL. There was no apparent end quote in the final passage quoted here, Anne Knight was a very expressive and sloppy writer and speller, and I have tried to retain the spirit with which she writes in the transcriptions of her letters and still make her meaning apparent.
Anne Knight was unmarried and spent her entire life travelling and spreading the word about antislavery and a number of other causes. She lamented that many other antislavery women were married with children and their time for activism was limited by their commitments to their families. Maria Weston Chapman had taken significant time from her writing and antislavery work while she was taking her children on the Grand Tour of Europe in 1848, and her absence from the movement was bemoaned by many women, including Knight. Not everyone was happy to see unmarried women taking such a large role in the antislavery movement. The growing activism of women by 1840 upset many antislavery men, particularly those who were more conservative in their antislavery politics. More outgoing women like Knight were encouraging new antislavery women to move beyond traditional women’s activism, like visiting the sick, making household items to donate or sell, and distributing Bibles, and encouraged them to discuss antislavery issues amongst themselves. That these women were beginning to move beyond their “proper sphere” was clearly on their minds, and women were already thinking in terms of their place being in the realm of the home and family rather than out in the public spaces of the street and the meetinghouse. Almost as soon as the idea of separate spheres became entrenched in American and English culture, women began to lament the barriers that kept them from broader society and work to find ways to influence the world outside their homes without entirely breaking the ideology of separation. As women became more and more involved in the antislavery movement in Britain, British men began to cast their interest elsewhere. The leaders of the men’s antislavery societies in Britain discouraged women from publicly attacking slavery and told them to direct their efforts in some other fashion than in giving speeches. James Cropper and
Thomas Clarkson apparently discouraged Anne Knight from speaking in public, claiming that it was impossible to spread antislavery sentiment in Britain. The leaders of the British and Foreign Antislavery Society were quite unhappy with the efforts of antislavery women, and they and their followers saw women as intruding on the men’s associations.  

Some women also thought that it was inappropriate for women to be speaking in public and taking on political issues. In the nineteenth century, women who encouraged one another to step into public in support of any cause were in the minority. Many of the most articulate defenses against women’s participation in public activities like speaking in public came from women. It would be unfair to portray the creation of separate spheres as something placed upon women by men; the building of separate spheres was done by both sexes. Some of Anne Knight’s correspondents were vehemently opposed to the woman’s

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rights sentiments that Knight espoused along with antislavery. Ann Taylor Gilbert, poet and antislavery activist from Nottingham, wrote scathingly in response to some woman’s rights papers Anne Knight had sent her,

I have looked over the papers forwarded to me this morning and cannot say that I accord with the views there advanced. On many grounds I think them untenable. I believe that if half of every family—observe not half the community (and there perhaps lies the practical mistake) for that might be a class only—but half of every family is honestly represented the right of the whole will be, in fact, as well secured as by any other arrangement. There will be I think as much justice with perhaps less dissension, dissension which might affect domestic happiness; together with a less cumbrous machine to manage. Nature seems to have settled the question ‘a priori’—we have not lungs, we have not courage, we have not time for it (to say nothing on interruptions which might happen inconveniently during the sittings of Parliament) and modern science says further that the division of labor is the great secret of order and progress.  

Home was where women stayed; it was separate from the workplace and as such excluded such worldly things as politics. Gilbert makes certain to point out that if only men participate in politics, it does not create class lines, whereas if the community were divided by any other line into groups of those heard by Parliament and those not, society would split along class lines. This attention to class as a permeable but real line was central to the political and social ideology of the British middle class. They saw their class structure as not falling along economic lines (though it did). People could be middle class without being well off, nineteenth century reformers thought, and many social reform movements, such as poor law

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27 Ann Taylor Gilbert (1782-1866) is best known as the co-author of “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” and a number of other children’s poems; however, she dedicated her adult life to reform causes.
28 Ann Gilbert to Anne Knight 26 February 1849, Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, FHL.
reform and vice reform focused on the moral and behavioral requirements to becoming middle class rather than the economic requirements.29 The family was the most important unit in society; in the eyes of the nineteenth-century middle class, it defined the duties of every person in society and bound them to codes of behavior dictated by their place in the family. Many argued that biology kept women confined to the home; the process of child bearing and rearing prohibited them from participating in any activity that required regular attendance or long hours of uninterrupted time. Women were physically incapable, according to those who opposed women’s participation in politics, of sitting in Parliament or any other body because they could not control their fertility; prior to the invention of reliable means of contraception, pregnancy was unpredictable and frequent.30 The middle class believed that women were actually the “weaker sex,” that they were physically incapable of speaking to a crowd, of going door to door or of standing up to resistance.

Women’s work did not stop at the front door of her home. Included in the home

29 Histories of reform efforts demonstrate this most clearly, for example Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Scott C. Martin, *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender and Middle-Class Ideology, 1800-1860* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 129-130 provide evidence of middle-class reformers attempting to shape working-class behavior to conform to middle-class standards. The biography of Harriet Martineau by Deborah Anna Logan, *The Hour and the Woman* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002) gives an example of a working class family’s attempts to maintain the façade of middle class gentility through the work of the female members of the family.

30 A number of historians have studied early birth control efforts and their inefficacy, including Susan Klepp and Janet Farrell Brodie’s *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997). Middle class Americans experienced a decrease in family size in the first half of the nineteenth century despite the lack of reliable birth control. Historians disagree whether the cause was an increase in child mortality, or if the decrease was purposeful and a result of social and cultural pressure to have a smaller family. See Gloria L. Main’s article “Rocking the Cradle: Downsizing the New England Family,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxxvii, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 35–58 for a historiographical review of the population decline and a new theory of social pressure driving middle class reproductive rates. For a study of the role of family planning and birth control in the British suffrage movement, see J. A. Banks and Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), chapters 3 and 4 are particularly useful in understanding the role family sized played in middle-class identity in the mid-nineteenth century.
sphere was the work of community and religious benevolent societies. Participation in these societies, including antislavery societies that did not cross gender barriers and did only women’s work like sewing or knitting for the antislavery fairs, was acceptable as part of women’s role as the nurturing sex. Mary Ryan argues that women’s sphere included “‘unrestrained intercourse with Christian friends of both circles’ that is, both the household and the church community.”

Antislavery work like sewing or even organizing bazaars was included in this as church community: it was a moral obligation to help those less fortunate. However, once antislavery efforts took on a political tinge, rather than remaining in the realm of moral suasion, they crossed the line from religious and moral obligation to public participation in politics. Ann Gilbert continues her dissection of the problem of women’s participation in public politics by discussing the work women were required to do.

So long as houses have insides as well as outsides, I think that the female has had enough on her hands, even, I might almost say, irrespective of the numerous demands now making upon her by benevolent and religious societies. To these she does feel it her duty to attend, but they make a large addition to ‘women’s work’ as understood by our grandmothers: still, with a warm heart and a managing head, much of this sort may be accomplished, but it seems to me to form the boundary line of her out of doors business. In doors, she may do much, even politically;—that is, I should say it is her duty to instill principles into her children—principles affecting all the great questions.—liberty, slavery, justice, humanity, war, monopoly, private judgment, voluntaryism with as many more of the class as may be thought of and supposing she do this well, wisely, effectively, and see to it at the same time that dinners come

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31 Ryan, Mary P. *Cradle of the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 71. In my reading of antislavery letters, I never came across men decrying women’s work fundraising through fairs or their distribution of antislavery tracts. All the letters regarding fairs and the collection of money and publication or distribution of literature was resoundingly positive and glowing with praise of women who participated in these activities.
secundum artim, that shirts have buttons and buttons shirts—that everything in short within the homestead is done ‘decently and in order’ she will have to my thinking, at least, enough to do.  

By dividing the house into indoors and out, and defining woman as belonging to the indoors and all it entailed, especially not political participation, the new middle class changed the meaning of the home. Ann Gilbert espoused the ideals of separate spheres and reinforced the concept that woman’s most important political contribution was to instill political ideals in her sons and to raise them to think of others. Her labor in the home was also a concern. By 1790, keeping the house had become middle-class women’s sole employment; she no longer helped her husband run his business. The elevated income of most middle-class families meant homes contained more furniture than just beds and an eating table; cleaning and caring for homes filled with upholstered sofas, carpets and fine wood furniture required significantly more work than a sparsely furnished home. And as their incomes increased, middle class families owned more than one change of clothing and had clothing for multiple purposes and it had to be washed, mended and ironed and starched so that men and women would present an image that displayed a public image of middle class ideals through their appearance. Most middle class families hired domestic servants to help keep the home clean, clothing mended and to care for children.Keeping the home and the family in order and to

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32 Ann Gilbert to Anne Knight 26 February 1849, Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, FHL.
33 See Edward Higgs “Domestic Servants and Households in Victorian England,” Social History 8, no. 2 (May, 1983): 201-210 and Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall’s Family Fortunes, 388-396 on master-servant relationships between middle class women and their male and female servants in Britain. For a study of American servants and middle class homemakers, see Faye E. Dudden’s Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America (Middletown: Wesleyan University, 1983). The common theme in all these works is the limitations of the available sources, documentation of the relationship between housewife and servant is sparse at best and usually only shows the extremes of the relationship, where it intersected with the courts or
the standards of cleanliness and good repair that middle class status required to separate their homes from those of the working class took a great deal of manual labor and time on the part of women.

Religious barriers to women’s work in the public sphere were also raised by Ann Gilbert, important particularly in refuting Anne Knight, a devout Quaker. The Anglo-Atlantic world was in the midst of a revitalization of religion in the first half of the nineteenth century, and religious ideas and religious disputes filled the news and engaged people, particularly women, in deciding what they believed was the correct interpretation of scripture in view of the way they believed the world was ordered.34

You adduce scripture, and suitably applied, we all bow to its authority,—but not misapplied: certainly ‘the righteous is bold as a lion.’—as general truth has no need ‘to fear what man can do unto him.’—but if applied to women as women it would be plainly confronted by others particularly included for our own guidance, in which ‘shame facedness,’ ‘subjection,’ ‘a meek and quiet spirit’—the ‘enquiring of husbands at home’, and many such like are enumerated as their virtues, and in describing their sphere, a very different course is assigned them,—‘To guide the house’—‘to bring up children’—‘to entertain stranger’—to descend to the humblest kindnresses are marked out for theirs by apostolic authority. It appears to me therefore that whensoever Scripture legislates for us specially, it speaks directly in opposition to the views you advocate.35

A close reading of the Bible was important in the Protestant religious life of nineteenth century believers. A text universally known and known more deeply than is common today, was idealized in magazines.

35 Ann Gilbert to Anne Knight 26 February 1849, Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, FHL.
reading the Bible was an important part in developing one’s self-understanding. Reading was an interactive pastime; readers took notes and copied passages from the works they read, and Bible passages were discussed among friends and family members, picking out meaning from the language. Passages on the proper behavior of women were pulled from the Old Testament, reinforcing the ideal of separate spheres and the concept of woman as the weaker sex. Women were also seen as particularly religious. Nineteenth-century gender ideology moved away from a puritanical view of women as temptresses who were more easily swayed from the right path; women, instead, were seen as forming the moral and religious heart of the family, central because children’s earliest religious instruction began at home. Women also filled the seats in pews at churches of every denomination, and they were the ones who participated in religious activities, as men represented their families in public. Despite their active participation in religious activities, women never led the group; they were led by a male member of the clergy, with women providing the labor to attain goals laid out by church leaders.

Separate spheres ideology was inherently based not only on a division of space, but a division of labor defined by what were believed to be the innate qualities of both sexes. Women were believed to be nurturing, caring, moral and emotional creatures of the heart,

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36 The literature covering the development of the ideal of “republican motherhood” is particularly instructive on this note. Linda Kerber and Mary Beth Norton’s works from the 1970s and early 1980s, namely *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) and *Liberty’s Daughters* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), explore the development of women’s political identity as mothers of future citizens in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the United States. The continuation of this trend led to the idealizing of women as epitomes of morality in Victorian America and the encapsulating of their role as wife and mother in the resulting “cult of domesticity.” This transition is not the subject of this dissertation, but the theoretical and methodological background of this work was extremely influential in the conception of the argument put forth in this paper.
while men were thought to be practical, intellectual, worldly creatures of the mind and body. The world was divided along the lines of these traits; therefore work, earning money, making decisions that affected others was left to men. Women were responsible for the moral health of the family, for creating a home that would nurture not only children but their husbands. Ann Gilbert continued in her letter to Anne Knight,

I do not think they [public women] would comport with the design of our creation; I do not think they would comport with actual, undeniable, unevadable duties; I think they would subvert the wise result of experience in the division of labor; & necessary to the working of all good machineries: and I think, after all, that we should not be a whit the better for her interference. Of course I believe that there are both wise women and foolish men but these terms do not thus divide the sexes. Generally speaking, if wise, we are not wisest, on a large scale especially, altho’ perhaps on small ones! But ‘the hand cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee’; each is best about its own business; and unless we could regard ourselves as likely to make the ablest statesmen of the two, all we could plead for would be the admission into their own councils;--and then large committees are always I believe less effective than small ones;--the fewer that can manage a business the better: and as Governments do not take up on them to make laws for us as women, but only all ‘as one concern’ with the men, we may, I think, without anxiety consent to share and share alike with the Law makers.37

The concept of a division of labor between men and women was central to the idea of separate spheres. Men worked outside the home and were involved in all things external: politics, community concerns, and money; women worked inside the home, raising children and creating a haven for men where the concerns of the outside world were distant. Some women embraced the ideals of separate spheres just as fully as did many men, seeing the

37 Ann Gilbert to Anne Knight 26 February 1849, Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, FHL.
division of labor as a natural and moral fulfillment of modern marriage. Women’s intellectual capabilities were only good for things inside the home, and they were considered to be intellectually inferior to men. This letter contained perhaps every argument against women’s political participation that circulated in the early nineteenth century: biology, labor and religion. These arguments helped to solidify the separate spheres ideology that defined middle class Britons in the nineteenth century.

Many antislavery women were married, and managed to balance their family life with their commitment to antislavery. Antislavery families were the rule rather than the exception, although many of the most active antislavery women were widows or never married. Lucretia Mott was married and had several children; even in her old age she worked to both care for her family and continue her public activities. She wrote to the Webbs, an antislavery couple in Ireland about her day,

But the hour arrives—I stopped to give breakfast to our household—an now I go to Meeting to help “take up the State of Society”--& make all sorts of woman’s rights speeches.— Away then with this trifling—how unbecoming an “aged woman”!

Lucretia Mott, Maria Weston Chapman, Angelina Grimké Weld and many other antislavery women were married and had families, some of them quite large. They worked their correspondence in around their responsibilities at home, and managed to participate in

meetings and conventions. Lucretia Mott’s children were mostly grown at this point (she was fifty-six when this letter was written and did not become heavily engaged in antislavery work until she was in her late 30s), but she often had them or her grandchildren visiting, and she entertained friends and her husband’s business associates frequently. Except for several years in the 1840s when ill health and poor eyesight prevented her from writing much or spending much time working, she corresponded regularly with dozens of antislavery activists and family members, spoke or led many conventions and meetings, and created many items for sale at antislavery fairs. The same was true for Maria Weston Chapman, who had several young children. She wrote steadily while her children were young, and participated in antislavery events in Boston. Angelina Grimké Weld quit her speaking tour after marrying Theodore Weld, but she and he continued to participate in meetings and kept up with correspondents even after they had several children. American women managed to balance family with activism in the antislavery movement and later in the women’s rights movement.

In contrast, the majority of the most active British antislavery women never married or married late. Anne Knight never married; Elizabeth Pease married very late in life and had no children of her own, and Mary Ann Rawson was a young widow with no children. Elizabeth Pease is a rather typical example of British antislavery women’s participation. As a young woman, she was dedicated to helping her father, who was a powerful figure in the British antislavery scene. Upon his death in 1846, she mostly retired from public work in her grief, and family members kept her from much participation in the movement outside of letter writing. In 1853, she met and married astronomer John Pringle Nichol and moved to Glasgow to care for him and his young son, and almost entirely retired from active work in
any cause. Her antislavery friends wrote of her, “[Elizabeth Pease] is a jewel—but is a good
deal swallowed up in [her husband]. She is a fine woman—but has little time for anything
not immediately connected with the Doctor as she calls him.” After her husband passed
away in 1859, she returned to active participation in a variety of causes, including women’s
rights and antislavery.\footnote{Richard Webb to Samuel May, 1859, as quoted in Kar en L. Halbersleben, “Elizabeth Pease: One Woman’s Vision of Peace, Justice, and Human Rights in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” \textit{Quaker History}. 84 no. 1 (Spring 1995): 31-32.} Despite these female leaders’ lack of family attachments and
households to run, we must assume the rank and file of women’s antislavery associations in
Britain were married women with children, as they were in the United States.\footnote{The demography of men’s antislavery societies has a long historiographical background, beginning with Betty Fladeland’s 1964 article, “Who Were the Abolitionists?,” \textit{The Journal of Negro History} 49, no. 2 (April 1964) : 99-115, and David Brion Davis’s work in \textit{Antebellum Reform} (New York: Harper Collins, 1967). A more statistical approach to American antislavery societies appears in Edward Magdol’s \textit{The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists’ Constituency} (Westport: Greenwood, 1986). Some work has been done on the demography of women’s antislavery societies, most notably Debra Gold Hanson’s \textit{Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Antislavery Society} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993) and Beth Salerno’s \textit{Sister Societies: Women’s Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America} (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005). Both draw conclusions based on the marital and financial status of members versus leaders of women’s antislavery societies, and shows that antislavery women in the US were predominately married, middle-class women or daughters of middle-class families.} These
women managed to keep their houses, tend their children and still attend meetings, read and
write antislavery materials and correspondence, and spread antislavery information
throughout their communities.

Antislavery work interacted with the middle class ideology of separate spheres along
its most vulnerable edges. Women’s earliest participation was only in writing; the few
interested women wrote poetry and novels that espoused antislavery ideas, usually supported
or commissioned by antislavery men. This early participation complied with the limits of
late eighteenth-century women’s behavior, and the beginning of the antislavery movement
corresponded with the decline in the literary salon where women were quite welcome. Over time, women’s writings turned from fiction and poetry to political pamphlets, and Elizabeth Heyrick’s 1824 pamphlet shocked many antislavery men when the author was revealed. The power of women’s writing changed the way many men looked at women’s participation in the antislavery group. With the publication of Heyrick’s pamphlet, women seized on the concept of immediate abolition and began to organize themselves in groups to support the work antislavery men were attempting. All of these early efforts did little to challenge the construction of separate spheres, and in many ways, they reinforced them by positioning women and women’s antislavery organizations as auxiliary to the men who were driving the movement. Women participated in the antislavery movement in the early decades of its work by supporting the existing cause and directing their efforts in ways that reinforced the image of women in middle-class ideology as nurturers and supporters of men.

By the 1830s, however, women began to step outside of private spaces to express their antislavery sentiments. Women began to move into the community to spread their message. They went door-to-door to deliver pamphlets, sell newspaper subscriptions and ask for signatures on petitions from the men in their neighborhoods. Many women’s organizations picked up where the men’s organizations had left off, trying to continue antislavery efforts in their towns after many men had moved on to other causes or simply lost interest. Once women began to venture out of their meetings and homes, public speaking was not far off. Women took up their pens and the podium against slavery in America and began to rally to try to do the same in England, and met with resistance from antislavery men and from some other women as well. The arguments arrayed against women’s desire to
participate more fully in the antislavery movement and in other reform and political 
movements in Britain, and to a slightly lesser extent in America, reinforced separate spheres 
ideology through a series of arguments beginning with biology. Women, they argued, were 
physically incapable of participating in politics—the process of childbearing made it 
impossible for them to attend meetings on a regular schedule. Women’s political 
participation was to be limited to what they could do from home: most notably, educating 
their children in the various political issues of the day and ensuring their sons would grow up 
to vote the right way. Their work also kept them confined to the home; new standards of 
housekeeping and clothing ensured they had plenty to do to keep their homes in the fashion 
considered acceptable for middle-class homes. Religious instruction also forbid women from 
acting publicly; they were supposed to be meek and bow to the greater intellect and wisdom 
of their male relatives. Despite all of these very real barriers to their participation in public 
political activity, many female leaders of the American antislavery movement managed to 
both raise families and participate in public activities. The majority of the female leaders of 
the American antislavery movement were married, and most had families. The most active 
women in the British antislavery movement were unmarried or widowed women with no 
small children. This difference points to a major difference in the strength of class structure 
between the United States and Great Britain. Although British women worked in the 
community, going door-to-door, and attended meetings with men, they did not regularly 
address mixed audiences until nearly a decade after the 1840 World’s Antislavery 
Convention dragged the “woman question” into antislavery debates in England.  

this difference in development lies an explanation for how and why feminist movements developed so differently in America and Britain. Class, race and gender intersected in the antislavery movement in ways that would shape the identity of the middle class in both countries.
**Nineteenth Century Reform Movements and Radical Societies.**

Antislavery was just one of dozens of reform movements gaining momentum in the early nineteenth-century Anglo-America. Women were active in many of them, taking the lead in several that had a significant impact on antislavery activism and women’s rights. Reforming women’s efforts began with the problem of poverty, founding societies to help impoverished women and families in their cities and towns. Temperance was the other major reform movement of nineteenth-century America. Education reform also was important to antislavery women, and many unmarried antislavery daughters spent a year or two in the American South teaching at schools for slave children, or even keeping schools for both white and black children. In Britain, some women participated in Indian reform movements, seeking to end the practice of *sati*, the burning of widows upon their husbands’ funeral pyres, and to reform the Indian caste system. Poor law and prison reform occupied many other women, most notably Elizabeth Fry, who was an early supporter of antislavery as well. Chartism and other domestic political reforms captured the attention of some women in England. Antislavery also had its roots in a variety of radical groups in England and the United States, including the Clapham Sect, Owenism and a number of religious sects.\(^1\) Antislavery efforts did not exist in a vacuum; reform was an important part of middle-class women’s lives. Each of these reform movements has a small but distinct historiography, and a few works, like Dorsey’s *Reforming Men and Women* have attempted to draw the various movements together and examine them through the lenses of class and gender.\(^2\) Reform

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\(^1\) For information on antislavery and religion in women’s lives, see Chapter 3.

\(^2\) The historiography of reform in the United States and Great Britain is vast. Poverty reform has a small but
movements and radical societies formed the public world of women, where domestic concerns could be brought into the streets and public buildings, and women’s reform efforts gave them experience in organizing, voting and participating in political and social processes on a small scale.

growing poverty in American cities as disease, fluctuations in local economies and a population imbalance favoring women taxed existing poor relief structures. A significant amount of work has been done on poverty reform and aid in Philadelphia, mainly due to the presence of a number of aid societies and the work of Mathew Carey, a reporter and activist who wrote extensively on the oppression of seamstresses and other women working in the textile industry in Philadelphia.³ Poverty reform grew out of a belief in caring for one’s neighbors in eighteenth century America, and the image of the poor was that of people fallen on hard times, experiencing accidents and ill luck; poverty was not their fault but the fault of circumstance. After 1800, middle-class ideas of poverty began to change; poverty became associated with crime and vice, and the working class and the poor were seen as agents in their own problems rather than victims of circumstance.⁴ By 1820, the majority of aid societies in Philadelphia had changed their view of poverty and altered their methods to fit a new middle class worldview.⁵ One strain in the historiography of labor argues that the 1820s mark a period of transition between forced and free labor systems in American labor, and the resultant poverty among unskilled free-laborers due to low wages and stringent rules

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⁴ Ibid, 55. In the British context, F.M. L. Thompson, in The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain, 1830-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 321-322, argues that the establishment and proliferation of an ideal of polite society from the middle class onto the working class was the cement that held Britain together through the early twentieth century.

⁵ Ibid, 63-64.
was one step in the process of moving industry from one style of labor to another.\textsuperscript{6} It is at this point that the middle class formulated its own identity within the new republic, positioning itself in opposition to the poor and working class, also insisting that all Americans conform to middle-class standards of behavior. At the same time, many societies began to focus on relieving spiritual needs, or requiring church attendance in order to receive aid, particularly as evangelical Protestants began to form charitable societies of their own, supplanting the secular aid societies that had dominated the poverty reform movement prior to 1820.\textsuperscript{7} As poor relief became more and more closely tied with evangelical efforts, resentment from the poor built, and charity efforts moved more and more into the hands of the churches and away from private societies. Like antislavery reform, poor relief efforts were cast in the moralizing and domestic tone by women, and tying them to religious reform cemented the appropriateness of the efforts in the minds of the middle class.\textsuperscript{8}

Although the vast majority of temperance efforts started after the abolition of slavery in the United States, some early temperance agitation overlapped with antislavery. Temperance movements began as middle-class efforts to reform employees’ behaviors, including excessive drinking at work, and temperance was often linked to protecting women against domestic violence.\textsuperscript{9} The earliest temperance movements were battlefields for changing ideals of womanhood in the first decades of the nineteenth century: with a shift from the image of woman as sinner and a danger to man that typified eighteenth-century

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, 71-72, following in the theories of Edmund Morgan. \\
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid, 79. \\
\end{flushright}
gender identity to the nineteenth-century woman as innocent and the bearer of the family’s (and by extension, the nation’s) moral standard. Drinking, and in particular women’s drinking, was a contentious issue and one that clearly separated the newly emerging middle class in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Ideally, middle-class women drank tea, and middle-class men drank alcohol only in social situations and never to excess. Working-class men, and some women, drank alcohol regularly. The formation of Martha Washington societies in the United States coincided with the most active period in American antislavery, 1840 to 1850. The Washingtonian societies encouraged working-class women to participate in middle-class style reform, embracing nineteenth-century middle-class ideals of womanhood and domesticity. Actively working against female drunkenness and encouraging men to reduce or stop drinking all together, the Washingtonian society ladies attacked a central part of working class social life: the saloon. They couched their arguments in protecting children from the dangers of drunken fathers and mothers. Although many working-class members of the Washingtonian Societies started out deeply committed to the cause, class friction began to wear on the organizations, and many crumbled within the first two years of operation. Working-class women turned to mutual benefit societies, while middle-class temperance women turned their efforts into religious societies, or continued their advocacy of sobriety in other venues. Some historians argue that working-class women in the temperance movement had less interest in class loyalty than in loyalty to other women,

in direct contrast to antislavery women’s attitudes.\textsuperscript{11} Although the membership of antislavery and temperance societies rarely intersected, the domestic ideology that both groups used to justify women’s active involvement was markedly similar.\textsuperscript{12}

Antislavery papers and committee reports from both the United States and Britain are filled with mentions of young women who travelled to slave-owning colonies or states to set up or teach in schools for slave children and adults. Domestic ideology saw women’s education as important to raising well-educated sons, and teaching in slave schools was a natural location for young, unmarried women to practice their teaching skills. Teaching slaves to read and write was illegal in some states, and frowned upon in many others; the young women who travelled to slave states to teach or provide aid to slaves risked community ostracism at the least, or even physical violence. Many antislavery men established the schools, and young women continued them once the men were driven out of slaveholding communities for their participation in the schools. Slave literacy campaigns had roots in the mid-eighteenth century, when women and clergy had been instrumental in early campaigns to teach slaves to read and write and to spread religious instruction throughout the American South and the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{13} Antislavery societies supported these


\textsuperscript{12} For a detailed examination of the role of domesticity ideology in the temperance movement, see Scott C. Martin’s \textit{Devil of the Domestic Sphere} (DeKalb: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2008). Martin argues that the temperance movement’s failure to end drunkenness in American culture indicates a failure of moral suasion and a weakening of the power of separate spheres ideology before the Civil War. The British temperance movement also relied upon the images of domesticity for its work, but there is much less attention to the role of women in the British temperance movement. See Brian H. Harrison’s \textit{Drink and the Victorians} (Staffordshire: Keele University Press, 1994), which draws connections between temperance and early feminism in Britain.

\textsuperscript{13} John Saillant, “Antiguan Methodism and Antislavery Activity: Anne and Elizabeth Hart in the Eighteenth-
young women’s efforts by sending them school supplies and money to support their living expenses and efforts. Antislavery ladies’ societies also sent their official support and prayers for the women’s safety and success in educating the communities. The language in which these prayers and declarations of support were couched insisted that the young women were doing something noble in spreading education and religion to the slaves. These young women’s efforts have not been incorporated into the mainstream historiography of antislavery, and overall, there appear to have been only a few women running slave schools for short periods of time. Even if their efforts did not have much impact on the education level of the slave, that they felt compelled to travel into slave-holding territory and set up schools is more indicative of the increasing importance that women’s roles as educators of children (literally or figuratively, in the case of adult slaves) had in middle-class northern ideology than as an act of resistance to slavery.

Other education reform efforts included the publication of a number of domestic manuals and children’s books written by antislavery women. Lydia Maria Child was the most notable antislavery woman whose actual career was writing manuals for housekeeping and childrearing. In these writings, a woman’s education and its importance for raising children

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14 “First Report of the Female Society for Birmingham, West-Bromwich, Wednesbury, Walsall, and their respective neighborhoods for the relief of British Negro Slaves” 1826. Microfilm 903, Anti-Slavery Collection: 18th-19th Centuries, FHL. Clare Midgley discusses British women’s participation in supporting schools for slaves and freed blacks in the British West Indies in Women Against Slavery, although she sees it as a separate movement from antislavery due to the connections between religious societies and the perpetuation of slavery in the West Indies prior to 1833, pp. 53-54.

15 Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) American writer best known for her children’s literature and as the editor of the National Antislavery Standard.
and her engagement in the world was central to debates over domestic ideology in the early nineteenth century. Lydia Maria Child’s writings directed women in how to run their homes, raise their children and manage their domestic servants. Catherine Beecher, another advocate of women’s education and writer of domestic manuals, also addressed these issues. Both women saw education as a reformative effort, for education could bring previously immoral women back into the fold of middle-class respectability. However, the two women disagreed over women’s public activities and the propriety of women speaking in public. Catherine Beecher saw a woman’s most important job as the raising of sons, who would take her beliefs into the public sphere, whereas Child and other radical abolitionists argued that women should make their own impact on the world through participation in reform movements. Angelina Grimké became the poster child for this conflict, and was routinely attacked in the papers and in private letters by Beecher and her sympathizers, who saw Angelina’s prominent public status in the 1830s as inappropriate and unwomanly. Women’s education thus was directly tied to women’s activism: radical abolitionists encouraged women to use their educations to help others, and conflicting views on how middle-class women were supposed to use the educations they received were more contentious than was women’s actual education by the 1820s.

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16 Catherine Beecher (1800-1878) American writer and educator, known for her work on women’s education and her staunch conservatism and opposition to women’s participation in politics. Sister to Harriet Beecher Stowe.


18 The historiography of women’s domesticity literature is long and I only dip into the arguments in this chapter. See Amy Kaplan’s article “Manifest Domesticity,” *American Literature* 70, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 581-606 for a bibliography and discussion of domesticity in literature.
British women also engaged in a variety of reform efforts. The movement most closely related to antislavery was reform in India. India had a variety of problems in the nineteenth century, some related to caste distinctions exacerbated by imperial policy, and others to native traditions that offended middle-class sensibilities, like sati, the practice of widow burning. Sati gained a significant amount of press in the early days of the empire’s exploration of India, and the act horrified British audiences of travelogues. Women in particular were driven to act to encourage Parliament to outlaw sati in India, and some helped to encourage the colonial government to enforce the law and provide alternatives for widows. Letter-writing campaigns resulted in the banning of sati in 1829, but the practice itself continued until the mid to late nineteenth century in rural areas of India. Many antislavery activists in Britain used India as a place to demonstrate the success of free-labor cotton and sugar plantations. Elizabeth Pease and her father were early supporters of cotton plantations in India. Mary Grew, a longtime American antislavery activist and correspondent of Elizabeth Pease wrote,

I thought the information respecting the doings of the British India Society, and its prospects of success, so valuable, and so important for dissemination here that I was sure you would be willing that it should be given to the public. Our sympathies are with you in this noble enterprise, and we hope much from it, much for India, for England and for America. You have some faithful and noble spirits engaged in it and, I trust, the

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20 Mary Grew (1813-1896) American antislavery activist and feminist from Pennsylvania.
American antislavery activists admired these efforts to find an alternative to slavery that would allow cash crops to be grown without forced labor, but saw them as distinct from antislavery itself. Indian reforms, particularly those related to growing cotton, indigo and sugar, provided models for American free labor systems. However, Indian free farming efforts were not antislavery, and Grew makes it clear that although the information about the success of the cotton farms backed by the India Society was positive and uplifting for the antislavery movement, it was not the same as actively working to end slavery.

One of the most pressing domestic reform issues British women participated in was prison reform. Elizabeth Fry became involved in the prison reform movement in the 1810s, and quickly became the spokesperson for prison reform efforts that encouraged rehabilitation and better conditions for prisoners. Fry led a group of Quaker prison reformers who took up the effort to pass prison reform laws in England in the 1820s and 30s, following the failure of Jeremy Bentham’s efforts to do the same in the late eighteenth century. Fry and her supporters advocated a kinder approach to rehabilitating prisoners, encouraging decent living conditions, religious and practical instruction, productive labor, separate space and matrons for female prisoners, and discontinuing the use of solitary confinement and hard labor for any criminals. Kindness and religious instruction were central to Fry’s policies, and her major active effort was to visit prisoners and read them scripture. Her actions and the

21 Mary Grew to Elizabeth Pease, 18 March 1841. MS A 1.2 v. 11 p. 117, BPL. Emphasis in source
22 Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) British prison reformer and antislavery supporter.
23 Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) British prison reformer.
changes she advocated made her a much more sympathetic character than earlier male prisoner reformers, and her efforts had a large impact on the popular perception of prison reform. Although many historians argue that her ideas were not her own and that her popularity was greater than her actual impact, Fry’s work on prison reform brought women into a movement that had previously been dominated by men. Fry’s womanhood may have ameliorated public opinion of prison reform. Her standing as a respectable middle-class woman, a devout Quaker, who went into dangerous and dirty prisons to teach prisoners and read the Bible to them, reframed prison reform as an act of charity rather than a lessening of punishment for the condemned. Her status and actions gave her some celebrity, and so many people wanted to watch her read to the prisoners that her charitable efforts were in danger of being overrun by spectators. Although little work has been done on Fry’s class and domestic ideology and its relationship to her fame as a prison reformer, there is some evidence that her notoriety was linked more to the spectacle of her activism than to true public interest in her efforts.

Chartism was perhaps the most visible reform effort in Britain in the nineteenth century. Advocating for universal male suffrage and other political reforms to level the political playing field between the classes and extend political rights to the working classes.

24 Robert Alan Cooper, “Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42, no. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1981): 675-690; Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999) argue that through prison reform, like in antislavery, middle and upper-class women were able to move for reforms to their own situations as well as those of the prisoners.


26 Ibid.
was the main goal of the Chartist movement. Some of the more radical Chartists groups also attempted to include female suffrage in the effort, but that did not gain much political traction. For the most part, the women involved in the Chartist movement were middle class, but even they did not speak in public or organize outside of the men’s organizations. Working-class women, who would gain the most from Chartist efforts, had little time outside of paid work and family obligations to organize, and for the most part, women were resigned to the galleries and sidelines in meetings and speeches in the Chartist movement. Despite their relegation to the sidelines, early feminists learned the rhetoric of freedom and connected with other radicals through Chartist organizations. Kathryn Gleadle, in her work on radical Unitarians, sees Chartism as an important step in the formation of the early feminist movement. Chartist domestic ideology depended on women’s desire to work less and to spend more time with their families, and their arguments to enfranchise women depended on the emerging middle-class ideal of women as moralizing agents in society. Chartist political aims mirrored many of those feminists would claim for themselves in the second half of the nineteenth century, and their efforts petitioning, marching and lecturing gave women examples to follow for their own later activism.

