

AMERICAN ANTIGONE:
WOMEN, EDUCATION, NATION, 1800-1870

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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My dissertation explores women's moral and educational labor—teaching, writing, and reforming—in the United States during the nineteenth century. Focusing on the social ideas and the lives of Emma Willard (b. 1787), Catharine Beecher (b. 1800), and Elizabeth Peabody (b. 1804), this study argues that an expansion of women's moral and educational labor played a significant role in political and social changes during this period. The Sophoclean heroine Antigone of the play named for her serves as a representative of womanhood in the emerging democratic culture of the United States.

Antigone tells the story of a woman who tries to fulfill her family obligations by burying her brother, killed in a civil war. The conflict between a citizen's duties to the state versus a sister's duties to family, illustrates the concept of "separate spheres," with its firm distinction between private and public. That these duties are not separate, that they come into conflict, is the moral dilemma of the play. Antigone challenges the state by publicly articulating her sense of family duty. Unlike her brothers, she does not claim the throne for herself. Like many American women in the nineteenth century, Antigone makes political arguments as a woman without claiming the same political rights as a man.

American women of this generation did not all believe in sexual equality, and so their social ideas imagined reform within a different framework than political parties and elections. Willard, Beecher, and Peabody understand themselves and other middle-class women as participating in the democratic culture of the United States. This participation was through their moral and educational labor, not voting. Their ambivalence toward women's suffrage was less a case of reactionary conservatism and more an attempt to assert the importance of civil society as the best ground for reform. Today, that position can seem alien in its conception of women as non-voters, but the social ideas of these women continue to speak to debates over the role that electoral politics can play in social change and to the way that the disenfranchised can speak to political authority.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page	i
Abstract of the Dissertation	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction: Beyond Tragedy: Antigone in American History	1
Chapter One: Abandoning Spheres: Civil Society, Sexual Polarity, American Antigone	15
Chapter Two: The Moral Economy of Women's Educational Labor, 1810-1835	64
Chapter Three: A Woman's Duties: Scenes of Educational Labor, 1835-1850	116
Chapter Four: Black Antigone: Abolition and the Educational Labor of Women	187
Chapter Five: Antigone's Politics: Subordination and 'Something Better than the Ballot'	231
Curriculum Vitae	260

Introduction

Beyond Tragedy: Antigone in American History

Antigone entered American culture as part of the celebration of ancient Greece that characterized the intellectual response to the rise of democracy. The first American edition of the play was published in 1835. It was first performed professionally in New York City during 1845. Caroline Winterer suggests that the arrival of *Antigone* in the United States “illuminates the moment at which Americans reimagined the function of classicism in women’s education, and in turn women’s preparation for citizenship.” The play was part of the cultural landscape in which women entered educational and political life in the United States and remains crucial to understanding how political culture is understood in relation to gender.¹

Perhaps the most obvious lesson of *Antigone* is about the exclusion of women from politics. The play is centered on the conflict between Creon, who represents the justice of the state, and Antigone, who tries to fulfill her family obligations by burying her brother, killed in a civil war trying to overthrow Creon. The conflict between Creon and Antigone, duty to state versus duty to family, illustrates the concept of “separate spheres,” with its firm distinction between private and public. That these duties are not separate, that they come into conflict, is the moral dilemma of the play. Antigone challenges the state by publicly articulating her sense of family duty. Unlike her brothers, she does not claim the throne for herself. Like many American women in the nineteenth century, Antigone makes political arguments as a woman without claiming the same

political rights as a man.

The difference between the Greek and the American *Antigone* is the difference between mythic and historical narrative. As a story centered on the doomed fate of Oedipus's family, the Greek *Antigone* ends in death and madness. Denied her public role and prevented from fulfilling her family duty, Antigone dies by her own hand after being buried in a cave. Creon is driven mad by the consequences of her death. His wife and son, who was betrothed to Antigone, commit suicide. Translated to the American nineteenth century, there is reason to see a similarity in the exclusion of women from politics and the denial of their civil rights. The lives of some American women were tragic, their voices silenced, their public lives denied. And like Antigone, many experienced the contradictions and frustrations of making women's concerns public. Yet, the stark clarity of Antigone's death does not reflect the complex history of women's civil and political life in the United States.

Another crucial difference, one that was repeated in nineteenth century reviews and commentary on the play, is between the "heathen" Greek play and the predominantly Christian society of the United States. The consensus among scholars and philosophers writing in national magazines was that Greek drama needed Christianity to complete its moral framework. As a reviewer of the first American editions of *Antigone* and the *Alcestis* of Euripides put it, "In point of morality they [ancient Greeks] reach the highest point of heathen purity."² As pre-Christian art, Greek drama was limited in its ability to reflect true morality, which was only available after Jesus had appeared. Thus, in an article titled "The Influence of Christianity on the Family," one writer suggested that

Antigone “reaches out prophetically beyond the domain of Heathenism. Antigone is an ideal creation of poetic fancy, realized only in Christian nations.” And realized, we can assume, not only in nations, but within the gendered framework of morality as well. The writer concluded, “Christianity alone *raises* woman to her true dignity.”³

Like many writers of his day, the author of “The Influence of Christianity on the Family,” understood women’s social roles through the family roles of wife and mother. His discussion of women’s dignity focused entirely on Paul’s description of the relation between husband and wife as being like the relation between Christ and church. The directive in *Ephesians* 5:22 “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” is followed by the analogy in *Ephesians* 5:23 that “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” and the complex view of marriage reflected in the rest of *Ephesians* 24-33. Like the author, American men and women of the nineteenth century interpreted these passages as meaning that wives were subordinate to husbands. Yet, it is worth noting that Antigone, unlike her sister Ismene, is not married. Whatever the meaning of Paul’s description of marriage, it does not directly address women who, like Antigone, have live outside the marriage relation. How then was Antigone “realized in Christian nations?” If the role of wife defines women as subordinate, what does the story of an unmarried woman who resists state authority mean?

Christianity was not the only moral framework for making sense of Greek drama. The transatlantic intellectual culture that began flourishing outside church structures during this period also struggled to make sense of Antigone’s meaning. George Eliot argued that rather than see *Antigone*’s moral in terms of an “antagonism between valid

claims” specific to the polytheism of ancient Greece, we should see that “the struggle between Antigone and Creon represents that struggle between elemental tendencies and established laws by which the outer life of man is gradually and painfully being brought into harmony with his inward needs.”⁴ Eliot suggested that the conflict between Antigone’s claim and Creon’s authority reflects something universal about the necessary dangers of a belief too strong or a political authority too unyielding. In the passage that serves as the epigraph to this study, Eliot beautifully described the unintended consequences of following individual conscience. Perhaps this modern sensibility informs more recent engagement with the figure of Antigone.

Antigone seems to have re-entered American cultural consciousness in a major way. In 2005, Starbucks chose to feature the debut CD by an all-women’s band named *Antigone Rising* in all its stores. That same year, *New Antigone*, a journal focused “on postgraduate women writing and arts, without being exclusively for and about 'women' and 'postgraduates’” began publication. In 2004, “The Antigone Project,” a collaborative project by five women writers and five women directors ran at the Julia Miles Theater, New York.⁵

In August 2005, Cindy Sheehan, bereaved mother turned anti-war activist, captured the imagination of the nation. The news media ran stories on her courageous stand outside President Bush’s ranch in Texas. Pundits suggested she would single-handedly mobilize the movement to end the United States occupation of Iraq. Jan Hartman, a columnist for the progressive website *Common Dreams*, called Sheehan an “American Antigone” because “both women are driven by grief to speak Truth to

Power.” The analogy was apt. Antigone’s resistance to Creon’s authority is a compelling framework for making sense of Sheehan’s efforts to confront President Bush. Part of the shared appeal is that both women justify their actions within the framework of family duty, not political interest. Their public action is necessary to honor the dead, not to gain power for themselves.⁶

Sheehan enters the public on behalf of her dead son. Antigone does so on behalf of her dead brother. Again, this difference is worth noting. Sheehan is a wife and mother; Antigone is neither. As a mother, Sheehan is a far more familiar public figure. Wives and mothers seem to have a special kind of politically and historically standing. Concepts like “republican motherhood” and “maternal power” have been mobilized to do political work since the early days of the republic and have served as key terms in women’s history. The public status of women who are not married and do not give birth is far more ambiguous. Perhaps this ambiguity, along with the symbolic power of her resistance to established authority, helps explain the recent use of Antigone as a figure in intellectual and popular culture, as well as her importance to the nineteenth century.

Connecting the history of American women and the mythic drama of Antigone offers an opportunity to mobilize theory in order to create new meanings for past events. The issue is less about historical facts and more about the way historical facts are arranged to create meaning. The problem, as Hayden White describes it, is one of emplotment or “the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.”⁷ The plots of the history of women in the United States have tended toward romance or melodrama. Romantic heroes like

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony led a movement that established women's suffrage and fought for sexual equality. The romantic mode celebrates heroic women, often those whose achievements can be related to specific victories. Women's suffrage or the entry of women into the faculty of research universities provides a frame to celebrate the struggles of heroes like Stanton or M. Carey Thomas.

Alternatively, women have been cast as victims of patriarchal oppression because they were denied civil rights or an equal voice. Melodrama emphasizes the lost possibilities and especially the lost voices of their heroes. If only the feminist social reformers of the mid-nineteenth century had not embraced possessive individualism, their organic and practical reform movements might have brought a feminist socialism to the United States. If only Margaret Fuller had arrived back in the United States safely, rather than die off the coast of New England, American feminism would have had a strong voice in its early history.⁸

Often such melodrama is informed by satire. Satiric modes of emplotment structure historical narratives in a way that imagines people in the past as caught in webs of contradictions that they could not see, forced into accommodations with powers they could not understand. Some scholarship on women who did not embrace women's rights shows how this satiric mode is applied in history. Women who believed that wives were subordinate to husbands or that women should not vote are understood to have been trapped in a prison of their own making, unable to understand the nature of their own oppression. Those who supported half-measures such as female education or celebrated women's roles in the home were simply laying the groundwork for a more enlightened

feminism, one grounded in political equality.

The problem with romantic or satiric narratives is that they they often draw overly simple lessons from the past. They impose a framework on past events and actors without introducing different points of view or imagining alternative possibilities. Rather than see what Eliot called the "antagonism between valid claims," romance chooses heroes and villains while satire assumes the superior perspective of a future unknowable to the actors. To understand the past with empathy, to recognize our own situation as actors who do not know the future in that of historical figures, recommends a tragic framework.

There are elements of truth in these ways of narrating the past. But tragedy is not the only way to narrate the past in a way that encourages empathy. Northrop Frye offers irony without satire as a possibility. He describes such non-satirical irony as giving "form to the shifting ambiguities of and complexities of unidealized existence" by recognizing their characters' humanity without assuming superiority. Such irony "minimizes the sense of ritual inevitability in tragedy, supplies social and psychological explanations for catastrophe, and makes as much as possible of human misery seem, in Thoreau's phrase, 'superfluous and evitable.'"⁹ Such ironical narration can help us understand women in the nineteenth century in new ways and perhaps, help rewrite their history as something other than romantic heroines fighting for justice or as unknowing agents of racial injustice and empire. This would mean adopting what Kenneth Burke called a "comic frame of acceptance" toward history, or what Cornel West calls "tragicomic hope."¹⁰

The best scholarship on middle-class American women in the nineteenth century has been told through what might be called a tragicomic or non-satiric frame. Despite a

popular image of women as essentially defined by the private sphere of the household and family, women's historians have worked to tell the story of women activists, writers, and workers who had both private and public lives. Indeed, the most important work in this field has taken the idea of domesticity as it was lived and defined by nineteenth-century women, and demonstrated its complexities and its social utility. Rather than tell the story of American women as a long struggle for women's liberation from the home, these scholars have made it clear that although they did not vote, women combined their family roles with social and political work outside the household.

