

## Women, True Womanhood, and Abolitionism

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Abolitionist Sojourner Truth

## True Womanhood's Implications

- T.W. gave women something in exchange for their decreased political standing: Female Moral Authority
- Female Moral Authority was available to all women who could live up to the requirements of True Womanhood:
  - piety,
  - purity,
  - submissiveness, and
  - domesticity

## True Womanhood's Implications

- But could all women “live up” to the requirements of True Womanhood?
- Work outside the home (beyond the temporary work allowed to unmarried women) barred women from T.W.
- Lacking Protestant piety barred women from T.W. (although Catholic and Jewish women argued for their own kind of piety).
- Slaves in particular were barred from T.W.
  - something that Linda Brent will challenge directly in her memoir.

## True Womanhood's Implications

- So, in fact, True Womanhood was a sort of battleground
- Women of differing classes and races struggled for status with one another
- And in addition, T.W. could also be used more generally to constrain women
  - Into domestic production (and the economic dependence that created)
  - Out of the political arena (because politics were simultaneously “beneath” women and beyond their limited intellects)
  - By constructing female identity around the womb, women could be barred from the public sphere almost entirely.

## True Womanhood's Implications

- But it is a reality borne out by history that the tools of any group's oppression often also contain the strategies for that group's resistance.
- Women (even those barred from inclusion in TW) used the ideals associated with TW to argue for women's political voice.
- These women used “Female Moral Authority” as a way to gain a foothold for women in the public sphere that shaped and defined their lives.

## Abolitionism

- Women use the argument that women, by nature, are morally superior (Female Moral Authority) to fight against the system of slavery in period from the 1810s to the end of the Civil War.
- Large numbers of women were active in the abolitionist movement, having significant ramifications for both the anti-slavery and woman's movements.

## Abolitionism

- Women were active primarily because they took seriously the role of society's moral guardian
  - Part of the "Cult of Domesticity"
  - and outcome of the Second Great Awakening.
- Once in the abolitionist movement, however, women began to think about the lives of slaves and to make connections between the condition of slavery and their own oppression as women.

## I – Background to Abolitionism

- In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, some Americans (and Europeans) began to call for an end to slavery, and for the return of African slaves to Africa (ex.: Liberia)
- But the generation born after 1800 was much more radical in their call to end slavery
  - Slavery was a sin and a crime against God and humanity
  - Called for an immediate, unconditional and uncompensated end to slavery.
- This generation of abolitionists would accept no gradualism, and argued that slavery had destroyed the political fabric of America at every level.

## American Antislavery Society

- Founded by William Lloyd Garrison in 1833.
- WLG demanded immediate end to slavery and to colonization.
  - Blacks and whites could live together in peace to the benefit of both.
- The Liberator, Garrison's newspaper, founded in 1831, continued to be leading vehicle for radical thought through 1861.

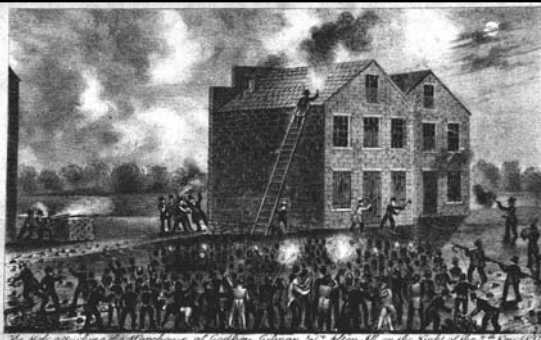


## Public Response to Abolitionism

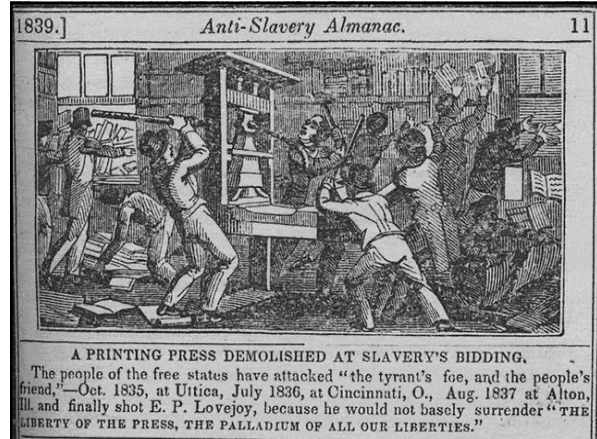
- Initial (Northern) public responses to the radical abolitionists were insults, ridicule, and violence.
- In 1836, Garrison was dragged through the streets of Boston by a lynch mob and saved only when a huge teamster pulled him into a wagon and took him to jail for shelter.