The Clapham sect and other late eighteenth-century literary circles provided some of

27 Kathryn Gleadle, The Early Feminists Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831-51 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 82-84. Also see Jutta Schwartzkopf’s Women in the Chartist Movement (New York: MacMillan, 1991), which details women’s involvement in the Chartist movement, mostly focusing on working-class women’s participation.

28 For a discussion of working-class formation and the role of Chartism, see E.P. Thompson’s The Making of the English Working Class (London: Vintage, 1966), and for women’s participation see Anna Clark’s The Struggle for the Breeches (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Clark argues that working-class women were the driving force behind Chartist domestic ideology and the incorporation of domesticity into working-class identity.
the earliest opportunities for women to participate in groups where their gender mattered less than their abilities or ideas. These groups consisted entirely of wealthy middle-class and elite men and women, who explored and encouraged radical ideas about gender, social roles and religion and provided female participants with feedback and support for their work. Mary Wollstonecraft, Hannah More, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and other radical feminist authors thrived in these communities, and their writings provided the inspiration for the women’s rights movement that developed in the early nineteenth century.29 In the late eighteenth-century, women authors were still a new phenomenon, and writing was not considered appropriate for women, although the arguments against women writing were ineffective as the activity itself did not expose them to anything that could be considered dangerous. “Scribbling women” of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a new development, and the communities of writers and poets that blossomed around this time period aided them in their personal development as writers. Without these early writing circles, many women authors whose writings would later become important to the antislavery and women’s rights groups would not have had the support they needed to develop their theories outside of the usual family and social restraints placed on women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.30


Many reform efforts in the early nineteenth century had their roots in radical religious societies, where men and women discussed social problems and attempted to find ways to apply religious theory to solve them. Chapter 3 discusses Quakers and their connection to antislavery and other reform movements, but they were not the only non-mainstream religious group that engaged in reform work. Unitarians, Owenites and a host of other small, radical groups engaged in a variety of reform efforts. Unitarians were one of the earliest religious groups to embrace antislavery and other reform movements; their loose ideological structure and focus on a personal relationship with God encouraged education for all church members and action in the world.31 Many radical religious societies rejected traditional forms of worship and traditional roles for parishioners, instead encouraging individuals to participate in spreading their teachings and engaging in the world in a manner which matched their doctrine. Radical Unitarians engaged in a variety of reform movements, including Chartism, and through their efforts developed an idea of feminism and women’s rights that incorporated elements of Chartism, antislavery and woman’s suffrage placing them at odds with the prevailing ideas of women’s role in society. Like most of the early women’s rights movement, the Unitarians pitted themselves against various class ideals and realities of women’s lives.32 Middle-class Unitarians did not fully understand or incorporate the concerns of working-class women, who had to work for wages as opposed to those middle-


32 Ibid, 88-89.
class women who wanted the right to work and participate in the public sphere. Despite their middle-class tendencies, Unitarians worked towards suffrage and greater work opportunities for all women and were some of the earliest women to write about women’s rights in England.

Owenites’ socialist ideals and emphasis on education and equality made them prime candidates for social reform efforts. Founded by Robert Owen, a businessman and education reformer, the Owenites started a utopian community called New Harmony in Indiana in the United States, and another community near Glasgow, Scotland. The Owenites came under scrutiny because some of their members espoused a “free-love” doctrine, and their communities were thought to weaken marriage bonds and to cause religious infidelity. Owenism in Britain became more of a working class movement, encouraging cooperative stores and other community efforts that allowed working class neighborhoods to pool resources for the common good.33 Women were particularly active in Owenist circles; Owenist emphasis on education for all and egalitarian ethics encouraged women to become active in their circles. Many women members wrote a number of articles for radical newspapers and worked on issues relating to feminism and women’s education.34 Radical societies and religious dissenters often disregarded traditional restrictions on women’s behavior and activities, allowing women involved in these societies the freedom to develop

skills they would later use in reform movements.

Religion played an important role in the rhetoric and lives of antislavery women. A number of historians have examined the religious lives of antislavery women, both in biographies and as groups. Anna Speicher’s *The Religious World of Antislavery Women* argues that religion played an essential part in the motivations of the most prominent American women antislavery lecturers, something she sees as having been overlooked in the feminist biographies of these women.35 Kathryn Gleadle’s work on the early Unitarians and their feminist tendencies also examines the role spirituality played in the lives of nineteenth-century reformers. Most of the works on the role of particular religious groups in reform efforts have focused on Quakers, Unitarians and other non-mainstream Protestant faiths. Although many of the most prominent female leaders of the antislavery movement in the US and Britain were Quakers or Unitarians at some point in their careers, the vast majority of women in the antislavery movement were evangelical Protestants. With a few notable exceptions, particularly the leaders of the movement in Boston, the mid-Atlantic and British antislavery women were members of churches that encouraged women’s equal participation in worship. Both Speicher and Gleadle credit the freedoms that non-traditional religious affiliations allowed women in providing their subjects with the experience and philosophies that encouraged them to break out of the roles middle-class ideals set for women and to reach for more freedoms and social and political intercourse with men. Women gained experience speaking in church and participating in religious organizations. These non-traditional

religions may have given the leaders of antislavery movements the skills and experience necessary for them to lead women’s antislavery associations and for some to speak in public.

Reform movements in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gave men and women a place to attempt to make their mark on the world. Women became involved in a variety of reform efforts in the United States and Great Britain. American women became involved in poor law reform, temperance, and education reform. British reforming women engaged in efforts to grow cash crops in India, change imperial territories’ laws, and prison reform. All of these reform efforts attempted to justify women’s involvements through the new ideals of womanhood embraced by the middle class in the US and Britain, and some were more successful than others. Chartism in England was distinguished from other reform movements of the nineteenth century by being led primarily by working-class people. Antislavery did not exist in a vacuum; supporters also worked in other reform movements, splitting their time or moving entirely from one effort to another and back again as local, national and international events rose and fell in the public’s consciousness. The clash between Unitarians and their working-class compatriots fell along the lines of gender, with Unitarians supporting suffrage for all women as well as men. Radical societies, both religious and secular, also challenged emerging ideals of womanhood, encouraging women to write, become educated and participate in their communities. Some religious communities included women’s equality within their doctrine, although the most radical communities were reviled as bringing immorality to the areas they established as their communal centers. These groups rarely succeeded in gathering many people together for any length of time. Despite their problems, radical religious and social societies introduced their members to a
variety of ideas that resisted the boundaries middle-class ideology set for women. All of these movements, both reform and religious, helped to shape the boundaries of separate spheres, and challenged middle- and working-class ideology of class, gender and political boundaries in both the US and Britain.\footnote{Scott C. Martin,\textit{ Devil of the Domestic Sphere} (DeKalb: University of Northern Illinois Press, 2008) and Bruce Dorsey,\textit{ Reforming Men and Women} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) are excellent examples of how historians have effectively analyzed reform movements through a gendered lens and through them described the shifting boundaries of gender roles in the nineteenth century.}
Religion and the Antislavery Movement: Quakerism

Antislavery men and women tended to be deeply religious people. The earliest antislavery efforts in both the United States and Britain occurred within the Quaker church. The Quakers believed that God spoke to everyone, and this belief shaped the way they lived their lives and treated others. Unlike many other more radical religious societies, Quakers did not believe in complete withdrawal from society, although they did require their members to marry within the faith. Quakers were seen as odd by non-Quakers, as they often adopted a very simplified and modest dress and kept to antiquated manners and behaviors that had long been abandoned by mainstream Protestants.¹ By the end of the eighteenth century, most Quaker meetings had condemned slavery, labeling it a sin in which no good Quaker would participate.² Schisms in the American Quaker church rocked the community, and antislavery and the role of women became contentious within the Quaker church.³ Hicksite Quakers embraced antislavery and women’s participation at the beginning of the schism; but as antislavery activism took on a life of its own, the Hicksites Quaker meetings began to distance themselves from the movement. The Quaker church did allow for women to speak in meeting, as part of their philosophy that all were equal before God and should speak if so moved. Many of the leading antislavery women were Quakers, including Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Pease, Angelina and Sarah Grimké and Anne Knight. Each of these women’s

relationship to the Quaker faith was complicated by her antislavery activities, and the Grimké sisters were eventually cast out of their Quaker meeting on a technicality for their outspokenness.\textsuperscript{4} Differences between American Quakers and British Quakers colored the interactions between them during the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention visits and were evident in the letters exchanged after these meetings. Quakers remained important to the antislavery movement through the 1850s, although many of the American Quakers had to separate themselves from their meetings to continue their work. Divisions and differences between different sects of Quakerism had a significant impact on the ability of antislavery women to cooperate and communicate with their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{5}

Historians have long recognized the presence of Quakers in the American and British antislavery movements.\textsuperscript{6} However, discussion of their participation as Quakers has been limited to a few texts published by Quaker historians. Most notably, \textit{Slavery in the Meetinghouse} by Ryan P. Jordan tackles the role of Quakers in antislavery and the resistance to antislavery in some Quaker meetings. Some other historians have examined the role of Quakers in founding the antislavery movement, through biographies of Anthony Benezet and John Woolman, founders of the first antislavery society in the United States.\textsuperscript{7} More recently,\

\textsuperscript{4} Gerda Lerner, \textit{The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971),
\textsuperscript{6} Frederick B. Tolles, ed., \textit{Slavery and The Woman Question} (Haverford, PA: Friends’ Historical Society, 1952) contains a discussion of Mott’s Quakerism. Subsequent antislavery works, including Gerda Lerner’s biography of the Grimké sisters, discuss the role of Quakerism in the antislavery politics of many participants in the antislavery movement.
\textsuperscript{7} Maurice Jackson, \textit{Let This Voice Be Heard} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Anthony
British historians have been focusing on female Quakers and their participation in radical societies and movements. Judith Jennings’ biography of Mary Morris Knowles, and Sandra Stanley Holton’s book on radical Quaker women complement earlier essays on Quaker women that have appeared in collections and journals on women and religion and Quaker history. Studies of Quaker women have remained on the fringes of both women’s history and on the history of antislavery in the United States and Britain. Academic biographies of Quaker antislavery women are easily accessible for American Quakers, but only recently have historians begun to piece together the details of the lives of British Quaker women. No modern, book-length biographies of Elizabeth Pease or Anne Knight have yet been published. The lack of full length biographies of the leading antislavery Quaker women in Britain is an unfortunate gap in the historiography of antislavery actions in Britain.

The historiography of Quakers and their involvement in antislavery is relatively small and spread over nearly forty years. Ryan Jordan’s *Slavery and the Meetinghouse* is the most recent work on Quakers and the antislavery movement. Jordan argues that not all Quakers were antislavery supporters, and that antislavery itself became a divisive issue in the Quaker

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9 An article on the life of Elizabeth Pease was published by Karen Halbersleben entitled “Elizabeth Pease: One Woman’s Vision of Peace, Justice, and Human Rights in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *Quaker History* 84, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 26-36 and Gail Malmgreen wrote an article on Anne Knight’s radicalism, “Anne Knight and the Radical Subculture,” *Quaker History* 71, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 100-113. Shirley Aucott, the Leicester city historian, self-published some short biographies of Leicester antislavery women, but her pamphlets are not widely available.
church. Jordan argues that contrary to what was argued in earlier historiography, the majority of Quakers were not staunch antislavery supporters; particularly as antislavery became more radical after 1840, the majority of Quakers moved away from the antislavery movement. Jordan’s work provides a corrective to the majority of work on Quakers and antislavery, which has focused on Anthony Benezet and the early male antislavery activists who influenced William Wilberforce and other eighteenth-century antislavery activists. Jordan’s work attempts to transcend the individuals in the antislavery movement and connect Quaker sectarian politics and antislavery to describe how antislavery impacted the structure of the Quaker meeting system in the United States. Earlier works on Quaker history focused on the reasons behind the schisms. H. Larry Ingle’s work *Quakers in Conflict* examines the Hicksite schism in terms of class conflict and the division between agrarian and urban Quakers. Ingle’s work is a rather myopic work of religious history, and as such, does not engage fully either with the historiography of class or antislavery even though he places his analysis in the framework of class conflict. Many works of Quaker history seem to follow this trend, where they are slightly separated from social and cultural history covering the same time period and sometimes the same individuals the Quaker-focused works are examining.

Quaker beliefs differed radically from most other Protestant beliefs. Quakers believed in individuals speaking to and being spoken to by God directly and in living in that spirit, embracing pacifism, egalitarian social behaviors and plain dress, and eschewing behaviors that were thought un-godly, like dancing, gambling and swearing. Quakers organized themselves into groups called meetings, based on geography. Meetings were
mostly self-governed, as long as they followed the tenets of Quakerism as laid out by founder George Fox. Although ministers ran their meetings, and elders governed the church, in theory, any Quaker was permitted to speak at meeting on whatever subject moved him or her. Once Quakerism had been established in the United States, divisions quickly formed between British and American Quakers. Further divisions emerged as religious tolerance in America allowed Quakers to develop without the oversight of English clergy or government. As a result, in the eighteenth century, schisms began to grow between more orthodox Quaker meetings, which used the Bible as a guide and worshipped in ways that were closer to other Protestant faiths, and a group that began to be called the Hicksites, after their leader Elias Hicks, which focused more on inner guidance and public works than on the Bible or evangelism.

The first decades of the nineteenth century in America were filled with religious revivalism. The Second Great Awakening had burned through the northern half of the United States, itinerant preachers held huge camp revivals, and religious questioning was a popular pastime. American Quakers were not immune to internal strife. New York Quaker Elias Hicks led a breakaway group of Quakers who called themselves the Hicksites, who focused their worship inward and moved away from Bible-focused worship. Hicks visited

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Philadelphia in 1816 and asked for permission to speak in their meeting; when permission was granted, he spoke on the dangers of worldliness in general and the worldliness of the Philadelphia Quakers in particular. Not surprisingly, the elders of the Philadelphia meeting took offense and censured him. His supporters came to his defense, and within ten years of Hicks’ original speech, the Philadelphia meeting had split over differences in doctrine between Hicks’ followers and the Orthodox elders.\(^{13}\) Hicksite Quakers believed in action in the world as an expression of their faith, and it was this belief that led many Quakers with antislavery tendencies to join the Hicksite sect and break away from the more conservative, Orthodox Quaker meetings. Other tenets of Hicksite Quaker doctrine appealed to antislavery activists, including the emphasis on egalitarianism in worship and the focus on the idea that all were equal before God. However, the majority of Hicks’ followers did not fall into the same class strata as most antislavery activists. Hicksites tended to come from the country, worked as artisans in professions threatened by increasing mechanization and were less likely to be merchants or professionals. Middle-class Hicksites did tend to be more active in social reform efforts of all types in comparison to Orthodox Quakers, however, and American antislavery women were more likely to be Hicksite Quakers than Orthodox.\(^{14}\) British Quakers did not experience internal schism to the same extent as American meetings, and British Friends sided strongly with Orthodox American meetings once the dust of the schism had settled.\(^{15}\) Divisions among Quakers created misunderstandings and distrust between


\(^{14}\) Ibid, 77.

\(^{15}\) For information on British Quaker controversies in the eighteenth century, see Judith Jennings’ *Gender,*
American and British antislavery Friends, and women’s letters reflected this.

Antislavery activism may have seemed to fit naturally with Hicksite Quaker beliefs, but as the Hicksite Quakers organized themselves and formed their own meetings, antislavery activists began to clash with Hicksite leaders. Antislavery, when not focused on immediate abolition, held no challenge for Quakers. Some of the earliest supporters of antislavery were Quakers. Anthony Benezet reenergized the Pennsylvania Abolition Society after the American Revolution, engaging antislavery with Quaker doctrine. Benezet’s arguments against slavery, drawing on the work of Woolman, Benjamin Rush and other Quaker opponents of slavery, influenced British antislavery from its beginnings. William Wilberforce drew on Benezet’s writings in his speeches to Parliament. Early Quaker abolitionists were not thrown out of the meeting as their later compatriots would be, but most, then, did not press immediate emancipation in their efforts. Elizabeth Heyrick, a Quaker and the author of the widely published pamphlet, *Immediate, Not Gradual Emancipation*, was exceptional among early Quaker abolitionists. Even those who supported her work were skeptical of the effectiveness or propriety of immediate emancipation. They, like many others, thought that disaster would follow immediate emancipation in the 1820s. Indeed, historians have argued that in the 1820s and 30s,

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See Kenneth Corfield, “Elizabeth Heyrick: Radical Quaker,” in Gail Malmgreen, ed., *Religion in the Lives of English Women, 1760-1930* (London: Croom Helm, 1986). Corfield cites a series of historians who argue that it was not until after 1830 that immediatism was embraced in the British antislavery movement. He sees some women’s antislavery societies as following in Heyrick’s footsteps in the mid to late 1820s, but their emphasis on immediatism did not catch on in the male antislavery societies until after 1830.
Quakers were so wrapped up in the Hicksite schism and its aftermath that antislavery received little official attention in the church. Once the Hicksites had established themselves and the Orthodox Quakers had resigned themselves to the schism, their attention turned to the activities of the members of their respective meetings.

Quaker women participated in antislavery within the structure of the Quaker meeting beginning in the early nineteenth century. Women had their own meeting within the larger meeting, and their own elders. However, women’s meetings did not have full autonomy from the men’s half of the meeting. Women could not accept their own new members, cast members out or discipline members. Technically women elders were equals in the church, but in reality they held much less power than male elders. Women could speak in meeting, however, and they could become ministers in the Quaker church. Although Quaker women were not true equals in their church, they did have significantly more freedom than women did in other faiths. Women elders were an important part of the Quaker church, and when Quakers spread their faith, female Friends were there. Eliza Walker wrote to her friend Anne Knight about her efforts to create Quaker meetings among American slaves:

I am obliged to cut very short having to leave home tomorrow on my way to the southern states feeling a concern to appoint meetgs amongst the people of colour—the service is arduous; but nothing short of faithfulness will produce peace let this hint stimulate to circumspection & self denial—it is no small trial to leave my family, but obedience yields strength—.

19 Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 18
20 Eliza Walker (life dates unknown) American free black woman from Boston, Massachusetts, wife of David Walker, noted free black author.
21 Elizabeth H. Walker to Anne Knight, 3 April 1827. Anne Knight Papers Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, 56, FHL.
Walker felt called to travel to the slaveholding states of the American South and to teach Quaker beliefs to the slaves. Although Quakers were not generally evangelical, teaching religion to the slaves was a longstanding Quaker tradition, especially before slavery was outlawed in Pennsylvania in 1780. Walker saw her efforts as part of the Quaker emphasis on peace, part of what God told her to do, which required that she follow her inner light towards greater spiritual enlightenment. Walker was also clearly going to the South without her children, although it is unclear if her husband accompanied her. Women could become elders before their husbands, and it was often the case that women were more active in the church than were their male family members.  

Women also spoke about antislavery in meeting, and many antislavery women gained their public speaking experience in Quaker meetings. In the 1820s, young women in the United States began to speak in front of meetings about slavery. Even in the American South, Quaker women began speaking to mixed assemblies against slavery. Their speeches were not documented, but that they spoke exhibited the greater freedoms Quaker women expected. Although this was not a regular practice for any antislavery women, their experiences opened the way for later women, like the Grimké sisters, to take to the lectern and speak for the slaves. Sarah and Angelina Grimké joined the meeting in Philadelphia while they lived there, and adopted the dress and manners of the Quakers. Sarah struggled with public speaking; her speaking voice and preachy manner made her an unpopular

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22 Maurice Jackson, Let This Voice Be Heard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 18.
speaker. Angelina, on the other hand, was a natural speaker, and gained experience speaking at meeting, although the elders resisted her speaking regularly. Other women were discriminated against for speaking in meeting, although technically they were permitted to do so. In the 1830s, when the Hicksite schism was still playing out in Quaker meetings across the United States, Elizabeth Reeder, a Hicksite follower stood up to speak in the women’s meeting. The men closed the divider between the men’s and women’s sections, shutting off her speech and conducting the meeting in secret. She was eventually excommunicated for her belief that the Hicksite men raised themselves above God by refusing fellowship to those members whose beliefs did not match theirs. Even the Hicksites frowned upon women speaking in meeting regularly, or with women criticizing male Friends, particularly elders. Quaker women may have had more opportunities to exercise leadership and practice speaking in public, but they did these things in the face of resistance from male leaders if they stepped beyond accepted boundaries for women. Historians of Quaker meetings recognize both the freedom Quaker doctrine allowed women to participate in the church, and also the limits that nineteenth-century social mores placed even on Quakers.

As Quaker women began to participate in antislavery meetings that included men and women outside their faith, outsiders began to comment on the strangeness of their dress and behavior. Antislavery brought Quakers into close contact with non-Quakers, sharing

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24 Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971). Lerner argues that Angelina and Sarah’s conversion to Quakerism was directly related to their rejection of slavery and eventually led to their leaving their family home and moving to Philadelphia. It is clear in her analysis that she sees their Quaker beliefs as ultimately secondary to their antislavery convictions, and she notes that their insistence on speaking out for the slave appalled some Quakers in their meeting.

25 Elizabeth Reeder (life dates unknown) American Quaker

philosophy and speaking about politics. Quakers, especially Hicksite Quakers, adopted a very antiquated and formal mode of dress and manners. Although Quakers did not separate themselves from society, they did create communities within the larger community they lived in, and did most of their business and socialized mainly with other Quakers. As antislavery grew, Quakers began to befriend more non-Quakers, and spoke and wrote to non-Quakers in the course of antislavery business. Ann Phillips wrote to Maria Weston Chapman about an encounter she had with a well-to-do lady with antislavery sympathy.  

“She was very polite, but I think she thought us rather odd folks what with living in a narrow st, riding in hackney coaches, caring for such things as slaves everywhere we pass for queer folks not drinking spirit. We find we are not thought much of.”

The simple lifestyle of devout Quakers was unusual in contrast to growing middle-class wealth and style. Quaker women wore simple dresses in dark colors, without lace or frills and little or no jewelry. Quaker men wore dark, sober suits and did not take off their hats when they greeted other men. Quakers did not value material objects, and their homes reflected this; although many Quaker homes were described as comfortable, they were not as luxurious or as lavishly decorated as other middle-class homes in American cities. Their behavior was also odd to outsiders; they spoke, and some even wrote, using “thee” and “thou” to one another, and they did not drink alcohol, dance or listen to music. Quakers were often thought queer or strange, and until women got to know one another, their differences separated them.

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27 Ann Phillips (1813-1886) American antislavery activist from Boston and wife of Wendell Phillips. Ann Phillips was confined to her bed with a serious illness for a large portion of her adult life.
28 Anne Phillips to Maria Weston Chapman, 30 July 1839. MS A 9.2 v. 12 p. 6, BPL.
29 Frederick B. Tolles, “‘Of the Best Sort but Plain’: The Quaker Esthetic,” American Quarterly 11, no. 4
British and American Friends were divided by the Hicksite schism as much as were the American churches. Many British Quaker meetings supported the Orthodox Friends in America, and rumors abounded about the theology and doctrine of Hicksite Quakers. Yet not all British Quakers sided with the Orthodox American Friends. Elizabeth Pease defended Hicksite Quaker antislavery activists, and the news of her actions reached the United States through letters. “Elizabeth Pease writes to Wm. Bassett that she is going to make a stir in England to make the friends there testify against [Orthodox] American Friends at whatever peril to herself, from which Maria [Weston Chapman] infers that she may perhaps be excommunicated from them.”

Elizabeth Pease and a few other Quakers in Great Britain stood up for the Hicksite Quakers when Orthodox American Quakers slandered Hicksites in letters or while travelling through Britain. Elizabeth Pease was perhaps the most outspoken supporter of non-Orthodox Quakers, and her actions endangered her own fellowship with her Quaker meeting. Pease would put her own reputation on the line again and again in supporting the more radical American antislavery activists when religious differences threatened to hinder their antislavery work in Britain.

American antislavery women also noted the division between American and British Quakers and the impact it had on the antislavery movement. Many antislavery activists in America were Hicksite Quakers, or were part of smaller sects that had broken away from the Hicksites in the aftermath of the schism. British Quakers’ distrust of Hicksite doctrine


31 Shirley Aucott, , Elizabeth Heyrick, 1769 to 1831: The Leicester Quaker who Demanded the Immediate Emancipation of Slaves in the British Colonies (Leicester: privately published, 2007)
created a large divide between the leaders of the American and British antislavery movement, particularly after the rise of the Garrisonians\(^\text{32}\) in the 1840s. Lucretia Mott wrote to one of her friends in the 1840s,

> The loss to frds in England was not by uniting with the benevolent in carrying out a practical good like Emancipation or temperance—It was by joining with Missionaries to convert & proselyte the heathens so called to their creed & forms, the joining in which was inconsistent with our principles & of course there might be expected a falling off, there was a union with bishops & priests recognizing their Office—not so in the union with the late efforts for the Massal {?} reform nor indeed in co-working with Clarkson, Wilberforce, & others to effect the slaves deliverance & the abolition of the accursed slave trade. We never hear of any compromise of principle or testimony by such union, on the contrary it brought Clarkson & hundreds, if not thousands of others into an acquaintance of & respect for Quakerism. I despise this modern cry against union more than I can express on paper & am truly sorry that such a noble mind as Aden T. Cory, the reformer should allow himself to be narrowed by sectarian partition walls we expect nothing better from many of the scribes & Phareses of the day.\(^\text{33}\)

Mott saw the problem facing British Quakers as a tendency towards evangelism, something profoundly against the tenets of Hicksite Quakerism. Rumors that British Quakers were leaning more and more toward Anglican style worship and beliefs disturbed Mott, who saw their behavior as detrimental to the work that antislavery Quakers had done to gain respect in the eyes of the larger antislavery audience. Quakers’ different modes of dress and speech

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\(^{32}\) Garrisonians were the friends and followers of William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the *Liberator* antislavery newspaper. They made up the most liberal section of the antislavery movement. Garrison’s paper discussed issues of atheism and resistance to organized religion, women’s rights, and practicing disunion from the government by refusing to vote until slavery was abolished.

\(^{33}\) Lucretia Mott to unknown, 184?. Mott Manuscripts, Box 1, FL. The envelope for this letter was missing and the date was illegible on the first page of the letter. Based on its place in the box and its contents, the letter was probably written in late 1840 or early 1841, in the aftermath of the World’s Antislavery Convention.
had set them apart, and they had been the victims of religious intolerance in Britain in the seventeenth century. Antislavery had helped Quakers gain wider acceptance among the reforming communities, and Mott saw the turn towards more mainstream Protestant doctrine as a step backwards for Quakers in their struggle to be accepted as they were.

Criticism of doctrine was not aimed solely at American Quakers. As more Hicksite Quakers began visiting Britain in the 1840s, they recorded their reactions to the treatment they received at the hands of British Quakers and their opinions of British meetings and Friends. Lucretia Mott’s opinion of British Quakers was shaped by her experiences in London during the World’s Antislavery Convention. Mott faced significant discrimination based on her status as a Hicksite minister when she visited London in 1840. Her diary describes numerous points at which she felt slighted, but her own opinions of the British Quakers were not kind. She criticized British Quakers for being overly formal and stuffy and their meetings as “mockery for sensible, intelligent people to employ children to chant &c.” The influence of Anglicans on Quaker services was apparent to Mott, and her opinion of British Quakers was quite low. She said she “found them ignorant & bigoted, but kind in feeling after disclaiming religious fellowship.”

Some British Quakers refused to see Mott as a Friend, despite her letters of introduction from the Quaker antislavery society to which she belonged in Philadelphia. American Quaker travelers faced significant difficulty when interacting with British Quakers unless they came from a purely Orthodox meeting. Mott’s status as a female minister from the meeting that originally split off to embrace elements of

Elias Hicks’ complaints against the Philadelphia elders made her particularly threatening in the eyes of British Quakers.

After the Hicksite schism in the late 1820s, Quaker sectionalism did not settle down for long. Once the Hicksites had broken from the Orthodox meetings and established their own rules and their own system of elders, some Friends decided that even the Hicksites were still not as close to the original teachings of George Fox as they desired. Mott and other Hicksites were quite aware of the further schisms of their faith. She wrote to some British Quaker friends about the connection between reform and divisions among American Quakers in 1848. “Reform is ‘certainly the order of the day’—New laborers are constantly entering the field of pioneer life, which is ‘white unto harvest.’ Agitation is in all the Churches—ours seems rocked to its centre. Orthodox & Hicksite dividing & subdividing.”

The late 1840s were a very exciting time in America: westward expansion was opening new territory unburdened with the same traditions, and territories could be established without slavery. Reform movements bloomed in American cities, and a new generation of young men and women took up the reins of reform efforts their parents had begun. Quaker meetings were still in tumult, and small groups formed their own meetings focused around a variety of Quaker doctrines. The tumultuous state of American Quakerism was directly tied to antislavery efforts and the evolving conflict between American antislavery societies. Mott herself was involved in a dispute with Hicksite leaders, and had expressed her disgust with the intolerance and restrictive actions of the elders towards antislavery and women preachers.

She was later sanctioned for her opinions by the Hicksite’s refusal to certify her as a minister. Quaker meetinghouses were closed to antislavery activists as Hicksite elders resisted radical efforts to force the Hicksite Quakers to openly embrace immediatism and other extreme antislavery efforts.  

Although Mott herself never left the Hicksites, others did and formed meetings in a tradition that would come to be known as the Progressive Friends. Progressive Friends believed in what they called “universal reform,” which embraced equality of class, gender and race. Antislavery activism and women’s insistence on speaking in meeting, and on speaking at antislavery meetings contributed to the ongoing splintering of American Quaker meetings.

Religion was essential to nineteenth-century women’s justification of their participation in reform activities. Although Quakers were not particularly numerous in America or the United States, they were central to the progression of the antislavery movement in both countries. Quaker women were particularly essential to the movement; many of the most well known, and most of the women who appear in this study, were Quakers at some point in their careers. Quaker beliefs gave female Friends opportunities to experience leadership and public speaking, although women’s meetings were not autonomous from the men’s. Schisms in the American Quaker church had long-lasting repercussions for the antislavery movement. British Quakers were skeptical of American antislavery Quakers, and spread rumors and refused to treat them as Friends and equals.

36 Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2007), 82-87. Jordan’s chapter on the Progressive Friends makes a convincing but somewhat clumsy argument about the increasing schisms in Quakerism and ties to women’s rights and antislavery.

37 Ibid, 102.
Some British antislavery activists tried to defend Hicksite Quakers and spoke out against the Orthodox American Quakers who slandered antislavery Hicksites. As more and more individuals travelled between the United States and Britain in the 1840s, American Hicksites began to criticize British Quakers for being too formal and stiff and too much like Anglicans. Relationships among antislavery women were complicated by religious tensions among Quaker women. British Quaker women did not have the same freedoms American Quakers did; some thought their active participation in both meeting and in reform was inappropriate. The Hicksite sect did not settle down after they split from the orthodox Quakers; instead, they splintered further over various issues of reform, gender and race in the Quaker church. Quaker church history in America is closely tied with the antislavery movement and the role of women in society, as reform and gender roles were important factors in the splitting of the Hicksite church into the Progressive meetings and more traditional Hicksites.
Literary Women: Antislavery writers and transatlantic audience

As well as writing letters to acquaintances and family members, antislavery women also wrote newspaper articles, pamphlets and novels. Although the vast majority of the source material examined in this dissertation comes from personal letters, the role of printed material in antislavery women’s lives cannot be understated. Women published pamphlets on antislavery issues, which antislavery societies subscribed to and circulated on both sides of the Atlantic. Newspapers also circulated across the Atlantic, advertising novels and pamphlets as well as spreading news of antislavery activities. The *Liberator* was widely subscribed to in both the United States and Britain, and women were regular contributors as well as subscribers. Women also started their own papers which catered to other antislavery women. Novels like Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*, published in 1688, examined the injustices of slavery and the lives of slaves. Although the vast majority of the books depicted fictional events, a few were autobiographies or biographies. The most famous antislavery novel written by a woman was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe’s novel, the story of a slave and the family that owned him, was an instant sensation in both the United States and Britain. Published in 1852, debate over the novel filled antislavery papers and

1 Nancy Isenberg’s essay on Lucretia Mott’s political philosophy draws close connections between Mott’s favorite literature and her own writings on women’s intellect and political agency. Nancy Isenberg, “‘To Stand Out in Heresy’: Lucretia Mott, Liberty and the Hysterical Woman,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 127, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 7-34. Other works on women’s identity and literature make similar arguments, including Cathy N. Davidson *Revolution and the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), although her newer, expanded version cited here takes a few steps back from her argument in the original 1986 edition where she claimed novel reading itself as a subversive act.

2 Robert Fannuzi’s *Abolition’s Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) examines the role of *The Liberator* in the politics of American antislavery.

3 Aphra Behn (1640-1689) British author and dramatist.

even local newspapers, and it seems almost everyone had read the book and had an opinion about it. Stowe travelled to Britain in 1852 to accompany the release of the book, in order to protect the copyright, and her speaking engagements and interaction with antislavery women revealed many of the tensions in the antislavery movement. Women’s novels described slavery and its effects on both blacks and whites, and their work sparked discussions both of women writers and antislavery. Women also read the novels, pamphlets and papers, and debated them with one another. Literature and newspapers helped create the transatlantic community of antislavery women, and their novels and newspaper articles transmitted ideas of propriety and women’s role in the antislavery movement.

The earliest non-fiction writings by women on antislavery were pamphlets. Elizabeth Heyrick’s *Immediate Not Gradual Emancipation* was published in 1824, and the initial edition was published without the author’s name. The pamphlet was very well received in both England and the United States, and after the first edition, her name was attached to the pamphlet. Shock over the power of a woman’s writing reverberated through the antislavery movement. Women’s societies published pamphlets regularly, and these pamphlets often addressed issues particularly relating to women’s activities in the antislavery work. Pamphlets about free produce and sugar were common in the 1820s and 30s, including a number of fictional conversations between women about sugar and the cruelty of slavery on the sugar plantation. Other pamphlets included information about projects like work bags, and annual reports of antislavery societies.5 Antislavery women’s societies raised significant

5 “What does your Sugar Cost? A cottage conversation on the Subject of British Negro Slavery” (1826) and a number of other women’s pamphlets included in Mic. 903 Friends Library Anti-Slavery Collection: 18th-19th
funds to pay for the publication and distribution of pamphlets, and also to subscribe to antislavery pamphlet publication series. Pamphlets formed an important part of the work of antislavery women; by writing, publishing and distributing them, the women spread their own message about how women could participate in the antislavery movement through their housekeeping and purchases.

Newspapers carried stories by and about antislavery women. The most widely circulated and longest running of these was William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*. Garrison, and, by extension, his paper supported women’s involvement in the antislavery movement. *The Liberator* carried the earliest calls to women from both sides of the Atlantic, open letters to the “ladies of the United States” and the “women of Great Britain.” From these letters in the early 1830s, *The Liberator*’s coverage of women’s participation expanded through the end of the decade, and culminated with coverage of women’s confrontation with the leaders of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society in London in 1840. In the 1850s nearly every edition of the paper carried news of women’s rights conventions as well as numerous letters about the propriety of women’s participation in reform efforts. Replies to articles and letters were printed from both American and British antislavery activists, although British writers were not always portrayed in the best light. In addition to news on

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Centuries, FHL. Work bags were the small handbags women used to carry their sewing or needlework. Antislavery ladies’ societies embroidered work bags with antislavery symbols and sold them in their communities, and the patterns and instructions on how to make them were widely distributed amongst societies.  