One reason that the images of women as excluded from the nation or as confined to the domestic sphere have persisted is because scholarship that places women outside the household has been fragmented along disciplinary lines, imagining that teachers, writers, or reformers were singular exceptions to the rule of the limits on women's opportunities. The history of women teachers is seldom linked to the history of women writers, and rarely are teachers or writers linked to the history of women reformers. This study brings these different histories together arguing that the expansion of women's moral and educational labor—teaching, writing, reforming—was one of the great social transformations of the nineteenth century. As a labor history of middle-class women, this study suggests that women's moral and educational labor is key to new understandings of history and culture emerging in scholarship on gender.

Even as it looks forward, this study looks back to earlier scholars of women's education, especially work by Willystine Goodsell, Thomas Woody, and Alma Lutz in the in 1920s and 1930s. All but forgotten today, their analysis of women educators and

educational institutions remain significant alternatives to historical frameworks that emphasize the limitations of women's lives. More recently, Anne Firor Scott's work on the connections between female education and reform organizing, David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot's work on gender roles within educational institutions, and Margaret Nash's work on women's education during the early national period have furthered understanding of women's educational experience and its role in American society. Following John Dewey, George Counts, and Lawrence Cremin, I understand education as far more than schooling. American education includes a broad range of religious and cultural institutions. These institutions embody educational and political ideas that structure the democratic culture of the United States. This mix of educational, intellectual, religious, political, and cultural history makes this project particularly ambitious in its crossing disciplinary boundaries. The extent to which it succeeds is due to past scholarship on women's lives and education, as well as scholarship that takes up broadly conceived questions about culture and education.

The concepts "republican motherhood" and "domesticity" associate the female with the sphere of home and family and, implicitly, the male with the sphere of commerce and politics. These gendered associations are understood as ideological, but "ideology" often carries with it an implication that ideas structure society rather than being part of social experience. To combat the tendency to separate ideas and lived experience, I avoid the term "ideology" in favor of "social ideas," which I borrow from Merle Curti's classic study, *The Social Ideas of American Educators*. This reflects my understanding that the ideas and writings of women and men are embedded in the social

world of religious and civil institutions. As Curti puts it, social ideas are “the individual’s intellectual and emotional responses to his family, his own social groups, and classes, to the church and to his recreational and intellectual activities, and to humanity in general.”¹¹ What follows is at once, intellectual, cultural, political, and educational history that critically examines the social ideas of Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Elizabeth Peabody—all women I would characterize as representatives of American Antigone.

Chapter one, titled “Abandoning Spheres: Civil Society, Sexual Polarity, American Antigone” directly addresses the much-maligned framework of separate spheres by arguing that scholars should abandon it entirely along with the conceptual language of “private and public.” In its place, I offer two key terms, “civil society” and “sexual polarity.” I take up Hegel’s social theory, arguing that his tripartite conceptual framework of family, civil society, and state, helps understand the role education plays in national development. Civil society is the social location where education and labor connect family and state. Then, I turn my attention to the social ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller. Using the term “polarity”—part of their shared vocabulary—as a way to describe sexual difference as a dynamic tension rather than a fixed relation, I suggest their intellectual and social relationship can help understand shifts in the social meanings of male and female. Together, civil society and sexual polarity help make sense of the central image of this study, American Antigone, which takes the Sophoclean heroine as a representative of womanhood in the emerging democratic culture of the United States.

Chapter two, titled “The Moral Economy of Women’s Educational Labor, 1810-1835” traces the development of women’s education from the expansion of female schooling in the mid- to late-eighteenth century to the emergence of new forms of women’s educational labor in the 1820s and early 1830s. This development can be understood in generational terms. Women born in the first years of the new nation had greater educational opportunities than their mothers. When they reached adulthood, they put their education to use, not only as mothers and wives, but as teachers, writers and reformers. Emma Willard (b. 1787), Catharine Beecher (b. 1800), and Elizabeth Peabody (b. 1804) serve as representatives of this generation. Their experience as socially and intellectually prominent women who were unmarried, or in the case of Willard, widowed and divorced, represent new social structures that continue to shape American and global society.

Chapter three, “A Woman’s Duties: Scenes of Educational Labor, 1835-1850” integrates family roles back into the social ideas and experiences of these women, even as it traces their emergence as nationally known educators and intellectuals. As Willard, Beecher, and Peabody made the transition from teachers to educational writer and reformers, they continued to live as aunts, daughters, and sisters (and in the case of Willard, as a widow and a mother). Rather than see these family roles as sharply distinct from their national leadership roles, I argue that educational reform is grounded in both the family and the state. That is, the social duties of women are best understood as existing within the overlapping realms of family, civil society, and state. The key educational writings by Willard, Beecher, and Peabody reflect this broad conception of

women's duties.

Chapter four, "Black Antigone: Abolition and the Educational Labor of Women" directly addresses the key moral and political problem of nineteenth-century America, slavery, while expanding the range of educational labor considered to include that of black women. On one hand, this means reconsidering the meaning of Catharine Beecher's debates with Angelina Grimké over women's role in the anti-slavery movement and the educational work of Beecher's sister Harriet in her novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. On the other, it means considering Maria Stewart and Harriet Jacobs as creating social roles through their educational labor as teachers, writers, and reformers. As black women, their educational labor was defined through the work of anti-slavery, even as they participated in the process of class differentiation inherent in the moral economy described in Chapter two. Following the Civil War, this moral economy organized the labor of black and white women teachers to create schooling for freed slaves in the South.

Chapter five takes up the question of women's rights. Catharine Beecher and Emma Willard are typically understood as reactionaries who wanted to keep women out of politics. This misinterprets their social ideas which were grounded in sexual difference rather than sexual equality. The political theories of Beecher and Willard offered women, in Beecher's words, "something better than the ballot." Viewed through the lens of liberation from household labor or the struggle for equal rights, their political ideas seem contradictory at best. But understood through the lens of women's educational labor, their ideas offer a way to understand middle-class women as participating in the

democratic political culture of the United States.

Endnotes

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 2. *The North American Review* (Boston: Apr 1836), 369.
 3. "The Influence of Christianity on the Family," *Mercersburg Quarterly Review* (Lancaster: Oct 1853), 473. For a more a general treatment of this theme see Caleb Cushing, "A secular view of the social influences of Christianity" *The American Biblical Repository, Devoted to Biblical and General Literature, Theological Discussion, the History of Theological Opinions, etc.* (New York: Jan 1839), 180.
 4. George Eliot, "The Antigone and its Moral" in *The Essays of George Eliot*, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 262.
 5. See, <http://www.newantigone.com/>.
 6. Jan Hartman, "Cindy Sheehan: American Antigone," published on August 18, 2005 by CommonDreams.org. <<http://www.commondreams.org/views05/0818-21.htm>>, accessed on May 27, 2006. The earliest use of the phrase "American Antigone" that I have uncovered is James H. Clancy, "The American 'Antigone'" *Educational Theatre Journal*, (Oct., 1954), 249-253. The article refers to a Jean Anouilh's version of the play which was translated into English in 1946. Sarah Bishop uses the phrase in the title of her review of Seamus Heaney's *The Burial at Thebes - A Version of Sophocles' Antigone* published in *Harvard Book Review* (Winter 2005).
 7. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), 7.
 8. For the argument that women's embrace of possessive individualism prevented socialism, see William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 347-351. For an account of Margaret Fuller's work that suggests her death in 1850 postponed "a crucial moment of reckoning" for American culture, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1998, paperback ed.), 259.
 9. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), 223, 237. I am indebted to the uses of White and Frye by Sol Cohen, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education* (New York: Peter Lang,

1999) and James Livingston, *Pragmatism, Feminism, and Democracy: Rethinking the Politics of American History* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

10. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 2 vols. (New York: New Republic, 1937). For Cornel West's most recent reflections on the role of "tragicomic hope" in American politics see, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

11. Merle Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (1935, reprint, Totowa: Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1974), xiv.

Chapter One

Abandoning Spheres: Civil Society, Sexual Polarity, American Antigone

I begin to grow independent. Wherever I can be myself and *act* if not speak my soul, is my home.

-Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

The conceptual framework of “separate spheres” has served scholars studying women in the nineteenth century quite well, not because it illuminates the past but because it does not. Separate spheres consists of two overlapping dualisms—man/woman and private/public— assigning women to the private sphere of family life and men to the public sphere of political and economic life. The explanatory power of separate spheres has been questioned since the 1980s, often in productive ways. As Cathy Davidson put it, this framework is “simply too crude an instrument—too rigid and totalizing” for understanding the culture and society of nineteenth-century America. Scholars questioning this instrument have found more complex ways of conceiving of women’s lives. Even during the nineteenth century, women thinkers resisted simplistic notions of sex-separate spheres. Mary Kelley has suggested that separate spheres was a “point of departure” for women activists then, and it has continued to work that way for scholars today.¹

If separate spheres has been left behind in the study of women in nineteenth-century America, then questions of race, class, region, and sexuality are where that scholarship has arrived. Scholarship on women since 1980 often invokes the foundational work of the 1970s—including the development of the conceptual framework of separate spheres—in order to highlight its narrow focus on white, middle-class women of the

Northeast. Describing this early work as too limited in its understanding of women, more recent scholarship examines the way categories of racial and class difference create identities and social movements that resist universalizing notions of womanhood. Even more recently, scholarship on manhood, sexuality, and mixed-sex reform movements has disrupted the reductive association of gender with womanhood, and theorized gender identity as a complex process rather than a simple binary.²

The rejection of separate spheres has, more often than not, tried to complicate rather than abandon the metaphor of spheres. This tendency has been most apparent in feminist theory and women's history that uses the "public sphere" as theorized by Jurgen Habermas to suggest that women participated in forms of public culture.³ But recognizing the fact that women sometimes extended their influence into the public, or that men had private as well as public lives, does not go far enough in breaking down the dualisms at the heart of this approach to historical thinking about women. The repeated calls over the past twenty years to move "beyond spheres" or to say "no more spheres" betray the framework's persistent hold on conceptualizing sexual difference in the nineteenth century.⁴

This study argues for replacing the concept of spheres with two other conceptual frameworks. The first is *civil society*, a concept that moves beyond the binary of public and private to a relational framework that posits family, civil society, and the state as distinct, yet overlapping aspects of social relations. *Civil society* makes education visible and understands it as a process that begins in the family and then continues in society, and helps account for the way the organization of education becomes part of politics and

state institutions.⁵ The second conceptual framework is *sexual polarity*, which treats sexual difference as a dynamic relation rather than as two fixed categories. Separate spheres universalizes womanhood across boundaries of race, class, region and period. *Sexual polarity* focuses attention on concrete social situations in which sexual difference is created or performed.⁶

Together, civil society and sexual polarity offer a complex and dynamic framework for understanding the significance of educational labor—parenting, teaching, writing, and reform—in the development of the United States during the period 1820-1870. The exclusion of women from political office and voting during these years has often been understood as excluding them from the nation itself. Families and communities, rather than politics or the new nation, have been the terms through which scholars have understood the lives and writings of women. By contrast, civil society challenges this view of women by locating their labor in the institutions of schools, churches, publishing, and voluntary organizations that make up the cultural and social life of the nation. Sexual polarity offers a way of understanding these new roles for women in civil society as neither the continuation of earlier forms of sexual difference, nor as the origins of later movements for sexual equality or liberation. Rather, polarity imagines the sexual categories of man and woman as shifting in response to social developments and historical events.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century women expanded the range of labor they performed. Some of this labor was in the new forms of commodity production, outwork and factory work. But many new forms of labor were performed in educational

and religious institutions. Women missionaries left New England to work with Cherokee Indians in the South. Women evangelicals taught in the growing number of Sabbath or Sunday schools. Young women left their homes and their communities to take paid jobs as school teachers. Women writers took advantage of the growing number of periodicals and book publishers to write for wages. Other women, usually older and married, established a wide variety of voluntary benevolent and reform organizations, some associated with men's organizations, others exclusively female. These new forms of labor created many of the institutions and social movements through which the new nation imagined itself into being.