A proslavery mob in Cincinnati attacks the offices of abolitionist James Birney's anti-slavery weekly, The Philanthropist. Illustration from The Anti-Slavery Record, Vol. 2, No. 9 (September 1836)



A pro-slavery mob attacks a warehouse holding the presses of abolitionist editor and minister Elijah P. Lovejoy; Lovejoy was killed.



1839.] *Anti-Slavery Almanac.* 11  
 A PRINTING PRESS DEMOLISHED AT SLAVERY'S BIDDING.  
 "The people of the free states have attacked 'the tyrant's foe, and the people's friend,'—Oct. 1835, at Utica, July 1836, at Cincinnati, O., Aug. 1837 at Alton, Ill. and finally shot E. P. Lovejoy, because he would not basely surrender "THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESS, THE PALLADIUM OF ALL OUR LIBERTIES."

**OUTRAGE.**

*Fellow Citizens,*

AN

**ABOLITIONIST,**

of the most revolting character is among you, exciting the feelings of the North against the South. A seditious Lecture is to be delivered

**THIS EVENING,**

at 7 o'clock, at the Presbyterian Church in Cannon-street. You are requested to attend and unite in putting down and silencing by peaceable means this tool of evil and fanaticism. Let the rights of the States guaranteed by the Constitution be protected.

**Feb. 27, 1837. The Union forever!**

[1839.] *Anti-Slavery Almanac.* 27

A MINISTER ARRESTED FOR PREACHING AGAINST SIN.

Dec. 14, 1835, Rev. George Storrs, who was invited to address the Anti-Slavery Society at Northfield, N. H., was dragged from his knees while at prayer by David Tilton deputy sheriff. He was also arrested in the pulpit, March 31, 1835, (fast day,) at Pittsfield, N. H., by the authority of a writ issued by Moses Norris, Esq., Gov. Isaac Hill sanctioned the outrage by reappointing Norris.

### Public Response to Abolitionism

- Northern businesses depended on good trade with the South – cotton for weaving – and feared that abolitionism would ruin trade.
- Abolitionists were flogged, tarred-and-feathered, shunned, and even lynched by Northern mobs.

PERSECUTION OF AMOS DRESSER.

And in the South, the "Gag Rule" was in effect: it was illegal to speak against slavery in any way.

### Women in Abolitionism

- Women who joined the abolitionist movement were also subject to criticism and attack
- The fact that they spoke in public at all opened them to criticism
  - And they were invariably speaking before a "promiscuous assembly" which made this doubly-damning.
  - Three case studies of these women's courage:
    - Maria W. Stewart
    - Maria Weston Chapman
    - Prudence Crandall

### Maria W. Stewart

- One of America's first black female political writers.
- In 1832, in Boston, she mounted lecture platform to speak to assembled crowd of men and women (promiscuous assembly) against the colonization movement, a scheme to expatriate black Americans back to West Africa.
- Her public career was barely 3 years long.

### Maria W. Stewart

- After husband (a free black shipfitter) died in 1829, underwent religious conversion and gave self over to career of secular ministry of political and religious witness.
- Stewart published a political pamphlet, a collection of religious meditations and delivered 4 public lectures which were later printed.
- Took public stage after the mysterious death of David Walker, a black Boston author of an inflammatory pamphlet "Walker's Appeal," a call for slave rebellion in the American South.

### Maria W. Stewart

- Stewart knew that she too faced danger for her unpopular political and abolitionist beliefs, perhaps especially because of her race.
- "Many will suffer for pleading the cause of oppressed Africa," she wrote, "and I shall glory in being one of her martyrs."
- Criticized Boston white society for racism and segregation, but ALSO criticized Boston's free black community for its passivity and "cooperation" with slavery.

### Maria Weston Chapman

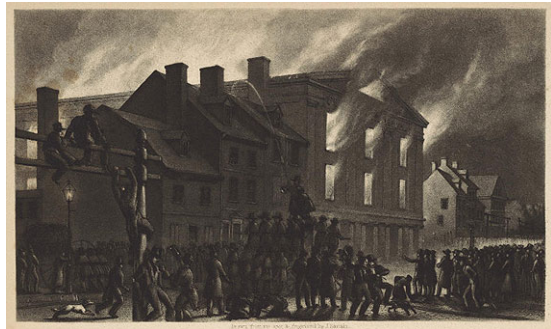
- Called "Captain Chapman" for assertive personality.
- A member of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, famed for her calm response amidst an 1835 riot in Boston when abolitionists were attacked with the intent of lynching the speakers and burning the hall down.