7 Garrison looked down on the majority of British antislavery activists after his experiences at the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention. However, he did maintain friendships with a few of the more liberal British antislavery activists who supported the inclusion of women in the debates. The British contributors to *The Liberator* tended to be sympathizers of Garrison and the female antislavery activists he supported. See Robert
slavery and antislavery around the Atlantic, The Liberator also ran articles from other newspapers, particularly news about politics that impacted antislavery in both the United States and Britain, for election news was of particular interest in both countries. The paper circulated widely on both sides of the Atlantic, with British as well as American women’s antislavery societies subscribing to The Liberator and sharing it among their members. Garrison’s ideas about women’s rights and equality meant that he published letters and articles from women and about women’s concerns regularly. Women wrote back and forth through The Liberator, or women shared their correspondence with the wider antislavery audience by submitting their letters to be printed in the paper. Debates over a variety of issues were brought into the antislavery public eye as friends and acquaintances had their exchanges printed, read and debated.

By the 1850s, The Liberator had become the mouthpiece of both the antislavery movement and the burgeoning women’s rights movement. Letters reporting on women’s rights activities poured in from around the United States and from visitors to Britain. British women did not write to The Liberator as often as American women even though many female antislavery organizations subscribed to the paper. The Liberator printed little news from Britain about women’s rights, even though some agitation was going on there.

Mrs. H. M. Tracy, now in London, in one of her letters to the Pittsburg Saturday Visitor, this notices the labors of an estimable and indefatigable English female philanthropist and reformer:--
In the midst of all this stir about man’s rights, our indefatigable friend, Anne Knight, is pursing her course with the patience of a martyr. She writes letters to Cobden, to Lord John Russell, to

Fannuzi’s Abolition’s Public Sphere (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
Walmsley, and a host more, and publishes them by the hundreds. She is admitted to all classes of society, and whether you find her at the soirees of the nobility, or among the humble builders on the great ‘walls of time,’ there you hear her untiring plea for the equal political rights of women….

Of course, she is laughed at, and laughed about…Her own friends feel most deeply mortified to see her walking so far aside from the beaten track, and most earnestly desire that she will turn her attention to some more popular subject. Her country home is a very paradise of fresh air, sweet scented flowers, and bright sunshine, but she is not for a moment to be charmed aside. She comes to London, and takes lodgings, enduring all the inconvenience and privation that befall a lone woman, and that for the sake of the good cause she so earnestly advocates. She never lets an opportunity slip for impressing her sentiments on others.

…Whether she will live to see any fruit of her labors, it is hard to conjecture. The great obstacle lies with the women themselves. They are too far neglectful of any but present gratification to hope for earnest co-operation till they are roused to a more thorough self-culture.8

Anne Knight was a woman before her time in her women’s rights advocacy. Her constant labors for the rights of slaves and of women filled her life. Knight was maligned by those who did not support her beliefs, but she continued to advocate for women’s right to vote throughout the debates over the reform acts in London, long before any larger women’s rights movement was organized in the 1860s. Character sketches like this one ran in The Liberator on a regular basis, describing both British and American antislavery and pro-slavery individuals. These sketches made readers feel they knew the individuals described, and some even started lifelong correspondences with individuals they read about in the paper. Although there were a number of antislavery newspapers, The Liberator was the most widely read, subscribed to by a number of large women’s antislavery societies in the United States

and Britain. The Liberator served as a forum for encouragement of a variety of reform efforts, linking antislavery, women’s rights and other nineteenth-century reform communities into a network of individuals and organizations working towards social reform.

Writing would become a proper occupation for a middle-class woman by the middle of the nineteenth century. Harriet Martineau, Lydia Maria Child and Catherine Beecher were just a few of the female writers who chimed in on both sides of the antislavery debate. Harriet Martineau agonized over her decision to become a writer rather than a seamstress and embroiderer. Her family’s opinion swayed her from her decision to be a writer for years, and she only really committed herself to writing after her mother died and she was no longer required to help her sew and embroider to support the family. Even after she began to sell her writing, Martineau continued to sew to support herself, and only until her writings began to sell regularly did she stop sewing to earn part of her income. Martineau’s struggle to decide between writing and sewing was not only a result of family pressure, but also of class pressure. Middle-class women did not write for publication in the 1820s, although Martineau’s biographer Deborah Logan argues that the Martineau’s fall into poverty relieved Harriet of some of the burden of her choice; once she was no longer part of the middle class, she was not as strongly bound by the ideals of middle-class womanhood.

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9 For a discussion of newspaper subscription in the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society, see their pamphlet “Statements respecting the American Abolitionists; by their opponents and their Friends indicating the present struggle between Slavery and Freedom in the United States of America. Compiled by the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society, Dublin 1852,” FHL.

stigma was attached to women writing for their living.

Some women participated in the antislavery movement almost entirely through reading, writing and commenting upon popular works of antislavery literature. Harriet Martineau read widely and wrote numerous letters for friends on what she read, commenting on the ideas and the impact they would have in antislavery circles and beyond. She was particularly interested in writings on American slavery, and commented to one friend after she had read William Ellery Channing’s 1835 book on slavery,

The only thing of a general nature wh strikes me painfully is the contempt with which some who ought to know better speak of Amer[ic]a. I know it arises from the treatment of the Slave question in Boston, & is partly the effect of Dr. Channing’s book, & his unconscious revelation of a state society absolutely startling to the Eng[lis]h: but such men such as Sydney Smith ought to know better than to generalize so rashly. 11

Embedded in a wide circle of antislavery and religious writers who debated a variety of issues surrounding antislavery and society in both the United States and Britain, Martineau saw herself as an authority on American slavery after her visit in the 1830s, and she often championed American antislavery efforts to her British correspondents. Her authority stemmed from her firsthand knowledge of American slavery and her long correspondence with antislavery leaders in the United States. Martineau’s identity was deeply tied to her literary work. Her travelogues and newspaper articles allowed her a space outside of her own life as a seamstress and a woman constrained by her family to develop a sense of self that

valued intellect and humanity over labor and femininity.\textsuperscript{12}

Even after she became an invalid in the last decades of her life, Martineau continued to participate in literary circles around a variety of social issues, including antislavery. Her visit to the World’s Antislavery Convention in 1840 expanded her networks and found her yet again spreading antislavery works through women’s networks. She wrote to Anna Jameson, a British antislavery activist,

I write to ask a favour of you,—prompted by some of my venerated anti-slavery friends from Amera, but adding my own petition to theirs. A periodical, —an annual—of excellent quality, called The Liberty Bell, is issued from Massts, & does great service to the cause among a sort of people who will not read A.S. newspapers. You see, no doubt, what has been said in this splendid Convention this week, on the subject of the influence of English writers in Amera. You must know how they regard all you say. If you will send to this period[ica]l, through me, any sort of piece, -(if only a single sentence)-breathing the spirit of freedom by which these noble abolitionists live, you may do more for the cause than you will easily suppose possible. I shall send something; & it would delight me to have the honour of sending a contribution of yours with my own….The editors of this work are Mrs. Child & Mrs. Hy Chapman.\textsuperscript{13}

Well-known writers like Martineau, Lydia Maria Child and Maria Weston Chapman solicited

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\textsuperscript{12} Alison Piepmeier, in her \textit{Out In Public: Configurations of Women’s Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), examines the role of print culture in allowing women to construct identities outside the norms of female life in her chapter on Sarah Josepha Hale. She argues that, “Women’s identities—including their bodily identities—were being formed in great part in the rapidly growing world of the printed word and the printed page” (184). Women read and wrote, interacting with one another and creating identities for themselves that superseded their roles as wives, mothers and daughters. Piepmeier may overstate the extent to which women’s identities were engaged with their reading, but in the case of Martineau and many other antislavery women writers, their identities were certainly deeply based on their writing and engagement with other women and men who held similar views.

\textsuperscript{13} Harriet Martineau to Anna Jameson, 20 June 1840 in Deborah Anna Logan, \textit{The Collected Letters of Harriet Martineau} (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 2:55. This letter was written from the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, although some list Jameson among the attendees.
\end{flushleft}
contributions for the journals and newspapers to which they regularly contributed, and Child and Chapman were well known editors of their own journals. *The Liberty Bell* was unique in American antislavery publications, as it was edited by a women throughout the entirety of its existence. The journal was published annually and sold through the Boston antislavery bazaar. Women writers filled the pages of a number of antislavery publications with short stories, novellas, serial novels, poetry and non-fiction pieces on slavery and its evils.

Although *The Liberty Bell* was the most well known woman-run publication, one of the earliest was *The Humming Bird or Morsels of Information on the Subject of Slavery*, published for 11 months starting in December 1824. The paper was edited by Elizabeth Heyrick and Susanna Watts. *The Humming Bird* was unique in that is was written almost entirely by and for women, had a strong Quaker influence, and emphasized enlightening women to participate in meaningful work in the antislavery community. The paper contained commentary on women’s situation, including this memorable line: “The time is gone when the energies of the female sex were wasted upon laborious and everlasting tasks of needlework, and their literature was confined to cookery books.” The paper routinely discussed antislavery women as “sisters” and focused on their productivity and efforts to move beyond

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14 *The Liberty Bell* was perhaps the most well known of what were called “gift books” produced by antislavery societies. Sold exclusively at the Massachusetts Antislavery Society Annual Bazaar, the book was published for eighteen years, from 1839 to 1857, although its publication was irregular for the last eight years of its existence. A survey of the work shows that over 275 individuals contributed to *The Liberty Bell*, seventy-five of those from Britain, and a good percentage of both the American and British contributors were women. Ralph Thompson, “The Liberty Bell and Other Anti-Slavery Gift-Books,” *The New England Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (March 1934): 154-168.


16 “An Address to the Ladies of Great Britain In Behalf of the Negro Slaves,” *The Humming Bird* 1, no. 7 (June 1825): 195.
traditional tasks in their charity efforts. The majority of articles in the paper appear to have been written by the editors or were reprinted from other sources, and were generally unsigned. The paper printed essays, first-person accounts of the cruelties of slavery and poetry on antislavery, prison reform, poor law reform, religion and a variety of issues that intersected with the antislavery movement in the 1820s. *The Humming Bird* was unfortunately not very successful, lasting for less than a year before it folded. The final issue, published in October 1825, gives no indication of why the paper did not continue. Both Heyrick and Watts, the primary editors of the paper, continued to be active in antislavery until their deaths.  

Women had written antislavery novels since the opening days of the antislavery movement. Aphra Behn’s novel *Oroonoko* told the story of an African prince, enslaved in Africa, freed, and re-enslaved by a British slave trader and sold to the colony of Surinam. Antislavery historians often seat the root of the movement in Britain in the publication of Behn’s novel in 1688, Behn’s treatment of slavery reflecting a new concern born in the radicalism of the English Civil War and an increasing awareness of injustice in the Empire. Historians debate the symbolism of Oroonoko’s slavery in the novel, many believing that Oroonoko’s character stood in for Behn herself, and for women in general. Many early antislavery novels had a main slave character, and many female writers projected their own

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17 Unfortunately, there has been little analysis of the Leicester circle of antislavery women. Heyrick, Watts and their cohort were extremely active in the early to mid 1820s, and produced a significant amount of antislavery literature, petitions and other materials which survive today. Outside of Midgeley’s attention to them in *Women Against Slavery*, the only other substantive work has been done by Shirley Aucott, Leicester historian, and has not been widely published outside of local history pamphlets.

internal struggles on their slave characters. Behn was one of the very first widely-read female authors in Britain, and her attention to slavery promoted a new direction for women’s writing. Due to the more flexible roles available to women in the late seventeenth century, Behn’s authorship was not challenged as unwomanly. Unlike later female authors, like Elizabeth Heyrick, Behn did not publish anonymously. By the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Heyrick was publishing her antislavery pamphlet, *Immediate Not Gradual Emancipation*, anonymously, although subsequent editions bore her name on the title line. Many were shocked when the author’s identity was revealed. By the time of that pamphlet’s publication in 1824, women’s roles had solidified, and writing was not entirely considered proper employment for a middle class lady.\(^{19}\)

It was the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 in the United States, and 1853 in Britain, that engaged antislavery women and men in a debate the crossed the Atlantic and brought into question the usefulness and propriety of women’s popular novels in the movement. The novel was initially serialized in a newspaper, *The National Era*, and then published as a two-volume book. The contract for publication in the United States was negotiated for Harriet Beecher Stowe by her husband, Calvin Stowe,\(^{20}\) with the printer John

\(^{19}\) Anne Fogarty’s essay in *The Discourse of Slavery* (London: Routledge, 1994) provides the most detailed examination of Behn’s novel as a seminal work of antislavery literature and connects it to discourses on authority, nationalism and gender roles in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. For an examination of the role separate spheres played in the lives of women writers, see Monika Elbert’s *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000). Elbert’s collection examines how female writers in the nineteenth century challenged separate spheres while working inside gendered boundaries.

Jewett, a well known abolitionist publisher. Harriet considered bargaining for the book contract as an inappropriate activity for a lady, and her husband was not wholly committed to getting his wife the best contract possible. Calvin Stowe was not a good negotiator, and after the publication of the book, both Calvin and Jewett released their own versions of the negotiation. Despite trouble with the contract, the work was published to wide acclaim and quickly became a bestseller.

Publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* took the country by storm. Reviews of the book appeared in numerous papers, including *The Liberator*. The first article on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ran on July 9, 1852, and it was not complimentary. Henry Wright wrote his article as a letter to Garrison, beginning, “I have just read the above book. It has affected me strongly. It has fascinated and repulsed me at the same time, as a reptile that enchanted you, while it excites your loathing and abhorrence. I had heard so much said in its favor, I tried to like it all, but could not.” Wright goes on to list his objections to the book, mainly Stowe’s use of Christian slaveholders to show that not all slave owners were hard on their slaves. He says of her,

> Harriet Beecher Stowe, by allying Christianity with slavery, in possible harmony, and by opening the Christian church to receive slaveholders into a loving embrace, while they remain such, has done what she could to make that church and that religion the scorn and execration of all that is pure, truthful, compassionate and just. …When the writing of Uncle Tom’s

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21 John P. Jewett (1814-1884) American publisher and antislavery supporter.
23 Henry C. Wright ((1797-1870) American antislavery activist and minister based in Massachusetts. He was a friend of William Lloyd Garrison and a regular contributor to *The Liberator*.
Cabin teaches, as she does, that this is possible, she proves herself to be a reviler of the Son of God, and an efficient enemy to his spirit and his principles.\textsuperscript{25}

Garrison and his friends, including Wright, took offense at some of the scenes in \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}. Stowe used religion to differentiate between the evil slaveholders like Legree, and those like little Eva, who sympathized with the plight of the slave, their religious beliefs tempering the effects of slaveholding on their behavior. Early reviews of the book in \textit{The Liberator} accused Stowe of being soft on slavery and of sympathizing with colonizationists, who wanted to move freed African slaves back to Africa.\textsuperscript{26}

As the months passed, antislavery fervor increased as the novel’s influence spread first throughout the United States, and then in Britain, when Stowe travelled there to publicize the book. Articles defending Stowe’s book began to appear in \textit{The Liberator}, although most were signed with pen names, including the letter that took on Henry Wright’s review of the book, from “Fair Play.”\textsuperscript{27} Garrison’s opinion of \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} seems to have shifted in the last months of 1852. As pro-slavery papers began attacking the book, especially the British edition, which contained a new preface that discussed the book as an antislavery tract, Garrison threw the power of \textit{The Liberator} behind the novel, printing both negative reviews and the numerous supporting letters that poured into the paper. George


\textsuperscript{26} A parallel movement to abolition in the American antislavery community was a group which advocated moving all African slaves to colonies in Africa. Liberia was the most successful and well known colonization project, however the feasibility and ethics of the colonization movement was widely debated among antislavery circles in the 1840s and 50s. James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, \textit{In Hope of Liberty} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 197-202.

\textsuperscript{27} “Reply to H G Wright on ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ by Fair Play” \textit{The Liberator}, September 17, 1852. Vol. XXIII, No. 38, p. 152.
Thompson wrote to the paper to say, “Uncle Tom is doing a great work here. Between 400,000 and 500,000 copies (varying in price from 6d. to 7s. 6d) are already in circulation. Two or our metropolitan theatres are nightly crowded to overflowing by persons anxious to witness a representation of the most striking scenes on the stage.” Uncle Tom’s Cabin sold well in England. The novel was extremely popular and was adapted quickly for the stage, scenes played out for those who could not read. Quite a few of the most well-known antislavery activists in Britain came out to support the novel, and they praised the influence it had on renewing antislavery sentiment in Britain. Stowe was much in demand as a speaker, and the mid-1850s saw a surge of antislavery activity in Britain in the wake of the publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The British antislavery movement was divided internally during the 1850s over a variety of issues, many related to the fallout from the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, and Stowe’s novel and subsequent visit helped to reunite and reinvigorate it.

Stowe knew when she was writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin that it would be controversial. She intended the book to pull on the heartstrings of those who read it, connecting her anguish over the plight of the slave to the deep feelings she felt for her own children, who were very young when she wrote the novel. A significant amount of work has been done on the motivations behind Stowe’s writing, focusing strongly on her own identification with the slave through her domestic work and motherhood. Literary historians have examined Uncle Tom’s Cabin extensively.

28 George Thompson (1804-1878) British antislavery leader and speaker, travelled extensively in the United States.
Tom’s Cabin and other sentimental antislavery novels and deduced a deep connection between the sentimentalized slave and nineteenth-century womanhood. Slaves, depicted as long-suffering, caring and moral individuals, embodied traits that defined nineteenth-century womanhood. Tom, like many other slaves in antislavery novels, portrays the moral traits of a Christian; he is caring, steadfast, loyal and always does the right thing. By depicting the slave in a positive light, antislavery female writers, including Stowe, wrote not only to shed light upon the suffering of the slave, but also to speak out about their own confinement inside the boundaries womanhood and motherhood subscribed them in. Some historians even argue that race and gender were inextricably linked in nineteenth-century literature. To write about slaves was to write about gendered identity, be it an examination of masculinity in novels like The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, or womanhood and desire in the character of Eliza in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Black characters become a space where authors could reaffirm the power of maternal love and other feminine attributes in domesticating masculinity and desire. Antislavery novels, particularly Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin made multiple levels of commentary on the state of freedom in American in the early nineteenth century; they condemned not only race slavery, but also the customs that bound women into the home and family.


Stowe’s novel sparked a number of pro-slavery tracts and novels that were published in the years following its release. The first to be released, *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin*, was written by Mary Eastman, and of all the anti-Uncle Tom novels, sold the most copies, although it did not come anywhere near the sales figures of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.\footnote{Joy Jordan-Lake, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), 64-65.} Novels like *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* attacked antislavery activists as hypocrites, calling them liars and pointing out how they used the products of slavery while advocating the end of the institution. They also claimed that slavery helped the slaves by converting them to Christianity. The plot of *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin* does all it can to contradict the plot of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It is the story of an older female slave, Aunt Phillis, and her relationship with her paternalistic owner and other slaves on the plantation where she lives. The slaves in the novel are animalistic but basically peaceful and unintelligent, while slave owners are benign and caring. Other novels similarly sought to show a kinder side of slavery, depicting paternalistic relationships between kind masters and grateful slaves. Soon after the release of *Aunt Phillis’s Cabin*, dozens of other anti-Uncle Tom novels appeared, many written by Southern women, all of which supported the institution of slavery, playing up the kindnesses and close relationships between slaves and slave owners, particularly the mammy-child relationship. Reviews of these pro-slavery novels appeared in *The Liberator* alongside continuing news of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s success in Europe. Other titles included *Our Nig* and *The Planter’s Northern Bride*. Antislavery writers exclaimed their horror at the content of these novels and their unfortunate popularity. Newspaper articles in *The Liberator* decried the fictional portrayals of slavery and a benign institution. Antislavery writers countered with more of their own
novels, including Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Dred*, although none of these subsequent novels met the popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The power of novels in mid-nineteenth century society was widely appreciated.  

Novels were a particularly female form of literature. In the 1850s, they were rapidly gaining popularity and middle-class approval as an art form, and women had claimed the novel as their own. The publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reawakened the form of the sentimental novel as antislavery propaganda. By 1855, readers of *The Liberator* noted the power these novels had to persuade and engage the otherwise uninterested public. An article ran in the first issue of the paper in 1855,

> The wise man who long ago said, that if he could make the ballads of a nation, he cared little who made its laws, would in our day certainly have so far modified his paradox as to have substituted novels for ballads. The [crease] of ballads has passed away [crease] among reading nations. The potent influence they once exercised on the feelings and opinions of the masses has been superseded by the stronger and subtler excitement of prose fiction. The popular taste requires a stimulant more complex and refined, more *spicy*, than the ballad. That stimulant is supplied by the Novel—the most varied and comprehensive and effective form of literature that has yet been devised.

The intense interest with which the skillful novelist invests his work, its adaptation to the tastes and understanding of all classes of society, and of almost every grade of intellect, thus

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34 See chapters one and three in Joy Jordan-Lake’s *Whitewashing Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for a detailed analysis of anti-Uncle Tom literature in the 1850s and 60s. Jordan-Lake’s analysis focuses on the pro-slavery facet of the opposition to the novel. However, some attacks were leveled against Stowe’s womanhood as well as her politics. Sarah Meer’s *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005) examines the role of anti-Tom literature in the fervor over the novel in the 1850s. Meer’s analysis of anti-Tom literature divides the works into those that rode on the coattails of Stowe’s popularity to bring their own pro-slavery message across and those that engaged in an effort to twist Stowe’s analysis of slavery back on the North and to respond to the accusations Stowe levels at slave owners in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

giving it a vast, and in the most successful instances a universal circulation, renders it a truly potent engine for moving the feelings or moulding the opinions of the people.… In the literature of America, three novels have already appeared, which have exerted, and undoubtedly will yet exert, a prodigious influence upon the solution of the great problem of slavery—*The White Slave, Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Ida May.*

Antislavery writers appreciated the power of the novel to change popular opinion towards their cause after the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin.* The novel developed fully as a literary form in the early nineteenth century, and its use as a tool to shape popular opinion became central to the efforts of some antislavery women. Stowe’s effective use of the literary form to expose the evils of slavery was not a new method for antislavery writers, but unlike earlier antislavery novels, hers was the first to appeal to an audience beyond the antislavery reading public and to gain widespread popular attention. Women were particularly engaged in writing antislavery novels; of the three novels listed in the article quoted above, two were written by women, as were a good number of the pro-slavery novels written in response.

Reading and writing formed a cornerstone of women’s antislavery networks. Pamphlets, newspapers and novels created a common literary connection between American and British antislavery. Reading and writing were activities that did not physically transcend the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Women were able to write and publish their works under pseudonyms if they felt they were acting improperly by stating their opinions in print. Antislavery societies subscribed to pamphlets and newspapers and circulated them among

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their members, allowing women to participate in broader debates within the antislavery movement. *The Liberator* also provided space for women to exchange ideas and to read about other women involved in the antislavery and women’s rights movements. Novels provided yet another way for women to express their opinions. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was the most widely read and well-known antislavery novel, and its popularity spread antislavery sentiment throughout the United States and Britain. In the wake of Stowe’s book, dozens of antislavery and pro-slavery novels were published in the United States. Women authored many of these novels, and women participated in the debates over *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the novels that were published afterward. Writing and reading novels was a particularly female occupation, and the power of the antislavery novels is evident in the uproar they caused both in antislavery circles and amongst the general reading public. Novels, pamphlets and newspapers allowed women to participate in the antislavery movement within their own homes, both through reading and recommending them to friends and family, and through writing to and responding in the newspapers. Pamphlets, newspapers and books created a large part of the network of antislavery women, provided a forum to exchange ideas and a common set of narratives to use in their advocacy for the slave.
1840: The World’s Antislavery Convention, London.

Prior to the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, contact between American and British antislavery women was restricted to letter writing and newspaper articles, except for the rare occasion when individual women traveled between the two countries. Even groups in the United States and Britain met in small organizations of fewer than 100 women in local antislavery meetings. As women began to participate in the Antislavery movement in larger numbers, they began to organize and attend conventions that took them outside their own local meetings, be they women’s organizations or mixed organizations of men or women. Some women attended the larger antislavery conventions in the United States, but rarely, with the exception of Lucretia Mott and the Grimké sisters, did they participate in the full sessions of these meetings prior to the mid-1830s.

The 1840 World’s Antislavery Fair has long been credited as the genesis of the idea that led Stanton and Mott to call the first women’s rights convention in 1848. Stanton herself created this connection in her memoirs and through the collection of records known as the History of Woman Suffrage collected by women’s rights advocates in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Despite this connection made by the attendees of both meetings, the historiography of the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention is quite short, limited to a few journal articles and passing mentions in histories of antislavery and women’s rights. Maynard’s article¹, which appeared in 1960, was the only scholarly analysis of the

convention for thirty years. Maynard’s article summarizes the events at the convention and
some of the issues surrounding the convention that impacted the debates themselves,
including the divisions among American antislavery organizations. However, Maynard does
not move beyond some basic discussion of middle-class liberalism in his analysis, and he has
little to say about the differences between American and British class structure or the wider
implications of the Convention. Maynard’s article is mainly used in this chapter as a source
of information on the narrative of the convention and is not engaged as a source of
historiography. In 1990, Kathryn Kish Sklar published her article, ““Women Who Speak for
an Entire Nation”: American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery
Convention, London, 1840,” where she laid out the possibilities of comparative studies of
American and British women’s antislavery activism and their connection to the political
world as being particularly fruitful for understanding the development of a female political
consciousness in both countries. Her main goal is to determine why British antislavery
women, who had been so admired by their American counterparts until 1840, ceased to be
the leaders and began following American antislavery women’s lead after 1840. Sklar,
however, spends less than half of the article on the convention itself, also covering a huge
range of subject matter from Quaker schisms to antislavery fairs. Sklar packs an amazing
amount of analysis into a fifty-page article. However, she sees antislavery women only
through a lens of gender and political action; the issue of class is lacking from her analysis in

\[2\] See Kathryn Kish Sklar, ““Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation”: American and British Women
Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 59, no. 4
(Nov. 1990): 455-56.

\[3\] Ibid, 461.
this article. Her analysis is not particularly deep, instead hinting at larger issues within the antislavery movement which are examined in detail in many of the earlier chapters of this dissertation. Since 1990, the only other work on the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention published was included in a collection of essays taken from a 2002 conference on slavery and gender, edited by Sklar that rehashes the argument she made in her 1990 article.4

Beginning in 1837, American women began organizing their own conventions to discuss their role in the antislavery movement. In May of that year, the Antislavery Convention of American Women was held in New York City, with Lucretia Mott as chair of 71 delegates and 103 corresponding members. The minutes of the convention are peppered with motions made by leading female antislavery activists. The convention raised a committee to correspond with women in Great Britain regarding the antislavery movement, and H. Sargent, Mrs. A. L. Cox, Mary Grew, Anne Weston, and S. G. Buffam were appointed to the committee. Unfortunately, if the foreign correspondence committee gave a report of their activities, it is not recorded in the official proceedings.5 Although Mott did not attend the first American women’s antislavery meetings, she was sent, along with her husband, as the delegate to the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention by the American Free Produce Association6 and from the Friend’s Association for Advocating the Cause of Slaves.

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6 The American Free Produce Association was a group of men and women based in Philadelphia who advocated the use of free labor goods, mainly sugar and cotton cloth produced without the use of slaves. Lucretia and James Mott were active members of the association and both held officers positions in it at various times.
The certificate of introduction from the Friend’s Association they carried clearly stated that both Lucretia and James Mott were equal contributors to the cause and both meant to sit as delegates from the Friends’ Association for Advocating the Cause of Slaves. Other groups similarly sent female members as their delegates, fully assuming that they would be permitted to sit on the floor of the meeting and participate in the debates. Interestingly, the records of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society contain the letters appointing delegates to the convention, but the letters which contained only female delegates are missing from the collection. American women clearly intended to participate fully in the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention.

Many women in both America and Britain were very excited about attending the World’s Convention. Once notices about the convention appeared in antislavery newspapers nearly a year in advance, women started planning their trips to London. Lucretia Mott wrote to Maria Weston Chapman in May 1839:

Hast thou any prospect of being at the great Anti-Slavery Convention in London next year?—How I shall long to go! Our next Womens Convention must not interfere with the time for leaving the country to attend that meeting. As ‘Chairman’

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7 May 1, 1840. Minutes of the Friends’ Association for Advocating the Cause of Slaves. Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, LOC.
8 MSS Brit Emp S22 G114, RHL. Most notably, the letter naming Lucretia Mott and Sarah Pugh as delegates from the Free Produce Society are missing from the collection, but the two letters introducing the two male delegates are in the collection. It is not clear when the letters were removed from the collection, or if the letters of introduction for the women were not accepted, or if they were disposed of at some point. On the issue of representation, Sklar goes too far in assuming great integration of women in American antislavery societies by their being proposed as delegates from mixed-gender societies. It is likely that these women who were sent as delegates had already decided to go, and to save expense and ensure their ability to participate, the organizations appointed individuals who were already planning to attend rather than ask members to go who might not be able to afford the trip. Kathryn Kish Sklar, “‘Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation”: American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840,” The Pacific Historical Review 59, no. 4 (Nov. 1990): 463.
of the committee in Philada., to make the appointment of time; I would thus early consult thee, whether immediately following the New England Convention will not be the best arrangement we can make, if it will allow time to cross the Atlantic. Dost thou know what month is concluded for that glorious event?9

American women were clearly excited about the idea of attending a convention of antislavery women. They reorganized their own meetings, even those which gathered women from all over America. Chapmen did not attend the convention, but she was clearly interested in the proceedings if the number of letters her friends and correspondents wrote her concerning it is any indication. Male antislavery activists, particularly those in the American Antislavery Society, refused to reschedule their conferences, and Garrison and other leaders of the organization arrived in London after the start of the convention.

British women were also excited to attend the meeting, but they were not expecting to attend as delegates. Mary Ann Rawson, the secretary of the Sheffield Ladies Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery, wrote to John Tredgold10 in the spring of 1840, the secretary of the British and Foreign Antislavery Society:

I should feel very greatly obliged by a few lines containing some information respecting the approaching Anti Slavery Conference. I know nothing but what I have seen in the Anti Slavery Reporter. The meeting on the 12th of June mentioned as the first sitting. How many days are the meetings expected to continue, and will the succeeding ones be public or private? Are ladies to be admitted? I suppose that the request that persons intending to be present will send their names to you may refer merely to the gentlemen but as it may have a more general meaning, and may facilitate

10 John Tredgold (1798-1842) British antislavery advocate and Secretary of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society.
our obtaining comfortable seats &c. I hope I shall not be considered intruding for mentioning that it is my intention, and that of Mrs Henry Walham of Clifton House the President of our Anti-Slavery Association, to go up to town purposely to attend the meetings.

I hope you will favour me with a few lines as soon as convenient. I particularly wish to know where the meetings are likely to be held (I suppose not all in Exeter Hall) as it may decide us where to lodge.\textsuperscript{11}

British women were unsure if they were even welcome to sit in the galleries for this meeting, although clearly they were to be allowed in as spectators, despite what Mott and other American women thought. The status of British anti-slavery women was clearly tenuous, as Rawson did not know for whom the call for attendees was meant, if women would be allowed to attend, or if the meeting was open only to men. Tredgold did not respond to Rawson, or at least his response was not filed. The lack of response to women’s letters appears to have been routine for the officers of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery society, as replies to women’s letters were much less frequent than replies to men’s letters. Rawson apparently received information from somewhere, as she wrote to John Scoble\textsuperscript{12} immediately before the opening of the convention:

I have this afternoon arrived in London (with my little girl) to attend the Anti Slavery Conference. You were so kind as to promise me a ticket, and I should feel greatly obliged to you if you would forward it to me in the course of the day. I saw William Wilson in Nottingham this morning. He hopes to be in town tomorrow. He understood that each delegate would have a Lady’s ticket at his disposal, and he authorized me to apply for one for Mrs. Strange, the friend with whom I am

\textsuperscript{11} Mary Ann Rawson to John H. Tredgold, undated [1840], MSS Brit Emp S18 C9 Tredgold Correspondence, RHL.

\textsuperscript{12} John Scoble (1799-?) British antislavery activist and executive member of the British & Foreign Anti-slavery Society.
staying who will be much interested in attending some of the meetings.\(^\text{13}\)

Rawson travelled to London with her child to attend the meeting, although she had not yet procured visitors’ tickets. It is not clear if the “Lady’s ticket” meant that the only spectators were ladies, or if women had to be sponsored by a delegate, whereas men could be spectators without invitation. Either way, the leading antislavery women in Britain attended the meeting as spectators and did not put themselves forward as delegates like American women did.

The Motts landed in Liverpool on May 28, 1840, and on their very first day in England, met with the mayor of Liverpool and discussed “Women’s duties & responsibilities.”\(^\text{14}\) After a whirlwind tour of the countryside, the Motts proceeded to London where the convention was gathering. They arrived in London on June 6\(^\text{th}\), and on the 7\(^\text{th}\) the issue of women in the convention came to a head. Lucretia Mott and the other women traveling with her and her husband had breakfast with Joseph Sturge,\(^\text{15}\) and the women tried unsuccessfully to submit their appointment as delegates to the London committee. He invited them to tea in the Anti-slavery rooms, where the American women “endeavored to shew him the inconsistency of excluding Women Delegates—but soon found he had prejudged & [he had] made up his mind to act with our New Organization.”\(^\text{16}\)

\(^\text{13}\) Mary Ann Rawson to John Scoble Wed. Evening [postmarked 11 June 1840] MSS Brit Emp S18 C21 Scoble Correspondence, RHL. The letter has a note in another hand that reads: “Mr. Morgan, Please to send Mr. Wilson and Mr. Scobles Tickets for Ladies to the above applicant J H T.”


\(^\text{15}\) Joseph Sturge (1793-1859) British antislavery activist and Quaker.

\(^\text{16}\) Frederick B. Tolles, ed., *Slavery and the ‘Woman Question’* (Haverford, PA: Friends Historical Association,
organization was the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which was opposed to women’s public speaking (among other issues arising in antislavery circles) and thought that women speakers detracted from efforts to free the slaves.

British women were in attendance at tea as well. Lucretia Mott met Elizabeth Pease at this meeting, and she accompanied her and the other American women delegates on an outing to a bonnet maker that afternoon where Pease discussed orthodoxy among the Quakers with Mott. This must have been a very interesting conversation, as Mott was a follower of the Hicksite division of American Quakers, and she had strong feelings against the conservative British Quakers, as she noted in her journal on May 31st: “we mourned such a declension from the simplicity of the Faith of the Society of Friends.” She describes British meeting houses as overly ornate and comfortable and the Quaker women in high bonnets and veils in the meeting.17 The World’s Antislavery Convention brought together Friends from a variety of traditions, and as such pointed out divisions amongst adherents to that faith. Much of Mott’s journal is underscored with her judgments and observations on the British Quakers she encountered. Pease also attended an evening discussion at the Antislavery Society’s rooms with Mott and Elizabeth Neall, another American female delegate. Neall called significant attention to herself by insisting that if the convention were

1952), 22. According to Maynard, Sturges and his colleagues were opposed to women’s participation and had been forewarned of the women’s’ appointment by letters from anti-Garrisonians in the United States. The Garrisonian delegation also arrived significantly later in the spring, after the planning sessions ended, and their absence from the early planning stages may have biased the other members against their cause. The “New Organizationalists” were anti-slavery activists who split off from the more radical abolitionists or Garrisonian anti-slavery activists due to their objections to the more radical groups insistence on women’s equal participation, insistence on immediate emancipation, and the inclusion of blacks in religious and anti-slavery meetings.

17 Ibid, 16-17
held in the United States, women would not have been denied the floor. Not all the men in attendance disagreed, and the refusal to seat women would insinuate itself into every conversation held at or during the antislavery conference.