The phrase "imagined itself into being" is meant to invoke Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.⁷ His title is a useful formulation for understanding that women were involved in the process of nation building despite their exclusion from political parties and public office. The word *imagined* suggests that language, especially as it is embodied in print capitalism, is a key element in the creation of modern nations. Quite a few American women were writing historical and literary texts for the market in the early years of the United States, which means that women were engaged in the process of imagining that nation from its beginning. In fact, the earliest historians of the United States were women. But women teachers and reformers also imagined the nation into being through the expression of republican ideas that argued education was fundamental to the social order.⁸

Anderson's second word, *communities*, has been a key word in women's history. In the 1970s, influential studies posited mutually supportive communities of women as a

crucial social formation of the early nineteenth century. Although women were denied political and property rights, social ideas about womanhood created bonds among women that helped build networks that laid the groundwork for later feminist movements. In the 1980s, studies of women in Oneida and Rochester, New York, and Petersburg, Virginia showed how important women's social networks were to community life. These community studies understood women's labor as integrated into society. Women lived and worked in what Mary Ryan called "the vital connections between family, society, and economy," even though these connections were "disguised by the scrim of ideology that venerated gender differences." This ideology justified discriminatory laws that gave almost no property rights to married women, even as it created opportunities for women to support each other and their families, and to work for legal and social reform.⁹

Entry into civil society gave women tools to challenge discriminatory laws and to reform society, and so they did. Some of the earliest examples of women's activism were attempts to change laws or ameliorate social problems that treated women unfairly. Still, women's issues were not the primary focus for early women's activists. Women's membership in a community, whether a local community, a community of women, or the imagined community of the nation, was understood in terms of self sacrifice. When women first began to work for political and moral reform they did so on behalf of others, sacrificing their time and energy for the downtrodden and for the new nation. This understanding of sacrifice was grounded in what Barbara Welter called "the feminization of American religion" and new images of Jesus Christ as "the exemplar of meekness and humility, the sacrificial victim." As female social power within churches increased, "a

special identification with suffering and innocence was shared by both women and the crucified Christ.”¹⁰

This sacrificial ethic was an important element of women’s participation in social movements during the nineteenth century and it was a necessary element of identifying with or belonging to the nation. Anderson argues that the nation as community ignores “inequality and exploitation” to create a “deep, horizontal comradeship” and, importantly, to call on its members, “not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” This description would seem to make the male soldier the central figure in the national imagination. But there are many forms of sacrifice, and many ways to be willing to die. And in fact, the dead soldier or fallen martyr is unable to do the work of imagining. It is the living who consecrates his sacrifice through acts of memorializing.¹¹

This formulation resonates with the organizing metaphor of this study: American Antigone. To convert a soldier’s sacrifice into a monument for the nation requires that soldier be buried and remembered. As women and men struggled over the memory of the dead soldiers of the American Revolution and the Civil War, they imagined the United States into being. National community in its broadest conception includes not only those who die for the nation, but also the work of remembering and honoring the dead.¹² The figure of Antigone helps account for the complexity of women’s remembrance and sacrifice by highlighting questions about women’s public actions in relation to their social roles as family members and as citizens. The heroine of Sophocles’s play attempts to bury her brother Polynices, killed in a civil war, against the order of Creon, the Theban

King. Antigone's action precipitates a crisis that leads to her own death and a political crisis for Thebes.

What makes Antigone a compelling figure for this study is not the tragic nature of her story, but rather that her claims to family and political duty challenge the distinction between public and private while suggesting an identity for women outside wife and mother. She speaks in the name of the family, but her power is not maternal, nor is it based on her role as a wife. Antigone acts as a sister and daughter...and as a citizen. Her symbolic actions help illuminate the situation of women born after the American Revolution who worked to remember and memorialize the revolutionary generation's sacrifice, and who worked to enlarge women's social opportunities through their educational labor as teachers, writers, and reformers. Their story, like Antigone's, raises questions about the way binaries such as domestic and political, male and female, public and private, equality and difference have functioned to mis-characterize women as essentially confined to the family or excluded from politics. American Antigone is a symbol of women in the nineteenth century who lived beyond separate spheres.

Civil Society

Using civil society as a framework helps make sense of women's social and political power because it includes the family and moral sentiment, along with the state and the political economy, as features of national and transnational life. In nineteenth-century America, civil society was as much a place of female action as male action. Women writers, teachers, and reformers entered the nation in ways that had political consequences, even as they were denied the ability to engage in specific political acts

such as arguing in court or voting. The entry of women into national life makes more sense in terms of civil society, a realm that exists between family and state, than in terms of a gendered division between private and public spheres.¹³

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835 & 1840) is the touchstone for understanding the social development in the United States during this period. Linda Kerber has suggested that the origins of separate spheres are located in Tocqueville's classic work which, when it was revived following World War II, informed the feminist work of Betty Friedan and early work in women's history by Barbara Welter, Allison Kraditor, and Gerda Lerner.¹⁴ More recently, Tocqueville has figured in the revival of civil society in American political theory. The problem with Tocquevillian ideas about associational life is that like Habermasian ideas about the public sphere, Tocqueville remains committed to the language of spheres, and so remains within a private/public dualism. To account fully for the entry of women into civil society requires a different theoretical perspective, one informed by different metaphors.¹⁵

Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony offers one possibility for understanding social change within civil society, especially as he expresses it in the distinction between "wars of position" and "wars of maneuver." In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci provides a way to understand power operates through the institutions of civil society without recourse to spheres. Instead, he offers a distinction based in metaphors of combat. These two kinds of wars suggest the deep connections between civil society and the state, challenging a conception of political power as something exercised only through state structures. What Gramsci calls "a struggle for hegemony, or a crisis of civil society"

provides a way to understand politics as something that operates through social institutions, as well as political institutions.¹⁶

In the nineteenth century, American women who entered civil society were engaged in a Gramscian “war of position.” According to Gramsci this form of political action takes place in the “massive structures of the modern democracies” including the state, but especially in the “complexes of associations in civil society.” These institutional structures constitute “the ‘trenches’ and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position” (243). Gramsci contrasts this sort of war with a “war of maneuver,” or a frontal attack on state structures. A struggle for hegemony is not entirely removed from politics, but it constitutes a much broader field of action. This complex process is key to understanding how women could be excluded from political office, yet still exercise social and cultural power.¹⁷

The American Revolution was a direct assault on the political structures of the British empire, but its effects were far greater than creating new American political structures. In the years following the war, Americans engaged in wars of position, moving the boundaries and reforming the structures of civil society. They did so by recreating political parties, markets, churches, schools, literature, and voluntary associations. The various social changes that historians describe variously as the rise of Jacksonian democracy, the market revolution, the Second Great Awakening, the common school movement, the professionalization of authorship, the American Renaissance, and the feminization of civil society, are markers for this complex thicket of political, social, and cultural development. Women played key roles in all of these institutions.

One problem with using Gramsci's ideas to explain for women's social power is that he does not address the family or sexual difference. Instead, he focuses almost entirely on the relation between civil society and politics. But, Gramsci does point toward Hegel's more fully integrated theory of civil society. Gramsci suggests that Hegel's theory of civil society shows how bourgeois revolutions created constitutional governments that govern "with the consent of the governed." The state "educates this consent, by means of the political and syndical associations" that are "private organisms, left to the initiative of the ruling class." Hegel was far more sanguine about this development than were social theorists who came after. As Gramsci puts it, Hegel belongs "to a period in which the spreading development of the bourgeoisie could seem limitless, so that its ethicity or universality could be asserted: all mankind will be bourgeois" (258-259). The same could be said of the vast majority of nineteenth-century writers and reformers in the United States who created the structures of American civil society.

In *Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel offers a theory of civil society beyond spheres and beyond simple distinctions between private and public. Hegel places institutions such as schools, print media, and corporations squarely in civil society, a location that is impossible to describe as either private or public. Instead of two separate spheres, Hegel offers three distinct, yet overlapping social fields: the family, civil society, and the state. Thus, he provides a theoretical map for the social and political developments that move beyond the dichotomies of society and state, private and public. Hegelian civil society conceptualizes the deep connections among the social, economic,

and political changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries without recourse to simple dualisms.¹⁸

Hegel does more than theorize relations among economics and politics. By including marriage, family capital, and education in his social analysis, Hegel brings the family into social theory and opens a way to recognize the contributions of women to the nation. While the dualism of private/public separates family from society, Hegel's conceptual framework connects family to society and state. While the dualism of domestic/political separates men from women, Hegel's framework connects domestic economy to other forms of social and political labor. Civil society situates men and women in families and social institutions where they cooperate and conflict, not into separate categories, where they exist as ideals.¹⁹

Hegel starts with the individual *in* society rather than in a Hobbesian, pre-social state of nature. Hegel stressed education and liberation, as well as conflict and competition, as the distinctive features of civil society. It is through the social processes of education that the individual enters into what Hegel calls "the ethical life" of civil society. Education is a transition from the family into civil society. The importance of education begins with what Hegel calls the "ethical mind in its natural or immediate phase---the Family," for the family is where individuals begin to encounter both liberation and competition. Marriage, family property and capital, and the education of children are each key aspects, what Hegel calls "phases," of the family.²⁰

By starting with the family rather than the abstract individual of most liberal theory, Hegel begins with love and unity as a ground for society. "The family, as the

immediate substantiality of mind, is specifically characterized by love, which is mind's feeling of its own unity. Hence in a family, one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself, with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member" (110). The development of human beings begins through membership in a family. Identity is grounded in a social setting in which social relations as embodied in the family are central. Hegel analyzes this development in terms of heterosexual marriage and family capital, recognizing the family as both a social and economic unit.

Beyond his crucial recognition of the family, Hegel develops the theory of civil society in two important ways. First, following the ideas of Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and other British social theorists, Hegel shows how modern modes of organizing production and competitive markets make the relation between civil society and the state more complex. Political economy is distinct from the state, yet it is crucial to understanding how the labor of self-interested individuals is organized in ways that create communities beyond the family. Second, in addition to the economic aspects of civil society, Hegel emphasizes the educational institutions—school, church, print media—that function to socialize the individual, first within family relations, and then into larger society.

The relations between the economic and educative aspects of civil society are organized through labor. As Michael Hardt concisely summarizes, in Hegel's social theory, "Labor produces, and labor educates."²¹ Hegel universalizes labor, as does Marx, through analyzing the social effects of the capitalist organization of labor, specifically the

division of labor. Labor organized this way both educates workers in new habits and disciplines, and creates capital. Both the labor and the capital are universalized or abstracted through a “process of dialectical advance.” The result of this advance is what Hegel calls “the complex interdependence of each on all” which is presented to each as “the universal permanent capital” (130). Hegel understands labor more broadly than simple commodity production. As labor becomes specialized, it produces goods and capital, and it educates workers into society. This form of education completes a process that begins the family with the educational labor of parenting. Thus, education—the socialization of individuals—begins in the family and continues in social institutions including the school and the corporation.