Leading the women out of the surrounded building, she spoke to the crowd so movingly that several men in the mob wept and the mob agreed to disperse.

### Maria Weston Chapman

- May 1838: Chapman was a speaker at the Second Annual Woman's Antislavery Conference in Philadelphia, PA.
- Mob gathered and yelled, threw stones, hurled excrement, attempted to break up the meeting.
- During this commotion, Chapman rose to give her first prepared public speech.
- According to those present, she enveloped the audience in her own mantle of self-possession. She had worn a conspicuously bright red shawl to the meeting. Said one delegate, "I kept my eye on that shawl.... I made up my mind that until that shawl disappeared, every man must stick to his guns."



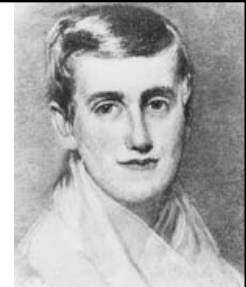
•On the following night, the second night of speeches, the mob surrounded the Pennsylvania Hall and burned it to the ground.

### Maria Weston Chapman

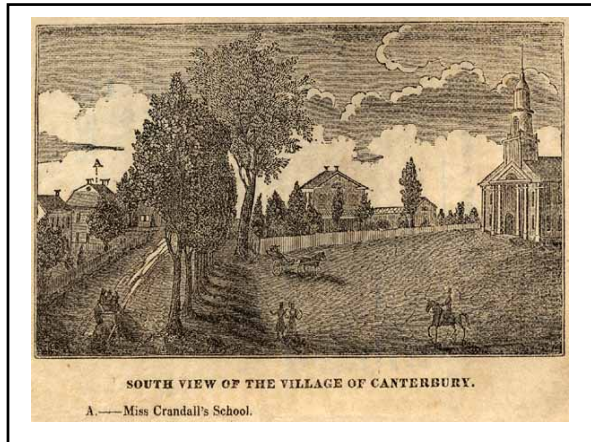
- The mob then turned with the intention of lynching Chapman and the other speakers, who were staying at the home of Quaker elders James and Lucretia Mott.
- Chapman and the Motts escaped, and the mob was dispersed.
- But on the train on her way home to Boston, Chapman emotionally collapsed;
  - she was in bed for several months afterwards, unable to speak,
  - and although she recovered and continued to work for abolition for thirty more years, she never spoke in public again.

### Prudence Crandall

- Quaker educator who opened a school for African American girls in CT in 1833.
- Citizens of the town were outraged:
  - refused to supply school with food,
  - barred students from attending local churches,
  - threatened to prosecute students for vagrancy and pauperism.
  - well stopped up with carcasses dead animals.



When the school accepted the children of runaways, Crandall was arrested under a 'black law' which prohibited teaching out-of-state black students.



## Prudence Crandall

- Finally, after year and a half of struggle, when the school had been burned and she had been dragged out and beaten, Crandall closed the school for the safety of the girls.
- Although Crandall continued to write antislavery poetry and prose, she left CT for frontier Kansas.



## Changes in Abolitionism after 1850

- In the 1830s, abolitionists were generally attacked; it was a very dangerous occupation.
- By 1850, however, the antislavery movement had become more respectable.
- More people joined as
  - political and economic interests in the North coalesced in opposition to slave South (Northern fear of "Slave Power")
  - Southern political power no longer seemed so invincible (it had dominated Congress and even the presidency since Revolution, but in 1850s, Northern and Western politicians began to challenge this supremacy)
  - The abolitionist movement succeeded in converting Christian men and women to the cause.

## II – Why Women Abolitionists?

### 1. True Womanhood

- Five main reasons
- 1. Women saw participation in the abolitionist movement as a natural outgrowth of True Womanhood and women's role as moral guardians and protectors of Female Moral Authority.



## II – Why Women Abolitionists? 2. Christian Charity

- 2. Women saw their role in movement as extension of the accepted women's activity of acts of Christian charity, such as visiting the poor, nursing the sick, teaching others to read the Bible, etc.
  - These women did not define the antislavery movement as political; nor was it a movement for racial equality.
  - Instead, they spoke in terms of Christian sympathy for the harshness of the slave's life and particularly focused on the evil effects of slavery on the virtue of women and the unity of the family.
  - These women saw slavery as a national sin that stained the honor and virtue of the republic
    - and which would prevent the second coming of Christ.