Religious discussion also permeated the social events surrounding the convention. Mott and her husband attended meeting regularly and often went to Anglican and other services to see how they were conducted. Mott had little nice to say about either British Quaker or Protestant services. She criticized Quaker meetinghouses for their opulence and Anglican services for their formality and thought the meetings a “mockery for sensible, intelligent people to employ children to chant &c.” At breakfast at the lodgings of the Pease family on June 8, James and Lucretia Mott were challenged as to rumors of their not being Friends. Lucretia “presented our certificates—explained some things—found them ignorant & bigoted, but kind in feeling after disclaiming religious fellowship.” Here again the Hicksite schism produced significant confusion and perturbation among British Quakers. The Quaker leaders of the convention had chosen to side with American conservative Friends, and attempts to have Hicksites disassociated from Quaker antislavery groups were fended off with significant irritation by the American delegates.

The issue of women’s exclusion came to a head at a party on the night of June 9th. The Motts, Elizabeth Pease and Anne Knight were among the guests at a party at the home of

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19 Ibid, 24.
20 Ibid, 25.
a London antislavery activist, whose name Mott did not record. William Crewdson and
William Ball arrived at the party with the official vote of the convention organizers, “that
Women were to be rejected.”

Discussion at the party over the decision went past midnight, and the next day Mott called the female delegates together to plan a protest. That afternoon, at tea in the Antislavery rooms, Mott was called upon to speak on free produce. She reports in her journal that she replied that we had been asked why we could not get the gentlemen to say all we wished, so now I would request Henry Grew or James Mott to speak for me—[Colver] insisted on my going on—gave some rubs on our proposed exclusion—cries of hear!, hear!,—offended Colver—told me I should have been called to order if I had not been a woman.

The women were excluded from participating in debates on the convention floor, but they had no qualms about bringing those debates back to the tea rooms and boarding houses they frequented during their stay in London. Before the official opening of the convention on June 12th, those women denied their seats by the organizers wrote a protest and submitted it to William Boultbee, one of the seated delegates to the convention. The protest affirmed the endeavor of the women to work as equals for “Universal Liberty” in any way they could while still following the instructions they received from their constituent organizations. They also asserted that the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which sponsored the convention, did not have the final say about the validity of their claims. Their protest insisted

23 Frederick B. Tolles, ed., Slavery and the ‘Woman Question’ (Haverford, PA: Friends Historical Association, 1952), 27. Unfortunately, Mott’s speech was interrupted by a report that Queen Victoria had been shot at while riding in Hyde Park.
24 William Boultbee (life dates unknown) British antislavery activists.
that the convention itself decide whether or not women delegates would be seated as full members.\(^{25}\)

Once the protest had been lodged, several men were sent to try to persuade the women not to “offer ourselves to the Convention.” Several of the men, mostly British but also a few American men, were particularly vehement in their insistence that the women give up their attempts to be seated. Nathaniel Colver, a Baptist minister from New York, who Mott notes as extremely outspoken and a constant thorn in her side throughout her journal, was “rather bold in his suggestions—[I] answered & of course offended him.”\(^ {26}\) The parade of male delegates in front of the women continued for quite some time and Mott records a few:

W. Morgan & Scales informed us ‘it wasn’t designed as a World Convention—that was a mere Poetical license,’ & that all the power would rest with the ‘London Committee of Arrangements’. Prescod of Jamaica (colored) thought it would lower the dignity of the Convention and bring ridicule on the whole thing if ladies were admitted—he was told that similar reasons were urged in Pennsylvania for the exclusion of colored people from our meetings—but had we yielded on such flimsy arguments, we might as well have abandoned our enterprise. Colver thought Women constitutionally unfit for public or business meetings—he was told that the colored man too was said to be constitutionally unfit to mingle with the white man. He left the room angry.\(^ {27}\)

Thus a few American women delegates had thrown the antislavery convention into chaos. Even at this early stage, women’s exclusion was equated to the exclusion of blacks from

\(^{25}\) Ibid, 28.
\(^{26}\) Nathaniel Colver (1794-1870) American Baptist minister and member of the American & Foreign Antislavery Society.
\(^{27}\) Ibid, 29.
religious meetings. Already women and their supporters were using the language of antislavery to discuss women’s rights and their position in the movement. At this point, British women were not involved, but once the convention opened the next day, the American women quickly found allies among the other non-members seated behind the rail.

From the first day of the convention’s sitting, June 12th, Mott was accompanied in the gallery by Anne Knight, Elizabeth Pease and a bevy of other women to which she had been introduced in the days leading up to the convention. Wendell Phillips, whose wife Ann was among the female delegates denied her seat, petitioned that the wording of the original invitation, which invited the “friends of the slave” to meet, had implicitly included women and that a committee should be formed to discuss the matter. The ensuing discussion occupied the majority of the first day of the meeting, with focus more on the position of women in reform movements and in society at large than on the goals of antislavery. Of the forty American men present, only half supported women being seated as voting members of the committee, and only three British men spoke out in favor of the women’s case. The overwhelming majority of British delegates voted to keep women off the floor of the convention. The women were offered seats in the gallery, and the convention attempted to

28 Wendell Philips (1811-1884) American antislavery activist.
29 Douglas H. Maynard, “The World’s Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840,” The Mississippi Valley Historical Review 47, no. 3 (Dec., 1960): 459-60. Sklar makes a similar point in her article; however, she sees the few British men who supported the women’s claim initially, and then changed their minds, like Daniel O’Connell as confused by the women’s boldness as something that would never happen in British antislavery. Kathryn Kish Sklar, “‘Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation’: American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840,” The Pacific Historical Review 59, no. 4 (Nov. 1990): 471. Interestingly, the handwritten minutes of the Convention, which are in the collection at the Rhodes House Library, are missing the first several pages, including all of the material regarding the debate and vote on the female delegates. The official published minutes also do not contain any mention of the issue of women delegates or the debate. Notes in the file with the minutes indicate that the committee that undertook to publish the minutes
return to its original purpose: organizing international cooperation in ending slavery.

One woman was allowed to sit on the floor of the chamber on the first day of the proceedings. Mary Clarkson, daughter-in-law and niece of Thomas Clarkson the British antislavery activist and the honorary chair of the convention, sat on the platform with her elderly uncle and her nine-year-old son, Thomas Clarkson, Junior. Mary Clarkson attended the entire convention with Thomas Clarkson, Senior, as his assistant and aide. Thomas Clarkson was over ninety years old and quite feeble by the time of the convention, and it was one of his last public appearances. Mary wrote her mother and several other friends a number of letters, still extant in the Clarkson family papers, and detailed her participation in the meeting and her thoughts on the American women. She wrote to her mother on the night of the opening of the convention,

We just this moment returned from the Great Meeting and altho’ I was overcome almost to fainting & my head hurt so violently I could scarcely get my breath, I would not have left it on any account If it were only the exhibition of heartfelt kindness from every one we met it would have been enough to have compensated for the suffering of going but such glorious ending of a public life was I should think seldom permitted before. … we set in the carriage about twenty minutes when we arrived at Exeter Hall. Joseph Sturge then conducted him & us (Mrs. Holdane, Mrs. Notg. Selina Alfred, myself & Tommy) you see all the gentlemen of the party avoided us) to the ladies committee room which was unaccompanied. The Duchess of Sutherland & Mrs. Fry had just left it. We all remained there for a few minutes, but then it was thought desirable or the platform seats were filling rapidly that all but my self, Tommy & Uncle should go into the meeting—… I do not think he is at all the worse for it, he means to go to London tomorrow to call

voted to leave out all mention of women delegates or any of the controversy surrounding the American delegates in the official minutes. See MSS Brit Emp S22 G114 RHL.
upon J. Baxter’s committee & I believe to call on the American Ladies again…. It looked rather strange, when everyone else was full of attention to dr. uncle, considering it the last time he would appear in public, that not one gentleman from this house & a few ladies only as possible, should attend him there, & to me seemed to think there were no names attached to the Society.  

As a member of the Clarkson family and assistant to Thomas Clarkson, Mary was allowed to sit on the podium although she did not speak. Her participation as a help meet apparently did not violate ideas of proper women’s behavior. As his last public appearance, Clarkson was feted and treated with great consideration. Mary also gives us information to which the American women apparently were not privy: that the ladies had their own conference or sitting room. None of the letters or journals of the American women delegates mention that the women had their own space at Exeter Hall to meet separately from the men. Mott mentions that she tried to organize a women’s meeting but was unsuccessful, either indicating that this room was used only as a sitting room, or that she was not invited to the women-only meetings held at Exeter Hall. She does not comment on the American women’s petition to be seated in any of her letters, although some of the other letters in the collection note that the women’s petition was not heard until after they left Exeter Hall, but she was apparently aware of the debate. W. F. Smith, a family friend of the Clarkson’s, wrote to Thomas Clarkson’s wife,

30 Mary Clarkson to Mother, 12 June 1840. Add. 41276A Thomas Clarkson Papers Vol. VII, BL. Mary Clarkson’s appearance on the podium is never mentioned in other works on the convention. It is not clear if the authors of the two main articles on the convention did not know these letters existed in the British Library’s collection of the Clarkson family papers, or if they chose to ignore her appearance as only that of a personal assistant to her uncle. Harriet Sutherland-Levenson-Gower, Duchess of Sutherland (1806-1868) British noblewoman and antislavery activist.
When TC was gone the American Ladies stood up for their rights of speech, as delegates, & as women generally & the American men warmed. Therefore & there was uproar. But this I only hear just now from your daughter—It was carried by a majority that the Ladies should not be on the Committees, now why not, if it is the Custom of their Country, You are sure Angelina Grimke would do herself well & why throw cold water on their gallant hearts. Could there not be exclusively lady committees privately conducted—You are tolerably certain the example wd. not be catching but perhaps it is feared that ridicule might prevail on the whole thing, by such proceedings.  

British men were confused by the American women’s insistence on being seated, and they feared that if the American women were seated as delegates and allowed to participate, British women would demand to do the same. Concern was also expressed that the antislavery movement would be subject to yet more ridicule if women were allowed to participate fully in the convention. Despite their fear of women speaking in public, the writer’s mention of Angelina Grimké indicates how well known American antislavery women were in British circles by 1840. The British public apparently was not prepared for women to speak in public or participate in debates although they were quite happy to have women do fundraising and listen to the men speak.

Thomas Clarkson paid the American women a separate visit and was quite sympathetic to their cause. Abby Kimber’s letter replying to his request for the meeting included an expression of her thanks for his interest in their cause and his support of their efforts to participate in the antislavery movement. Kimber remarks that they appreciated Clarkson’s support of “a cause which we believe to be worthy of every sacrifice, and in

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32 Abby Kimber (1790-1871) American antislavery activist.
which we are happy to labor in every way, in which we may be permitted.”

The tone of the letter makes it clear that Kimber resented having to ask permission to participate in the antislavery cause, something to which the American women were not accustomed. The meeting between the Americans and the Clarkson family apparently was successful and enjoyable for all, despite the disappointment the American women felt in being refused their seats. Mary Clarkson wrote to her mother,

We saw the American Ladies by appointment last night. I think I feel worse from the excitement (such an exciting scene I should not have conceived of) of that visit then from the meeting itself. I could not but catch their enthusiasm and though the time he was more than normally present in my mind who is never absent, such has the strength of the excitement that the outside of one was carried along with the general stream of feeling, and then I fell back painfully in to my inmost self. Dear uncle wrote to the ladies himself to appoint the meeting & at eight o’clock we set off to pay the visit. All the gentlemen had been collected we found a large room crowded containing thirty people or more all waiting to receive him. It was nothing short of adoration. Each lady set by him a few minutes & I am sorry to say they made almost as much of Tommy as they did of Grandpapa—he told them he wanted to go to America to see them—they presented him with a note and a little book. Poor grandpapa’s head has been half cleaved of his hair I thought he would be none less as I could off for them & not only for them but for their friends in America & their wives & children. Tommy had a good portion taken off his head, one lady at last said Uncle “I love some of yr hair sir, I have seen you, have shaken hands with you, & talked with you but one thing more I must have” & these kissed him—we were detained there an hour and a half.

Thomas Clarkson had been well known as a flirt and a charmer when he was younger, and apparently he continued in this role well into old age. He was fawned over by the American

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33 Abby Kimber to Thomas Clarkson, 14 June 1840 Add. 41276A Thomas Clarkson Papers Vol. VII, BL.
34 Mary Clarkson to Mother, 15 June 1840. Add. 41276A Thomas Clarkson Papers Vol. VII, BL.
women, and so was his grandson. The American women collected locks of both Thomas, Senior and Junior’s hair for souvenirs. These evening meetings seemed to take up most of the American and British women’s time, as they spent time hearing speeches and socializing with people about whom they had only read in antislavery papers. Mary Clarkson appears to have been quite shy, although she apparently believed in the women’s cause and participated in some of the informal discussion surrounded the “woman’s question.” Her position as the only woman allowed to sit on the platform concerned her, and she worried about offending the American women.

I and Tommy went to the convention this morning and staid there an hour, though pressed by many of the Committee to take my seat again as the only lady on the little Platform, I could not make up my mind to so conspicuous a position. Mr Charlesworth conducted me, but in endeavoring to take me amongst the ladies he took me unknowingly among the best seats of the men delegates, the very place prohibited to the American ladies, though the Gentlemen all begged me to remain & they gave up their seats, I moved round the barrier & some ladies divided their seats with me. I was next to Mrs. Ossie, Julia Smith soon found her way to me, and not being able to get up to the American ladies I delivered to her a packet for Lucretia Mott, the leader of them containing twenty slips of paper with part of a sentence of dr. Uncle’s speech (be not discouraged, go on, persevere to the last) written in his own hand and signed by himself.35

Clarkson’s position as the family member of one of the most famous antislavery men gave her special access to the convention floor that was denied to other women. The male delegates were apparently happy to have her sit among them and saw no impropriety in it, despite her lack of a male companion. British men had no apparent objection to women

35 Mary Clarkson to Mother, 16 June 1840. Add. 41276A Thomas Clarkson Papers Vol. VII, BL\
sitting on the floor of the convention, but to their participation in the debates. Mary Clarkson was very aware of the awkward position in she was placed in relationship to the American women. The boundaries set for women at the World’s Convention were very clear, and the female attendees were careful to abide by them, not only to avoid angering the men or endangering the convention, but also to avoid offending one another.\(^{36}\)

After a week of listening to debates from the sidelines, Mott and other women tried to organize a separate meeting for the women. She noted,

> J. Sturge came to us—doubted whether the ladies would have a meeting—they feared other subjects would be introduced and he partook of the fear. Some were then invited to meet us at our lodgings—much disappointed to find so little independent action on the part of the women. Called a Meeting of the Delegates in the evening—so that such as were dissatisfied might prepare a protest.\(^{37}\)

The organizers of the convention were so terrified that they had unleashed a debate over the role of women in society they refused to allow women to meet within the convention hall on their own to talk about antislavery issues. Elizabeth Pease remarked in a letter to a friend, that “Every obstacle was thrown in the way & no public opportunity was ever afforded them [the American women] for a free interchange of sentiment with their English sisters. I regretted it deeply and several of us mourned over our utter inability to help it-had we been at our homes, we might have exerted an influence, but here we felt ourselves to be

\(^{36}\) Kathryn Gleadle discusses the presence of Mary Clarkson in the painting made of the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, but does not examine the meaning of her presence at the meeting. \textit{Borderline Citizens} (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 257.

\(^{37}\) Frederick B. Tolles, ed., \textit{Slavery and the ‘Woman Question’} (Haverford, PA: Friends Historical Association, 1952), 38
powerless."³⁸ The American women then attempted to take matters into their own hands and hold their own meetings in private accommodations. In the United States as in Britain, separate women’s meetings were the norm even in 1840, and women discussed antislavery and other political issues without the concern that they would conspire against men. Instead, Mott was forced to hold private meetings in her lodging house, where antagonistic delegates like Nathaniel Colver, could intrude on their discussions if they met in a public part of the house. Despite her offering to host a meeting for women on antislavery, few besides the delegates from Pennsylvania appeared, and she was left feeling as if the British women were not as motivated on their own part as were the Americans. She wrote on June 20th, “Our Free Produce society will have to double their diligence & do their own work—and so will American Abolitionists generally—& especially women.”³⁹ Visiting Britain revealed the divide between British and American women’s style of involvement in the antislavery movement.

Despite their exclusion from the official proceedings as anything but spectators, it is clear that women ran the social scene surrounding the meeting. Mott’s journal is peppered with the names of women, often accompanied by their husbands or fathers, who invited her to dinners, teas and sat with her during the debates. Many of the delegates had their wives or entire families with them in London, and they all socialized in the evenings after the meetings concluded.

One faction remained solidly with the women delegates. In protest of the women’s

³⁹ Ibid, 40.
exclusion, William Lloyd Garrison and the other delegates from the Garrisonian organizations refused to take their seats after they arrived halfway through the proceedings. Garrison’s refusal to sit on the floor of the convention, instead sitting with Mott and the other American women, provided a direct insult to the organizers of the convention. If Garrison and his followers had not been delayed by bad weather and their own convention in the United States, they would have arrived in London before June 12th and perhaps could have swung the vote for the women through their influence. Mott and the other ladies did not ask Garrison and his fellows to refuse their own seats on their behalf, but Garrison insisted, and his refusal to sit on the floor solidified the Garrisonian and abolitionist position on the side of women’s rights. Garrison supported the women in more than just his refusal to take his seat. At a dinner party during the course of the convention, Garrison spoke to the assembled company. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was new to the antislavery movement and attending the convention with her new husband, was appalled at his apparent inability to remain on topic.

Garrison arrived on the fourth day of the meeting, but as the female delegates were not received and were not permitted to take their seats as delegates, he refused to take his, consequently his voice was not heard throughout the meeting. However last evening he opened his mouth, & forth came, in my opinion, much folly,—a party was given to foreign delegates at the Crown & anchor Hotel (a famous place for whig celebrations to which we all adjourned from Exeter Hall—there in a spacious room, where Fox used to give great dinners to his whig friends, a feast was spread for us after

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41 Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) American feminist and antislavery activist. She attended the 1840 World’s Convention on her honeymoon.
which instead of toasts & jokes we had antislavery speeches. Garrison took this opportunity to relieve his full heart. This being a social occasion, & in no way connected with the convention he thought he might do so without sacrificing principle. This was his first appearance & he was received with many cheers, but oh! how soon by his want of judgment did he change the current feeling of his audience,—a general look of disappointment was visible among the English elsewhere he had spoken long. The chairman (for these social meetings which are frequent here are conducted with great order) was obliged to call him to order for wandering from the subject of conversation, which by general consent was to be slavery. Garrison touched dwelt I might rather say, on woman’s rights, poor laws, temperance, &c &c and last of all stirred up the ire of Dr Hoby, he accused him of having proved recreant to the cause of abolition when in America—up jumped Dr Hoby red in the face, & declared that he had always acted right (would that all men could say that)—then came a scene which ended by the two gentlemen complimenting e[ach] other, shaking hands & then at the request of the chairman sitting down.42

Garrison and the members of the American Antislavery Society were already not very popular at the convention. Their views on woman’s rights, religion, immediate emancipation and a host of other controversial topics clashed directly with those held by the hosts of the convention, and their outspokenness offended many of the other delegates. After the first day of the convention, an unspoken agreement had been reached not to bring up controversial topics in order to ensure that the business of the convention would be accomplished, and Garrison’s speech clearly violated this unspoken agreement.

If the experience of Lucretia Mott and the other female delegates in London had ended on June 23rd with the close of the convention, women’s transatlantic discussion of

antislavery might have died with it, if Mott’s gloomy outlook on the efficacy of British antislavery women can be believed. Fortunately, the day after the convention closed, a general antislavery meeting was held. The meeting of the 24th of June at Exeter Hall included nearly every person present at the World’s Antislavery Convention, including those delegates not permitted to take their seats. Mott found the treatment of women at this meeting to be hypocritical after hearing several weeks worth of arguments about how women should not be seen or heard in public. Elizabeth Fry, a noted prison reformer, and the Duchess of Sutherland were given seats of honor at the opening of the meeting. More surprisingly, Lucretia Mott was called upon to speak, and despite the attempts of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society to prevent her from speaking, the crowd insisted on hearing her.\textsuperscript{43} She spoke at some length about the boycotting of slave produce, something that was considered particularly important to women antislavery activists in their role as household consumers. Garrison also spoke, and Mott thought he acquitted himself well.\textsuperscript{44}

Even after being allowed to speak, Mott’s opinion of the way women were treated, and the way they behaved, in Britain was dim, particularly within antislavery circles. Only two days after the Exeter Hall meeting, Mott convened a “Company of Anti-Slavery Ladies at our lodgings—stiff—poor affair—found little confidence in women’s action either separately or con-jointly with men, except as drudges—some sectarian zeal manifested.”\textsuperscript{45} Compared to the American Convention of Antislavery Women that Mott had chaired only

\textsuperscript{43} Frederick B. Tolles, ed., \textit{Slavery and the ‘Woman Question’} (Haverford, PA: Friends Historical Association, 1952), 45-47.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 48.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 49.
three years prior to her London visit, her experience with the women in Britain seems to have left her disappointed and concerned for the continuation of women’s involvement in the antislavery movement. How much of her disappointment was caused by her own attitude and derision of the less aggressive British women in difficult to ascertain. Sarah Pugh, Lucretia Mott’s co-delegate from the Free Produce Society, also expressed her despair over British women’s lack of initiative in forming their own meetings and discussing their own actions in conjunction with the larger convention. “Alas for our meeting on 7th day evening! Some 20 or 30 women assembled. But they had little to tell us-and had but little desire to hear anything we had to say-seemed very insensitive-fearing they might get ‘out of their sphere’ should they speak aloud even in a social circle-yet seemed quite pleased with themselves to think they had granted us a meeting!!! Peace be with them! Excuse that last sentence. I am sorry it is written - it is not kind to wish them rest and peace in a false position.”

British women were concerned that the Americans’ forwardness might reflect poorly upon their own behavior at the convention. Socially as well as politically, the American women stepped outside what was considered proper within British society. However, by this point in the convention, one must read Mott and Pugh’s letters and diary with some skepticism. Their opinions of British women seemed to reflect the response to the treatment they received as Hicksite Quakers than as antislavery activists. Mott and Pugh were formidable figures, dressed in somber, dark clothing and bonnets, stern and strongly outspoken in their arguments for the slave. It is not hard to imagine that the British women,

46 Sarah Pugh to Richard and Hannah Webb, July 2, 1840, Ms.A.1.2.,v.9, p. 66, BPL. Sklar sees this letter as the expressing Mott and Pugh’s decision not to work with the British women’s antislavery groups after this point, but instead to concentrate their efforts on individual women who sympathized with their goals.
whose societies spent their time fundraising, were intimidated by the American women’s zeal and physical presence. In a letter to Maria Weston Chapman, written from Dublin on July 29th, Mott wrote:

Of course we would not ‘thrust ourselves forward’ into such a meeting, but having come so far to see what could be done for the slave, & being thus prevented doing anything ourselves, we were willing to be mere lookers on & listeners from without, as by so doing we should be the means of many more women having an invitation to sit as spectators—which we found was accounted a very high privilege in this land—by their women who had hitherto most submissively gone forth into all the streets, lanes, highways & byepaths to get signers to petitions, & had been lauded—long & loud for this drudgery, but who had not been permitted even to sit with their brethren, nor indeed much by themselves in public meetings—having transacted their business, as we were informed, by committees. In vain we endeavored to have a public meeting called for women—although a few Anne Knight, Eliz Pease &c—did all they could to promote it. At length we gave up in despair & left London satisfied—that ‘when for the time they ought to be teachers, they have need that one teach them which be the first principles’ of Human Freedom…We had many opportunities with members of the ‘new organization’, & with the com. & with individuals, to present them their injustice to us to the cause of the slave as well as their on inconsistency…That the feelings of the British public would not have been as outraged as we were given to understand, by our admission, is abundantly evinced in the readiness with which I have at the meeting at the Town Hall was as heartily cheered as if I had been worth hearing.⁴⁷

Her frustration with the subordinate place women took in the British antislavery movement is clear. And yet, the majority of the opposition she faced to her public speaking came from a select group of American and British antislavery activists, and not from the general British

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public. After this experience, it was clear to Mott that British women were denied the right to sit in antislavery meetings by the men who ran those meetings, not by the general public. Unlike in the United States, where mobs broke up promiscuous meetings in outrage over women speaking and preaching to men in a public setting, British women were not afraid of popular reaction to their appearance in mixed company. Instead, British women were restricted from participating publicly in these events by their peers. Middle-class ideas of proper behavior for women restricted their behavior, not the fear of violence against them. Mott’s positive experience speaking in front of the Exeter Hall meeting gave greater weight to the refusal of the conservative wing of the antislavery movement to permit women access to public space. Safety was an issue in the US, but Mott did not see any reason to worry about violence in London; instead, the pressure came from upper-middle-class men who were the mainstay of the antislavery movement. Worse yet, the restriction was supported by middle-class women who did not challenge the barriers in the same way American antislavery women had been doing for the years leading up to 1840. The 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention pointed out not only the relatively progressive nature of the American abolitionist movement, but real differences in social norms between the United States and Great Britain. The experience also galvanized these American women to take their own domestic activism further. The experiences of Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had also attended the convention with her husband, led them to organize and hold the first women’s rights meetings in the United States. The assertiveness of American women in comparison to British women in this instance highlights the real difference between women’s readiness for public and political activism in the mid-nineteenth century.
Upon their return to the United States, those antislavery societies that had sent female
delegates to the convention were livid to learn that their delegates had been refused full
participation. The American Free Produce Society minutes clearly reflect members’ ire
towards the lack of respect paid to the two female delegates they sent.

Whereas this association having in compliance with the
invitation of the committee appointed a delegation to attend
[the Worlds Antislavery Convention] and learning by the report
of our delegates that two of them were excluded from the
meeting then held on account of their sex, therefore, Resolved
that in the rejections of a part of our delegate by that body this
association cannot but put themselves deeply aggrieved.
Resolved that the course pursued by our excluded delegates
meets with our cordial approval and that James Mott, who with
some others offered a protest against that act of the mutiny by
which it refused to allow regularly nominated delegates to sit
with them and take such part in their deliberations as their
connections of duty might lead them to do, did but anticipate
the wishes of this association.48

Other members of the Free Produce Society, most of them Quakers, saw the exclusion of
Lucretia Mott and Sarah Pugh to be a slight to their organization, and an insult to their
members. Free Produce was a particularly female concern, although the society had both
male and female members. The exclusion of the delegates and the lack of interest in the
topic was a source of dissatisfaction to Mott, who wished to talk about purchasing power and
the importance to the antislavery cause of buying items grown or made without slave labor.
The Free Produce Association also sent a letter, the text of which was not included in the
minutes, to the organizers of the World’s Antislavery Convention, expressing their discontent

Members of the Free Produce Society were informed of the problems encountered by their female delegates through a letter, sent by Lucretia Mott and Sarah Pugh upon their return to Philadelphia. Accounts of the meeting’s proceedings and the centrality of the “woman question” to the discussion had filled the antislavery papers for much of the month of July, as news of the convention reached the United States.

To the free produce association to assemble at Philadelphia 10 Mo. 1840

The women delegates appointed by you on 10th month last to attend the Convention to be held in London respectfully report that near the time appointed they proceeded to that city, but were there informed, as you are probably aware, by a committee of the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society that women would not be permitted by them to sit as members of the Convention about to assemble in that city. Invitations were however, given us to be present as spectators. Though denied the right of participating in their deliberations, we listened with interest to the discussions on the subject in which this society is most deeply interested.

Many present appeared to find the demand of the slave to be just, that those professing to be his friends shall not share in the gains of his oppressors; yet beyond this expression of opinion little was done to aid us in our plans of procuring goods the product of requited labor. Of this however we leave those of your delegation to speak who were permitted to be your representatives, regretting that as much as was expected from us, more was not in our own power.

Respectfully
Lucretia Mott
Sarah Pugh
Phila. 10 month 20 1840

50 The letter, reproduced below, was dated October 20, 1840 from Philadelphia and is included in the Minutes of the American Free Produce Association for their second annual meeting.
This letter, presented as the female delegates’ report on the proceedings, excluded much of the detail recorded by Mott in her journal. The issue of Free Produce was not much discussed at the convention, possibly because free produce was one area where women were much more heavily involved as the purchasers of most household goods. Mott and Pugh had also been tasked with finding connections to suppliers of free-labor goods, which they were unable to do, given their limited and stilted contact with the majority of British abolitionists. The ill treatment these Quaker women received in London comes through in the tone of the letter, and their discouragement is evident.

The 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention provided a unique opportunity for American and British women to meet face-to-face. Perhaps more significantly, the Convention brought the issue of women’s public participation in political activities to a head in both the United States and Great Britain. Although Mott was disappointed in British women’s lack of effort to obtain positions in mixed organizations and the right to speak in public, it is clear from her later correspondence with young British women that the Americans had quite an impact on British antislavery organizations. As more and more women realized that they and the causes within antislavery they championed (like free produce and antislavery fairs) were not being given equal, or in some cases any, weight in mixed-company meetings, they began to speak out for their own rights as well as those of slaves.
Transatlantic Connections: Antislavery Families and Societies

Prior to 1840, communication between antislavery individuals and groups was limited to family trips and letters between individuals and associations. The frequency of letters was greatly impacted by the growth of the postal system in the United States and the decrease in the cost of sending mail across the Atlantic.\(^1\) After the cost of transatlantic mail dropped to a reasonable sum, antislavery letters became more and more frequent, and individuals and organizations traded pamphlets and newspapers readily across the ocean. Family was essential to antislavery efforts from the very beginning. Even before women’s direct involvement in the movement, their participation in hosting travelling antislavery men, helping to answer their husbands or father’s correspondence, acting as hostesses for gatherings of antislavery activists and a myriad of other duties fell to the wives and daughters of antislavery men. Letters were often addressed to the entire family, clearly intended either to be read aloud to the entire family or passed amongst them as news of the movement was intermingled with news of friends and relatives, marriages, births, illnesses and deaths. Women also travelled with their families on the antislavery speaking circuits, and visited other antislavery wives. This sort of support often led to women cooperating together to do their own antislavery work, the precursors to the powerful women’s antislavery organizations.

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of the 1830s.\textsuperscript{2}

Once the cost of post began to fall, and women organized locally into antislavery societies separate from the men, they began to reach out to one another without formal introduction. The earliest correspondence occurred through newspaper articles, appealing to women to join the cause or to contribute items to the various antislavery fairs held regularly by groups in the United States. These early correspondences are formal and stilted; women were not entirely sure how to address their sisters across the ocean. After many women met at the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention in London, the tone of the letters changed, and became considerably more friendly and newsy. These connections formed in 1840 were strengthened over further visits in the 1850s. Within the United States, women increased travelling to visit other antislavery families and attend conferences, bringing news of antislavery up and down the eastern coast. As civil war loomed in the United States, and the interest in antislavery efforts in Britain declined, letters about antislavery tapered off; many of these long term friendships either died away, or their correspondence shifted to other mutual interests.

From the very earliest days of antislavery efforts in Britain, women were essential to antislavery men’s communications and travel plans. Women hosted antislavery men and often other antislavery wives in their homes while they travelled, sending news of who was travelling where and when they could be expected to other families around Britain. From the

\textsuperscript{2} In researching for this dissertation, the correspondence, journals and personal papers of approximately 20 antislavery women were examined, as well as several periodicals and the papers of the major American and British antislavery societies. Conclusions about the character and content of antislavery women’s correspondence were drawn from close reading of the correspondence and journals of the leaders of the antislavery women’s movements.
earliest days of the antislavery movement, William Wilberforce and his wife travelled together around Britain while he worked towards ending slavery in the empire. Letters between antislavery wives told of the various visits the Wilberforces made to other antislavery leaders around Britain. Other women chose to stay at home when their husbands travelled, either to watch their children or to manage the family business, including the antislavery business. Kathryn Gleadle’s *Borderline Citizens* argues that women’s participation in public movements after marriage was discouraged through ideals of ‘wifely submission’ to her husband and that married women’s political input was confined to the family. Thomas Clarkson’s wife rarely travelled with him due to illness and family issues. Clarkson travelled frequently, and the Clarkson family papers contain dozens of letters written by nearly every major antislavery figure in England to Mrs. Clarkson, detailing Thomas Clarkson’s travels, pamphlet sales, plans for petitions, updates on her husband’s health, news of other antislavery families, and requests for assistance with a variety of projects. Clarkson also wrote long letters to his wife containing instructions for distributing pamphlets and other papers, stories from his travels, news from the families he stayed with and requests for advice and other information about business from her. The wives of antislavery leading men were clearly deeply involved in their husbands’ efforts to free the slaves. Travelling with them or staying at home, they were charged with helping their husbands continue to write, speak and also run their own private efforts to support their

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3 See Anna Gurney to Mrs. Braithwaite, 2 October 1822. Braithwaite Papers Temp MSS 403/15/30/1, FHL. This letter discusses the movements of Mr. & Mrs. Wilberforce and Mr. Wilberforce’s failing health. Other letters in this collection contain similar information about the travels of a variety of antislavery men.


5 Thomas Clarkson Papers, Add. 41266 and Add. 41267 A, BL.
families. Women’s efforts in support of their husbands’ antislavery work fit neatly within the boundaries of domesticity: entertaining guests, corresponding with friends, and helping their spouses manage their business all fell within the ideal of woman as keeper of the home and helpmeet to their husband. Early antislavery work by women tended towards these types of activities and did not challenge the borders of separate spheres. Although these women did little in their own names to support the cause of the slave, without their help the male leaders of the antislavery movement would have been unable to do as much as they did.

Other female members of the family sometimes took over assisting their fathers or fathers in law with antislavery efforts. One young British woman apparently became quite a familiar figure in the meeting houses and drawing rooms of early antislavery efforts. Priscilla Buxton, the daughter of Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton and Hannah Gurney Buxton, attended a number of antislavery meetings and parties in the 1830s with her father while her mother was ill or otherwise indisposed.\textsuperscript{6} Priscilla was in her early twenties when she began attending antislavery events with her father. She quickly became active in a number of reform movements, including antislavery, although she is most well known for her efforts to help the aboriginal people of Australia.\textsuperscript{7} She kept a journal and wrote many letters to friends and family about her experiences attending meetings and parties with her father.

\begin{quote}
Did I tell you of our large Anti-slavery party on Wednesday? It was a fine assemblage of excellent and interesting people—twenty gentlemen, lords, MPs, &c. Mamma did not appear. My father chose I should; and Aunt [Elizabeth] Fry was to
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{7} Kathryn Gleadle, \textit{Borderline Citizens} (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 7.
come to be with me. Just as we were assembling we heard she could not come. My father and uncles would have me, so down I went and sheltered myself in a corner of the sofa, and got through with considerable éclat. My father introduced everyone to me. It was most interesting. There conversation and debate were well worth hearing. Uncle Hoare sat at the top. I begged Lord Nugent, with whom I went down, to let me sit near the door, that I might make my escape; but I stayed a long time after dinner, it was so interesting. I am glad I was there. My father’s mind is turning more and more to immediate emancipation. Slavery, slavery, is more than ever our topic. We have numbers of people to breakfast on it, and our evenings are prone to be very full.8

Priscilla was the only woman present at this party of important men. Some were family members, and most were probably longtime family friends. Priscilla was clearly overwhelmed and intimidated by the company her father kept, but also deeply interested in the reform efforts they discussed. Her home life was deeply immersed in antislavery efforts, as the Buxtons hosted other antislavery people in their home and attended dinners and parties where it was the topic of the evening. Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton was a Member of Parliament and one of the founders of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society, and after Wilberforce’s retirement in 1825, the leader of the antislavery party in Parliament. As his daughter, Priscilla was at the center of the British antislavery movement. By 1833, at the height of the movement, Priscilla reported on her father’s work in Parliament leading up to the abolishment of slavery in the empire. Priscilla wrote to one of her brothers,

\[\text{We are almost in a fright at the Antislavery Parliament, as it is called, now we have got it. The only virtue we desire of them is implicit obedience. & this seems the only thing they cannot on their consciences give.}\]

8 Priscilla Buxton to C. E. Hankinson, 17 February 1831. Priscilla Johnston’s Journal and Letters collected by her daughter E. Mac Innes (Carlisle, 1864), 46. Elizabeth Fry was Priscilla’s mother’s sister.
Papa came home very hungry to dinner yesterday having from 7 oclock to 6 taken nothing but instead been quarrelling or quarreled with rather, in keeping Peoples “principles” are he says the Greatest nuisance in life.9

Unlike two years prior, when she attended her first antislavery meeting in the form of a party, by 1833 Priscilla was clearly comfortable discussing antislavery matters and the workings of Parliament. She knew the daily workings of her father’s efforts on the floor of Parliament, and she had her own strong opinions on how members should act. Her interest in the efforts, however, remained focused on her father, and it is through the lens of a caretaker that we see her impart news to her brother. Katherine Gleadle argues that Priscilla, her husband and her brothers all worked on antislavery causes using Thomas Fowell Buxton’s name, and that the Buxton family and name acted like a corporate brand in the antislavery effort. Priscilla’s participation was in many ways representative of women’s participation in the early antislavery movement; she acted in support of the male members of her family as a secretary and often wrote in their names.10 Since she did not write articles or speeches in her own name, only for her father, her efforts fit within proper behavior for middling-class ladies. As the daughter and wife of a Member of Parliament, her presence at gatherings with political purposes was part of her role as supporter to her father and husband. Unlike Elizabeth Pease, who also acted as assistant to her own father but wrote and participated in the antislavery movement under her own name, Priscilla Buxton Johnson’s participation is largely hidden.