Hegel’s integration of family and society avoids the problem of “reproductive” versus “productive labor” that frustrates attempts to combine Marxist and feminist theory. In Hegel, labor is both productive and educative. Put another way, the fact that labor produces both commodities and human beings is reconciled within a Hegelian framework without dividing family and society into separate spheres. Although commodity production does move out of households and into society as labor gets organized by capitalist production, capital and education remain tied to both households and social institutions. For Hegel, the universal permanent capital is also the family capital. Educational labor (e.g. reproductive labor) occurs in both society and the family. These insights give Hegelian ideas about civil society particular explanatory power with regard to the middle class, especially the way education and sexual difference function in middle-class family and social life. The term “educational labor” as it appears through

this study should be understood within this Hegelian framework.

More than any other post-Hegelian social theorist, Michel Foucault has reconceptualized the way educational labor produces human beings. By de-emphasizing commodity production and state power in order to focus attention on the educational institutions of civil society—the prison, the school, the hospital, the insane asylum—Foucault has helped make educational labor, what he calls “the disciplines,” central to the study of civil society. By focusing on the physical (bodies), rather than the mental (mind), Foucault understands power in a material sense. Disciplinary techniques of coercion and domination are related to commodity production, but their effects are political and cultural as well as economic. He writes, “Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience).”

This process “dissociates power from the body” both increasing individual aptitudes and capacities, and reversing “the course of the energy, the power that might result from” these new bodies. This reversal turns the power “into a relation of strict subjection” requiring the new individual bodies to be socially useful. Clarifying the connection to commodity production and the cultural/political dynamic, Foucault writes, “If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.” Education increases aptitude even as it socializes human bodies for particular kinds of work. For Hegel, this process is liberating. For Foucault, it is inevitable.²²

Even as Foucault adopts Hegel's broad view of labor and production, he undermines Hegel's ultimate conclusions in *Philosophy of Right*, which emphasize the way that the state completes or universalizes the family and civil society. Hegel's trajectory is reversed by Foucault who sees power, developed in disciplinary techniques of control and domination, as diffused throughout the structures of society. In this sense, Foucault extends and complicates Hegel's theory of civil society by providing a sophisticated account of how power operates through language and civil institutions, and not simply through state authority. Hegel's conception of family and civil society shows how educational labor is important to individual and social development. Foucault's conception of the social production of knowledge and power shows how educational labor operates within civil institutions to produce individuals.²³

Foucault's theory of power is different from Gramsci's account of hegemony as a struggle in the trenches of civil society. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault leaves little room for the kind of individual or collective action that Gramsci imagines can create political change through "wars of position." For Foucault, individuals and social movements are usually understood as the products of power rather than agents who exercise power. Michael Hardt usefully summarizes the contrasting visions of civil society:

Disciplinary society can be characterized as civil society seen from a different perspective, approached from underneath, from the microphysics of its power relations. While Gramsci highlights the democratic potentials of the institutions of civil society, Foucault makes clear that civil society is a society founded upon discipline and that the education it offers is a diffuse network of normalization. From this perspective, Gramsci and Foucault highlight the two contrasting faces of Hegel's civil society. And in all of this what is primary is the way our labor or

our social practice is organized and recuperated in social institutions and educated in the general interest of political society.²⁴

The contrast between Gramsci's democratic potential and Foucault's disciplinary normalization is less important than their extension of Hegel's understanding of labor in civil society. Women's educational labor in civil society can be understood through both Gramscian and Foucauldian frames. Depending on the angle of vision, middle-class women either entered civil society to struggle for justice or to become agents of disciplinary power. Social analysis of female teaching has frequently foundered on this either/or, alternately treating teachers as a class of oppressed workers or as the paid agents of the bureaucratic/capitalist order. So too, the benevolent work of women on behalf of the poor is often understood as either social justice or social control. Placing both perspectives within Hegelian philosophy registers the way that teachers, social workers, and other educational wage laborers are neither potential working-class revolutionaries, nor cogs in the bureaucratic machinery of the state.²⁵ They are agents of the middle-class concerned with improving society as they understand it. To paraphrase Gramsci on Hegel, women educational laborers in the nineteenth century belong to a period in which the spreading development of the middle class could seem limitless.

Hardt's analysis of Hegel is in the service of a larger argument that Europe and North America are experiencing a transition to a "post-civil society," an argument that strangely echoes aspects of Robert Putnam's thesis in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Neither Hardt nor Putnam fully credit civil society's fundamentally transnational nature. Although the imagined community of the nation is an important aspect of organizing labor in civil institutions, labor and capital are global and

national. International institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, as well as transnational social movements working for social justice and peace, and against economic exploitation of the less-developed world, have grown dramatically. This suggests that civil society, especially in its international dimensions, is leading neither to the decline of associational life (as Putnam would have it) nor to the withering away of civil society.²⁶

Globalization, properly understood, includes both educational and economic institutions, as well as educational and productive labor. In the late eighteenth century, the Lancasterian organization of urban schools spread through the Atlantic world at roughly the same time as factory-organized commodity production. In the mid-nineteenth century, reports on education such as those of Calvin Stowe, Horace Mann, Domingo Sarmiento helped organize national systems of education through the transnational exchange of educational ideas. Missionaries and teachers crossed the Atlantic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, just as agricultural workers did and continue to do. Civil society includes political economy and education in both their national and a transnational dimensions, and helps illuminate the fact that the global changes of the twenty-first century have a long history. Much of that history as it concerns education has been marginalized because its key players were women.²⁷

These different perspectives on labor and education in civil society create a conceptual framework for understanding the history of women's educational labor in nineteenth-century America. Civil society places educational labor beyond the private/public confusion that imagines work happens either in households or factories.

Neither the political economy nor the state completely contains or explains labor and education. The concept of civil society is best described as a place where individuals move beyond their family, a place where social and political interests compete and ally, a place that exists both within and beyond the nation. This concept does not resolve all theoretical obstacles to understanding the history of women's educational labor. Nevertheless, Hegelian civil society offers an alternative to separate spheres as a framework, one that is both more dynamic and historically grounded.

Sexual Polarity

There is one significant problem with Hegelian civil society as a conceptual framework for women's history. *Philosophy of Right* imagines gender in precisely the terms I have been arguing against. Sounding very much like the domestic advice literature published in mid-nineteenth century United States, Hegel writes that man has "his substantive life in the state, in learning, and so forth, as well as in labour and struggle with the external world...Woman, on the other hand, has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind"(114) As this passage demonstrates, a conceptual frame that complicates the relation between family, civil society, and state can still accommodate an account of gender relations that assigns women to an internal, private world of domesticity while assigning men to the external, public world of politics and economics. Abandoning separate spheres requires not only a social theory that moves beyond private and public, but a theory of sexual difference that complicates the categories of woman and man, as well as masculinity and femininity.²⁸

Gender is a term that is supposed to do exactly this kind of work by suggesting that sexual difference is socially constructed rather than naturally determined. This distinction rests on the difference between the terms *sex* as a biological or natural category and *gender* as a social or cultural category. The physical differences that distinguish between men and women are sex differences, while the meanings that distinguish between masculine and feminine are gender differences. Used in this sense, *gender* was important to feminist scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a project to challenge often unstated ideas that female subordination was a natural rather than a cultural phenomenon. More recently, *gender* seems to have lost its usefulness, and the distinction it marks has functioned to shut down theoretical questions rather than open new ones. Joan Scott, one of the most influential scholars writing about gender in the 1980s, writes in the revised edition of *Gender and the Politics of History* (1999), “As the 1990s draw to a close, ‘gender’ seems to have lost its ability to startle and provoke us.”²⁹

Gender has become exhausted, in part, because of its success. The term has entered into everyday language, often in ways that illustrate the way that sexual differences are culturally constructed. But it also is used in ways that erase the very distinction it is supposed to mark. For example, people ask a pregnant woman about her baby’s gender when what they mean is sex. Another problem has to do with the culture/nature distinction as theorists grapple with the study of transgender and transsexuality. If bodies are biological facts on which gender identities are imposed or created, how are bodies that do not conform to the standard categories of man or woman, or are in transition between categories, to be understood? Such questions cannot be

answered by invoking the sex/gender distinction.

These confusions over *gender* and *sex* undermine the idea that sharp distinctions between the two terms yield a useful theoretical clarity. Scott suggests that rather than see this as a problem to be solved by greater attention to language, “we need to read the tendency to conflate sex and gender as symptomatic of certain abiding problems.” Some of these problems reside in the tendency to universalize the category of woman, even while arguing that gender is socially constructed. For example, scholars may grant the theoretical point that sexual difference is something that develops culturally, but then treat womanhood as a self-evident, transhistorical category. Another related problem has to do with the tendency to treat natural categories as given, rather than as historically developed through ongoing processes of scientific research. Biological and medical research proceeds by assuming that conceptions of bodies change over time in light of new research and new theories. Yet often, biological conceptions are imagined as fixed and unchanging. The concept of separate spheres has been particularly prone to both these confusions, especially in its singular attention to women rather than social relations between men and women and in its sweeping generalizations of womanhood across time and space.³⁰

Sexual polarity overcomes these problems by treating sexual difference as an unstable and changeable process, one based in the dynamic relation between women and men. What is more, polarity recognizes that both natural and cultural explanations for sexual difference are never entirely separable. Sexual polarity is a metaphor that uses man/woman and masculine/feminine to make sense of the world, and in so doing

complicates easy distinctions between nature and culture. Polarity suggests both sexual dimorphism, the scientific term for bodily differences of sex in many species including humans, and the symbolic organization of society through the differentiation of masculine and feminine social forms. What is more, it offers an understanding of historical change that neither assumes dialectical progression toward an already determined outcome (e.g. Hegel's universal) nor a disordered collection of chaotic impulses impossible to describe coherently. Thus, sexual polarity offers a better framework for making sense of the past than the fixed relations and stasis of separate spheres.

The example of Margaret Fuller reveals how separate spheres fails historically and culturally. Fuller has been a problem for both literary scholars and for women's historians. As a woman, she was barely visible in earlier literary scholarship that equated greatness with maleness, and celebrated Melville, Whitman, and Hawthorne as the great writers of the age. But, the woman-focused scholarship that emerged to challenge the way women were excluded from the canon had its own blind spots where Fuller was concerned. Unlike writers of sentimental fiction or domestic advice, Fuller was no exemplar of a separate women's consciousness. Although *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* contains much that might be labeled proto-feminist, Fuller did not think of herself as living and thinking in a separate sphere, nor did her life conform to the ideals of "true womanhood."³¹

Yet, Margaret Fuller is far more than the exception that proves the rule of separate spheres. Her commitment to the intellectual projects of transcendentalism and

German romanticism, which were made up of mostly men but included a number of gifted women, have led some scholars to imagine her as overly influenced by powerful male role models. The difficulty of her prose, with its dense theoretical cultural criticism that alternates between challenging and celebrating sexual difference, has contributed to her reputation as a precursor to feminist theory, rather than a social theorist in her own right. Fuller's writing, especially *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* provides a model for thinking through the polarity of sexual differences. As she engaged the ideas and social movements of her day, she wrote about them in all their complexity, and with the problem of sexual difference in mind.