## II – Why Women Abolitionists? 3. Quakers

- 3. There were significant numbers of Quakers in the movement, particularly in the early years.
  - Quakers had always permitted a larger role for women in church governance and ministry than other denominations.
    - Women preached in Quaker churches and traveled about the country spreading the word.
    - Quakers held to doctrine of the equality of women before God and the responsibility of women for the health of their own souls. For a woman to stand before God, she must speak out against sin. Each Quaker was thus compelled to follow their "inner light"; that alone was responsible for guiding their actions and was believed to be insight from God.
  - Abolition activism is seen by Quakers as following this "inner light."

## II – Why Women Abolitionists? 4. British Influence

- 4. Influence from Britain.
  - British abolished British slave trade in 1807 and abolished slavery in West Indian colonies in 1833. This turned attention to the American slave system.
  - Women were active in British movement, particularly in collecting names on petitions for Parliament.

## II – Why Women Abolitionists? 5. Snowball effect

- 5. Snowball effect
  - The increasing legitimacy of the movement and the example of other women's involvement encouraged more women to participate.
  - Women were also active proselytizers in their communities.
  - Many abolitionist women spoke directly to their sisters urging them to join.



## Positing Sisterhood

- Angelina Grimke's "Appeal to Christian Women of the South," and "Appeal to Women of Nominally Free States"
- Theme of both appeals:
  - sisterhood of black and white women.
  - "The female slaves are our country women, they are our sisters; & to us as women, they have a right to look for sympathy with their sorrows and effort and prayer for their rescue."
- Went so far as to object as well to racism in North – almost alone among white abolitionists in doing this.



## Positing Sisterhood

- Angelina Grimke's "Appeal to Women in Nominally Free States," which came out of the 2nd annual women's antislavery convention:
- "In consequence of the odium which the degradation of slavery has attached to color even in the free states, our colored sisters are dreadfully oppressed here. Our seminaries of learning are opposed to them, they are almost completely banished from our lecture rooms, and even in the house of God they are separated from their white brethren and sisters. As they walk the streets of our cities, they are continually liable to be insulted...they cannot visit the Zoological Institute, except in the capacity of nurses or servants...they cannot gain assistance into or receive assistance from any of the charities of this city...if they attempt to travel, they are exposed to great indignities and great inconvenience...Prejudice, then, degrades and fetters the minds, persecutes and murders the bodies of our free colored sisters. Shall we be silent--shall we say prejudice is an innate feeling implanted by God in our hearts? Or shall we not arise in the moral strength of our womanhood and our Christianity, and cast out this foul demon from our hearts, our houses and our churches?"



## Positing Sisterhood

- Both appeals -- of sisterhood and of the degradation of both black and white by the existence of slavery -- promoted political activism among women based on the familiar ideas characterizing the cult of True Womanhood: women had greater moral virtue, sensitivity, and piety.

## III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 1. Encouraged and organized boycotts of slave made products -- cotton and sugar.
  - Lucretia Mott encouraged James Mott to change his whole business, from cotton to wool merchant.
  - Women sold candy made from northern beet sugar and wrapped in antislavery slogans.

### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 2. Women called meetings, although in early years usually chaired by man, and founded antislavery societies.
- The Westons of Weymouth, Massachusetts, key leaders Boston Female Antislavery Society, were active in establishing women's antislavery societies in Groton, New Bedford, Hingham, and Lynn, MA, and through role as Corresponding Secretaries, counseled others on various questions of doctrine and strategy as they sought to form and continue local associations.



Executive Board of the Pennsylvania Antislavery Society, 1851



Women also attended meetings of antislavery societies, usually far outnumbering the number of men in the audience, as in this 1845 Cazenovia, New York, antislavery convention.

### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 3. Women drafted antislavery newspapers
  - Lydia Maria Child, editor of Antislavery Standard
  - Maria Weston Chapman frequent co-editor and contributor to Garrison's The Liberator
  - Angelina Grimke's Appeals
  - Weston sisters produced The Liberty Bell
    - gift annual sent to those contributing to fair, published well known on slavery with essays, fiction, poetry, to appeal to respectable audience.
- Also pamphlets – those of the Grimke sisters and L.M. Child were particularly effective.