9 Priscilla Buxton to dearest Brother 18 April 1833, MSS Brit Emp S18 C106 Thomas Fowell Buxton, RHL. It is not clear to which brother this letter was written as the address was missing from the cover sheet.
10 Kathryn Gleadle, Borderline Citizens (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter seven examines the role of the female members of the Buxton family and their support of Thomas Fowell Buxton’s career as a MP and antislavery activist.
from the larger antislavery world as she rarely signed her own name to letters, and it is
difficult to disentangle her own views from those of her family. Priscilla’s participation in
the antislavery movement ended with her father’s retirement from Parliament and his
subsequent elevation to nobility.

Once women began organizing into their own associations, they published open
letters in newspapers, calling for other women to join their cause. Newspapers flourished in
the early nineteenth century as changes in printing technology made them less expensive to
produce, and decreasing postal costs allowed for newspapers to be sent by mail at a
reasonable rate. Beginning in 1832, British women wrote letters to be published in the
Liberator, the most widely circulated antislavery paper.\(^{11}\) These letters were calls for
American women to take up the antislavery cause, encouraging them in religious terms to
stop the evil that was slavery. Newspaper articles addressing women became more common
in the 1830s, and in 1836, Maria Weston Chapman and Mary Parker\(^{12}\) published their letter
to the women of England in the Liberator.

Dear Friends, we boast a common ancestry and language; our
hearts and our hopes too are one. You, as well as ourselves,
claim kindred with those ‘devout and honorable women,’ the
puritan mothers of New-England. They were wont to
commend themselves to their friends in ‘the love of Christ.’\(^{13}\)

By the 1830s, religion had become one field in which women were increasingly able to claim
a right to participate. Women constituted the majority of church members by 1830; most

\(^{11}\) An 1832 article in the Liberator, entitled “To the Ladies of the United States,” was the first article in that paper to call on women specifically to engage in the antislavery movement as women.

\(^{12}\) Mary Parker (life dates unknown), American anti-slavery activist from Boston.

\(^{13}\) Mary S. Parker and Maria W. Chapman to the Women of Great Britain. The Liberator, 30 April 1836. p. 69, col. 4.
churches could not run without their attendance and support. Although most denominations did not allow women to speak in church or meeting, women’s work was essential to keep churches operating.\(^\text{14}\) By appealing to women through their religious sentiments, antislavery writers approached the issue of women acting in what could be deemed a public reform movement in a manner that did not challenge social norms. These earliest letters through newspapers were formal and unthreatening; until women began to meet and write to one another as individuals rather than groups, the tone of the letters remained distant.

In America, antislavery women also attended meetings in family settings in the early 1830s. Family connections were important to building the earliest antislavery societies, as women met with men in informal gatherings, often when an important person was visiting or to discuss a new pamphlet or book. Family was also an important way for antislavery men and women to meet one another, and for young people to spend time together with supervision. Mary Pennock\(^\text{15}\) spent evenings with her husband-to-be, David Sellers, in the home of Lucretia Mott attending antislavery meetings,

I spent an evening with David at Lucretia Mott’s to meet Lydia Maria Child. It was a social company. Our family and David’s were invited, so we represented them. LMC was an interesting woman and we were young and full of life and enjoyed it very much. She had natural manners, was simple in dress, and a woman full of information. Her subject was slavery and its effects. Her husband, Lee Child, was with her, a well informed man, a lawyer of good appearance. They had no children….Lucretia Mott called me over to sit beside her that I might better hear what Lydia Maria Child was saying. In the course of conversation the noted guest told that once a southern

\(^{14}\) For information on the role of women in religion in the United States, see Catherine A. Brekus’s *Strangers and Pilgrims* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

\(^{15}\) Mary Pennock Sellers (life dates unknown) American Quaker from Pennsylvania.
lady had said to her. ‘You do not know about the workings of slavery!’ Lydia Maria Child had replied ‘Do I not? I have read all your laws.’

For young people interested in antislavery, informal gatherings like the one hosted by Lucretia Mott for Lydia Maria Child’s visit allowed them the opportunity to interact with leaders of the antislavery society and to spend time together. These sorts of visits provided role models for young antislavery women, and the women clearly dominated these informal gatherings. These well-spoken and well-read women who were unafraid to speak their minds or stand up for the rights of the slave were clearly interested in cultivating young women and encouraging them in their antislavery efforts. Inviting families to attend meetings like this one allowed women to gather together and discuss issues that interested them, as equals with their husbands, or in the case of Lucretia Mott and Lydia Maria Child, completely dominating the discussion.

Family was very important to many antislavery women. Elizabeth Pease was deeply affected by the death of her father in 1846. Antislavery women wrote to her to sympathize and share their own stories of grief and ensure her that they understood how her grief affected her ability to work. By this point, long correspondences had blossomed into friendships based on shared values and experiences. Lucretia Mott wrote to Elizabeth Pease upon the death of her father, sharing her own experience with grief.

Most especially I wish to convey a line to thee dear Elizb., expressions of the sympathy I feel with them for thy late bereavements Thy long continued devotion to thy dear Father,

doubtless indeed this stroke doubly trying to me. In many ways we feel such a loss; Your feelings & sentiments were congenial to many points. You could travel together & were each others helper in the truth. The tears will then naturally flow at the severance of such a tie. And far be it from me to seek to stay it. I know full well the keenness of the separation between Parent & Child. My dear Mother was taken from us when I could illy bear such a shock to my nature. She was companionable in every way. Her Grandchildrn as well as her childr. delighted in her society. She was vigorous in constitution of both body & mind, and promised a longer life than 73—But we had to yield her—and resignation to this has been a hard lesson. I therefore feel less able to preach it to others. The thought has already recurred to us, now that thou hast no longer that tender tie to home, whether to visit to this Country may not be effected by the gladdening the hearts of many here and perhaps cheering for the time some lonely hours for thyself. We need not say such a visit would be very pleasant to us, and a hearty welcome would await thee as a guest, under which of our roofs thou might choose to abide.17

The death of her father struck Elizabeth Pease hard; she had spent nearly half of her adult life as her father’s constant companion and worked beside him on a variety of reform efforts. She did not marry until several years after his death, which sent her into retirement for several months. The outpouring of support she received upon his death was remarkable; nearly every antislavery woman she corresponded with in the United States sent her a letter or several letters of condolence. Many of these letters encouraged her to visit the United States, something prevented by her father’s ill health. In Pease’s case, the information fed back to her friends in the United States did not end with her retirement. Pease apparently went to live with family members who did not agree with her and her father’s politics, and they blocked her from visitors who worked on the antislavery effort. William Lloyd

17 Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Pease, 4 March 1846. Mott Manuscripts, Box 1, FL.
Garrison tried to visit her in the fall of 1846, and was unable to do so, prevented by family members who belonged to the British & Foreign Antislavery society and opposed his political leanings. Within a few months, she had established her own home, however, and continued to entertain antislavery visitors until her marriage and retirement from active reform. Information about antislavery families was transmitted through letters from family friends and other members of local antislavery groups. Letters were treasured, and they were often forwarded to other friends or relatives, or quoted in length when women wrote to one another. Communications between antislavery women contained information about the women’s own lives as well as about the movement itself.

Travel between Europe and the United States became more common in the 1840s and 1850s. American women travelled with their families to visit European sights, and in the case of antislavery families, to visit other antislavery activists in England. British antislavery societies in the 1840s were deeply divided over several issues, including the place of women’s participation and which American antislavery society to support. In 1851, Maria Weston Chapman and Anne Warren Weston visited England and travelled around the country visiting women’s antislavery societies. Their visit to the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society was the cause of the following declaration:

> We embrace the earliest occasion of our assembling together, after the departure of Mrs. Chapman and the Misses Weston from Bristol, to express the high gratification we have derived from forming their personal acquaintance, and our deep sense of obligation to them for the valuable information they have

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18 William L. Garrison to Helen Garrison 10 September 1846. MS A 1.1 v. 4 p. 32, BPL.
imparted to us respecting the history and difficulties with which those engaged in it have to contend, the course pursued by its prominent advocates, and the principles, aims, and spirit in which their sacred enterprise is conducted. We desire to convey to Mrs. Chapman and her sisters the assurance, that the intercourse it has been our privilege to hold with them has greatly strengthened the confidence, affection and respect with which we regard themselves and their devoted fellow-labourers; that, instructed by their words and animated by their example, we trust, with the Divine blessing, to dedicate ourselves with fresh zeal to the great conflict for freedom; and we hereby renew our offering of sympathy and co-operation with the American Anti-Slavery Society, in their holy work of rescuing their country from the blighting influences which slavery now casts over all its political, social, and religious institutions.  

Maria Weston Chapman and Anne Warren Weston’s visit to England coincided with the shift of the women’s antislavery organizations away from supporting the British & Foreign Antislavery Society and their American counterpart, the American & Foreign Antislavery Society, and towards Garrison’s American Antislavery Society and its emphasis on immediate emancipation, on women’s equal participation and its secular focus. American women’s visits to the societies and individuals with which they had corresponded for years cemented relationships and changed the direction of the antislavery movement in Britain. These visits allowed women to meet face-to-face, something that had not happened in almost a decade. Maria Weston Chapman had gained great notoriety for her pamphlets, namely *Right and Wrong in Massachusetts*, and her presence in Britain excited antislavery women to

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20 “Special Report of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Anti-slavery Society during eighteen months, from January, 1851, to June, 1852 with a statement of the reasons of its separation from the British and Foreign Anti-slavery society.” London, 1852. BL.

21 See Chapter 7: The Division of the Antislavery Movement: Garrison and the Ladies’ Antislavery Societies for details on the division of the antislavery movement in the United States and how women’s participation was affected.
new zeal. After this visit, British women once again began making and donating items to antislavery fairs in the United States. Chapman and Weston’s society, the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, benefitted enormously from British donations, their fair in Boston becoming one of the highlights of the antislavery social scene, drawing wealthy members of society from all political backgrounds.

Travel inside the United States was also on the rise in the 1850s. Antislavery women travelled to visit one another and to attend the increasingly larger women’s meetings, both on antislavery and on women’s rights. After the Seneca Falls meeting in 1848, numerous other women’s right meetings were scheduled across the country, and the organizers and speakers of Seneca Falls were often invited to them. Lucretia Mott was invited to several meetings in the 1850s, and occasionally travelled to them alone. “The Boston trip is certainly knocked in the head. Sarah Pugh\(^\text{22}\) will be disap[oin]t[e]d. She was preparing to go with me. To tell the truth, I don’t care. Since my husband has declined going, half at least of my interest has gone with it. He thinks that stone wall needs his supervision.”\(^\text{23}\) Mott decided not to go to Boston in 1855, but circumstances including her ill health and her husband’s preoccupation with repairs to their home prevented her from going. Her husband’s refusal to go was not the final factor in her decision not to go; however, women rarely travelled alone, but a male companion was no longer a necessity in travelling in populated areas. Women travelling together, like Mott and Pugh planned to do, was not uncommon prior to the Civil War. Women were physically in public much more often as they travelled long distances away

\(^{22}\) Sarah Pugh (1800-1884) American antislavery activist and co-founder of the Philadelphia Ladies’ Antislavery Society.

\(^{23}\) Lucretia Mott to Martha Wright, 11 September 1855. Mott Manuscripts, Box 2, FL.
from their homes, taking trains, stagecoaches and boats to other cities.\textsuperscript{24}

Lucretia Mott was also at the center of a circle of correspondents that received and sent information about American and British antislavery efforts around both countries. Not only antislavery information passed through their letters, but information about other reform movements and religious instruction. Mott wrote to her sister, Martha Wright,\textsuperscript{25} about a variety of reform efforts.

\begin{quote}
We know nothg about that New Y[ork] Library movement, but as thou says, it speaks for itself”. That paragraph of thy letter, and & I thot very well expressed—I must take it to the Ex. Com. The Pughs & Grews always enjoy all I read to them. I have a letter from Harriet Martineau to shew them, & to report to the Fair Circle this eveg. Also 18 holders from Coz. Ruth.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

Letters from family that contained information on reform efforts in other cities, such as the effort to form a public library in New York City, were passed on to other antislavery women and their families. Letters were brought to antislavery meetings and read aloud or passed between discussions and votes. Even if family members were not as engaged in reform movements as were some of the leaders of the antislavery movement, antislavery activities remained a family affair. Women made handmade items for their family and friends to sell at antislavery fairs, and embroidery, knitting and other women’s handcrafts filled the booths at antislavery bazaars in the United States. Women also traded information on travelling speakers and opinions on issues in their own countries and beyond. Lucretia Mott was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] Martha Coffin Wright (1806-1875) American feminist and sister of Lucretia Coffin Mott.
\item[26] Lucretia Mott to Martha Wright, 2 November 1858. Mott Manuscripts, Box 2, FL. Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) British travel writer and antislavery activist, best known for her travelogue of her trip to the United States. The comment about “18 holders,” probably refers to potholders made for Philadelphia’s annual antislavery bazaar that Mott took part in organizing.
\end{footnotes}
keenly interested in the progress of women’s rights in Europe, and wrote to her sister in November 1858,

They saw at the AS Office, Madam Mari’s you may have seen notice of her lectures on Italy. She is a fr[ien]d of Madam Bodichon-- & brings letters to us we hear Miller says one from Professor Nichol—who s[ai]d she was very eloquent—Ind. only to Hossuth—Sarah [Pugh] sd she had a remarkable bright eye. She goes to Boston-& then is comg here—Edwd D. read aloud last eve[nin]g her Lectu[re] delivd in Eng[land].—All this gives evidence of advance in the Wom. Question.27

News about speakers and public lectures travelling around the country from a variety of people was a popular topic in women’s letters. Lucretia Mott and her friends were deeply interested in lectures by women on a variety of topics. Women speaking in public was still a contentious issue, even after Seneca Falls, and the experience Lucretia Mott and the other American women had had in 1840 in London stayed with them. They were happy to see English women standing up for women’s rights.

Women’s rights and universal suffrage had engaged many antislavery women. Networks of women wrote to one another, encouraged by changing sentiments in Parliament which moved to expand voting rights in England. Anne Knight corresponded with her siblings about the slow movements towards universal suffrage, paying close attention to the newspapers,

I want no morning & evening starts my young English friend find me a sight of the illustrated London news & they talk of the stupidities & willfulness of our lawmakers it seems to be

27 Lucretia Mott to Martha Wright, 28 November 1858. Mott Manuscripts, Box 2, FL. Madam Bodichon was Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon (1827-1891), one of the first women’s rights activists in England. Professor Nichol is the husband of Elizabeth Pease Nichol. Lucretia Mott’s ailing eyesight and hands made her write most of her letters in shorthand; I have expanded the abbreviations in brackets for clarity when necessary.
little or no enlargement of suffrage & so we must be greatly
disused & now very loud for our own ‘vast boons’; yes, like
the immediate emancipation shouted through the land from
Janagroats to Black gang shire; oh it is a black gang whose
hands we are thus half smothered & it was owed them, what a
delightful thing that in 12 years time slavery to cease! After all
our insistings! Oh what things are men! What are they made on
made on. ‘full of sound & fury signifying nothing! Oh most
lame & misered conclusion’ & that’s what they are made on!
What say Cobden & Walmsley to all this? Are they made as
mice? The rest of one well feathered by popular favour he may
go to sleep & dream he is King of the poor gulls.28

England in the 1850s was full of protests against a variety of issues, Chartism and suffrage
being the loudest. The language of antislavery suffused these arguments; its rhetorical style
and flourishes filled Anne Knight’s letters long after antislavery efforts had nearly ceased in
England. Pressing for immediate change, she railed against men who resisted change and
delayed reform to the point where it became meaningless. The imagery and rhetoric of
antislavery was easily used in poor law and suffrage efforts; the language of freedom turned
to white British subjects rather than African slaves.29 Anne Knight continued her earlier
railing against male leaders of whatever movement in which she was involved, accusing
them of not working hard enough and of giving in when they should stand firm for faster
action.

As the antislavery movement began to disintegrate in Britain, antislavery women
appealed to their families to help keep it alive. Women in the antislavery movement had
mostly moved on to new reform efforts, or turned their attention to family affairs or been

28 Anne Knight to her sister, 29 March 1859. Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, 56, FHL. Richard Cobden was the leader
of the Anti-Corn Law League and an influential activist in the Chartist movement. Sir Joshua Walmsley was
Liberal Member of Parliament for Leicester and a member of the Anti-Corn Law League.
sidelined by old age and illness. Anne Knight, one of the most active and controversial antislavery women, continued to advocate the end of slavery in America even after the beginning of the American Civil War. She wrote to her brother,

And now a word for cousin Cyrus you know pretty well what an inquiring mind he has ever thirsting for knowledge & living paper—now just please dear brother apply to his amply stored cranium for the work of Elizabeth Heyrick ‘Immediate not gradual Emancipation’; her brothers living here could either supply a copy for money or inform where is to be had if he will enquire & follow this matter through it would much oblige me & behold a red queen for your kind letter to him & please my respects to him & love to yourselves.\(^{30}\)

Finding printed materials for continuing antislavery work had become difficult by 1861. In England, the issue of slavery had fallen aside in favor of issues of universal suffrage, women’s rights, prostitution reform and other reform efforts.\(^{31}\) Anne Knight kept working towards antislavery as well, although she struggled to find materials to aid her efforts. The collections of materials kept by family members to whom she had sent pamphlets helped her maintain older antislavery writings for her reform efforts. Antislavery efforts had clearly permeated the entire Knight family, and Anne was able to obtain a copy of the pamphlet nearly forty years after its original publication.

Separated by over three thousand miles of ocean, British and American antislavery women used the mail and family connections to create a network of information and support which aided their efforts to help both slaves and themselves gain more freedom. The earliest letters were formal missives sent through newspapers or pamphlets; these were impersonal

\(^{30}\) Anne Knight to her brother, 11 April 1861. Temp MSS 725/5/1-64, 56, FHL.

and often simply issued a call to join the cause. With dropping postal prices and an increase in the number of travelers, friendships formed, sustaining them through adversity, family woes, personal illness and political struggles. Family was very important to antislavery women, and most of the women gained access to the antislavery movement through their fathers or husbands. Many of the women were quite young when they first became involved, often helping their fathers or brothers in their reform movement or acting as hostesses to visitors to the family home. Antislavery meetings provided a social outlet for young people to express their opinions, practice their public speaking and meet others with similar sentiments. Family also served to transmit information about the movement and about other antislavery activists. The 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention allowed British and American women to meet for the first time, and many developed friendships during the convention that would last to the end of the century. Women relied on one another for support through family crises, to help with reform efforts and fundraising, and for information. As women’s interests branched out from antislavery, their letters contained news of dozens of reform and political movements as well as news of antislavery activists, lecturers and family and friends. Letters and travelers were the lines that connected antislavery women, many of whom never met face-to-face, or met only once in their lives. These friendships impacted the future of the world. All of these methods of participation in the antislavery movement from within the circle of family and friends did not challenge middle-class ideas of propriety and domesticity; instead, they strengthened these ideologies through the importance of these bonds to women’s participation in the movement. Not all antislavery work challenged separate spheres ideology; like many reform efforts women
participated in, their work relied upon the connections of home and family to further their efforts and provide support and solace for their efforts.
The division of the US antislavery movement: Garrison and female antislavery societies

1840 was a year of great change in the antislavery movement. Immediately before the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention met in London, the American Anti-Slavery Society held its annual meeting in New York. At this meeting, Abby Kelley was appointed to a committee as the first female voting member of the society. Her appointment caused a series of debates that eventually split the association in two, and the more conservative segment, led by Lewis Tappan and James Birney, formed a new organization, the American & Foreign Antislavery Society and a new political party, the Liberty Party. The philosophy of the American Antislavery Society under Garrison changed dramatically from its previous, less controversial stance on a variety of issues. Garrisonian abolition embraced a number of ideals, many of which were not related to antislavery in any direct fashion. The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society had much earlier undergone a similar division when liberal antislavery activists took the majority of the executive seats on the committee and reformed as a strictly Garrisonian society, with the new society having female officers and a clear policy of immediate emancipation. The issue of women’s participation was not the only thing that caused the division, but it was a convenient excuse for those who differed in politics to separate themselves from Garrison and his followers.

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1 Abby Kelley (1811-1887) American antislavery activist and feminist.
2 Lewis Tappan (1788-1863) American antislavery activist and leader of the American & Foreign Antislavery Society
3 James Birney (1792-1857) American antislavery activist and leader of the American & Foreign Antislavery Society
4 Garrison was one of the founders of the American Antislavery Society along with Lewis Tappan. However, in 1839-40 Garrison and his more liberal friends took the majority of the executive positions within the society, and took over governing the society with a more liberal agenda.

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Garrisonian antislavery was quite different from the more conservative antislavery movement that had developed in the mid-Atlantic states and in Britain. Traditional antislavery had promoted the end of slavery using differing methods, varying from gradual emancipation to abolition (immediate emancipation) and acting through petitioning, pamphleteering and other forms of public appeal. Newspaper editor, William Lloyd Garrison, started his paper, *The Liberator*, to promote his philosophy of individualism and antislavery. Although Garrison wrote few of the articles in each edition, his politics suffused the paper and all of the ideas promoted there, except those articles reprinted from other papers that directly opposed Garrisonian ideas. Garrisonian antislavery supported a number of ideas outside of immediate emancipation, all based on Garrison’s commitment to individualism. Women’s right to participate equally in the movement was only one of the controversial stances Garrisonian abolitionists supported. Garrison and some of his followers were also active in the anti-Sabbatarian movement, which focused on the right of government and business to continue on Sunday, an effort strongly opposed by ministers and many evangelical Christians. The concept of disunion was another, perhaps more controversial even than women’s rights. Disunion was the idea that individuals could secede from the state if they disagreed with the political or moral institutions of the state. In asserting disunion, Garrisonian antislavery activists abstained from voting or participating in any political activity outside of public discourse. Even petitioning was abandoned, seen as appealing to an oppressive government which supported slavery. Garrisonian abolition was quite extreme in

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5 See Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition’s Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) for a detailed analysis of the importance of *The Liberator* in spreading Garrisonian ideas and the divisions those ideas caused within the antislavery movement.
its anti-government stance, and that, as much as their support of women’s public participation, alienated more conservative antislavery activists.⁶

A number of other antislavery societies were affected by divisions between Garrison’s followers and more conservative antislavery societies, most notably the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, which had close ties to Garrison and the *Liberator*. For some time, the *Liberator* was taken on as the paper of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, but Garrison’s diverse political ideas put off many people in the society, and Garrison soon rejected their help in order to maintain editorial control of his paper. The *Liberator* remained independent of any society’s financial support, and Garrison relied solely on subscriptions, individual donations and loans to keep the paper open.⁷ Despite this separation, by 1839, when the Massachusetts Antislavery Society split into two factions, one more conservative and one which supported Garrison, Garrison and the *Liberator* became the acknowledge mouthpieces of the New England antislavery movement.⁸ Many of the same issues that drove the split between the American Antislavery Society the next year fueled the division of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society. By this point, the majority of other antislavery newspapers had died off in the United States due to a lack of subscribers, and the *Liberator* had gained the largest and most stable following. Women became very important to the administration of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society after the division of the society in 1839, and Maria Weston Chapman and her sisters became leaders in the society through their

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⁷ Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition’s Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 57-64.
⁸ Ibid, 74.
management of the Boston Female Antislavery Society’s annual bazaar and publication of Chapman’s *Right and Wrong in Massachusetts* in 1839. The change in the stance of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society towards one that accepted female participation, supported Garrison’s ideas about disunion, voting and women’s rights was not nearly as dramatic or immediate as the American Antislavery Society split the following year, but the change still caused ripples in the local community, particularly after the more conservative society folded several years after the split and Garrisonians became the sole organized voice of antislavery in New England.

Maria Weston Chapman’s *Right and Wrong in Massachusetts* was one of the most influential pamphlets written by an American woman in the antislavery movement. Her defense of Garrison and his politics won many antislavery activists over to Garrisonian antislavery and cemented her place within the antislavery movement. Chapman’s pamphlet moves through the history of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society and its relationship to the national American Antislavery Society, touching on the role of women in early petitioning efforts, the church and slavery, and women voting in antislavery meetings. Chapman defended Garrison’s right to publish what he wanted in his own paper, especially after it was no longer supported by the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, and Garrison was held to a higher standard than any other newspaper editor. Her careful retelling of the events of 1835 to 1839, leading to the division between the conservatives and the followers of Garrison in the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, gives a positive impression of Garrison and his followers, painting them as victims of slander and misinformation. Her final

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9 Maria Weston Chapman, *Right and Wrong in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1839), 52.
argument was about the relationship between the British and American antislavery movements. She writes:

At the outset, they were encouraged by the comparatively quiet progress of abolition in England, to believe that our own would necessarily follow the same course. Strong as was the agitation there, it effected its work, without shaking ponderous establishments, civil and, which bore down upon the land with their “weight of calm.” Here, on the contrary, the yokes of church and state are so shaken by contest, as to convulse those hearts with for their existence which lack the honesty to acknowledge the worse than uselessness of a church or a government which sustains slavery, and humble faith in God to say, “Whatever fall—whate’er endure,/ I know thy word shall still stand sure.” When such lose their confidence in the identity of the principles of freedom, with those of order and Christianity, they are disunited in soul from those who are pressing forward with undiminished confidence; and to disguise their change feeling they sacrifice their integrity.10

Chapman argues that the distance between British antislavery activists and the actual institution of slavery in the British Empire allowed antislavery to continue without challenging the basic social structures of British middle-class life. In America, church and state were so intertwined with the institution of slavery, as slave holders and justifications for the continuation of slavery, that to challenge slavery, one had to challenge the laws and very precepts of the church and state. Some antislavery supporters were not up to the task of separating themselves from their church and state, as the Garrisonians thought antislavery should do, and in refusing to do so, Chapman stated, they could no longer claim to support antislavery. This justification for the policies of anti-Sabbatarianism, disunion and separation from the established American churches gave a reasoned argument that British

10 Ibid, 162-163.
antislavery activists could understand for the radical politics of the Garrisonian abolitionists.

Immediately following the World’s Antislavery Convention, the split in the American antislavery societies between Garrisonian and conservative antislavery became the subject of international debate. The role of women was much on the minds of antislavery men, having been brought up at both the American Antislavery Society annual meetings and the World’s Convention. Charles Stuart,¹¹ a good friend of Henry Stanton¹² and a member of the more conservative American & Foreign Antislavery Society, wrote to Tredgold, the secretary of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society. He commented upon the division between the societies:

You know that in the United States, the Abolitionists are divided; the chief ground of division, being, that one party persists in intruding women, as delegates, debators & governors, upon mixed associations of men & women, while the other, rejects women as resolutely refuses such intrusion. The American Anti Slavery Society was formed in December 1833. The principles were eminently noble, and it pursued its glorious cause harmoniously & rejoicously, with rapidly increasing power, during its first four years….But in the cause of 1837, new opinions began to be broached, one of these, gradually assumed the position, that whatever is morally right for a man to do, is morally right for a woman to do; and that therefore women ought to be intruded, as delegates, debators & managers, into mixed associations of men & women. The innovation was resisted; but resistance only aggravated the Zeal of its advocates—and the new truth as they call it, ere long obtained such importance in their eyes, that all harmony was destroyed; and they who conscientiously resisted the dogma, had no alternative left them, but to yield to it, or to separate themselves from those who held it paramount to the

¹¹ Charles Stuart (life dates unknown) British antislavery activist born in Bermuda and traveled widely in the Anglo-Atlantic promoting antislavery.
¹² Henry Stanton (1805-1877) American antislavery activist and husband of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Henry Stanton was a member of the Free Soil Party and did not support women’s rights or Garrisonian antislavery.
cause of the Slave. …

The American Anti Slavery society, of which Mr. Collins is the agent, ought in my opinion to be called, the woman intruding Anti Slavery Society, this being the great feature which distinguishes it from the other. Its woman intruding dogmas, have fearfully shattered the Abolition ranks in the United States, and have excited deep & intrusive distrust of the whole Abolition movement.¹³

Charles Stuart held strong opinions about the inappropriateness of women serving as active members of the antislavery societies. By reframing the history of the American Antislavery Society as an organization that began as one with a good purpose but was later subverted by members with opinions differing from the original purpose of the society, Stuart frames the division as something caused entirely by Garrison and his followers. He quotes from a letter from Angelina Grimké that had been widely published and quoted among supporters of women’s active participation in public events and societies, in his line “whatever is morally right…”, drawing attention to the force with which antislavery women spoke and wrote. The conservatives thought the Garrisonians and their supporters were placing the rights of women ahead of the rights of the slave by continuing to support women’s right to participate fully in the organization, thereby endangering the antislavery movement through their actions. The British & Foreign Antislavery society became involved in the debate over the split in the American societies through correspondence from agents like Charles Stuart.¹⁴

¹³ Charles Stuart to Tredgold, 28 December 1840. MSS Brit Emp S 22 G84 USA 1757-1852, RHL. Emphasis in source.

¹⁴ Clare Midgley, in Women Against Slavery, does not engage with the disruption the Garrisonian-conservative split in American antislavery organizations created in British antislavery societies. She only discusses it in the context of the 1840 World’s Anti slavery Convention. She argues that the impetus for female autonomy in the 1850s came from the British & Foreign Antislavery Society and not from inside women’s antislavery organizations, as I argue in this chapter. Kathryn Kish Sklar, on the other hand, argues that immediatism was the difference between the United States and British societies that allowed women more agency in the
One of the largest controversies in the split between the Garrisonians and more conservative antislavery groups was a fundraising trip to England taken by John Collins, a member of the American Antislavery Society. Nathaniel Colver, a member of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society, blocked his efforts at every turn and cast aspersions on his religious beliefs. The British & Foreign Antislavery Society believed his slander and blocked Collins from continuing his mission by forwarding portions of letters from Colver to most of its members. Elizabeth Pease, a confirmed Garrisonian (one of the few in England), wrote to the executive committee of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society to support Collins in his work.

Having received a letter from my esteemed friend James Cannings Fuller, I enclose an extract from it to the character of Wm Lloyd Garrison and John A Collins, you will transmit a copy of it to every individual to whom the extracts from the letter of Nathl. Colver were sent, as an antidote to the false and libelous charges brought by N C against those individuals. 

Pease’s letter to the executive committee of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society contained an enclosure (which was not in the box with Pease’s letter) supporting the character of Collins and Garrison. Collins himself was not the focus of the attack; it was really Garrison that Colver and his allies were attacking. The anti-Sabbatarian tendencies of Garrisonian abolitionists appalled many of the more religiously inclined antislavery activists.

antislavery movement. She sees Garrison’s acceptance of women’s aid in his efforts as important, but does not draw the direct connection between Garrison’s other radical ideas and the role of women in Garrisonian societies. Instead Sklar argues that immediatism required abolitionists to recast normative behavior and roles for blacks in American society, loosening their adherence to other social norms, like women speaking in public.

Elizabeth Pease to The Committee of the British & Foreign Anti Slavery Society, 25 March 1841. MSS Brit Emp S 22 G84 USA 1757-1852, RHL
and some of whose opponents used their apparent disrespect for traditional Christian practice to cast aspersion on their characters. The committee replied to her letter a month later:

Your letter of the 25th ulto. With the extract from a communication of James Canning Fuller to yourself respecting Wm. Lloyd Garrison and John A. Collins having been read in Committee I am requested to acknowledge the receipt of the same and to state that you labour under a wrong impression in supposing the Committee to have been party to the circulation of what you designate ‘false and libelous charges brought by N. Colver against those individuals’, and that therefore they are not in position to comply with your requests.

The Committee of the Hibernian Anti Slavery Society having addressed them on the same subject, labouring under the same error, they beg to hand your extracts of that part of their reply to the friends in Dublin on the subject.

‘With respect to the extracts from Mr. Colver’s Letter and from the Massachusetts Abolitionists which were transmitted to you, the Committee is in no way responsible for the one nor the other, the Committee neither knew of nor sanctioned directly or indirectly their circulation in any direction. On enquiry however they find that one or two of their number conceived it to bee proper that a few of the more active AntiSlavery friends in this country should be made aware that statements of the nature of those referred to, were circulated in the United States, apparently on good authority knowing their friends to exercise their own judgments as to what degree of [illegible] or importance might be attached to them. This is the true state of the affair.16

The British & Foreign Antislavery Society thus denied involvement in distributing the letters which slandered Collins’ reputation. They attempted to place themselves as neutrals in the dispute, and tried to help Pease in her effort by passing on information from the Dublin antislavery society. Whether or not their assertion that they were not involved in the spread of the slander is true, it is clear that the division between the Garrisonian and conservative

16 John Scoble to Elizabeth Pease, 25 April 1841. MSS Brit Emp S 22 G84 USA 1757-1852, RHL
groups captivated British antislavery activists and cause a great deal of division among them. Pease’s support of the Garrisonian abolitionists was a important for their continued presence in Britain, as support for Garrisonian antislavery in Britain had dwindled quickly after the events of the World’s Convention and the noise generated by their opponents from the United States and in Britain.

The American women who supported Garrison were thrilled to hear of Elizabeth Pease’s support and her letters to the British & Foreign Antislavery Society. Those women who supported Garrison’s ideas of individuality and appreciated his support of their equal participation in the movement took a great interest in the division between the societies and the impact it had on the movement both in the United States and abroad. Lucretia Mott wrote to Elizabeth Pease after seeing her letters in the papers,

> How we rejoice at thy allegiance to Wm. L. Garrison and the right!—The exposure of such doings as have disgraced N. Colver, will open the eyes of some of our half-now organized brethren. How base to speak of J. A. Collins in the manner he did! Some of us feared he Collins was following too soon in the wake of so many beggars—Dawes & Keefe, J. C. Fuller, Chs. E. Lester, &c &c. but he & others thought the exigencies of our cause demanded it & I hope he may not be disappointed.\(^\text{17}\)

Yet, the division among American antislavery groups worried many antislavery women. Many men had travelled around Britain after the World’s Antislavery Convention, trying to raise funds for their particular portion of the cause. Representatives of Oberlin College were the most numerous to do so in 1840, travelling and speaking about the goals of the college in an effort to raise funds for expanding the school. Collins’ mission was to raise money for the

\(^{17}\) Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Pease, 18 February 1841. Mott Manuscripts, Box 1, FL.
American Antislavery Society and to sell more subscriptions to the *Liberator*. Mott was convinced that the support of such a well respected member as Elizabeth Pease of the British antislavery movement would carry weight with more conservative abolitionists, and expressed her happiness in this letter.