As important as Fuller is to the theoretical conception of sexual polarity, she also embodies the dynamic relations implied by that term, especially in her relationship with Ralph Waldo Emerson. In *Feminist Conversations: Fuller, Emerson, and the Play of Reading*, Christina Zwarg argues that their relationship has been "deeply denied" in American literary history, largely because both literary and feminist critics lacked the tools to make sense of it. Her account of their friendship and mutual influence reveals "how gender took on a wonderfully fluid character in their interaction." What is more, she recovers the importance of Charles Fourier's ideas played in the development of both theorists' understanding of social roles. Zwarg's reading of Emerson's *Essays: Second Series* and Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* against the backdrop of their mutual reading of Fourier recovers a crucial context for their ideas about women and men, as well as their skepticism about social reform. In this, *Feminist Conversations* is an important contribution to the project, exemplified by Richard Poirer, Stanley Cavell, and

Cornel West, of recovering Emerson's importance to the development of post-structuralism. Including Fuller in this project recognizes that the problem of sexual difference was crucial to these developments from the beginning.³²

In the polar energies of the intellectual and emotional relationship between Fuller and Emerson, Zwarg finds the tools to help rethink both feminist and post-structuralist theory. She offers Fuller as the missing figure in the recovery of Emersonian cultural criticism, the figure that allows Emerson and Fuller to anticipate not only Derridian deconstructionist criticism, but also Butlerian ideas about gender. Zwarg complicates feminist readings of their friendship that assume Emerson "constitutes the negative or (to use terms affiliated with Emerson) the 'fatal' pole of Fuller's early career," that is, assumptions that Emerson's influence damaged Fuller's independence and artistry. To the contrary, Zwarg demonstrates that Fuller's "relationship with Emerson is complex, mutually empowering and interactive." In other words, Fuller and Emerson emerge from her analysis as writers engaged in a project with particular importance to understanding sexual difference within the context of social change in the nineteenth century, as well as the development of social theory in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³³

Emerson and Fuller not only represent sexual polarity; they were its first theorists. They applied scientific ideas about electromagnetism to both natural and cultural processes, usefully complicating the sex/gender distinction. In fact, it might be more accurate to say they wrote in the moment just before that distinction became possible, the moment when natural history and natural philosophy were still part of historical and philosophical writing. Emerson's "Nature" is a great example of this, but it is in "The

American Scholar” that he introduces polarity, quoting Newton’s definition of the term as “fits of easy transmission and reflection.” Emerson describes polarity as “That great principle of Undulation in nature, that shows itself in the inspiring and expiring of the breath; in desire and satiety; in the ebb and flow of the sea; in day and night; in heat and cold; and as yet more deeply ingrained in every atom and every fluid.” This understanding of polarity, as both a process between two extremes and as an aspect of individuality, is a trope Emerson returned to again and again.³⁴

In “Compensation” Emerson sees polarity “in male and female” as well as “in the systole and diastole of the heart; the undulations of fluids and of sounds; in the centrifugal and centripetal gravity; in electricity, galvanism, and chemical affinity.” Emerson frames polarity in terms of both natural dichotomies and natural energies. In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* Fuller uses these energies as a metaphor for women’s power: “The electrical, the magnetic element in woman has not been fairly brought out in any period. Everything might be expected from it, she has far more of it than man.” This association between electromagnetism and women appears throughout both the published and unpublished work of both writers. Emerson also draws upon polarity to describe his sometimes difficult relationship with Fuller, but in terms of light and dark, hot and cold, as well as magnetism In his journal from 1842: “I cannot give the lights & shades, the hopes & outlooks that come to me in these strange, cold-warm, attractive-repelling conversations with Margaret.”³⁵

One way to understand polarity as it relates to sexual difference is to consider how it differs from separate spheres. The contained and defined space of two spheres

may overlap, but they are clearly demarcated. To move outside one of the spheres is to violate boundaries. In contrast, polarity is dynamic: it has two extremes (e.g., the north and south poles of the globe) which contain a dynamic interaction (e.g., the global magnetic forces measured by a compass). In a reference to experiments in electromagnetism by Michael Faraday and André-Marie Ampère, Emerson writes, “Superinduce magnetism at one end of a needle; the opposite magnetism takes place at the other end. If the south attracts, the north repels.” Like spheres, poles may represent hierarchies—north over south, man over woman—but polarity suggests the energies and tensions within and beyond the interaction, not the simple distinction of separation. So too, these energies can represent the processes of social interactions between individuals, in the “strange, cold-warm, attractive-repelling conversations” between Emerson and Fuller.³⁶

The electric or magnetic element distinguishes this use of polarity from the word “polarizing,” or moving to the extremes or poles. Polarity does imply dichotomy, so that Emerson writes “an inevitable dualism bissects nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole.” However, the meaning of this “inevitable dualism” is found in the dynamic process, the beating heart, the undulations, the magnetic motions of attraction and repelling. The power that exists in motion between the ends of the pole, in the relation, is what interested both writers. Emerson’s “inevitable dualism” becomes Fuller’s “radical dualism.” She writes, “Male and female represent the two sides of the radical dualism. But, in fact they are perpetually passing into one another Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man,

no purely feminine woman” (68-69).

Sexual polarity resists attempts to categorize or “fix” the relation between men and women. Fuller writes, “History jeers at the attempts of physiologists to bind great original laws by the forms which flow from them. They make a rule; they say from observation, what can and cannot be. In vain!” (69). Earlier in the essay, Fuller critiques rigid understandings of sexual difference, dismissing “little treatises, intended to mark out with precision the limits of woman’s sphere” and “lectures on some model-woman of bride-like beauty and gentleness” (17). In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller offers something beyond spheres. Polarity brings together nature and culture even as it refuses fixed cultural or natural definitions. Fuller notes that “Nature provides exceptions to every rule” and then goes on to list some of nature’s exceptions to the “rules” of sexual difference:

She sends women to battle, and sets Hercules spinning; she enables women to bear immense burdens, cold, and frost; she enables the man, who feels maternal love, to nourish his infant like a mother. Of late she plays still gayer pranks. Not only she deprives organizations, but organs, of a necessary end. She enables people to read with the top of the head, and see with the pit of the stomach. Presently, she will make a female Newton, and a male Syren. Man partakes of the feminine in the Apollo, woman of the masculine as Minerva. (69)

This passage directly addresses the confusion between nature and culture. Fuller’s attention to the physical strengths of the female body and the cultural possibilities of male nurture conflate assumptions about sexual nature. Her reference to the “gayer pranks” offers her the chance to joke about useless organs and organizations, as well as anatomical anomalies. Her concluding sentence of this paragraph about the feminine traits of Apollo and the masculine traits of Minerva is directly to the point of her essay.

Woman in the Nineteenth Century is an analysis of the history of literary and mythological representations of sexual difference in the service of explicating the actual experiences of women.³⁷

Apollo and Minerva are Fuller's examples of sexual polarity in this passage, but she explores a wide range of cultural texts and figures. Fuller suggests female power exists in the ability to move beyond boundaries of masculine and feminine forms, to see the dynamic potential in shifting roles. She writes, "Harmony exists in difference, no less than in likeness, if only the same key-note govern both parts. Woman the poem, man the poet! Woman the heart, man the head! Such divisions are only important when they are never to be transcended" (47). Her example is Manzoni's poem "Adelchi" which celebrates his wife as a feminine ideal. Fuller reverses the polarity of this relation, suggesting that while creative genius resides in the male poet contemplating female duty, women too have a claim on such energies. "The woman might have sung the deeds, given voice to the deeds, given voice to the life of the man, and beauty would have been the result[...] Nature seems to delight in varying the arrangements, as if to show that she will be fettered by no rule, and we must admit the same varieties she admits" (47-48).

Such variety is implicit in every individual. As Emerson puts it in "Fate," there is something that "resembles the ebb and flow of the sea, day and night, man and woman, in a single needle of the pine, in a kernel of corn, in each individual of every animal tribe. The reaction so grand in the elements, is repeated within these small boundaries." For Fuller, this greatly expands the range of women's potential to work in society. Not only the woman poet, but in one of her most famous passages, Fuller writes that every path

should be “laid open to women as freely as men...If you ask me what offices they may fill, I reply -- any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea captains, if you will.” Every individual has access to the power of this natural polarity, which is linked to a natural balance. This power is represented in the potential of individuals and in their literary creations.

Like so many of her contemporaries, Fuller was interested in the literature of ancient Greece as a particularly important expression of democratic culture. In an essay originally published in *The Dial* and included as the final portion of the appendix to *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller turns her attention to tragic Greek heroines. She addresses two tragic heroines, Antigone and Iphigenia the sacrificed daughter in the two plays by Euripides. She treats them as familiars calling them “my sisters” and contrasts her recognition of their experience with the impossibility of understanding men, writing “You, we understand at once, those who stare upon us pertly in the streets, we cannot—could never understand.” Fuller’s identification with her literary sisters through the act of reading is very different from her inability to read the male desire she encounters in the streets. This contrast between The power of Antigone and Iphigenia resides in their purity and distance from those stares. Her literary sisters represent, “the force of woman’s nature, virgin and unbiased. You were women; not wives, or lovers, or mothers” (123-124).³⁸

Even as Fuller identifies with Antigone, she recognizes a distance from her own situation. Antigone’s brothers are somehow different from her own. “Were brothers so dear, then, Antigone? We have no brothers. We see no men into whose lives we dare look

steadfastly, or to whose destinies we look forward confidently.” As Fuller looks around at her contemporaries, those whom she does not understand as they “stare pertly” at her, she sees no “spark of kingly flash from their eyes” (124). The image of “kingly flash” is a reference to Fuller’s hope that once woman is given her full due, she will see “what few have seen, The palace home of King and Queen” (105) This image is from the last lines of the poem that concludes the main body of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. This palace home is a fully reformed institution of marriage, imagined in Fourierist terms that will contain sexual polarity while allowing full expression of the different natures of men and women. Although the day such a marriage can exist is far off, Fuller asks if perhaps Antigone’s brothers do exist: “None! Are there *none*? It is base speech to say it. Yes! there are some such; we have sometimes caught their glances. But rarely have they been rocked in the same cradle as we, and they do not look upon us much; for the time is not yet come” (124).

Fuller’s Antigone is an image of female potential waiting for a corresponding male power to emerge. But, the question of just who Antigone’s brothers are is one Fuller cannot answer. The desire implicit in the brother’s glance is incestuous. Antigone is, of course, a product of incest herself. Her father is also her brother. Fuller does not address these possibilities. In fact, she turns away from them, telling Antigone “Thou art so grand and simple! We need not follow thee; thou dost not need our love.” Instead, Fuller follows Iphigenia, the dutiful daughter who dies upon the orders of her father in the plays by Euripides. Still, the questions Fuller refused to follow remain. Who are Antigone’s brothers? What do their glances mean? Did Fuller sometimes catch in Emerson’s glances

the desire and recognition she imagines through the figure of Antigone?

These questions were not Fuller's alone. Her fellow transcendentalist, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, faced her own versions of them in her relations with men. Peabody also had a complicated relationship with Emerson—they were the first of the circle to meet when Emerson, a shy, nineteen-year-old Harvard student tutored Peabody in Greek. Like Fuller, Peabody visited the Emersons in Concord during the 1830s and 1840s. But her most passionate questions were reserved for the men who became her brothers-in-law, Horace Mann and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Indeed, the sexual polarity that structured the relation between Emerson and Fuller similarly energized Peabody's relations, first with Mann, and then with Hawthorne.³⁹

In her wonderful group biography, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism*, Megan Marshall charts the social and family drama of Elizabeth and her two sisters, Mary and Sophia. She describes the effects of the sisters' energy—“magnetic, stimulating, nurturing”—on Mann, Hawthorne, Emerson, William Channing, and Bronson Alcott, among others. The overlapping triangular relationships between the Peabody sisters and their suitors frame the story, which ends with the marriages of Mary and Sophia to, respectively, Mann and Hawthorne. Elizabeth emerges from this story as a complex figure, alternately drawn to men of genius and unwilling to marry one. Her intimate intellectual friendships with Emerson and Theodore Parker, and her professional relationships with the educators Bronson Alcott and Charles Kraitsir, were characterized by celebration and support as well as tension and frustration.⁴⁰

Naturally, scholars raise questions about who Peabody may have been in love

with, or who loved her—or whether Emerson and Fuller were in love. More important than questions of romantic love, or questions about whether such feelings were acted upon, are broader questions of passion and ideas. Fuller, the Peabody sisters, and their fellow transcendentalists Caroline Sturgis, Elizabeth Hoar, and Sarah Clarke were intellectual women who raised questions about the relation between bodies and minds, love and ideas. These questions were new. As women created social and professional roles as writers and teachers that competed with men, many of them fell in love and married, many remained single. Women and men would converse with each other, write books, and reform society. Working side-by-side, they would exchange glances. What did these glances mean? What would these new social relations— competitive as well as cooperative—mean for relations between women and men? Between men and men? Women and women?