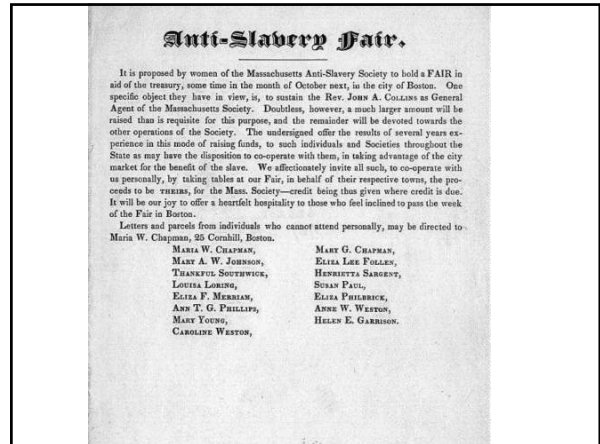
### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 4. Women supported and taught schools for free black children,
  - such as one organized by Rachel Willard Stearns in Worcester, MA.
  - She had been governess to a slaveholder in Missouri and then founded school there.
  - But was driven out of Missouri for admitting black students, so moved to MA and started school specifically for black students.



### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 5. Women raised funds – they were the primary fund raisers of the antislavery movement, often supporting the salaries of male agents.
  - Women held antislavery fairs to which women contributed merchandise, handicrafts, and baked goods.
    - Philadelphia society earned \$28,000 over a couple decades.
    - Boston fairs drew up to \$5,000 a year.
  - Fairs were planned months in advance, with extensive participation throughout the country.
  - Women in local societies sewed, painted, cooked and had materials sent to Boston where each town had a table set up and womaned in a large hall.
    - The Hall was decorated with greens, refreshments served, sometimes entertainments given.
  - Goods were also collected from abroad, particularly Britain and sometimes France.
  - These fairs became a popular place for Christmas shopping for proper Bostonians, even those not fully active in movement – dolls, embroidered goods, stationary, photographs and autographs of famous people, books, etc.



### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

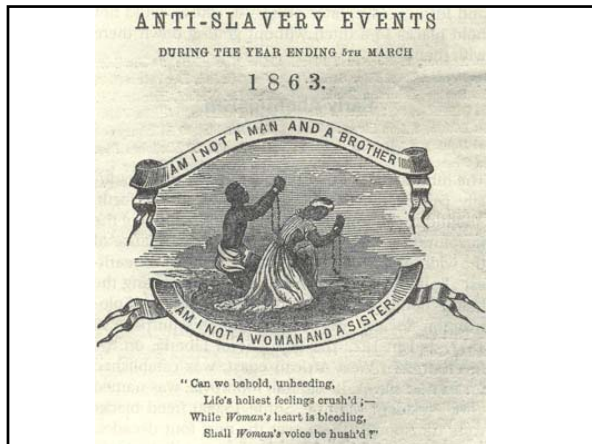
- 6. Women circulated petitions
  - This was particularly painful to women as put them in the public eye.
  - It forced them to ask strangers for help, go door to door.
  - Serious threat to their status as “True Women”

#### Petition Campaigns

- Mary Cook of Hadley, MA:
  - “I received the Petitions you forwarded and have circulated two of them [and] obtained 322 names in Hadley, succeeded beyond anticipation. The prospect was far from flattering one in putting forth such an effort here on account of the profound lethargy that reigns here as it regards the condition of the poor degraded slave...By some I received kindness, by some cold neglect & by others open abuse without any regard to my feelings personally or for the slave.”
- Anne Weston talked about coming in front door and being asked to leave by servants’ entrance or back stairs.
- Some women signed but then asked to cross off their names as their husbands disapproved.

### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 7. Women passed antislavery materials.
  - Charlotte Austin, Nantucket describes door to door solicitation:
    - “We are visiting every family, with a request to purchase the 1841 Anti-Slavery Almanac, and where this is declined follows the request to accept. By this means they can probably be introduced into 9/10 of the families. This with the preparations for the Antislavery Fair furnishes constant labour for the female portion of working abolitionists.”
  - Women passed a variety antislavery literature – newspapers, books, antislavery tracts written by women such as Lydia Maria Child and Angelina Grimke, and Maria Weston Chapman’s annual reports of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society.
  - Women also displayed Liberator and Liberty Bell in their own home and in church meetings.
  - Women made good use antislavery iconography – pictures of slaves in chains adorned work bags, stationary, medallions, etc., that women sold or gave as gifts or stocked in bazaars.



### III. What Abolitionist Women Did

- 8. In the case of former slaves, they gave testimony
- Published accounts of their experiences in antislavery journals, spoke in public about their experiences, used their experiences as background for their own activism in opposition to slavery

### IV. Harriet Brent Jacobs

- An example of abolitionist activist
- Published her work under name "Linda Brent"