Mott was not the only woman moved to write to Elizabeth Pease in thanks for her support and kind words. Anne Warren Weston began a correspondence with Elizabeth Pease in the wake of her defense of Collins that revealed many of the concerns American antislavery women had about their British allies.

> Long since you must have seen that the Anti Slavery Cause in America is a far differing thing from the Anti Slavery Cause in England. If you will but imagine the fact that Slavery in your Colonies could not have been abolished till you had first converted the West India interest at home, you will perceived at once, the nature of the obstacles that oppose us. As it is, we can do little more for the furtherance of the cause till the ProSlavery ministry is removed out of our way. We must convert them to the Truth, or that failing, we must destroy their influence over the people. ¹⁸

By attempting to describe how the American antislavery effort was challenged by the presence of proslavery individuals in the same cities and towns as the antislavery societies, Weston points to the ministry as a center of resistance to antislavery. In Boston in particular, the local clergy strongly opposed antislavery, mostly due to the other political and social efforts of the Garrisonians rather than in actual opposition to antislavery. Apparently, the anti-Sabbatarian movement and women’s activism were more threatening to the clergy than any antislavery sentiments the groups espoused. With slave owners in their own states and

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¹⁸ Anne Warren Weston to Elizabeth Pease, 30 January 1841. MS A. 1.2 v. 11 p. 41, BPL. Emphasis in source.
country, American antislavery reformers had a much more personal connection to slavery than British reformers, many of whom had never seen slavery firsthand. The split among American antislavery forces had placed some significant doubts in the minds of British antislavery activists:

> While the actual position that the real friends of the slave in this country occupy is so cruelly misapprehended and misrepresented, it is indeed cheering to find that there are those, who however wisely separated from us in some respects, are still in others, of the same mind and heart. We rejoice that you so fully understand and so justly appreciate the manifold and perplexing difference that resent beset our way, and we thank you for your willingness in performing the painful duty of bearing testimony to the purity of a cause perilously insulted in so signal a manner by the revolting slanders of those who once claimed fellowship with us.  

Weston places the Garrisonian abolitionists as the “real friends of the slave” in America, and reacts to Pease’s support of Collins as proof that there are still those in England who support antislavery. The alliance of most English antislavery groups with more conservative antislavery organizations in the US meant that many American women’s antislavery organizations would be deprived of the goods English women sent for their bazaars and fairs, a main source of income for many antislavery efforts. American women’s worries were apparently not confirmed, for Sarah Pugh wrote to Elizabeth Pease after the first fair in Pennsylvania after the split, telling her that they had so many items they could not display them all.  

Anne Weston wrote again, after the controversy between Collins and Colver had played itself out in the newspapers and letters of American and British antislavery societies.

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19 Anne Warren Weston to Elizabeth Pease Nichol, 31 March 1841. MS A 1.2 V. 11 p. 134, BPL.
20 Sarah Pugh to Elizabeth Pease Jan. 20, 1846 MS A 1.2 v. 16 p. 6, BPL.
I also write partly for my own pleasure for it is a heartfelt one to me to thank you for the faithfulness and constancy with which you have stood by the genuine Anti Slavery cause, so deeply perilous by the misunderstandings of some and the envyings and fears of others. I read the correspondence between yourself & the London Committee with thankfulness, not merely because you were giving support to those whom I esteemed & respected but because it strengthened my own faith and reproved my own weakness to witness your labours & exertions, the self sacrifice connected with which I feel that I some what appreciate. So many have fallen away with in England and America that those who remain may well be uncounted faithful.21

Weston’s series of letters to Elizabeth Pease attempted to cement a relationship between Pease and the Garrisonians in Boston. Through mutual support, antislavery women were able to exert their influence on the antislavery movement as a whole and sway the opinions of the leading men. Emphasizing her own weakness, Weston expresses her appreciation for Pease’s outspoken support of the Garrisonian abolitionists. This sort of language permeates many antislavery women’s letters, emphasizing female weakness and the idea that abolitionist women were sacrificing their femininity in their efforts to spread their message to the antislavery community or to the public at large. What exactly they were sacrificing is up for debate. They saw themselves as sacrificing their privacy, giving up some intangible feminine separation by stepping into the public limelight. Perhaps they thought they were sacrificing some modesty and propriety as well, believing some of the taunts hurled at them about the nature of women who appeared and spoke out in public.22 The split between

21 Anne Warren Weston to Elizabeth Pease Nichol 31 May 1841 MS A 1.2 v. 12.1 p. 36, BPL.
22 Kathryn Gleadle argues that beginning in the 1840s, women were able to speak to some broader audiences drawing on their position as an expert in their field, however the women remained concerned about the propriety of their speaking even when their male counterparts did not seem concerned, Borderline Citizens
conservatives and Garrisonian abolitionists in America thus had a wide impact on antislavery in both the United States and Great Britain.

Rumors about the division among the antislavery societies in America swirled around Britain for years after the division had occurred and long after reform efforts had resumed in the United States. Ten years after the original split had occurred, the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society became entangled in it, and eventually published a pamphlet that detailed the steps leading up to their decision to break away from the British & Foreign Antislavery Society and cast their allegiance in with the American Garrisonians. The pamphlet details how the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society was originally persuaded that the Garrisonian organizations in the United States were immoral and did not deserve their assistance, and how their minds were changed through a variety of correspondence and visits. The Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society was founded with the advice of Charles Stuart and instructed to be cautious of any relationship with the unchristian American Antislavery Society.

Fully relying on this information, we carefully avoided any intercourse with the members of the American Anti-slavery Society…entered into correspondence with Miss Martha V. Ball, of Boston, secretary of the Massachusetts Abolition Society, requesting to be informed of any way in which we could aid the cause we had so much at heart. It was proposed that we should contribute to a bazaar, which was to be held at Boston for the benefit of the Massachusetts Abolition Society. After a time, however, we found that the bazaar was discontinued; in consequence, as we understood, of the death of its chief manager; [Note below: A short time ago, we discovered that this impression was erroneous; but that the lady referred to, instead of being known as an actor in the anti-

(London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52-52 and 70-73.
slavery cause, was a regular attendant at the church of Rev. W. Rogers, notorious for his advocacy of the Fugitive Slave Bill, and his opposition to the abolitionists.] and no succeeding report of the Massachusetts Abolition Society was sent to Bristol. …

We made repeated applications to the secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society, for instructions as to what we in Bristol could do to promote the cause; but the suggestions were so vague and unsatisfactory, that with the exception of occasionally contributing to the support of schools or other institutions for the emancipated negroes and free coloured people, (which objects, although philanthropic, are not anti-slavery) we could find no occupation beyond that of collecting funds for the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society. This, indeed, we were told by the secretary of that society, was the most useful anti-slavery work in which we could engage; and the right to exercise an independent control over our funds was disputed. [Note below: Some years afterwards, the same complaint having been repeated by our secretary to Mr. Scoble, he stated that there were numerous anti-slavery objects engrossing the attention of the parent society; but that so strong a feeling was understood to exist in Bristol in favour of Mr. Garrison, that the Committee in London were afraid to solicit our co-operation in the work with which they supplied their other auxiliaries!]

The women of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society were deeply interested in the cause of antislavery, and made a number of attempts to find ways to engage in the reform work that they felt so important. Their appeals for more information from the men’s organizations were met with silence, prevarication, and concern that their society leaned too far towards Garrisonian abolition to participate in the British antislavery movement. The newspapers and pamphlets the society subscribed to were either quickly discontinued or were

\[23\] Special Report of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Anti-slavery Society during eighteen months, from January, 1851, to June, 1852 with a statement of the reasons of its separation from the British and Foreign Anti-slavery society.” London, 1852, pp. 6-7, BL. Notes from source placed in brackets in the original text. The middle passage, which is not quoted here, discusses antislavery newspapers the society took and that they did not hold their attention.
uninteresting to the ladies. Even the American societies they corresponded with fell by the wayside, and their offers of donations for the annual fair of the more conservative Massachusetts Abolition Society were ignored. When the leaders of the British & Foreign Society did give them some guidance on how to help the cause, they had the women in Bristol raising money, but did not give them any control over where it was spent, claiming that the city was too connected with Garrison for them to be trusted with the funds. Ironically, by ignoring and pushing the women aside, the more conservative antislavery groups in Britain may have just pushed the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society towards the Garrisonians. Garrison visited the city several years after the split between the societies, and impressed the Bristol and Clifton ladies with his commitment to the cause. A series of letters to William Scoble, the secretary of the British & Foreign Antislavery Society, attempted to clarify why the American Antislavery Society was shunned by the British & Foreign Antislavery Society, to little effect. Scoble finally returned the women’s letters with one of his own, which claimed the American & Foreign Antislavery society was larger and more active than the American Antislavery Society, and that Garrison and his followers were not true friends of the slave. The Ladies’ society conducted their own inquiries, and discovered that, in fact, by 1846, the American & Foreign Antislavery Society was basically defunct, and the Garrisonians ran nearly every active antislavery society in the United States.24

The Garrisonians welcomed the participation of women in their societies and events, and the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society found this to be in their favor. By

writing to Maria Weston Chapman and Anne Warren Weston of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society for information on their society and after a number of letters, they decided:

We have become at length fully satisfied that the platform of the American Anti-Slavery Society is sacredly guarded from the introduction of extraneous subjects; and that the accusation of mingling these with its anti-slavery advocacy is unsubstantiated, and proceeds either from open enemies from the cause, or from men who have deserted its ranks from inability to bear the true anti-slavery cross.

The conviction has been left upon our minds, by this study of the divisions in the anti-slavery ranks, that if, at the world’s convention in 1840, the backsliders had obtained no sanction for their retrograde course, but had been remonstrate with for their want of fidelity to the cause; and if the representatives of British abolition had from that hour to the present tended a cordial and impartial sympathy to every American who made the slave’s cause his own; orthodox believers would never have suffered themselves to be outnumbered by members of so-called “liberal” sects, in a society consecrated to the deliverance of the captive; still less would they hope to justify their own shortcomings in the eyes of their English brethren, by the admission that ‘unbelievers’ were foremost in fulfilling the Saviour’s precepts.  

The Bristol and Clifton ladies thus made up their own minds about the importance of mutual support despite religious or other views. They pointed fingers at the men leading the World’s Convention, claiming that if they had embraced all abolitionists from the United States, the division would not have wrought all the problems it had within the movement. They blamed the poor treatment the American received at the convention for the collapse of the “orthodox” antislavery movement in the United States and the resulting separation between the British

25 “Special Report of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Anti-slavery Society during eighteen months, from January, 1851, to June, 1852 with a statement of the reasons of its separation from the British and Foreign Anti-slavery society,” London, 1852. pp. 32-33, BL.
and American antislavery movements. Men are specifically identified as those who abandoned the antislavery cause over this issue, without doing the research that the Bristol and Clifton ladies did. Antislavery was clearly seen as a religious task, and the religious aspect of the schism in the American antislavery movement was the most important part of the schism to the British antislavery audience.

In 1851, Maria Weston Chapman and the Weston sisters visited Bristol and attended a meeting of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society. Of all the correspondence with American antislavery activists, this visit had the most impact on the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society. After they departed, the ladies met and resolved:

We embrace the earliest occasion of our assembling together, after the departure of Mrs. Chapman and the Misses Weston from Bristol, to express the high gratification we have derived from forming their personal acquaintance, and our deep sense of obligation to them for the valuable information they have imparted to us respecting the history and difficulties with which those engaged in it have to contend, the course pursued by its prominent advocates, and the principles, aims, and spirit in which their sacred enterprise is conducted. We desire to convey to Mrs. Chapman and her sisters the assurance, that the intercourse it has been our privilege to hold with them has greatly strengthened the confidence, affection and respect with which we regard themselves and their devoted fellow-labourers; that, instructed by their words and animated by their example, we trust, with the Divine blessing, to dedicate ourselves with fresh zeal to the great conflict for freedom; and we hereby renew our offering of sympathy and co-operation with the American Anti-Slavery Society, in their holy work of rescuing their country from the blighting influences which slavery now casts over all its political, social, and religious institutions.  

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26 “Special Report of the Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Anti-slavery Society during eighteen months, from January, 1851, to June, 1852 with a statement of the reasons of its separation from the British and Foreign Anti-slavery society.” London, 1852. p. 34, BL.
After Chapman and the Westons visited Bristol, any lingering doubts about the propriety and
morality of the Garrisonian antislavery societies dissipated. A marked difference can be seen
between the finger-pointing paragraphs written before their visit, which still contained some
reservations about the religious liberalism in the Garrisonian antislavery organization, and
the warmth and connection that Chapman’s and the Westons’ visit brought. The American
women’s visit brought support to the American Antislavery Society and changed British
women’s opinion of the society and its members. The statement closes with a very
interesting line about the influence of slavery on religious institutions in America.
Proslavery ministers, some of the strongest opponents of the Garrisonians, used the
Garrisonians’ more controversial views to discredit their efforts. After a decade of
misinformation and neglect by the male leaders of the British antislavery movement, the
Bristol and Clifton Ladies’ Antislavery Society stepped outside of the structure of the British
antislavery societies and formed their own connections to the largest American antislavery
societies in order to continue their reform work.

Garrisonian antislavery’s rise to prominence in the United States shook the
antislavery community deeply in 1840. The shift towards Garrisonian abolition was gradual
and began in Massachusetts with the relationship between The Liberator and the
Massachusetts Antislavery Society. The resulting tug of war between conservative members
of the society and Garrison’s friends and followers resulted in the severing of ties between
the paper and the organization. The dispute resulted in the eventual dissolution of the
original Massachusetts Antislavery Society and the creation of two new groups in 1839, the
Garrisonian side taking the name of the original organization. A similar split happened in the national American Antislavery Society in the spring of 1840. With Garrison leading the liberal branch of the society in support of female officers and a number of other changes to the society’s unwritten policies, the conservatives broke away and formed the American & Foreign Antislavery Society. British involvement came at the World’s Antislavery Convention, and immediately after, as British & Foreign Antislavery Society members began a smear campaign against Garrison and his followers and threw their support behind the American & Foreign Antislavery Society. Problems with communication began nearly immediately, as the conservative branch of the antislavery movement died off relatively quickly, and British organizations found themselves without any American allies. Backlash against the radical policies of those Garrisonians who took power in the major antislavery societies reverberated through America and Britain for over a decade, damaging relationships between organizations and leaving some groups, mostly women’s societies in England, adrift and without direction. British women’s organizations began their own investigations and discovered, to their surprise, that the Garrisonians were not as radical or immoral as they had been led to believe. As a consequence, many broke from the British & Foreign Antislavery Society. Visits from American women abolitionists aided the British societies’ change of allegiance, especially those from Maria Weston Chapman, who had written the most widely-read tract on the divisions in American antislavery societies. The split between the Garrisonian and conservative antislavery activists reverberated throughout the movement from 1840 to 1855, causing a great deal of confusion among the British Ladies’ Antislavery Societies, as their main activities were making and sending items to be sold at the American
antislavery bazaars. Garrison’s impact on antislavery went far beyond the inclusion of women as officers of societies or supporting women’s public speaking and writing. Controversy over the other social and political reforms Garrison supported disrupted the antislavery movement and excited many women’s organizations in Britain and the United States. Garrisonianism drew the issue of women’s involvement in the movement to the forefront of discussion and pitted women against one another, as well as against the men and men’s organizations in both countries. In the United States, this galvanized women to form their own organizations and to expend their efforts defending themselves. In Britain, it drove many women away from the antislavery movement, either by frustrating their efforts to help, or through their dislike of the other agendas of Garrisonian abolition.
Opposition to Antislavery Women

As more and more women began to participate in the antislavery movement, attending conventions and meetings and speaking in public, popular sentiment against the antislavery movement in the United States as well as against women’s participation in it occasionally turned violent. Slavery, and agitation against it, created a great deal of zeal on both sides of the issue. Unlike in Great Britain, where actual slaves were rare, in the early nineteenth century, slaves were seen in every large city in the United States. Slavery was an aspect of daily life for many Americans, even after northern states began to ban slavery within their borders. Freed blacks and runaway slaves populated large sections of many northern cities, and as one travelled further south, slaves could be seen working at almost every job imaginable. To understand why physical violence was such a concern among American abolitionists, we must remember that unlike in Great Britain, slavery was a real presence in the daily life of Americans in the early nineteenth century.¹

Early antislavery meetings were often broken up by mob violence. Between 1834 and 1838, anti-abolitionist mob violence was the most common form of public disturbance in the United States. Meeting houses quickly became difficult to obtain for many antislavery groups, as mob violence often broke windows or even burned buildings. Throwing bricks or cobbles from the street was the most common form of violence against antislavery

meetings, resulting in dozens of broken windows and bruises when someone was unfortunate enough to be struck by flying debris. Antislavery newspaper printers and publishing houses that printed antislavery pamphlets and books bore the brunt of mob action. Even churches were not immune to the pro-slavery mobs’ anger. However, for the most part, the purpose of the mob was to break up the meeting or distract from the message antislavery activists were trying to transmit, not to cause harm to people.

The Grimké sisters faced a significant amount of animosity when they first began their speaking tour in 1836. Angelina Grimké was the first white American woman to speak in public about antislavery. Men and women turned out in huge numbers to hear her and her sister Sarah speak, and the first speaking engagements went smoothly. As the sisters grew in notoriety and the size of the meetings increased, resistance to their presence on the podium became more vocal. By the spring of 1837, ministers began publishing addresses and giving lectures about the immorality of women speaking in public. Albert Folsom, a minister in Massachusetts, advised,

If it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church upon one topic, it is no less shameful for her to raise her voice upon any other theme. And in all instances of the kind, females go counter to the established opinion of the world and the express commands of Holy Writ. Hence, they ought to be looked upon as “busy bodies” “speaking things which they ought not.”

…May a suitable regard to your own characters and sex deter you from entering upon the inappropriate and unlawful duties

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2 David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 35. Grimsted argues that a large majority of mob violence in the northern states was motivated by slavery and antislavery; however he does not engage with the issue of women speaking in public, instead including evidence on mobs attacking antislavery women in the general discussion of mobs against antislavery meetings and individuals.

Members of the clergy were among the most vocal in opposing the Grimké sisters’ speaking tour. Ministers of a variety of sects took to their pulpits to denounce the women, even some well-known antislavery supporters decried their public speaking. Antislavery activists began to line up along the two sides of the issue: those opposed to women’s participation in mixed-sex organizations and meetings, and those who supported the work the Grimké sisters had started. Numerous statements were published on each side of the issue, filling antislavery newspapers in 1837-38, and eventually dividing the antislavery movement. By 1838, these diatribes had led the more conservative members of the antislavery movement, those who opposed women’s speaking in public and position with antislavery societies as equals, to split off and form a new organization, the American and Foreign Antislavery Society.

Angelina Grimké broke through a major barrier to women’s public presence in 1838, where she spoke in front of the Legislative Committee of Massachusetts. Although there was originally some opposition to her speaking, other delegates insisted she speak immediately so they would not miss her lecture if they had to leave the session early. At her arrival in the legislative committee room, the reaction was mixed. Angelina wrote to Sarah M. Douglass about her reception and speech,

On reaching the State House we found numbers of persons coming away not being able to gain admittance; and the hall was jambed to such excess that it was with great difficulty we were squeezed in, and then [we] were compelled to walk over the seats in order to reach the place assigned us. As soon as we entered we were received by clapping. O! Sarah do you

know—can you imagine—how I felt? My heart did not sink in prospect of this meeting as it [had] done before. After the bustle was over I rose to speak and was greeted by hisses from the doorway, tho’ profound silence reigned thro’ the crowd within. The noise in that direction increased and I was requested by the Chairman to suspend my remarks until order could be restored. Three times was I thus interrupted, until at last one of the Committee came to me and requested I would stand near the Speakers desk. I crossed the Hall and stood on the platform in front of it, but was immediately requested to occupy the Secretaries desk on one side. I had just fixed my papers on two gentlemen’s hats when at last I was invited to stand in the Speaker’s desk. This was in the middle, more elevated and far more convenient in every respect. Now my friend, how dost thou think I bore all this? I never was favored with greater self-possession. I was perfectly calm—took up the thread of my discourse and by speaking very loud, soon succeeded in hushing down the noise of the people, and was suffered to continue for than 2 hours without the least interruption.

The image that Angelina projected of herself was one of a fearless and cheeky young woman. Walking across the seats of the State House, setting up her lecture notes on men’s hats and finally climbing into a seat where no woman had ever sat before. She faced a crowd consisting not only of the elected lawmakers, but also of people off the streets, many of whom were there to cause trouble. Booing and hissing at women speakers was routine, even when they were invited to speak. By this point in her speaking tour, Angelina drew large crowds, as the spectacle of a woman speaking to a government body was novel. By attempting to drown her out, the spectators outside the hall were attempting to silence her, although we can never know if they objected more to her topic or her gender. It took the

committee chairman to silence the crowd, and it was not until she was moved to the more central and sheltered position of the Speaker’s desk that she was able to continue speaking, although even then some continued to try to drown her out.

Biographies of Angelina Grimké’s are one of the few places where violence against antislavery women has been examined in detail. Her extraordinary speaking career was the genesis of many of the diatribes against women speaking in public, although she was certainly not the first or the only woman to do so. Grimké’s age and marital status also set her apart from other women who publicly supported antislavery; as a young, unmarried woman she attracted significantly more attention in standing behind a podium than did the married and middle-aged Lucretia Mott or Maria Weston Chapman. From her very earliest biographers, the continued haranguing in the newspapers and the mobs that formed outside meetings where she spoke were essential to telling the story of Angelina’s speaking careers. Lerner in particular plays up the resistance Angelina faced in speaking, finding detractors everywhere she looked, including in the original Quaker meeting where Angelina first felt called upon to speak for the slaves.6

In Philadelphia, violence against antislavery meetings was not limited to those attended by men. Philadelphia was not unique in violence against antislavery women, but the abundance of antislavery activists and the proximity to slaveholding states meant that a significant number of antislavery meetings were broken up by violence. Several letters from Lucretia Mott in 1835 remark on antislavery meetings being postponed due to race rioting in

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the city which burned some black neighborhoods. Race riots and riots against antislavery were closely intertwined, and a mob intent on one might easily turn to destroying buildings owned by free blacks or by antislavery supporters. In 1837, the Pennock daughters attended the Antislavery Convention of American Women which was surrounded by a mob intent on breaking up the meeting. Sarah Pennock Sellers recorded her mother’s experience in her biography of her parents.

Mary Coleman Pennock with her younger sister Sarah was in the last meeting ever held in Pennsylvania Hall, a woman’s meeting on the afternoon of the 17th. As they sat in the hall, with the angry murmur of the mob outside ever increasing, a light remark was made by someone in the assembly. Lucretia Mott arose and said that no light remark should be made, for no one knew when she stepped outside the building whether or not she would step from time to eternity. A hush fell over the gathering. Just then Abraham L. Pennock stepped in. Since his daughters were in the audience he became too anxious to stay away longer. They were sorry to see him at that time. As the only man among so many women, he would be conspicuous, drawing the attention of the angry mob to himself and to his daughters also as they left the building. But his daughters walking close beside him, one leaning on each arm, they stepped out onto Haines Street, into the dreadful sights of the mob. But they reached their home on Twelfth Street in safety.

…the next day the Female Anti-Slavery Society were told to go to Sarah Pugh’s school-room, no more than two at a time, for it should be kept quiet where they were holding their meeting. They followed this advice, gathered there, and went on with the business of the society.

Sellers observation that the arrival of a man at a women’s antislavery meeting could have

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caused the mob to become violent, rather than simply shouting and threatening the women inside. Actual physical harm was quite rare; most attacks took the form of throwing rotten food or eggs at the meeting attendees. The girls and their father were probably in no real danger from the mob, who were more intent on destroying the building and breaking up the meeting than injuring the women. The leaders of antislavery meetings knew the danger that mob violence posed; many buildings where meetings were held were burned down by pro-slavery groups after the announcement was made that a meeting would be held there. Pennsylvania Hall was particularly vulnerable; it was built specifically to house antislavery meetings, a bookstore and be a central meeting place for antislavery sympathizers in Philadelphia. The meeting the Pennock girls attended was the first meeting held there, and the last. Pennsylvania Hall hosted only one meeting of antislavery women; that evening, after the mayor of Philadelphia closed the hall due to the fear of riots; the hall was burned to the ground by the mob. After the burning of the hall, some women became much more cautious about meeting in Philadelphia. Sneaking into meetings in schoolhouses and private homes became the only way many women’s organizations could hold meetings. The Philadelphia Female Antislavery Society sent letters requesting that other female antislavery activists in the area attend their 1838 convention, although surprisingly Lucretia Mott turned down their invitation when it was sent to her society, the Friends’ Association for Advocating the Cause of Slaves. Many women became much more cautious about

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11 May 2, 1838. Minutes of the Friends’ Association for Advocating the Cause of Slaves. Miscellaneous
attending meetings, even in their hometowns.

The issue of women speaking and participating in public discussions of antislavery was much on the mind of the meeting organizers. The few women who spoke in public were increasingly pulled away from activism by family obligations or ill health, and many female antislavery leaders were concerned they would not be able to attract enough new blood to the organizations to continue both the antislavery fight and expand women’s sphere. Lucretia Mott wrote to Abby Kelley in 1839 of her concerns over the detractors from women speaking and meeting publicly and of the concerns of the women who would be speaking.

I should be very glad if women generally, and men too, could so lose sight of distinctions of sex as to act in public meetings, on the enlightened and true ground of Christian equality. But they cannot yet do this is abundantly evinced, by the proceedings of your New-England Convention last spring, as well as by the more recent movement in Massachusetts.—There is perhaps no better or speedier mode of preparing them for this equality, than for those women whose ‘eyes are blessed that they see’ to act in accordance with the light they have, and avail themselves of every opportunity offered them to mingle in discussions and take part with their bretheren. At the same time without compromise of the principle of equality or sanction of any error as I conceive in these present circumstances, they must meet by themselves for special purposes, in the same manner as the Society of Friends have ever done, and thus prepare themselves for more public and general exercise of their rights.\(^1\)

Mott was concerned that women were not taking on enough incentive to run their own meetings and to speak at antislavery meetings. Acting as equals in meeting was, Mott thought, essential to creating a true equality. She saw the calling to speak in public against

\(^1\) Lucretia Mott to Abby Kelly, 18 March 1839. Mott Manuscripts, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 1. FL. Emphasis in source.
slavery as a religious calling, akin with the call to speak that Quaker ministers felt they had received. The problems that Quaker women had with the men’s meeting colored her letter, as she remarked on the inequality of allowing the men’s meeting to discipline Quaker women in closed meeting. She called on antislavery women to prepare themselves for public participation by forming women’s meetings and running them without male supervision or interference.

Again I think we may yield in some measure, to the conscientious objections of those whose education has kept them in the dark on this subject, but who are in other respects valuable co-adjutors;--at least until we have labored more to convince them that ‘in Christ-Jesus there is neither male nor female.’—It is already acknowledged that our Conventions have done something towards bringing women to a higher estimate of her powers, and it will be a subject of regret, if those who are qualified to enlighten their sisters and who may be instrumental in removing the prejudice by which so many are bound, should hastily withdraw and leave their sisters ‘to serve alone’… 13

Mott’s concerns were drawn not only from her experience in antislavery meetings, but also from her increasing problems with her local Quaker meeting, where women were discouraged from participating fully in meeting and were expected to attend quietly. The position of women in the Quaker meeting contributed greatly to the schisms forming within the Quaker church in the United States. More liberal Quaker sects believed that all people were equal in front of God, and women were as welcome to speak in meeting as men. More conservative sects forbade women from speaking in full meeting; women were only allowed to stand up in women-only meetings. A woman speaking to mixed audiences outside of

13 Lucretia Mott to Abby Kelly, 18 March 1839. Mott Manuscripts, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 1. FL
Quaker meetinghouses was a new development in the 1830s, and many men and women resisted women’s presence at the podium, if not in the meetinghouse. Mott encouraged the women in her organizations to practice speaking in public in front of their peers, speaking at the women-only meetings. Women faced more than just the scorn and ridicule of antislavery men, as Mott continues:

Thou will observe that we have changed the time first concluded upon for our Convention, and have fixed on the 1st or 5 Mon. to meet here at such place as we may succeed in obtaining for the purpose. We have applied for several places of worship—there are Friends as well as others have so far refused to us, with the exception of the Universalist’s house in Gallowhill Street, which we shall probably have, if we can find persons willing to guarantee the safety of the building. We are making some progress in our city society, two of our youngest members delivered each an address before large meeting of women for the occasion, and we have another appointment for next week, to hear one from Elizabeth Stickney. They have begun as S. and A. E. Grimke did, and in as short time they may be prepared for a mixed audience.  

14 Mott’s concern that the women in her organization were not prepared to speak in front of mixed audiences was a valid one. Earlier mixed and women-only assemblies had been attacked by mobs bent on breaking up the meetings. The safety of any hall holding an Antislavery meeting was in question, and if the meeting was mixed gender or women were speaking in public, it was not unheard of for crowds to break windows, pelt the building with stones, or smash down the doors in order to disrupt the meeting going on within. Danger to the building and its windows and fixtures made many churches and building owners fearful of allowing antislavery groups to rent the buildings, particularly women’s groups who could

14 Lucretia Mott to Abby Kelly, 18 March 1839. Mott Manuscripts, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 1. FL
not guarantee the physical safety of the building. Women’s groups had to hire guards or ask their male friends and family to guard the meeting space if the meeting was publically known. As pro-slavery opposition to antislavery activism rose, it became more difficult for many antislavery groups to obtain space to meet outside of private homes. Churches supporting abolition were more likely to host antislavery meetings, but as the threat increased, more and more churches closed their doors to antislavery meetings. This led to many antislavery women and men drifting away or severing their ties to churches that had removed their support.\textsuperscript{15} The Unitarians were one of the few that continued to support antislavery despite the threats leveled against antislavery churches and the possibilities of losing members who supported slavery or simply had business dealings with slave owners.\textsuperscript{16}

In Boston and other northern cities, antislavery meetings became more commonplace, and women and men began to mix more easily in public. Boston antislavery women routinely met in Boston’s public meetinghouses and churches. The ladies met in auspicious surroundings at Faneuil Hall, famous from meetings at the start of the Revolution, and that may have protected their meetings from mob action.

Last Friday evening the 28\textsuperscript{th} a public meeting was held in Faneuil Hall composed of citizens of Boston & vicinity to testify against slavery in the District of Columbia, & to exhibit & cease the great Irish Remonstrance to their brethren that cluster round Faneuil Hall. It is in the centre of the city, the largest public building in it hung with the portraits of Washington, Adams, Honorit Warner & the other

\textsuperscript{15} Anna M. Speicher, \textit{The Religious World of Antislavery Women} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 62.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 159. For a study of Unitarians in Britain and their connection to women’s rights, see Kathryn Gleadle, \textit{The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831-51} (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).
Revolutionary war heroes,…The galleries there are three, steep & ample, were entirely filled by ladies & there was preferably men helping.\(^1\)

Anne Warren Weston wrote this description to Elizabeth Pease after a meeting in Boston in 1842. Women filled Faneuil Hall to discuss activism against slavery in the capital and to encourage Irish immigrants to support antislavery.\(^2\) In the 1840s, with the number of Irish immigrants swelling due to conditions in Ireland and economic growth in the United States, unrest in Boston was high. Faneuil Hall was likely surrounded by warring groups of the working class, Irish immigrants and perhaps some free blacks, all taking up different sides of the issue of slavery.

As the issue of slavery came to a head and civil war became more and more certain, American antislavery women faced more and more hostility. Antislavery women were subjected to criticism and ridicule from pro-slavery writers. After the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe joined the women who were maligned in the pro-slavery press,

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\text{The Southern railing at you will be something unequaled, I suppose. I hear that three of us have the honor of being abused each day to day already, as most portentious and shocking of women, you, Mrs. Chapman and myself (as the traveler of twenty years ago). Not only newspapers, but pamphlets of such denunciation are circulated, I am told.}\]

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\(^1\) Anne Warren Weston to Elizabeth Pease Nichol, 30 January 1842. Ms A 1.2 vol. 12.2 p. 19, BPL.

\(^2\) In Boston and other northern cities, Irish immigrants were some of the most vocal supporters of slavery because they saw free blacks as threats to their hope of employment. The Irish took many jobs that had been held by free blacks in northern cities, and Irish and free blacks fought over employment, housing and public space in the mid-nineteenth century. Native born American working class people also protested Irish immigration as Irish immigrants would take wages much lower than any other workers, driving down wages and increasing competition for unskilled and semi-skilled work. See Kevin Kenny’s *The American Irish* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 66-71.

\(^{19}\) Harriet Martineau To Harriet Beecher Stowe, 18 September 1856 in Deborah Anna Logan, ed., *The Collected*
Harriet Martineau faced attacks by pro-slavery writers for almost two decades, after she published her travelogues of her experiences in the South. Rumors and libel were the attacks most often made against antislavery women writers. Harriet Beecher Stowe was so widely attacked for the antislavery theme in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that the outcry was heard even in England, where many antislavery activists spoke up to support her and her work. Her visit to Britain in 1853 reopened old divisions among British antislavery groups over Garrisonian antislavery. Various groups praised or maligned her for her connections to Garrison and her methods of fighting slavery. Either way, her visit and her writings created a new revival in British antislavery activism at a time when the movement was slowing down.  

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* raised more ire than many earlier works due to its immense popularity outside antislavery circles.

Other antislavery women were the objects of a significant amount of slander and libel. Sarah Grimké was regularly maligned for her activities as one of the most accomplished female antislavery speakers in the United States. Leonard Bacon, a strong opponent of Garrisonian abolitionism, attacked antislavery women regularly in his speeches. James G. Birney recorded that Bacon remarked in one speech, “During the prevalence of fanaticism in New England, a quaker-woman was known publicly to walk through the streets of Salem—*naked as she was born*—but Miss Grimké had not yet made such an exhibition of herself.”

By speaking in public, antislavery women opened themselves to accusations of inappropriate

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behavior, like Bacon likening Sarah Grimké’s public speeches with parading naked through the streets. Snide comments and insults directed at antislavery activists, and at antislavery women in particular, pepper pro-slavery writings and speeches.

Some other women put themselves in the line of danger trying to protect or assist antislavery men. After John Brown’s attempt to seize the arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, some abolitionist men as far away as Massachusetts were arrested for their involvement or support in the plot. The antislavery community rallied in support of the men who were arrested, and often banded together to keep them from being arrested. Women also participated in these efforts, sometimes to good effect. In Concord, Massachusetts, Anne Whiting, a young antislavery activist, aided her neighbor who was being arrested for participating in the conspiracy.

By blocking the door to the carriage intended to take Franklin Sandborn to jail, Anne Whiting intentionally put herself in danger’s way. Anne Whiting was a young woman, and apparently deeply committed to the cause and a natural leader. By delaying the arresting party, she was able to keep Franklin Sandborn from being arrested as the men could not get him into the carriage or drive it off to the local jail with a young woman in it. Actions like

those of Anne Whiting frightened those who opposed women’s participation in antislavery and other political movements. Her physical involvement in an altercation meant that she risked her own propriety, as men laid their hands on her and had to forcibly remove her from the carriage. This sort of public display is a precursor to women’s hunger strikes, marches and other physical demonstrations which occurred the women’s rights movement in the twentieth century in the United States and earlier in Britain. For a woman of the early to mid-nineteenth century to participate in a public, physical confrontation over slavery was to press the bounds of proper behavior long before women marching in the streets or demonstrating in front of government buildings became a common occurrence.