New ideas and ideals were created to address these shifts in the polarity of sexual difference. The companionate ideal of harmonious relations between intellectually equal man and woman came to characterize many marriages during this period. Fourierist and Owenite experiments with communal living were other, more controversial responses. The Boston transcendentalists were as engaged as any group in the world with these questions, most famously in the experiments of Brook Farm and Fruitlands. Some of the most interesting women of this period are those who chose to remain single, creating identities outside of marriage. Single women, especially intellectual and independent women such as Fuller and Peabody, had access to forms of energy that challenged norms of marriage and female dependency.

The image that most powerfully represents the sexual polarity of such women is Fuller's conception of Antigone as a figure of female force, "virgin and unbiased"—women who were "not wives, or lovers, or mothers"—women who sometimes catch the glances of their brothers, even though "the time is not yet come" to act upon those glances. The polar energies in this complex dance of desire and recognition cannot be reduced to women's movements for equality. Sexual polarity suggests that something far more complex operates in the social processes of sexual difference and in the institutions of civil society.

Civil Society, Sexual Polarity, Antigone

In *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel recommends sisterhood as the most important social role in conceptualizing what he calls "sitttelicicht" or the ethical life. He writes that the brother/sister relation is purely ethical in that although "they are the same blood....they do not desire one another." Sisterly love, existing outside the natural and historical requirements of sexuality, provides Hegel with an ethical ideal. Although Hegel argued that the sister's duty to the brother is "higher than any other family duty," he also imagines the sister as restricted to the private life of the household. It is the brother who leaves the family for the community, who "passes from the divine law, within whose sphere he lived, over to the human law." The sister remains within the household, beholden to the divine law of the family; the brother leaves to follow the dictates of the public law of the state.⁴¹

This view of sexual difference cannot account for the public lives of Margaret Fuller and many other women of her generation. Sisters and daughters, along with wives

and mothers, entered the public as writers, teachers, and reformers, and in so doing changed civil society and challenged many of the laws of the state. The issue is not simply avoiding theory that overdetermines historical analysis. The failure of separate spheres, whether in women's history or in Hegel's theory, suggests the need for more flexible ways to conceptualize historical problems. Such flexibility requires loosening conceptions of family structures, recognizing that, like civic and political institutions, family relations are products of language and history. A full account of historical change requires understanding the deep connections between family, social, and state structures. Hegel's use of *Antigone* to address complex philosophical issues is one example of how that play is, as George Steiner puts it, "one of the enduring and canonic texts in the history of our philosophic, literary, and political consciousness."⁴²

As Hegel continues his discussion of brothers and sisters, the simple, gendered division of private and public breaks down. His discussion of ethical consciousness as related to the family/state relation is permeated with references to Antigone's defiance of Creon. Antigone, like the slave in master/slave dialectic, achieves a self-consciousness unavailable to her polar opposite. By speaking publicly, by making the ethical actual, Antigone challenges and confuses the boundaries between family and state, private and public, woman and man. In doing so, she becomes a potent symbol of the political possibilities of civil society and the explanatory power of sexual polarity.⁴³

In essay titled "Antigone's Daughters," Jean Bethke Elshtain takes up Antigone in a way that illuminates both the history and the problems of using Antigone to understand women in society. Antigone represents what Elshtain calls "social feminism," a feminism

somewhere between a “rush toward...an overweening public identity” and a “standpoint of ardent feminine passivity.”⁴⁴ Antigone’s position between the public power of Creon’s order not to bury her brother and the passive acceptance of the order by her sister Ismene, marks a feminist project that resists state power by throwing “sand into the machinery of arrogant public power.” The “social location” created by this resistance transcends the limitations of the private world, yet is not co-opted by public power.⁴⁵

Antigone speaks from a location between the family and the state, and in so doing, offers women a model of activism that maintains difference without abdicating social power. Ironically, Elshtain ends her essay with a discussion of “maternal thinking,” which she posits as a form of social power suited for feminist practices that resist state authority. “Maternal thinking makes contacts with the strengths of our mothers and grandmothers; it helps us to see ourselves as Antigone’s daughters, determined, should it be necessary, to chasten arrogant public power and resist the claims of political necessity.” The irony is that Antigone rejects marriage and dies childless. Rather than embrace the roles of wife and mother, she commits herself finally to the role of sister. If Antigone did not marry and give birth, who then are Antigone’s daughters?⁴⁶

If Antigone offers a symbol of activism through sexual difference, she also helps move beyond the “traditional” woman’s roles of wife and mother. Her commitment to the roles of daughter/sister and the confusion of that role in terms of her own family relations— Antigone is both daughter and sister to Oedipus— makes her an intriguing symbol for feminist politics. This confusion or “kinship trouble” is central to Judith Butler’s exploration of Steiner’s argument that Oedipus replaced Antigone as the key

cultural figure in western culture around 1905. According to Butler, a psychoanalytic theory that takes Antigone as its central figure “might put into question the assumption that the incest taboo legitimates and normalizes kinship based in biological reproduction and the heterosexualization of the family...From the presumption that one cannot—or ought not to—choose one’s closest family members as one’s lovers and marital partners, it does not follow that the bonds of kinship that *are* possible assume any particular form.”⁴⁷

Butler shows how Antigone represents the limits of the intelligibility of the family and suggests that family and kinship can function in radically alternative ways. In other words, the middle-class, heterosexual family is far too limiting a conception of how biology (represented by the incest taboo) regulates kinship. This is a particularly important point for the nineteenth century as competing versions of kinship (e.g., the Iroquois and other Native Americans, the Mormons and other patriarchal sects, the extended kinship networks of Appalachia) were under attack. Fourierist conceptions of family and kinship existed in the social ideas of Robert Owen and Fanny Wright, as well as the social practices of utopian communities like those in New Harmony, Onieda, and Brook Farm. The heterosexual family emerged as the ideal during the nineteenth century, but it was never the only, or even the most prevalent way of organizing family and kinship relations.

Antigone usefully represents the connections among social ideas about the family, civil society, and state. As Elshtain points out, Antigone is a symbol of the necessary tension between family and state as it exists in civil society. But, as Butler suggests,

Antigone also challenges the naturalization of the middle-class family. Unmarried and childless, Antigone suggests a notion of family based on something other than heterosexual marriage and biological parenting. If Antigone's daughters and brothers exist, they are not members of a middle-class family, at least as it became an ideal in the United States during the nineteenth century.

The emergence of opportunities for women to earn wages independent of family and kinship networks changed the nature of unmarried life. Margaret Fuller wrote of the "aversion with which old bachelors and old maids have been regarded" suggesting that in avoiding marriage, "the natural means of forming a sphere," single men and women become homeless. Yet, they were also indispensable. Thus, "the business of society could now scarcely be carried on without the presence of these despised auxiliaries; and detachments from the army of aunts and uncles are wanted to stop games in every hedge." Spinsters had long helped families raise children, but questions about the presence of unmarried women took on new significance during this period. Among the key aspects of American Antigone are the range of questions around the complex social circumstances of a woman's choice to marry and have children.⁴⁸

During one of Margaret Fuller's famous "Conversations," many of which were held in the bookstore Elizabeth Peabody owned in the 1840s, the question of unmarried women was raised in the context of "intellectual differences between men & women." When Fuller expressed dismay at the thought that "there was no great musical composer among women," she suggested as a reason that such pursuits occurred in the period of life when "most women became mothers—but there were some women who never

married.” The recorder of the conversation, most likely Elizabeth Peabody, responded that unmarried women “too often spend the rest of their lives in mourning over this fact” and the social pressure to marry led such women to “despair.” She writes, “This caused some lively talk all around.” The issue must have sparked an emotional response with Peabody, who was then 36 and perhaps facing questions about life as an unmarried woman.⁴⁹

The 29-year old Fuller answered that “there came a time however when everyone *must give up*.” Peabody did not respond, but could not resist recording her thoughts. “I might have answered that then it was but too common for youth to be past—& the mind to have wedded itself to that mediocrity, which is too commonly the result of disappointed hope, especially if hopes are not the highest.” The tension between the two leading female lights of transcendentalism over the question of marriage and genius would only have been exacerbated by the fact that many of the women in attendance were married or widowed. Among the key family issues for women teachers and writers involved the choice to marry or have children. Several years later, after at least one failed love affair in the United States, Fuller would marry and have a child while living in Italy. Peabody would choose to do neither.⁵⁰

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Fuller would address the family roles of those who choose to remain unmarried and without children. She writes that in acknowledging the “character of the Aunt, and the Uncle,” society recognizes “in these personages the spiritual parents, who had supplied defects in the treatment of the busy or careless actual parents.” For Catharine Beecher, another who chose unmarried life,

households could be headed by single women acting as a kind of “spiritual parents.”

The American Women’s Home (1869), a book she co-wrote with her sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, suggests that economically independent women who do not choose to marry “can institute the family state, adopt children and employ suitable helpers in training them; and then to her will appertain the authority and rights that belong to man as the head of a family.” The Beecher sisters, especially Catharine, are typically understood as expressing a conservative domestic ideology, but their radical vision for the social roles of unmarried women should suggest that more complex approaches to their ideas.⁵¹

For Elizabeth Peabody, family and home were also flexible ideas. In a emotional letter written in 1836, she responded to her sister Mary’s charges that she was indiscreet. Describing the role of “confidence” in family relationships, Elizabeth compared to her relationship with Mary to that of husband and wife. At the end of the letter, Elizabeth referred to their triangular relationship with Mann as “that happy union which for a time I enjoyed with you & him.” Mary had a rather different understanding and their stormy relationship continued well after Mary married him. When Mann died in 1859, the two sisters lived together for many years.⁵²

In an enigmatic letter to her brother George from 1839, around the time of her exchange with Margaret Fuller over the question of marriage, Elizabeth addressed the question of what home might mean.

I begin to grow independent. Wherever I can be myself and *act* if not speak my soul, is my home. Mr Emerson says *our home* is not this or town, or even a particular body. It is the *unity of our character*. I not only am coming to the *place* home, but to the *being* home. Such a combination of *homes* cannot but succeed. I

have come to the conclusion that disinterestedness is a maggot of the brain, and the only virtue is to be indifferent to these phenomena we call men and women. Among this phenomena, however, I reckon E. P. Peabody.⁵³

The growing realization that she might not marry and have a home in the same sense that her siblings did seems to be liberating to Peabody. Her independence leads her not to imagine herself homeless, but to understand the term *home* has a multiplicity of meanings. This understanding leads her to the contradictory statement that imagines “disinterestedness” in rather nauseating terms, yet conceives “indifference” to the “phenomena” of men and women as a virtue. Her closing identification with “this phenomena” ironically closes the distance opened by her simultaneous distaste for disinterestedness and embrace of indifference. This passage expresses some of the complexity of feeling and thought that Peabody, and perhaps other single, intellectually-minded women navigating their growing independence, experienced as they imagined lives without marriage.

Antigone, especially as she exists in the social theory of Hegel, Fuller, Elshtain, and Butler, is a symbolic representation of these emotions, ideas, and lives. The phrase *American Antigone* is meant to suggest that Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Catharine Beecher, Emma Willard and other women who did not marry, or spent much of their lives widowed or divorced, matter to the history of the United States. The terms civil society and sexual polarity are frameworks that explore connections—between families and social ideas, emotions and activism, and labor and writing—that show how they matter. As an emblem of history, American Antigone abandons the distinction of private and public, complicates the categories of man and woman, and suggests that the

individual human life should be the material of history. In the chapters that follow, the lives and social ideas of unmarried women will make the meanings of American Antigone concrete and specific. In the essay “History,” Emerson puts this thought beautifully, writing that “all public facts are to be individualized, all private facts are to be generalized. Then at once History becomes fluid and true, and Biography deep and sublime.”⁵⁴

In a famous passage from the essay “Experience” Emerson writes:

I feel a new heart beating with the love of the new beauty. I am ready to die out of nature, and be born again into this new yet unapproachable America I have found in the West.

“Since neither now nor yesterday began
These thoughts, which have been ever, nor can
A man be found who their first entrance knew.”⁵⁵

By the time Emerson quoted these lines from Antigone, he could no longer read them without noting the ironical use of “man”—a man who cannot be found because he is a woman. Emerson’s deep and polar connection to Margaret Fuller led him to this passage which concerns the emergence of new ideas, especially the new idea of America. Although Emerson is ready to die and be reborn into this new idea, the timelessness of thought, which began “neither now nor yesterday” prevents his completion of this event. He is only “ready” after all. Exploring the ideas and actions of women as they entered civil society during the nineteenth century may be the path to better understanding the unapproachable America that Emerson imagined he had found, and that we still find ourselves struggling to approach.

Endnotes

1. Cathy Davidson, "Preface" to *No More Separate Spheres!* a special edition of *American Literature* 70 (1998) 443-464, 445; Mary Kelley, "Beyond the Boundaries" *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Spring 2001), 73-78.

2. Two important early essays are Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood" (1966) reprinted in *Dimity Convictions: The American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976) and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual" (1975) reprinted in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). The scholarship exploring separate spheres as a conceptual framework for women's history is immense. Two important exchanges from the 1980s are Ellen DuBois, Mari Jo Buhle, Temma Kaplan, Gerda Lerner, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," *Feminist Studies* 6 (Spring 1980), 26-64; Linda Kerber, Nancy F. Cott, Robert Gross, Lynn Hunt, Carrol Smith-Rosenberg, and Christine Stansell, "Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking about Gender in the Early Republic," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (July 1989), 565-585. For an overview of "separate spheres" scholarship, see the "Introduction" to *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930*, ed. Monika Elbert (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2000).

On race and womanhood, see Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987) and Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984). On class and womanhood, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1960* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986) and Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Class, and Politics in the Nineteenth Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). On manhood, see David Leverentz, *Manhood and the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) and Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996). On mixed-sex reform movements see, Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

3. On Habermas and feminist theory, see Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" in *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse* ed. by Johanna Meehan (New York: Routledge, 1995); Sara M. Evans, "Women's History and Political Theory: Toward a Feminist Approach to Public Life" in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, eds. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). For brief, but illuminating discussions of Habermas in relation to women's and American history, see, Mary P. Ryan *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6-8; and Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 6.

4. *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. Jeff Weintraub & Krishan Kumar (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997). The introductory essay of that volume, Jeff Weintraub, "The Theory of and Politics of the

Public/Private Distinction” is an excellent overview of the various ways the private and public distinction is used in social theory. The essay is particularly useful in illustrating the way that private/public frameworks create “as much confusion as illumination, not least because different sets of people who employ these concepts mean very different things by them—and sometimes, without quite realizing it, mean several things at once.” See also, Carol Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981). Despite sophisticated use of the private/public frameworks by these and other social theorists, as well as path-breaking women’s history that uses the framework, I believe the confusions have become more debilitating than illuminating, especially in understanding women in the nineteenth century. Put another way, confusions and questions created by the different meanings of private/public no longer produce interesting questions for historical scholarship on sexual difference in the nineteenth century. To be clear, my argument applies only to historical analysis. I am not rejecting the important use of such concepts of privacy and the private sphere to protect the rights of individuals from government power.

5. On civil society, see Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 17-18; Michael Walzer, “The Concept of Civil Society” in *Toward a Global Civil Society*, ed. Michael Walzer (Providence: Bergham Books, 1995), 7-16. Adam Ferguson, Frances Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, David Hume—the so-called Scottish Enlightenment thinkers—first articulated the concept of civil society as I am using it. They influenced the American revolutionary generation use of the term (c.f. Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978)) and German philosophers, especially Hegel (c.f. Mary Catherine Moran, “‘The Commerce of the Sexes’: Gender and the Social Sphere in Scottish Enlightenment Accounts of Civil Society” in *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern German and British History*, ed. Frank Trentmann (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

6. One important source for what I call sexual polarity is writing by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller elaborated below. Another is Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), particularly her critique of binary categories of man and woman and that critique’s implications for the politics of sexual differences and practices. See also, *Feminists Theorize The Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992) and Butler’s collection of essays, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), particularly the essay “The End of Sexual Difference?” which appeared originally in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for a New Century*, eds. Misha Kavka and Elizabeth Bronfen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). The aspects of Butler’s recent thought that I find most important to sexual polarity are her arguments against universalizing notions of sexual difference, her interest in transexuality, and her continued engagement with Hegelian philosophy.

7. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 7.

8. On early women historical writing see, *Women's Early American Historical Narratives*, Sharon M. Harris (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003) and Baym, *American Women Writers*.

9. Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Onieda County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 204. Two other influential community studies are Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change, Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: , 1984). The opening sentence recalls one of the most influential studies of American women, Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

10. Welter, *Dimity Convictions*, 88.

11. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7. The fact of women soldiers and male memorialists does not alter the gendered structure of meaning that associates the work of soldiering with the male and that of memorializing with the female. The question of martyrdom is more complex. There are famous and important women martyrs in national mythologies—for example, Joan of Arc. But, in the United States, from John Brown and Abraham Lincoln to the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King, Jr., national martyrdom has been an entirely male role.

12. On the post-revolutionary period, see Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). During and following the Civil War, see Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Kirsten E. Wood, "The Homefront In Black And White" *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 30, No. 1. (Mar., 2002), pp. 39-50.

13. Two important studies from the mid-1990s use civil society as a conceptual framework for women's history. The first, Karen Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) discusses civil society as used by Allan Wolfe, but she rejects it for a more narrowly defined concept of "the social." Her argument is that it is important to maintain a strong distinction between private family life "rooted in the activities of the household and nuclear family" and public, social life. While her broadly conceived notion of the social is useful, Hansen's strong distinction between private/public fails to adequately move beyond spheres. Ironically, her analysis of the family and social lives of men and women, especially in Chapter Five's exploration of gossip and reputation, reveal the way that the "private sphere"—where individuals "attend to bodily needs, sexuality, identity, intense emotion, and domestic concerns"—was subject to a great deal of public commentary and social control.

The distinction between family members interacting in private and family members

interacting socially with those outside the family, abstracts or universalizes the nuclear family rather than interrogating it. For example, the sons and daughters of Lyman Beecher were acutely aware of both the private and public dimensions of family life. Debates within the family over theology, abolition, and politics frequently became public, as gossip and reputation showed the relation between family life and social life. For more on “the social” see, Hansen, “Rediscovering the Social: Visiting Practices in Antebellum New England and the Limits of the Public/Private Distinction” in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice*.

The second study, Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) uses a broad conception of civil society and shows how participation in “public culture” was deeply connected to the educational processes of the family. According to Sklar, Kelley was influenced by “two models of public activity,” one represented by her father and the other by her great-aunt. These two cultures, based on sexual difference, “developed as parallel entities; each could act independently, but each was further empowered through alliance with the other.” Sklar argues that Kelley’s generation at the end of the nineteenth century, “brought these two cultures into effective conjunction, thereby introducing important changes into American political life and the American state” (4).

The notion of two cultures developing into one over the course of the nineteenth century is a far better understanding of civil society than static separate spheres. But if education is part of public culture/civil society, then this “effective conjunction” between women and men began in the 1820s around questions of female education. Thus, as early as 1819, Emma Willard and Dewitt Clinton could forge an alliance to argue for publicly funded women’s education in New York. Even around other reform issues such as temperance and abolition, there never was never an entirely distinct women’s public culture.

14. Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History” in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997), 159-199.

15. See, Robert Putman, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). Like Habermas’s “public sphere,” Tocqueville’s “associational life” is often used as a framework for understanding civil society. The problem with “associational life,” at least as it is used by political theorists like Robert Putman is that it only accounts for voluntary activity, not socially beneficial forms of wage labor like teaching, social work, or writing. If Habermas’s “public sphere” overemphasizes print culture, “associational life” overemphasizes voluntary organizations. In both cases the complex relations among political economy, moral argument, educational labor, and shared spiritual life that constitute civil society are obscured by too narrow a focus.

16. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 240. Page numbers in text hereafter.

17. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) offers a useful definition of hegemony: “It is a whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming” (110). The dynamic sense of hegemony as a struggle, or as a “lived system of meanings and values,” is what is most important. In this sense, social or cultural struggle is not something external or internal, private or public, but something that permeates human life. On hegemony as a concept in history, see, T. J. Jackson Lears, “The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities” *The American Historical Review* 90 (June, 1985), pp. 567-593.

18. The Hegelian ideas I explore here may be unrecognizable to those who know Hegel as a metaphysician of “world spirit” and as a philosopher of the state as the ultimate expression of freedom. I have been greatly influenced by the philosophical work on Hegel which abandons both his metaphysics and his understanding of the state. See, Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Klaus Hartman, “Hegel: A Non-Metaphysical View” in *Hegel*, ed. A. MacIntyre (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972). For an interesting overview of this turn in Hegel studies, see *Hegel Reconsidered: Beyond Metaphysics and the Authoritarian State*, eds. Engelhardt and Pinkard (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994). It is worth noting that Hegel’s life reflects some of the theoretical and historical issues I explore in this study. He had a troubled relationship with his unmarried sister, Christine, that at some level must have influenced his writing on the brother-sister relationship in *Phenomenology*. In addition, he was the rector (principal) of a Gymnasium (secondary school) in Nuremberg from 1808 to 1815 where he played a role in the neo-humanist educational reform movement led by Wilhem von Humbolt and Friedrich Niethammer. On Hegel’s experience as an educator and educational thinker see, Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 266-285. On his relationship with his sister, see 314-319.

19. Linda Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and *The Play of Reason: From the Modern to the Postmodern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). Nicholson’s analysis of the limitations of Locke and Marx for feminist theory is crucial to my understanding of the role family plays in a historically grounded social theory.

20. *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 110. Page numbers in text hereafter.

21. Michael Hardt, “The Withering of Civil Society” *Social Text* 45 (Winter 1995), 27-44, 29.

22. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 137-138. The impact of Foucault on historians has been the subject of much debate. See, Allan Megill, “The Reception of Foucault by Historians” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 48 (Jan. 1987), pp. 117-141 and Mark Poster,

Foucault, Marxism and History: Mode of Production Versus Mode of Information (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). For an argument that the development of Foucault's ideas in his later work undermines the starkness of his earlier analysis, see Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York: Other Press, 2006).

23. Foucault is seldom understood as having much to say about the individual, especially in his early work. For a thoughtful exploration of this issue, see Richard Poirier "Writing Off the Self" in *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1987). More broadly, the work of philosophers including Richard Rorty, Cornel West, Stanley Cavell, and Richard Bernstein have placed an American tradition of philosophical writing beginning with Emerson, in relation to Continental tradition beginning with Nietzsche. Understood as part of a long standing transatlantic tradition of theoretical writing, the Emersonian/Fullerian perspective that informs my discussion of sexual polarity is directly related to the Gramscian/Foucaultian perspective that informs my discussion of civil society. At the historical root of both perspectives is the Anglo-German idealist/romantic writing of Goethe, Wordsworth, Fichte, and others, as well as Hegel's response to that idealist/romantic writing.