By 1860, when war was a foregone conclusion and sectional strife riddled American political activity, antislavery meetings attracted a great deal of negative attention. The growing power of the Republican Party in national politics threatened even Northern Democrats, and slavery became a national political issue. Antislavery meetings were invaded by pro-slavery Democrats intent on disrupting debate and causing argument. Maria Weston Chapman wrote to Elizabeth Pease Nichol about a meeting in Boston that was disrupted by pro-slavery democrats:

A meeting was called the other day Dec. 3rd to discuss the means of abolishing slavery, & it was mobbed by a few democratic, to wit, southern partisans. The Evening session was protected because the Mayor found such to be the will of the city generally. He could have entirely prevented the disgrace from happening had he been aware that it is not now 155 but 160 a dominant party, however feeble in its Anti-Slavery sentiments, will not submit to such outrages, & it is the

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As more and more northerners joined the Republican Party in the 1850s and 60s, Democrats became more desperate to dissuade the general public from supporting antislavery sentiments. Local politics in Boston became more polarized as Republicans took over the local government and antislavery activities gained more support, if not more popularity. Thirty years before, antislavery women could not call on the local government to protect their meetings, as was the case with Philadelphia Hall, but by 1860, city mayors were forced by popular sentiment to protect and support the meetings.

British women faced different challenges. Outright physical violence was rarely directed at them, unlike in the United States. Early British antislavery meetings were much more structured affairs than they were in America. Meetings in the 1780s were held in traditional meeting places, and only freeholding men were allowed to speak or vote on issues. The meetings were called as community meetings as much as antislavery meetings; many members of the community attended, but only a few were allowed to speak. The early structure of the antislavery meetings shaped how British antislavery women worked within the system. British women were most active in gathering signatures on petitions, raising money through fairs, and writing pamphlets, newspaper articles and stories decrying slavery and its evils. British women participated in the movement as aides to activities sponsored by antislavery men. They were more likely to attend women-only meetings, or attend meetings with spouses or family members, and as such they were more often attacked in print and in

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24 Maria Weston Chapman to Elizabeth Pease Nichol, 10 December 1860. MS A 1.2 v. 30 p. 169, BPL.
rumor than with physical violence.  

Appeals to women to participate in the antislavery movement acknowledged that women opened themselves to ridicule or damage to their character. Beginning with their family, antislavery women faced obstacles to their participation. Many husbands and fathers disliked their female relatives’ participation in the movement, seeing it as inappropriate to attend meetings, to go door to door with petitions or write to strangers. The Darlington Antislavery society published a plea for women to participate, and including a statement appealing to women to participate despite the obstacles.

Fear not the voice of ridicule or censure, follow the dictates of those sympathies, which the God of nature hath implanted in your bosoms, defend the defenceless, succor the oppressed, plead the cause of the innocent, manifest your allegiance to Him, the distinctive badge of whose disciples is love—love to the whole human family, and prove that you joyfully exchange the admiration of the world, for the blessing of the perishing.

Appeals to women’s religious sentiments and their familial duty were meant to encourage them to oppose the nay-sayers in their communities and families. Fear of criticism was a powerful tool to keep women from behaving outside of social norms. Women had to find a socially acceptable reason to act in public, to participate in something that could be considered political. Religious fervor and motherly love were good reasons for women to embrace reform movements, and had some impact on those who said their appearance at and participation in public events was inappropriate.

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27 “To the Females of Great Britain” signed by A. D. Miller and Elizabeth Pease on behalf of the Darlington Ladies’ Society for the Universal Abolition of Slavery, March 2, 1838, FHL
28 Anna M. Speicher, *The Religious World of Antislavery Women* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000),
British women were not exempt from being attacked in the press and through slander. Even the few members of the nobility active in the antislavery movement were not safe from slander. Lewis Tappan wrote to the British and Foreign Antislavery Society about the writings in American papers concerning the Duchess of Sutherland.

Several of our Periodicals are endeavoring to prejudice the public mind against the Duchess of Sutherland by intimating that the distinguished lady, in the exercise of despotic power, ejected from her estates the Scotch Gaelic population in 1811, when Marchess of Stafford, thereby confounding the present Duchess with another person bearing the same title. And one of them exclaims “The enemy of British Wages—Slave has a right to condemn Negro-Slavery, a Duchess of Sutherland, a Duke of Athol, a Manchester Cotton-Lord-Never!”

A member of the more conservative branch of the British antislavery movement, the Duchess of Sutherland, wrote a document known as the “Stafford House Address” after the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* encouraging amelioration in America and retreating from the stance of immediate emancipation that most antislavery activists had embraced. Attacks on the Duchess of Sutherland centered on claims that she was really a supporter of slavery and cast aspersions on her other political leanings. Antislavery was well tied into issues of labor and the rights of tenant farmers in Britain and Ireland, and to claim that a prominent antislavery landowner had cast out her own tenant farmers was a serious charge. In this case, the Duchess of Sutherland was attacked by other antislavery activists rather than by slavery supporters. Character attacks were a large part of the divisions between antislavery groups, and no one was safe if their writings or speech happened to prod a

110-112.
29 Lewis Tappan to ?, 15 February 1853. Brit Emp S18 C113, RHL.
sensitive point in a growing schism.

Other antislavery women were seen as over-committed to the cause. Their constant work for the cause embarrassed and shamed some male antislavery workers. Harriet Martineau was one of those criticized and characterized for being overly zealous. Her unflagging work and constant writing on antislavery was at the center of quite a few of these attacks. One man, on hearing that she was ill, reported he was happy to be free of her “didacticalities.”

Martineau was a prolific author; she wrote numerous articles for British and American antislavery papers, as well as numerous letters to every major player in the movement. Some antislavery men seemed to resent the tireless work of the more dedicated antislavery women, and they responded to their work with snide comments and criticism. Martineau was particularly open to criticism, being one of the most outspoken British antislavery women, and her social status as an unmarried, self supporting woman gave her no protection from aspersions on her character.

In the United States, violence against antislavery women (and men) was motivated by the economic success of slavery and the political and social regime which supported the continuation of slavery. A secondary cause of violence against women was the feeling that women overstepped their place by participating publicly in what was considered a political activity. Although it is impossible to tell what the mobs that attacked antislavery women’s meetings were thinking, the methods of violence they used, throwing rotten fruit, drowning out women’s speeches with noise, and damaging buildings meant they wanted to stop the

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women from speaking or humiliate them rather than injure them. The distance between Britain and the actual site of slavery made British antislavery much more of an intellectual exercise for most people than something driven by personal experience. Apathy was more of a danger to the antislavery movement in Britain than mob violence. Attacks on personal character and honor were more likely to occur in Britain than physical threat. Although American women were not really in any danger, as abolition mobs rarely cause anyone serious physical harm, the women were quite likely to cast themselves as martyrs or as in grave personal danger in their participation in the movement. Mob attacks on meetings were certainly frightening, especially to many of the younger attendees, and although they were not really in much physical danger, they feared for their lives. More seasoned veterans of the meetings were more concerned that continued attacks on meeting locations would make it nearly impossible to find a place to hold an antislavery meeting in the future. American women who spoke in public prior to 1840 were attacked from the pulpits and through newspapers. Their morality was questioned and the attention they drew to themselves was derided as inappropriate for women. British women were less likely to fear for their own safety, merely to be slandered in letters and newspaper articles or ignored by male antislavery leaders. These early episodes of violence against antislavery women mark just the beginning of the physical and verbal assaults women demonstrating for their own equality would face over the coming decades.

33 So much so that Midgley does not even mention violence against antislavery women in her Women Against Slavery.
Antislavery and Gender Roles: The Rise of the American Women’s Movement

Historians have long acknowledged the roots of the American Women’s movement in the antislavery movement. Beginning with the compilation known as the *History of Woman Suffrage* put together by members of the women’s rights movement starting in 1880, antislavery has been seen as the beginning of the women’s rights movement.\(^1\) Many of the leaders of the American women’s movement developed their leadership and public speaking skills in the antislavery movement. Most notably, Elizabeth Cady Stanton directly tied her own awakening to women’s oppression to her experience at the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention.\(^2\) The issue of women’s rights continued to occupy American antislavery conversations through the 1840s and 1850s. Women’s position in society was much on the minds of Americans in 1848, with the passage of the Married Woman’s Property Act and the debate surrounding it.\(^3\) Also in 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth M’Clintock and Martha Coffin Wright called a meeting of American Women at Seneca Falls, New York to discuss women’s rights.\(^4\) This convention brought together many antislavery activists who had become aware of the secondary status of women in the United States and abroad.\(^5\) However, many of the most outspoken antislavery women did not attend or even respond to the invitation. After 1848, women began holding conventions around the United

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1 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: various publishers, 1881-1922)
2 Stanton included the proceedings of the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention in her *The History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: various publishers, 1881-1922), I: 50.
4 Elizabeth M’Clintock (1821-1896) American women’s rights activist.
5 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: various publishers, 1881-1922), I: 63-64.
States to organize themselves to lobby for equal rights for women under American law and to try to gain the vote in local, state and federal elections. The women’s rights movement split entirely from the antislavery movement by 1850, and after the Civil War, civil rights and women’s rights activists actively opposed each other’s efforts.

The historiography of the American women’s rights movement has always tied the movement back to the discussions between women at antislavery events. The connection was originally made by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her memoirs, and the historiography has mainly focused on Stanton and her later compatriot, Susan B. Anthony. However, Stanton and Anthony both were not leaders in the antislavery movement. Stanton believed in antislavery, and she did attend the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, where she met Lucretia Mott and other noted antislavery women, but it was as part of a honeymoon trip and the purpose was so that her husband, Henry Stanton, could attend the convention as a delegate. Stanton’s engagement in antislavery after the convention was mainly through the visitors and friends of her husband, who was an active participant in the Liberty Party and whose position on the role of women in the movement directly contradicted her own. Anthony was also only peripherally involved in antislavery. Judith Wellman tries to deal with this discrepancy somewhat in her biography of Stanton, *The Road to Seneca Falls*. The

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7 Ibid.
8 Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) American women’s rights activist.
9 Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Women’s Rights Convention* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004). Wellman’s discussion of Elizabeth and Henry Stanton’s differing opinions on women’s rights and women’s place is important to understanding Stanton’s reasons for forming the Women’s Rights Convention. She does a particularly nice job with her narrative of how Henry decided to be out of town the weekend of the Women’s Rights Convention. The popular history of the 1848 Convention calls
real connection between antislavery and women’s rights is in the person of Lucretia Mott, and to a smaller extent, Elizabeth M’Clintock. Mott had been insisting on her own rights to speak publicly, hold office in associations and participate in public political debates for decades. She did not do so as loudly as the Grimké sisters, who supported women’s rights but were not active in the movement itself, but in her own quiet but forceful way.10

Antislavery women were extremely interested in the ideas of women’s rights that began circulating in the antislavery press in the 1840s. With the uproar over the Grimké sisters’ speaking tours and fallout from the rejection of the American women delegates to the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, American antislavery women paid attention to issues of gender in the reform movement in the 1840s. As early as 1842, the Massachusetts Antislavery Society was engulfed in issues of women’s rights as well as antislavery. Anne Warren Weston wrote to Elizabeth Pease,

‘What!’ you will exclaim in astonishment, is it possible that the Mass. Society there has been lost the staff of accomplishment, changed into a Woman’s Rights Soc’y & done, nobody knows what beside, can have arrived at such a pitch of greatness as to need any thing but a prosaic pen to describe its doings. Even so, had I but the gift, I have the material to work up for you some most glowing descriptions but as it is, you must rest content with a plain statement of faith.11

Some were clearly concerned that the emphasis on women’s issues rather than antislavery

Stanton an antislavery activist, see Estelle B. Freedman’s No Turning Back The History of Feminism and the Future of Women (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002). Other works on women’s rights, including Carolyn Summers Vacca’s A Reform Against Nature Woman Suffrage and the Rethinking of American Citizenship, 1840-1920 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004) focuses more on the schism between women’s rights and antislavery than on the roots of women’s rights in the antislavery movement.


would derail the intention of the society, and that the women only wrote about their rights rather than seizing them. Women’s rights was still an extremely radical idea in 1842. Weston’s tone in the letter is skeptical and sarcastic. She is clearly not happy with the rumors that the Massachusetts Antislavery Society’s shift to embrace fully Garrisonian equality had turned the society into a women’s rights society and that antislavery might not be its central aim at that point. Women’s rights was a divisive subject in America as well as in Britain, and not all antislavery women were convinced that women’s voting or right to speak in public was worth distracting from antislavery efforts.12

The 1840s saw an increase in discussion and argument over the role of women in American society. Women’s property was an important issue in the 1840s, as women were entirely dependent upon their husbands once they married and could not hold property in their own right after marriage. Judith Wellman argues that the Married Women’s Property Act had a significant impact on the life and career of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whose father specifically left property to her in his will and during his lifetime in an effort to keep her financially sound in spite of her husband’s fiscal irresponsibility. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s experience studying in her father’s law office made her acutely aware of women’s legal status in the United States, and although her own husband did not interfere with her property, her father’s efforts to protect her home from her husband’s financial status was indicative of

the experience of many middle-class women in the 1840s.  Many antislavery women were also dependent on their husband’s financial stability, or victims to their instability. Lydia Maria Child was one; her husband, David Child, was notoriously financially unstable, and although Lydia’s writing career enabled her to support herself, she remained in a precarious legal position as her husband could seize her earnings at any point and use them in his harebrained ideas. The issue of money strained their marriage and resulted in a separation that lasted for almost ten years. The Married Women’s Property Act protected women like Stanton and Child, whose husbands’ financial situations endangered their own middle-class standing, and whose families tried to help them become financially stable in their own right. The need for this act illuminates the inherent danger middle-class women faced when they married. The law did not protect them from their husband’s financial difficulties and their ability to remain in the home and out of the world of work was entirely dependent on their husband’s financial success.

The other major event in the women’s movement in 1848 was the calling and sitting of a convention of American women in Seneca Falls, New York. The idea for the convention came out of a social gathering held at the home of Jane and Richard Hunt in Waterloo, New York. The tea party was originally called to discuss a schism in the local Quaker meeting,

13 See Judith Wellman, The Road to Seneca Falls (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Chapters 6 and 7 examine the legal status of women in New York State and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s own situation in the 1840s after her move to Seneca Falls. Carol Lasser argues that the politicization of gender in the 1840s led to women becoming more circumscribed in their political participation, at the same time that they were being given more legal rights, “Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric,” Journal of the Early Republic 28 (Spring 2008): 93.

which had divided over the issue of individuality versus the authority of the meeting. The Hunts were members of the Genesee meeting, and recent events there had the Quaker community in upstate New York shaken to the core. At the June meeting, the Genesee Meeting decided to split, both among the men and the women, and form new meetings at their October sitting, the new one being called the Congregational Friends. Lucretia Mott was in the area, visiting her sister Martha Coffin Wright in Auburn, a short train ride from Seneca Falls and Waterloo. Mott travelled to Waterloo with her sister, and met Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Ann M’Clintock and her two daughters at the Hunt home. From all accounts of the meeting, Stanton and Mott dominated the conversation and were drawn back into a conversation they had hashed out again and again while in London in 1840. Wellman argues that the pressures these individual women were feeling in their marriages was the catalyst for the meeting: Stanton was beset by her husband’s dislike of her politics and his financial instability and her regular miscarriages, Mott distressed by her husband’s illness and the regular pressures of middle-class women’s lives wearing on the M’Clintocks and Hunt. By the end of the tea party, the women, minus Mrs. Hunt whose name does not appear in the written documentation of the convention, had drafted a notice they placed in the paper, calling a Women’s Rights Convention to “discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman.”

Once the announcement was printed and disseminated among newspapers and

through letters to friends, the convention sat in Seneca Falls on July 19th and 20th, 1848. There were a surprising number of notable attendees, especially since the women had published their announcement just over a week before the convention was to meet. Men and women both attended, and although the organizers had originally meant to have only women in attendance and no men on the podium, they did invite several men to speak, and several sat on the podium, with James Mott acting as chair.\textsuperscript{18} Judith Wellman’s accounting of the intervening days reads a bit like the meeting was put together without much forethought on the part of the organizers.\textsuperscript{19} Despite the short amount of notice the women gave for attendees, quite a few of the notable reformers from upstate New York attended, and even Frederick Douglass attended and spoke at length about Stanton’s “Declaration of Sentiments.” This was perhaps one of the only times when antislavery and women’s rights did not work at cross purposes. The “Declaration of Sentiments” takes a similar form and tone to the “Declaration of Independence.” Indeed, the “Declaration of Independence” was the template that Stanton, Mott and M’Clintock used to draft their declaration, changing only one word in the opening passages, adding the words “and women” to the phrase “that all men are created equal.” The “Declaration of Sentiments” was, in essence, a list of grievances these women felt they had, not against men, but against the government created by men and the social restrictions created by men and women that confined and restricted them to the domestic sphere. In addition to the declaration, the attendees, men and women, adopted a


\textsuperscript{19} Judith Wellman, \textit{The Road to Seneca Falls} (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 190-91.
number of resolutions, declaring that laws oppressing women were invalid, and that it was time for women and men to embrace true equality and for women to have the vote. In 1848, the claim for women’s vote was radical and shocking. These women rejected the idea of universal representation, that their fathers and husbands represented their interests in voting, in congress.\(^{20}\) Douglass supported the women’s assertion that they should have the vote, and spoke convincingly in favor of it. The reach for the vote was controversial from the moment Stanton proposed the idea to the convention. Official reminiscences claim that 100 men and women signed the declaration and resolutions. However, the press attacked the declaration and its supporters, and many of those who originally signed the “Declaration of Sentiments” broke away from the women’s rights movement.\(^{21}\)

Women’s rights became central to the thoughts of many of the attendees of the convention. Lucretia Mott returned home after the convention with a reawakened concern for women’s situation, which tinged her letters after 1848 in a way that it had not previously. Lucretia Mott wrote to Ruth Dugdale about a visitor she had,

> We have a friend now staying with us-a Unitarian- one of Heaven’s own. Saml. J May of Syracuse NY-You probably know him, as conspicuous in the A. S. movement as well as in the Non-resistant conventions. He is an advocate for Women too-it is fitting therefore that this should be his stopping place.\(^{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Lucretia Mott to Joseph and Ruth Dugdale, 28 March 1849. Mott Manuscripts, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 1, FL.
Samuel May was a minister and a well known antislavery supporter. His support of women’s rights was important to the female abolitionists who supported Stanton and her efforts. Many of the men who had supported antislavery women’s efforts to speak out for the slave or to organize themselves also supported the women’s rights movement. Prior to the Civil War, many antislavery men thought that if white women could gain the vote, slavery could be ended without disunion because women were sympathetic to the slaves’ plight and could easily be convinced to vote for antislavery politicians. Sympathetic antislavery papers carried women’s rights news along side news of the continuing efforts on behalf of the slave. Women’s rights and antislavery were not at odds for the first decade after Seneca Falls.  

Women’s rights remained a mainly local effort until the Civil War; conventions were held in a variety of towns and cities, but women never held their own national convention. News of these conventions appeared in newspapers and spread through women’s letters.  

Lucretia Mott, for example, became more and more involved in women’s rights. The antislavery content of her letters dwindled after 1848, and her interest in women’s rights rose. Her correspondents changed as well; some of her old antislavery friends had passed away as had family members, but she gained new correspondents among young women interested in women’s rights. One was Rebecca Ketchum and her husband John. Mott wrote to her about the women’s rights news she had received.

I have not learned whether our friend Sarah Tyndale has

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Agitation on behalf of women’s rights erupted in a flurry of activity in the first years after the Seneca Falls convention. Conventions were held in a number of larger towns and small cities, including Worcester, Massachusetts and Rochester, New York. Newspaper accounts of many of the women’s rights conventions were not flattering to the women or their ideas. The women employed reporters to take down the proceedings, but apparently their efforts did not satisfy Mott or her contemporaries. News of women’s rights conventions travelled like much of the antislavery news, through women’s letters.26 Lucretia Mott’s letters were filled with information about women’s rights conventions and writings.

Stories of women’s rights activities also were sent across the Atlantic in antislavery letters as antislavery activists started including the news of antislavery women participating in the women’s rights conventions. Wendell Phillips, who was quite sympathetic to women’s rights and had supported Mott and other female antislavery activists in their efforts

25 Lucretia Mott to John and Rebecca Ketchum, 16 March 1850, Mott Manuscripts, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 1, FL. John and Rebecca Ketchum were Quakers from New York state; they may have been neighbors or friends of Mott’s sister, who moved to New York state in the 1840s.

26 Judith Wellman, The Road to Seneca Falls (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 206-208
to be equal members of antislavery societies for many years, wrote to Elizabeth Pease in 1851,

You would have enjoyed the Women’s Convention—I think I never saw a more intelligent & highly cultivated audience—more ability guided by the best taste on a platform—more deep practical interests on any occasion. It took me completely by surprise & the women were the ablest speakers too. You would have laughed as we used to do, in 1840, to hear dear Lucretia Mott answer me. I had presumed to differ from her & assert that the cause would meet more immediate & palpable & insulting opposition from women than men - & scolded them for it. She put, as she so well knows how, the silken snapper onto her whiplash & proceeded to give me the quietest & yet most cutting rebuke. Twas like her old fire when the London Quaker angered her gentleness--& beautifully done, so that the victim himself could enjoy the artistic perfection of his punishment.  

Not all men thought the women’s rights conventions were misled or inappropriate. Phillips had been a strong follower of Garrison and his ideas for years, and he had been one of the women’s few supporters in London in 1840. Lucretia Mott, at 68 years old in 1851, was still one of the strongest speakers on the platform at any convention, either antislavery or women’s rights. Phillips had met Pease when in London for the convention in 1840, and Lucretia Mott’s sharp wit had apparently become a long standing joke among antislavery supporters. At this point, the women’s conventions were not at odds with antislavery principles.

Other threats still faced antislavery activists in the 1850s. The division between the Garrisonian abolitionists and the more conservative antislavery men of the Liberty Party scarred American antislavery activities for years after 1840, and skeptics seized on the

27 Wendell Phillips to Elizabeth Pease, 9 March 1851. MS A 1.2 v. 20 p. 10-11, BPL.
division as a weak point in the movement. Garrison’s followers were particularly sensitive to critiques that women’s rights and other aspects of their platform and personal beliefs were much more radical than their antislavery views. Lucretia Mott wrote the following to her young friends in New York in 1852.

> While the enemies of the Abolitionists are continually charging them with having put back the slave’s redemption some 50 years, some 20 yrs of their labor has aroused this slumbering nation a consideration of its accumulated wrongs—and now the ballads of the North are in favor of the despised Ethiopian—at least they are changing in their tone & tune, and a tenderness & pathos marks them now, far different from the old ‘Jump Jim Crow’—so that whether Freedom be preached in word or song, therein we do rejoice & will rejoice.²⁸

The antislavery cause had been riddled with divisions since 1840. The Garrisonians had been dragged through the mud over their religious radicalism and criticism of the American government and advocacy of disunion of the individual and the North in order to save the slave. Pro-slavery Northerners and Southerners claimed that slavery might have died out on its own if abolitionists had not created so much agitation against slavery and gotten slaveholders on the offensive. By the early 1850s, Northern middle-class sentiment had begun to turn towards the eventual abolition of slavery. Slavery in the territories had become a political issue on the national stage. In many ways, antislavery reform was winning the battle in the North.²⁹

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²⁸ Lucretia Mott to John and Rebecca Ketchum, 30 August 1852. Mott Papers, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 1, FL.
Some antislavery women saw the end of slavery coming in the 1850s, but others had a more pessimistic vision of the future. Ann Phillips, wife of Wendell Phillips and bedridden due to disease in the 1850s, kept up a constant correspondence with other antislavery women despite her illness. She wrote to Elizabeth Pease, whom she had met while in London in 1840 with her husband for the World’s Antislavery Convention, “The future seems to unfold a vast Slave Empire united with Brazil & darkening the whole west—I hope I may be a false prophet but the sky was never so dark. Our Union, all confess, must sever finally on this question—it is now with 9/10 only a question of time.”

The threat of the secession of the South over slavery was apparent by the time Ann Phillips wrote this letter in 1854. Antislavery activists were well aware that slavery existed in South America as well as in the southern states. The threat of southern secession and alliance with outside slave powers frightened many Northerners. The major political issue of the 1850s was whether or not the western territories would be slave territories or free. Slavery, antislavery activists were sure, would divide the country.

Women’s attention in antislavery in the 1850s moved away from public speaking and more towards fundraising. Antislavery bazaars became increasingly important in raising funds and awareness for antislavery in the 1840s and 50s.

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30 Ann Phillips to Elizabeth Pease, 7 August 1854. MS A 1.2 v. 24 p. 106, BPL.
boasted large antislavery fairs that raised thousands of dollars each year towards antislavery efforts. Boston’s bazaar was the longest running and most famous, and along with the bazaar, the women put out a gift book, *Liberty Bell*, which contained some of the strongest antislavery writings by women published in the United States. Maria Weston Chapman and her sisters were the organizers of the Boston Antislavery Bazaar and the editors of the *Liberty Bell*. Chapman wrote to Elizabeth Pease of the success of their fair in 1860, one of the last they were to hold.

You will be glad to hear of our success at the Bazaar. Wellnigh $4000 which is much more this year than $5000 was last. It did not come out of the same people’s pockets by any means, however. This Crash fell upon the great cotton manufacturers, who have been so long in alliance with the plantations that they come hard by conscience of any other model of existence, & are learning that slavery is not the El Dorado they have hitherto found it. These are they that have been our best customers heretofore, they & their parasites—out of a sort of exhistory, politeness at the thought of their mobocratic violence of past times. This year the bankruptcy prevented their coming to buy. The shops too were full of bankruptist’s stock at half price & no price supplying other purchasers to our loss—our own power of buying greatly abridged. But we united all counsel & all temptations, & treated our contributions according to their deserts as Sacred trust property. The consequence is, we have half our contributions yet on hand, to dispose of during the year.…

I think the signs are full that we ought to make our next year’s call in the Standard & Liberator thus. “25th National Anti-Slavery Subscription Festival” The signs are full on this field of the water also. I observe a disposition on the part of persons beyond the reach of our thorough Anti-Slavery circle to think that, somehow, through our means, the work of abolishing slavery is to be done for them. That they have only to sit still.

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By 1860, the antislavery bazaar in Boston had become part of the annual social scene. Held in Fanueil Hall, it attracted Boston’s middle class and elite to shop from the beautiful handmade items made and donated by Massachusetts and foreign antislavery women and girls. The economic situation of the United States was precarious, and Southern slaveholders had been hit harder than Northern manufacturers. Although the economic setback had affected those who dealt in slave-grown goods like cotton cloth and tobacco, it appears that the antislavery ladies of Boston mobilized their friends and allies to make the bazaar a success even if the city was less prosperous than usual. January 1861 would be the 25th annual antislavery bazaar, and the last one before the opening of the Civil War. Apparently Chapman’s antislavery friends were not wrong that their work was nearly done and slavery would end if they just watched and waited.

For many antislavery women, by the eve of the Civil War, antislavery and women’s rights advocacy were so closely intertwined that they could argue the validity of both movements with the same rhetoric. Lucretia Mott was one of these women.

If Washn and Jeff. only desired to exalt white men to a political level—not negros & women, why then they are no models for us. He calls it a wise arrang[emen]t that the South shd be sovereigns over slavery in their States, & we wd rid them to maintn what system they pleased, & defend their sovrenity if assailed. That the south is equally at liberty to reject our system of ethics—How can he say so, with such a Declaration of Ind. as they boast? Then that composite structure a mere

33 Maria Weston Chapman to Elizabeth Pease Nichol, 25 January 1860. Ms. A 1.2 v. 30 p. 5, BPL.
34 Mott is writing about the speech of Henry Waldron, the Senator from Michigan and the speech he delivered to the Senate on April 26, 1860. An earlier paragraph describes the discussion her female antislavery society had about the speech on a meeting on May 1st.
matter of choice asks who wd lay violent hands on it—We should demand it at once if imperfect, lest great be the fall thereof—It is sicken[ing]g his profound respect for the Vice Pres. & never loved Southern Rep. more than now.
I took the above notes with others about the wisdom & justice of the Framers of this Republic acting in harmony with the condition of society, & the spirit of the age in all its provisions & made quite a speech warng against unqualified praise—especially as the negro was so disparaged. It seemed unexpected, but little reply was made.
I then waited for the Standard’s comments, & was far from satisfied that “want of room excluded” them—hopg that Paper wont wait for the Liberator. Where that severe, because in the main, just criticism was read, how glad was I that Garrison reviewed it, as my instincts had led me to do & with all, the faithful rebuke that ever flows from his pen.35

Mott’s argument about the rights of the slave and woman being drawn from the same rights that Jefferson and Washington echoed the arguments from both sides in Congress as they discussed the admission of Kansas into the Union. Congressional speeches of the spring of 1860 captured the attention of antislavery activists, and the speeches laid out the rights of Americans in excruciating detail as Southern Democrats battled Northern Whigs and Republicans over the role of slavery in the territories. Mott framed her objection to the speeches’ drawing on the founding fathers in terms of both race and gender. By 1860, in her mind, antislavery and women’s rights were tied together into a single philosophy of equality for all.

Yet, after the Civil War, the relationship between the old antislavery regime and women’s rights became more tenuous. During the Civil War, women’s rights activism stalled; wartime was not the time to press the issue of women’s access to the vote.

35 Lucretia Mott to Martha Wright, 12 May 1860. Mott Papers, Series 1 Correspondence, Box 2, FL.
Antislavery advocacy continued until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution ended slavery in the United States in 1865. After the war and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, most antislavery activists shifted their work to civil rights and reconstruction. Some women antislavery activists, however, saw the abolition of slavery as an opening to press for rights for women. Women’s rights activists resumed their agitation and meetings, calling for women to have access to the vote, to universities and to many of the other grievances listed in the “Declaration of Sentiments.” Antislavery activists insisted that pressing for women’s rights would only delay the equal rights of the free slaves, and the women’s previous allies evaporated. As the Republican antislavery supporters who were deeply invested in Reconstruction turned their back on the women’s rights advocates, Stanton and her followers embraced Democratic supporters. Antislavery and women’s rights reformers found themselves working in opposition, with antislavery reformers arguing that chaining women’s rights to civil rights for ex-slaves would doom both efforts. Racism crept into some of the women’s rights activists’ arguments, and the women began to distance themselves from civil rights, arguing that it was unfair for black men to get the vote before white women, who had long been participating in American politics.\(^{36}\) Historians of the women’s movement have shied away from discussing the changing allegiances of women’s rights activists, although many, including Lucretia Mott, continued to advocate for both civil rights for ex-slaves and women until her death in 1880. It is in the years after the Civil War, when many antislavery activists saw their work as almost done, that the issue of women’s

rights was permanently severed from the cause of the slaves.  

For the history of racism and the relationship between civil rights for ex-slaves and the women’s rights movement, see Jean Fagin Yellin, “Dubois’ ‘Crisis’ and Woman’s Suffrage,” *The Massachusetts Review* 14, No. 2 (Spring 1973): 365-375; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978 and 1999); Barbara Andolsen, *Daughters of Jefferson, Daughters of Bootblacks: Racism and American Feminism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996). All of these works seek to address the racist overtones of early suffrage activists who felt that women’s rights had been passed over in the years after the Civil War in favor of extending suffrage and protecting the voting rights of former slaves. DuBois’ work, in particular, made a strong connection between the women’s rights movement and antislavery movement, and focuses on growing tensions between civil rights and women’s rights workers after the American Civil War and the schism caused by the failure of the Equal Rights Association, pp. 55-78. Andolsen argues that the major thrust of racism in the women’s rights movement was the widespread adoption of the ‘myth of True Womanhood’ with its inherent racist and classist ideals, into the rhetoric of women’s rights in the late nineteenth century. Racism in the American women’s movement has also been widely discussed by feminist scholars like bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, and Audre Lorde, all of whom tie the roots of feminist racism to Susan B. Anthony and the schism between the women’s rights and antislavery movement in the decades following the Civil War.
The Collapse of British Antislavery and Women’s Political Identity

Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833. Antislavery efforts in Britain continued, as has been discussed, well after the official end of slavery in the empire. After the revolutions of 1848 rocked the political stability of Europe, reform movements began to shift towards domestic concerns. Even before 1848, antislavery activists began to turn their interest to local issues, including agitation against the Corn Law beginning in 1838 and continuing until the repeal in 1846.¹ Divisions in the American antislavery movement continued to plague the British societies, and internal arguing and finger-pointing became more and more common in the 1850s. Women’s participation in the movement changed, and as the women moved more towards assisting the Garrisonian women’s societies in America, British women’s organizations changed their efforts to supporting antislavery fairs in American and were less focused towards fundraising for British men’s societies. As the movement splintered, women became more and more involved in other reform efforts. The start of the British women’s rights movement has long been associated with the debates over the 1867 Reform Act.² Unlike in America, there was no direct connection between the antislavery and women’s rights movements’ leaders. Some women who had supported antislavery also worked for women’s rights, including Elizabeth Pease Nichol and Anne Knight, but the leadership of the two movements was distinct. However, the rhetoric and

experience gained in antislavery reform served women’s rights leaders in Britain in similar ways to the American movement.\(^3\)

The revolutions of 1848 shook the British antislavery movement on many levels. Social revolutions that threw off monarchies occurred throughout most of Europe, and the working poor of France rose up against their government.\(^4\) Letters of antislavery men and women commented widely on the events in Europe, and worried over the safety of the British government. Britain’s 1832 and 1867 Reform Acts had attempted to quell the agitation of the middle and working classes through slowly expanding and refining the franchise in Britain, but the first major reform act, in 1832, had left most of the working class without the vote. Although Britain had already undergone its own revolutions of class agitation at the end of the eighteenth century, it had solved them with legal and parliamentary reforms. The food riots, corresponding committees and radical pamphleteers had been subsumed into a new ideal of domesticity that embraced the working class and allowed them to relate to the government and middle class in ways that quieted rebellion.\(^5\) Despite little real danger of political or actual revolution in Britain in 1848, the fear of revolution spread from mainland Europe, and Britons began looking to their own people for reform efforts, seeking to prevent the issues that led other countries to violent revolution.\(^6\)

Corn Law reform was one of the first of the political reform efforts middle-class

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\(^4\) Ibid, chapter 7.

\(^5\) See E.P Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* and Anna Clark’s *The Struggle for the Breeches* for analysis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century agitation over class consciousness and political access.

\(^6\) Linda Colley argues that reform efforts were essential to British identity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in *Britons* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).
women advocated in large numbers. By the time anti-Corn Law sentiment had grown in Britain, women had experience petitioning government through the antislavery movement. Many antislavery women participated in anti-Corn Law agitation, signing petitions and writing letters to encourage the repeal of the Corn Law, which drove up food prices and endangered the livelihood of many poor Britons. Anne Knight was one of the antislavery women who were interested in Corn Law repeal, and her letters to other antislavery advocates included commentary on the injustice of the Corn Laws and the petitions she helped to circulate for their repeal. Women organized and gathered nearly 100,000 signatures for a petition to Queen Victoria in 1841, and their participation in petitioning was longstanding at this point. Women’s participation in the anti-Corn Law agitation drew upon the idea of women caring for the community, extending the domestic sphere to less fortunate neighbors and drawing on the tradition of women’s benevolent activity in the community. Their petitions called upon Victoria’s womanhood as an appeal to help the poor of the nation. Although the Corn Law agitation was completed in 1846 with the repeal of the laws, before the revolutions of 1848 turned British reform concerns inward, it marked the beginning of a shift towards national and imperial focus for reform and a shift away from engagement with

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7 Chartism, as discussed in Chapter 2, was another. However, Chartism and antislavery agitation had existed side-by-side for several decades by the time antislavery activism began to wane and as such is not discussed in this chapter.


9 Anne Knight to R. H Webb, 12 October 1841. MS A 1.2 v 12.1 p 118, BPL. For information on women petitioning the queen, see Kathryn Gleadle’s *Borderline Citizens* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44. Olive Banks identifies the Anti-Corn Law agitation as a precursor of feminism in her sample, with five women she identifies as feminists involved in the movement, second only to antislavery in connection with early feminism in *Becoming A Feminist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 20-21.
slavery, which had ended in the empire over a decade before.\textsuperscript{10}

Divisions in the US antislavery movement, discussed in detail in chapter seven, plagued the British movement for two decades. As discussed in that chapter, women’s antislavery groups began to turn towards Garrisonian antislavery since there was little actual work being done by the more conservative American & Foreign Antislavery Society in the United States. British women’s handmade goods decorated the antislavery bazaars of American female antislavery societies. The women sent thousands of dollars worth of needlework, knitted items, jams and jellies, books and pamphlets, clothing and any other handmade item they could think of that would survive a trip across the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{11} The British & Foreign Antislavery Society refused to work with the Garrisonians, and also regularly ignored letters from British antislavery women seeking information on how they could help. The indifference of British leaders and the reluctance of some British women to help the American Garrisonians due to concerns over Garrison and his followers’ religious leanings contributed greatly to the decline in antislavery activism in Britain. Women turned their own interest to other concerns, most focused on domestic or imperial concerns. It was at this point, Clare Midgley argues, that women began to take a leadership role in the movement. Women’s continued participation in antislavery was often more active than that of men in local societies, and the national leadership had to acknowledge that antislavery sentiment was failing in Britain. In 1854, the British & Foreign Antislavery Society held a

\textsuperscript{10} Kathryn Gleadle, \textit{Borderline Citizens} (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 80-90.
\textsuperscript{11} See letters in the Boston Public Library Antislavery collection to the Weston sisters, letters to and from Lucretia Mott, and the letters of Harriet Martineau which list the innumerable items sent and received by the Boston and Philadelphia antislavery fairs and bazaars.
convention, and unlike in 1840, at this convention, a few women sat as delegates. The resistance of the women’s antislavery societies to the national leadership discussed in chapter six bears this out, although it clearly took some time for women to become frustrated enough to dare to resist the rulings of the national associations. It would have been easier, as many organizations did, to simply turn their efforts elsewhere, to disband their antislavery society and drift off to other reform efforts where their work would be appreciated.

Antislavery women continued to criticize national leaders of antislavery efforts, regardless of the reforms being pursued. American women also continued to criticize the male leaders of British antislavery. Maria Weston Chapman wrote to Elizabeth Pease Nichol in 1851, when they both were planning to attend the Congress of Peace in Paris,

> I hastened yesterday morning to the Congress of Peace in the hope of seeing you. Nothing else would have taken me there such is my connection of the worse three: inability of the movement, which blocks the way to real thought, discussion and actions on the question as one of the principle and progress by substituting a time-serving sentimentality for the truth. I say this without the least desire to impeaching the sincerity or integrity of the mass of persons attending. But the Leadership of Wm. Scoble & Mr. Burritt is not free from the approach of being that of worse than blind guides. However small may be their moral light, I am confident that they both see farther than they are willing to go. Enough of them.

As Chapman’s letter suggests, the leaders of Britain’s antislavery movement had made long-term enemies of American female antislavery activists and their British allies. Leaders of the national British antislavery societies had become known in America and among women in

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13 Ibid, 178.
14 Maria Weston Chapman to Elizabeth Pease, 24 July 1851. Ms A 1.2 v. 20 p. 80, BPL. Emphases in source.
Britain as short-sighted and unwilling to bend their strict ideals of propriety to further their cause. Some women, like Chapman, became convinced that the British & Foreign Antislavery Society was too invested in its own philosophies to make real progress, and that the restrictions of middle-class behavior and mores rendered its adherents incapable of working towards any emancipatory goal.

The start of the American Civil War ended much other antislavery effort, especially as antislavery groups in the United States quieted as the war went on, focusing more on the issues of the war than on continuing to agitate for the now inevitable end of slavery in the United States. Britain was notably supportive of the Confederacy, cloth manufacture being one of the most successful and a widespread industry in Britain and the American South the source of their raw material. Here again, British women’s benevolent concerns turned towards domestic matters. The end of cotton exports from the American South damaged the British economy and left many mill workers without a source of income. Midgley argues that antislavery women engaged in benevolent activities mainly to help those women left destitute by the lack of mill work during the American Civil War. Their reform efforts were closely tied to efforts to reform working-class women’s behavior, and their efforts closely mirrored later efforts to reform prostitutes’ behavior in the second half of the nineteenth century.15 After the war, some antislavery societies turned to freedman’s aid societies, while others disbanded and individual members turned to domestic issues. Although antislavery agitation did continue on a smaller scale in Britain after 1860, the British & Foreign

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15 Ibid., pp. 182-85. For descriptions of efforts to reform prostitutes and teach them to behave as middle class women would have them do, see Judith R. Walkowitz’s *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
Antislavery Society still exists in London under the name Antislavery International, and reform efforts became focused on domestic issues, like prostitution reform.\textsuperscript{16}

Prostitution reform was, like antislavery, a movement that exposed gendered divisions in law and social behavior established alongside the ideals of domesticity. Judith Walkowitz’s work on prostitution reform in Victorian England examines the feminist campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts and their discriminatory restrictions on women’s behavior. Prostitution reform was closely tied to women’s suffrage; the Ladies’ National Association advocated both the repeal of the Contagious Diseases acts and suffrage.\textsuperscript{17} Prostitution law reform efforts couched their language in the longstanding rhetorical tradition of invoking the imagery of slavery and applying it to white women on the streets of England. Antislavery speeches provided context for suffragists’ later use of the rhetoric of slavery, women in bondage to circumstance and to the state.\textsuperscript{18} Women’s exposure to and experience of writing antislavery rhetoric colored their later reform efforts and even the speeches of suffragettes well into the second half of the nineteenth century. Some of the women active in prostitution law reform and suffrage either had engaged in antislavery work as young adults, or were the daughters of reformers.\textsuperscript{19} Antislavery activism preceded many later efforts led by women, and the language of slavery colored efforts to reform society to

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\textsuperscript{16} Clare Midgley, \textit{Women Against Slavery} (London: Routledge, 1992), 194.
\textsuperscript{17} Judith R Walkowitz, \textit{Prostitution and Victorian Society Women, Class and the State} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 129.
\textsuperscript{19} Olive Banks, \textit{Becoming a Feminist} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 20-21. Banks identifies seven women who participated both in the antislavery and the suffrage movement, some of which were early leaders, more connections than any other reform movement prior to the beginning of the suffrage movement.
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give women greater equality. Like in America, the lessons of antislavery applied neatly to women’s own position.

If women in Britain engaged in debates similar to those held in America in the second half of the nineteenth century, why did it take twenty years for British women to call for the right to vote after American women began agitating for suffrage? Suffrage was not universal for men, or even for households in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century. The 1832 and 1867 Reform Acts changed the requirements for voting for Parliament, shifting which individuals were including in the voting public and which were not. Suffrage and access to Parliament became part of middle-class male identity in the early nineteenth century. The 1832 Reform Act extended the vote to middle-class heads of household, although the act specifically excluded women by limiting voting to male persons only. Some suffragists attempted to move this middle-class identity as voters to their arguments about female voters. Class and gender were conflicting identities for suffragists in the earliest years of the movement. Liberal women engaged with the idea that they were middle class before they were women, and that their votes would expand the influence of the middle class in Parliament. The Reform Bill of 1867 changed the requirements for voting in Britain, lowering the property requirement to £7 from £10 and created a small group of working-class voters, who had been disenfranchised under the 1832 Reform Bill. Access to the vote was an issue that strained class relations, creating concerns over working-class influence on the House of Commons

22 Gertrude Himmelfarb, “The Politics of Democracy: The English Reform Act of 1867,” *The Journal of British Studies* 6, no. 1 (Nov. 1966): 102-03. This early article places Mill’s efforts to include women in the reform to an earlier bill which failed in 1859, but Himmelfarb does not mention the women’s agitation for inclusion.
and the decline of middle-class importance in establishing the laws of the nation. Like race in the United States, class divided the suffrage movement in Britain. The long battle for universal male suffrage was entangled with middle-class women’s suffrage, and those two movements clashed and entangled in many the same ways civil rights and women’s rights did in the United States.²³

Historians have long seated the beginning of the British women’s suffrage movement in the agitation over the Reform Act of 1867. Women were deeply interested in the bill expanding suffrage in Britain, and they made their intention to be included in the bill known by signing and sending in numerous petitions.²⁴ John Stuart Mill’s attempt to amend the bill to change the wording from “man” to “person” failed, and his female supporters organized the first campaigns for women’s suffrage.²⁵ The vote for middle-class women was the original purpose of the suffrage campaigns. Unlike in the United States, the announcement of a campaign for women’s suffrage did not originate from debate over women’s rights in society. From the beginning, the suffrage movement in Britain was split between the liberal and radical sides; liberals emphasized the role of women as property owners and the constitutional precedence of middle-class women voting, and radicals emphasizing the moral superiority of women and their positive impact on government. Women quickly gained the right to vote in local elections, and sitting in local governing bodies followed soon thereafter.²⁶ By 1869, women had gained the vote in local elections if they met certain

²⁴ Philippa Levine, Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900 (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1987), 56-58.
²⁶ Philippa Levine, Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900 (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1987), 55-57.
property requirements, and access to local office, such as sitting on education committees, became possible in the 1870s.\(^{27}\) Nineteenth-century British women were not unified into one organization either; rather, small groups loosely connected by umbrella organizations worked towards suffrage in a myriad of ways.\(^{28}\) Women’s position within the political space of the middle class remained tenuous in the 1860s, with women turning to petitioning, demonstrating and writing letters to support their right to vote.

The leadership of the suffrage movement in Britain was distinct from the leadership of antislavery women, unlike the United States, where many antislavery female leaders stepped into women’s rights agitation once it became clear that slavery would end only with war. In Britain, many of the leaders of the antislavery movement eventually supported female suffrage, but they did not lead the movement. Anne Knight was one of the few antislavery women who took a leadership role in the early women’s rights movement.\(^{29}\) She had long advocated that women should participate in government, as her letters stated, and despite her advancing age in the 1850s, she strongly supported women’s access to the vote. In 1832, after passage of the reform bill that advanced middle-class householders to the franchise, Anne Knight led a group of women to attempt to vote in Chelmsford.\(^{30}\) Knight died before the campaigns leading up to the Reform Act of 1867, but her loud and vehement

\(^{27}\) Ibid, 58.


\(^{29}\) Olive Banks identifies seven women, almost 30 percent of the women she identifies, as directly involved in both antislavery and feminism, although she does acknowledge a connection between the rhetoric of antislavery and the rhetoric of early feminists in *Becoming a Feminist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 20.

\(^{30}\) Kathryn Gleadle, *Borderline Citizens: Women, Gender, and Political Culture in Britain 1815-1867* (London: Oxford University Press, 2009), 177. Anne Knight was born in 1786, and was over 50 years old by the time of the 1832 attempt of the Chelmsford ladies to vote.
voice for women’s equality rang on through the women who took up the cause after her death. Elizabeth Pease Nichol, who had moved to Edinburgh and rejoined reform efforts in that city after the death of her husband in 1859, was also engaged in women’s suffrage. By this point, she was also over fifty years old, and had lost many of her close friends when she left the Quaker meeting after marrying a non-Quaker. She was lauded for her continued agitation for equality, but her advanced age and a lack of existing letters from her collection limit our knowledge of her continuing reform work.\(^{31}\) Many of the other leaders of the women’s antislavery movement had passed away or were ill or too infirm to participate in the suffrage movement by the time it gained momentum in the late 1860s. The leadership of the suffrage movement came from a younger generation, the daughters and granddaughters of the leaders of the antislavery women.

From 1868, British suffragists proceeded with their activities in much the same manner as had American women’s rights activists. Women used a variety of methods to obtain the vote, including picketing, petitioning and civil disobedience. Their rhetoric drew upon the language of antislavery women, calling upon the language of bondage and suffering that female pamphleteers and letter writers employed against slavery to free women they called sister.\(^{32}\) Although the intervening years had pared the antislavery women down to


\(^{32}\) Philippa Levine, *Victorian Feminism, 1850-1900* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1987), 62. The importance of John Stuart Mill’s rhetoric in suffrage debate has been examined in Laura E.N. Mayhall’s article “The Rhetorics of Slavery and Citizenship: Suffragist Discourse and Canonical Texts in Britain, 1880-1914”, *Gender & History* 13, no. 3 (Nov. 2001): 481-497. Barbara Caine also points out the continuation of slavery metaphor in Victorian feminist discourse in *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 84-85. Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall argue that antislavery was where the idea of “women’s work” became essential to justifying women’s participation in public politics, and that this language grew
only a few remaining who supported women’s suffrage, Anne Knight, Elizabeth Pease and the other antislavery veterans lent their experience and knowledge to the newer generation, encouraging them to speak out and cross the barriers of public and political participation and stand up for their cause. The antislavery cause had begun to crumble in the 1840s and 50s; the leadership of the men’s societies made infrequent and inefficient use of the women’s auxiliary societies. Women began to decide for themselves which American organizations they wanted to help, and their contributions to American antislavery bazaars raised thousands of dollars for the cause. Some women’s societies did not choose to assist the Garrisonian American antislavery societies, either due to the rumors about religion or apathy over a lack of leadership.

Despite the change in leadership in Britain, antislavery connections continued to funnel information regarding women’s rights between the United States and Britain. Articles on women’s rights conventions in the United States were common in the *Liberator*. Letters carried information about women’s rights meetings, as have been quoted earlier in this dissertation. The continuation of trans-Atlantic connections between women in the women’s rights and suffrage movements drew on earlier connections between antislavery women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s visits brought together the earliest women’s rights movements, and later feminist journals and books crossed the Atlantic regularly. Stanton’s daughter, Harriet Stanton Blatch, married an Englishman and participated in the British suffrage movement beyond the reform movements of the first decades of the nineteenth century in their *Defining the Victorian Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

33 Harriet Stanton Blatch (1856-1940) American, married a British man and was active in the British and American women’s rights movements.
until she was widowed and returned to the United States. Lucy Delap’s *The Feminist Avant-Garde* discusses the journals that flowed from Britain to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She argues that feminists more than suffragists, shared ideas and theories through journals like *The Freewoman*, although it became clear after the first issues that Europe would dominate the theoretical discussion of feminism. Sandra Stanley Holton’s article on the Bright circle and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s connections with British feminists argues that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her daughter, Harriet Stanton Blatch, became the center of a transatlantic women’s rights movement through their connections on both sides of the Atlantic. A transatlantic exchange of ideas continued, based on existing networks established during the heyday of the antislavery movement. Continuing connections between the United States and Britain shifted back towards Britain leading and America following behind. The long tradition of shared literature and news continued in the women’s rights movements on both sides of the Atlantic, drawing on connections made by antislavery women and continuing with their daughters and granddaughters.

In the 1840s and 1850s, women and men in Britain turned their attention to more domestic concerns, prompted both by unrest in Europe and problems in Britain. The Corn Laws and their effects, making food unaffordable to many poor families in Britain, drew the attention of middle-class reformers, including women. Prostitution law reform sparked the

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34 Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70
concern of other middle-class women, and their efforts to help “fallen” women and to change laws that saw women on the street as morally corrupt. The language of bondage and slavery informed women’s arguments about these reforms as well, turning the ideals of antislavery onto the situation of white women in Britain. As domestic concerns and divisions in the American antislavery movement divided antislavery women, the few who had engaged in agitation for women’s rights during the movement continued to support women’s public participation in reform efforts and politics. Suffrage for men was under debate in the 1860s in Britain, and women began to insert their own cause into the debates. Once British middle-class women began to petition for their own access to the vote, they drew upon women’s experiences in antislavery reform and other reform movements to muster enthusiasm for their cause.
Conclusion

The preceding pages have argued for the existence of complex relationships between women in the United States and Britain, founded on their mutual efforts to end slavery in the Atlantic world. This argument is certainly not a new one. Bonnie S. Anderson, Clare Midgely, Karen Halbersleben, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Jane Rendall and a host of other historians have examined the correspondence of antislavery women and seen there the roots of an international movement of women working towards equality for oppressed people. All of this work paints a picture of a small group of women who were unique in their assertion of their own rights to take part in a political discussion, and who, in claiming rights for the slave, discovered their own inequality.\footnote{Anderson claims there are twenty women in this early feminist movement, which she places as having taken place between 1830 and 1860. Her work encompasses women outside of the antislavery movement, however, over half her list were women who did participate in the antislavery movement. Bonnie S. Anderson, \textit{Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830-1860} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 4-5.} Several things, however, have been missing from the discussion of antislavery women and their connection to the women’s rights movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century. All of the historians listed above studied individual women, examining their letters, speeches and writings and seeing in them the roots of feminist thought. However, aside from Bonnie Anderson, few focus on the connections these women forged which provided mutual support and an exchange of ideas that fed the growing feminist sentiments within the antislavery movement.\footnote{Sandra Stanley Holton’s article, “‘To Educate Women into Rebellion’: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 99, No. 4 (Oct. 1994): 1112-1136, is one of the few works to closely examine the connections between American and British suffragists and their roots in the antislavery movement.} Anderson’s work, despite its focus on connections, does not give due credit to the actual words and philosophies of these women.
The lack of concrete examples in many of the historians who work on antislavery women shifts the focus of their work towards an examination of structures and organizations and gives less attention to the women themselves. The words of Lucretia Mott, the Grimké sisters, Anne Knight and Elizabeth Pease give us insight into their characters. Without reading the words of Lucretia Mott, it is hard to imagine the grouchy but matronly grandmother of the women’s rights movement, or the eccentric and energetic Anne Knight in her relentless pursuit of the end of slavery and the rights of women. The second missing factor connects the historiography of transatlantic slavery with the study of the creation of the middle class in the United States and Great Britain. Although the historiography of the middle class in the United States is much smaller and less up-to-date than that of Great Britain, both currents have commented on the importance of reform works in the creation of middle class identity. The idea of separate spheres permeates the writings of antislavery women, and they are forced again and again to justify their participation in antislavery activities as appropriate activities for middle class women, particularly when they are called to speak publicly against the institution of slavery. This dissertation has attempted to combine a focus on connections among activists with a close reading of the words of antislavery women and argues for a class-based analysis of the rise of feminism in the antislavery movement in the United States and Britain.

Antislavery women not only worked for the slave and accomplished their goals in both Britain and the United States, but in doing so, they forged a network of mutual support despite obstacles of distance and difference. Women worked within and around the constraints that middle-class ideals placed upon their participation in public aspects of the
antislavery movement, highlighting the barriers they sometimes plowed straight through in their efforts to help those less fortunate than themselves. Through their experiences in the antislavery movement, many women became acutely aware of the inequality within their own societies, of the restrictions that middle-class domesticity placed upon intelligent, passionate women in the name of propriety. Middle-class ideals of domesticity were not simply placed upon resisting middle-class women, class ideals had to be supported by both men and women, and many women loudly protested the breaching of boundaries of proper behavior. Women worried over their participation in antislavery reform, concerned that it was improper for respectable women to be speaking in public, petitioning or otherwise making what was ultimately a political statement. Some women embraced reform efforts, including antislavery, as a way to make a political statement without violating social norms, arguing that their womanhood made them particularly suited to reform efforts. Antislavery women pushed the boundaries of social norms, making space for themselves and their descendants to speak out publicly on issues that mattered to them.

Religion also played a role in the creation and crossing of boundaries of class behavior. Unitarians and radical Quakers endorsed equality among their members, and Quaker women could become ministers and speak to mixed assemblies without censure from their peers or church. Many of the earliest public speakers and leaders of the antislavery women in both the United States and Britain were Quakers or Unitarians. Religion also complicated relationships between antislavery women; controversies over the religious leanings of Garrison and his followers caused the leadership of the national antislavery societies in Britain to distance themselves from the Garrisonians, and women’s organizations
in Britain suffered from a lack of direction after this distancing occurred. Some women were able to overcome this distance, forging their own connections to American antislavery activists and revitalizing their societies in the 1840s and 50s, when the majority of the British antislavery societies were falling apart due to lack of leadership and interest.

Even for women who did not actively engage in antislavery groups, literature and newspapers allowed them to participate in the larger antislavery debate. Some women, like Harriet Martineau, participated in antislavery discussion almost entirely through their writing. Her trip to America and subsequent travelogue discussing the horrors of slavery catapulted her to antislavery fame in Britain and the United States. She never again travelled to the US, nor did she participate in antislavery activities outside of donating items, but the publication of her travelogue began a long series of correspondence with antislavery leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Harriet Beecher Stowe is yet another example of a woman who participated in antislavery work mainly through her writing, although she also spoke publicly against slavery in her book tours. Writing and reading antislavery literature provided a way for women who were barred from more active involvement, including those with small children, illness, or kept by their families from openly participating, to be a part of the larger antislavery community. Literature also exposed women to ideas about freedom, and many antislavery novels connected gender to slavery, exposing the chains that bound women as well as examining the horrors of African slavery in America. Reading became a political act, as pro- and antislavery authors published books supporting their side of the debate and women read, commented upon and shared antislavery texts amongst their families and friends.
The meeting of British and American antislavery activists in London in 1840 revealed the differences in the development of American and British ideals of middle-class domesticity. In Britain, women had long been barred from politics or participation even as spectators in political arenas. American women had traditionally been allowed to watch and listen to public political events, and had begun to participate in them as speakers in the late 1830s. British women were not even sure if they would be allowed to attend as spectators, where American women expected to participate as voting delegates. The debate over whether or not to admit female delegates became a catalyzing event for American women’s rights activists, especially Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who met and became friends during the agitation over women’s inclusion at the meeting. Their meeting resulted in the 1848 Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention and the drafting of the Declaration of Sentiments, the beginning of the American women’s rights movement. Some British women were also moved to call for women’s equality, most notably Anne Knight, but the women’s movement in Britain did not really begin until 1866 with the arguments over the Reform Act of 1867 and the debate over franchise and property. The question thus arises, why did American women seize upon the call for the vote and for formal equality nearly twenty years before the call for the vote and equality spread through middle-class British women?

The answer lies in the reactions of the women to their exclusion from the podium at the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention. American and British women reacted quite differently to the call for delegates, and their attitudes on arrival at the convention were very different. British women were happy to be invited to attend as spectators, as Kathryn Gleadle argues, British women’s participation in public political as spectators after 1830 was
entirely dependant on the circumstances and leaders of the event.  

The boundaries of the domestic sphere in Britain were much more rigid than those in the United States. Women in the United States had a long history of being spectators to political events, and in the 1830s, had begun to speak in public spaces on political topics. The strength of separate spheres ideology in Britain prohibited women’s participation even as spectators in some situations. In the United States, particularly in the early republic and the Jacksonian era, political culture was part of popular entertainment, and because all white men had the franchise, politics permeated American culture in the early nineteenth century. Politics and access to the vote in Britain in the early nineteenth century was entangled with masculine class identity for the middle class, who only gained the vote in 1832. Middle-class women used domesticity to solidify middle-class identity, eschewing public life as the field of working-class women, who worked outside the home and participated in political events like riots and demonstrations. 

The rigidity of separate spheres ideology made a difference in the way women went about agitating for the vote in both countries as well. American women held a convention of their own and published a document listing their grievances. The document, although written by a small group, was taken up by other American women and raised as the standard of the

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women’s rights movement. In Britain, women passed petitions for signatures and sent them to Parliament and the crown, asking to be included in the reform acts. Women had participated in petitioning for decades by 1866; many of the first petitions were passed by antislavery women. Early suffragists in Britain challenged their access to the vote as members of the middle class, not as women. They downplayed their gender and emphasized their connection to middle-class morals and ideals, encouraging Parliament to see them as an extension of middle-class political power. American women eventually based their appeal for the vote on their whiteness, as voting in the United States had been expanded to all white men well before 1848. Whiteness became an important part of middle-class identity in the second half of the nineteenth century. That American middle-class identity was based as much on race as on behavior changed the ways in which individuals were included and excluded from the middle class, and softened many of the boundaries of proper middle-class behavior. There were few non-whites in England, and the identity of the middle class there was based on behavior and property, and as the middle class solidified its social and political power, the unspoken rules governing men and women’s behavior became more rigid.

Reform movements provide interesting insight into the boundaries of women’s behavior in American and Britain. Reform efforts required women to leave their homes and meet together, sometimes with men, and often to venture onto the street with petitions or to raise money for their cause. Although benevolent activity was expected of middle-class women, participation in it was the route many women took to learning their own abilities to

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organize and speak out on behalf of others, and eventually for themselves. Antislavery was an obvious starting place for learning to stand up for one’s own freedom; antislavery rhetoric called upon the equality of all human beings and in speaking out for the slave, women found their work revealed their own inequality. The women whose letters figure so strongly in this work are in some ways unique from their sisters-in-arms; they spoke the most widely and were the leaders of the movement. One can only believe that the women who followed their leadership also sought similar freedom for themselves. Although the amount of time between the end of the widespread activity of the antislavery movement and the beginning of women’s rights activism differed between America and Britain, the rhetoric and experiences of women in the antislavery movement helped women’s rights activists in both countries claim political agency for themselves and the women they represented.

More work is needed to create a broader picture of the interrelations between class, reform movements and transatlantic culture in the nineteenth century. As new, post-Marxist interpretations of class are debated in American historiography, a broader understanding of how the middle class shaped itself in opposition to the working class and elite will emerge, and complicate discussions of suffrage, reform and relationships between British, American and French men and women. The study of the French antislavery movement is still nascent and not accessible to English speaking historians. Further work connecting the French antislavery and women’s rights activists with their radical political backgrounds will add immensely to the understanding of the networks women forged throughout the Atlantic world. This dissertation does not take into account the participation of black women in the antislavery movement; the small but growing historiography of the black antislavery
movement complicates the discussion of antislavery and class by adding the element of race to the debate in the American context. Plans for future versions of this dissertation include adding material on the French contribution to antislavery through the study of Anne Knight and her circle, a chapter on black abolitionism in America, and an examination of the relationship between women’s antislavery groups outside of London and the British & Foreign Antislavery Society. Further study in any of these directions would enhance our understanding of the intersections of race, class and gender in the Atlantic context.

This dissertation examines one reform effort that led to women’s discovering and working against their own oppression. Issues of class, gender and religion color the letters of antislavery women from the very first days of their involvement in the movement. Women were essential to the effectiveness of antislavery societies, and their letters reveal a deeply interconnected network of families and single women who worked tirelessly towards ending slavery and creating equality for all men and women. This network served them well in both supporting their work against slavery, and in their later work for female suffrage and women’s rights. The leaders of the women’s rights movement in the 1860s grew up in the network of strong antislavery women of the 1840s and 50s, learning at the knees of their mothers and family friends how to stand up for their own right to speak out and how their gender barred them from participating in the movement on an equal level as male abolitionists. Studying antislavery women in a comparative context gives us an image of how activism changed gender relations in both America and Britain, and makes visible real differences in their relationships to the men and other women in the movement. Comparative studies of the women’s rights movement may reveal even more details about the ways in
which class, gender and race interacted along lines of tension within the middle class. So much work has been done on working-class formation in both the United States and Britain, and the middle class, with its long reaching impact on politics and culture in both countries, deserves equal treatment.
Appendix A: Brief Biographies

Maria Weston Chapman (1806-1885)

Maria Weston was born in 1806 to a middle-class family in Massachusetts, the eldest of eight children. Maria was educated in London and lived there until 1828, when she returned to Boston to run a girls’ school. She married Henry Grafton Chapman in 1830, with whom she had four children, three of which lived to adulthood. Henry died in 1842 from tuberculosis, leaving Maria Weston Chapman to raise their children and continue their antislavery work alone.

Maria Weston Chapman and her sisters were well known in the antislavery movement in New England. Maria, along with her sisters, ran the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar and published the Liberty Bell, the annual magazine sold at the bazaar. She also sat on the executive committees of several antislavery societies, including the American Antislavery Society. She took several breaks from antislavery work in the 1840s to educate her children and to live in France until 1855, but resumed her antislavery work upon her return to the United States. She retired from reform work after the Civil War and lived as a private individual until her death in 1885.

Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880)

Lydia Maria Francis was born in 1802 in Massachusetts. She studied to be a teacher, and was tutored in literature by her older brother after their mother died. She taught in Massachusetts from 1823 until her marriage to David Child in 1828. She wrote her first novel, Hobomok, in 1824 in response to a call for an early American novel in The North
American Review. Child wrote prolifically throughout her lifetime, but was best known in her own time for her works for children and her poetry.

In 1831, Lydia Maria Child and her husband began to support antislavery after reading works by William Lloyd Garrison. Childs wrote a number of works against slavery in the 1830s through 1850s, and served on the executive committee of the American Antislavery Society in the 1840s and 50s. This period was both a time of great productivity for Child, and one of great difficulty. She was separated from her husband for most of the 1840s. David Child’s career path was a rocky one; he left a relatively successful law practice to become a sugar beet farmer, moving Lydia to a small, isolated farm in 1838. Their relationship suffered along with their finances as the farm failed to thrive, and in 1841, Lydia moved out of her husband’s home and moved to New York to take up the editorship of an antislavery newspaper. She did not return to Massachusetts and her husband until 1850, and there is evidence she conducted at least one affair while they were separated. Even after their reconciliation, their marriage was not a happy one. Inheritance from Lydia’s father made them financially stable after 1856. Lydia Maria and David Child had no children. Lydia Maria Child died in Massachusetts in 1880.

Elizabeth Heyrick (1769-1831)

Elizabeth Heyrick was born in 1769 in Leicester, England, to a cloth manufacturing family. Heyrick was a schoolteacher and married the lawyer Robert Heyrick in 1787. They had no children, and Robert died in 1795, leaving Elizabeth a widow at a relatively young age. Heyrick converted to Quakerism and devoted her life to reform efforts.
Anne Knight (1786-1862)

Anne Knight was born in 1786 to a grocer and his wife in Chelmsford, England. Anne was raised as a Quaker, and her mother was the daughter of a well-known radical family in Chelmsford. Knight took up the antislavery cause as a young woman and was one of the most outspoken British women in the movement. She attended the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention and met with the American women at the meeting, forming lifelong friendships.

In 1846, Anne Knight moved to France and there advocated antislavery and human rights. She lived in Paris during the 1848 revolutions, and participated in agitations for women’s political rights and participation in France. While in France, she befriended a number of antislavery activists there, and many of her letters from this period request pamphlets and other information for their efforts. She returned to England regularly throughout the 1850s, and continued to advocate antislavery through letters and pamphlets.

In the 1850s, she also began to advocate women’s rights in Britain. Anne Knight organized women in her home town of Chelmsford, and also helped the women in Sheffield to organize a women’s rights group. She was deeply interested in Chartism and voting rights for all Britons, including women. Anne never married, and she died in France in 1862.

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876)

Harriet Martineau was born in 1802 to a manufacturing family in Norwich, England.
She was raised Unitarian, although her family were Huguenot exiles. Her family experienced some financial instability in her young adult life, and she and her mother contributed to the family income through needlework and dressmaking. Her father died when she was a young woman, and after the death of the eldest son, she and her mother brought in a large portion of the family income. Familial pressure kept Martineau from devoting herself to writing full time until after her mother’s death. Martineau never married; her fiancé died before they could be married.

Martineau was first drawn into antislavery work after her visit to the United States and the publication of her travelogues, *Theory and Practice of Society in America* (1837) and *Retrospect of Western Travel* (1838). She was sympathetic to the cause prior to her trip to the United States, but after her travels and her reports of slavery in her books, she was included in the antislavery movement in both Britain and the United States. She continued to write sociological works for the rest of her life; needlework became a hobby and she donated dozens of items to American antislavery bazaars.

Ill health prevented Martineau from writing or working towards antislavery off and on for the last thirty years of her life. She spent a considerable amount of time confined to her rooms in the 1840s due to an ovarian cyst. She continued to write and also farmed and kept up a voluminous correspondence when she was well enough. She died at her farm in 1876.
Lucretia Coffin Mott (1793-1880)

Lucretia Coffin was born in Nantucket, Massachusetts to Quaker parents. Her parents sent her to a Quaker boarding school in New York, where she met James Mott. Her family moved to Philadelphia while she was at school, and she and James Mott settled there after their marriage in 1811.

James and Lucretia Mott had six children, five of which lived to adulthood. James and Lucretia were active in their Quaker meeting, and Lucretia began speaking at meeting in 1818 and became a minister in 1821. In 1827, they left their meeting and joined with the new meeting of Hicksite Quakers in Philadelphia. Mott adopted the simple dress and speaking style of the Hicksites for the rest of her life.

Both James and Lucretia Mott were active in antislavery societies on the local and national level. Lucretia quickly outpaced her husband in antislavery circles, and he encouraged her activism and speaking. The Motts were members of the American Free Produce Society, and Lucretia was an officer in the Ladies’ Antislavery Society of Philadelphia. By 1840, when James and Lucretia travelled to London for the World’s Antislavery Convention, Lucretia’s fame as an antislavery speaker had long surpassed her husband’s.

Lucretia and her sister, Martha Coffin Wright, were among the organizers of the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention. Lucretia continued to participate in women’s rights and antislavery activity through the 1850s and 60s, and after the Civil War, was elected to the presidency of the Equal Rights Association. She was known in the women’s rights movement as a centrist and as one who encouraged factions within the movement to
work together towards mutual goals.

Elizabeth Pease Nichol (1807-1897)

Elizabeth Pease was born in 1807 to Joseph Pease, a noted abolitionist, and his wife Elizabeth Beaumont. She was very close to her father, and worked with him towards ending slavery. They travelled around Britain extensively while her father spoke on antislavery. In 1840, she attended the World’s Antislavery Convention in London with her father, and there met Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, with whom she formed long lasting friendships. She was also deeply interested in pacifism and other human rights efforts.

After her father’s death in 1846, Elizabeth went into a deep mourning and stepped away from reform work for several years. She kept up her antislavery correspondence, but was not nearly as active in local antislavery efforts. In 1853, she married John Pringle Nichol, a Scottish astronomer with a young son. She moved to Edinburgh with her new husband and retired from reform efforts until her husband’s death in 1859. She spent the years from 1853 to 1859 caring for her husband and his son, and her letters in this six-year period are scarce. After his death, Elizabeth rejoined a number of reform efforts, including participation in women’s rights efforts.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

Elizabeth Cady was born in 1815 to Judge Daniel Cady and his wife, one of eleven children. When she was young, her only surviving brother died, and in later life, Elizabeth Cady Stanton always told a story of how her father told her he wished she was a boy. She
studied law in her father’s library, and attended a boarding school where she was unhappy with the quality of the education she received.

Elizabeth Cady married Henry Stanton against her family’s wishes in 1840. Henry and Elizabeth met through antislavery and temperance friends, and their courtship was plagued with doubts over Henry’s ability to support a family. They honeymooned at the World’s Antislavery Convention in London, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott and discussed women’s rights with her. Upon their return to New York, Henry and Elizabeth had seven children; the last was one born in 1859, when forty-four year old Elizabeth was deeply involved in women’s rights activities.

Elizabeth and Henry moved to Seneca Falls, New York, in 1847 to a home owned by the Cady family. Henry was often away for business or reform activities, and Elizabeth quickly formed her own connections with antislavery women in the area. Only a year after moving to Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized and held the first women’s rights convention along with Lucretia Mott, Martha Coffin Wright and Elizabeth M’Clintock. Until her death, Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked towards women’s rights and suffrage on the national level in the United States.
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