24. Hardt, "Withering of Civil Society," 33.

25. On teachers as agents of the capitalist order, see Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976). On teachers as potential revolutionary workers see Henry Giroux, *Teachers as Intellectuals : Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning* (Granby: Bergin & Garvey, 1988).

26. Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. Hardt's ideas are more fully worked out in his collaborative writings with Antonio Negri. See, Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001). For a specific answer to Hardt's argument about civil society in the essay cited above, see George Yudice, "Civil Society, Consumption, and Governmentality in an Age of Global Restructuring: An Introduction" *Social Text* 45 (Winter 1995). My understanding of global civil society as a vibrant field of action, especially in the relations between internationalism and nationalism, has been informed by *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

27. On Lancasterian education, see *Joseph Lancaster and the Monitorial School Movement: a Documentary History* ed. Carl Kaestle (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1971). Calvin Stowe, *Report on elementary public instruction in Europe, made to the Thiry-sixth General assembly of the state of Ohio, December 19, 1837* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1837); *Mr. Mann's Seventh annual report. Education in Europe* (Boston: Massachusetts Board of Education, 1844); Domingo Sarmiento, *De la Educacion popular* (Santiago, 1848); *Sarmiento's Travels in the United States in 1847* ed. Michael Aaron Rockland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

28. For a useful feminist reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* that includes a discussion of Antigone, see Seyla Benhabib, "On Hegel, Women and Irony" in *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* eds. Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 1991), 129-145.

29. Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (1999), xii.

30. Scott, *Gender*, 200.

31. Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life: The Private Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) provides a wealth of detail and explodes many of the myths surrounding Fuller's life. However, the organization of the two volumes into the private years and the public years recapitulates separate spheres in a way I am trying to avoid. Following the recent trends of women's history, Capper summarizes the cultural shifts of Fuller's generation. "Many educated yet restricted antebellum (sic) women were in these years redefining what their culture liked to think of as a women's 'private' activities—whether mothering, school teaching, or writing—in ways that allowed for their expansion into the public sphere" (xi). As I hope this chapter makes clear, I find the conception of these important shifts as moving from private to public more confusing than not. Fuller's teaching, correspondence, and her "conversations" were both private and public, so dividing her life into a period of "private" and a period of "public" lacks explanatory power. Fuller did become famous after she moved to New York and began writing for the *New York Tribune*. However, the letters, journals, and social gatherings that make up so much of the early history of the transcendentalists cannot be described usefully as "private." The letter and the journal were self-conscious, literary forms understood by their authors and by critics since then as contributions to literature. So too, the conversations and club meetings of the transcendentalists were fundamentally public even if they took place in "private" homes.

Similar confusions around private and public also exist in regard to the history of the novel, which has been understood as a literary form that reveals the private life of its characters. See Stacey Margolis, *The Public Life of Privacy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) for an critical exploration of some of these issues, including a challenge to interpretations that privilege "privacy" and "domesticity" in reading nineteenth-century novels.

32. Christina Zwarg, *Feminist Conversations: Fuller, Emerson, and the Play of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 1 and 32. By making Fourier central to her account of Fuller and Emerson, Zwarg provides highlights two crucial figures missing from most historical and critical scholarship on Emerson. Zwarg's analysis of the role of Fourier and Fuller in Emerson's thought clarifies the ways he was thinking about issues of gender and places him directly within the flow of ideas back and forth across the Atlantic. For an account of Fuller and Emerson in the context of women's rights, see Phyllis Cole, "Women Questions: Emerson, Fuller, and New England Reform" in *Transient and Permanent: The Transcendentalist Movement and Its Contexts* eds. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999). For scholarship that stresses Emerson's engagement with the social reform movements of his day. See, Ann Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Len Gougeon, *Virtue's Hero: Emerson, Antislavery, and Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990); David Robinson, *Emerson and the Conduct of Life: Pragmatism and Ethical Purpose in the Later Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); *The Emerson Dilemma: Essays on*

Emerson and Social Reform, ed. Gregory Garvey (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), Another trend has placed Emerson directly in the transatlantic history of philosophy, usually traced through his influence on Nietzsche. See Stanley Cavell, *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); *Philosophical Passages: Wittgenstein, Emerson, Austin, Derrida* (New York: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Michael Lopez, *Emerson and Power: Creative Antagonism in the Nineteenth Century* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 1996); Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) and George Stack, *Nietzsche & Emerson: An Elective Affinity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993).

33. Zwarg, *Feminist Conversations*, 14. For a useful account of Fuller and transcendentalism that places *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* directly in the context of the ideas of those Boston intellectuals, see David M. Robinson, "Margaret Fuller and the Transcendental Ethos: *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*" *PMLA* 97 (1982), 83-98.

34. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Six volumes to date. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972-), Vol. 1, 61. Cited as *CW* hereafter.

35. Emerson, *CW*, Vol 2, 57; Margaret Fuller, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, A Norton Critical Edition ed. Larry Reynolds, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 61. Page numbers in text hereafter; *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960-), Vol. 8, 109.

36. Emerson, *CW*, Vol. 2, 57.

37. For interpretations that stress myth in relation to *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, see Jeffrey Steele, *Transfiguring America: Myth, Ideology, and Mourning in Margaret Fuller's Writing* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001) and *The Woman and the Myth: Margaret Fuller's Life and Writings*, ed. Bell Gale Chevigny (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994)

38. The two plays by Euripides are *Iphigeneia in Tauris* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*.

39. On the first meetings between Emerson and Peabody, see Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), 125-126. On their early friendship and its importance to transcendentalism, 332-340, 389-390.

40. Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*, xvi. On Peabody and Parker, see 411-415. On Peabody and Alcott, see 314-326. On Peabody and Kraitsir, see Rhonda, *Peabody*, 211-213, 225-226.

41. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 273, 275. On sisterhood and Antigone in general, see pages 266-289.

42. George Steiner, *Antigones* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), preface. For an intriguing discussion of Antigone in relation to the politics of educational reform, see J. Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

43. *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 284.

44. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Antigone's Daughters" *Democracy* 2 (1982), 52.

45. Elshtain, 55-56.

46. Elshtain, 57.

47. Steiner, *Antigones*, 1 and 18. Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 66. If Antigone represents the end result of the incestuous union of Oedipus and his wife/mother Jocasta, she also represents the negation of the patriarchal family. Creon's attempt to contain her power brings about Antigone's death, but it also leads to the tragic dissolution of Creon's own family.

48. Fuller, *Woman*, 57. On single women during this period see, Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

49. Nancy Craig Simmons, "Margaret Fuller's Boston Conversations: The 1839-1840 Series," *Studies in the American Renaissance* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 215. Simmons' scholarly reconstruction of the "Conversations" is a wonderful source for understanding Boston's elite women's social ideas about a range of issues. Among the topics discussed were womanhood and manhood, women's education, genius, and Greek mythology. Peabody's authorship, or "recording" of the conversations is not beyond doubt, but Simmons's argument that the text is the work of Peabody is convincing. The women attending the conversations included Lydia Maria Francis (Child), Ellen Sturgis (Hooper), Elizabeth Davis Bliss (Bancroft), Eliza Susan Morton (Quincy), Anna Shaw (Greene), Caroline Sturgis (Tappan). These women's married names—usually the better known—are in parenthesis.

50. Simmons, "Boston Conversations," 215.

51. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, ed. Nina Tonkovich (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 25. It was originally published as *The American Woman's Home, or Principles of Domestic Science* (New York: J. B. Ford, 1869).

52. *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody* ed. Bruce Rhonda (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 170-173. On the sometimes tense relationship between Elizabeth and her sisters' families, see Rhonda, *Peabody: Reformer*, 262.

53. *Letters of Peabody*, 229

54. Emerson, *CW*, Vol. 2, 12.

55. Emerson, *CW*, Vol. 3, 41.

Chapter Two

The Moral Economy of Women's Educational Labor, 1810-1835

In the use of the pen, women have entered the arena, and if we take all the books which are now published, I believe those which will affect the morals of society are, the one-half of them, the works of women; but, in the use of the living voice, women are generally considered as being properly restricted to conversation. St. Paul has said they must not speak in churches, but he has nowhere said they must not speak in school-houses.

-Emma Willard

Emma Willard was the only woman included in Henry Barnard's 1861

Educational Biography: Memoirs of Teachers and Educators. This collection celebrated educational leaders and innovators, almost entirely New Englanders, who served as college professors, state superintendents, school principals, and educational writers during the first half of the nineteenth century. The author of Willard's biographical sketch suggests that her inclusion in the volume was "not so much because of her accomplished work, immense as this has been," nor because of her founding of Troy female seminary, nor because "as an author, a million of her books were circulated," "nor because she has published various addresses on education," nor because of her disinterested work for the improvement of society. She was included "because she is preeminently a REPRESENTATIVE WOMAN, who suitably typifies the great movement of the nineteenth century for the elevation of woman."¹

Today, no historian would treat Emma Willard as "representative" without careful qualification. As the work of women's history has increasingly focused on racial minorities and the working-class, the limitations of separate spheres have become apparent. The experiences and lives of middle-class, white women in the Northeast do not "represent" all American women in the nineteenth century. Yet, the notion that

women of Willard's class and status could best be understood through ideals of a private domesticity has remained more or less intact. Scholars have understood women of middle class in terms of family roles, domestic economy, and community. A closer look at the public life of Emma Willard suggests a serious problem with this interpretive framework. Willard was a national public figure. Her family roles of wife and mother do not provide enough of a context to understand her work as an nationally known educational reformer. Domestic economy cannot help us analyze her best-selling textbook *History of the United States, or Republic of America*. No community, except that of nation, can account for the significance of her work organizing a women's movement to end civil war in 1862. Clearly, Willard demands to be understood in different terms. So then, what does Willard represent?

This chapter argues that Emma Willard, along with Catharine Beecher and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, represent the moral economy of women's educational labor, a social formation that placed women directly into the national life of the United States. Between 1820 and 1850, significant numbers of women engaged in educational labor by teaching in Sunday schools, common schools and female seminaries, writing books and magazine articles for commercial publishers, and becoming involved in benevolent, evangelical, and reform associations.² The voluntary work of benevolence and moral reform is the most obvious example of a form of labor that could be described in terms of a moral economy. But moral economy is not a separate sphere of action. Teaching and writing are forms of wage labor, pursued for reasons that include earning a living and reforming society. Thus, the moral and political economies overlap, even as there is a

strong tension between the two.³

Educational labor, not domestic labor or the ideals of “true womanhood,” provided women the earliest opportunities to create meaningful national roles within the institutions of civil society. These new roles were created in response to the economic and social changes in the years following the Revolutionary War. Just as the political economy changed dramatically during this period, so did the moral economy: markets in labor and commodities expanded and new transportation systems were created; the moral authority of the church was separated from the state; schooling was reorganized under the bureaucratic control of state governments. At the center of these complex changes was a shift in the domestic economy of the household. Most forms of labor left the household to be organized in society. This shift has been consistently misunderstood as limiting women’s social roles by confining them to the household and separating them from politics. In fact, as labor left the household for society, so did women laborers.

New England experienced these changes earlier and more intensely than the rest of the nation. From 1820 to 1850 the productive labor of commodity production and the educational labor of teaching children were reorganized in ways that anticipated the development of other regions by the end of the nineteenth century. Women and men worked in these new factories and in new schools, even as the meaning of sex roles shifted to associate women with educational labor and men with productive labor. This slow and uneven economic transformation changed the meanings of masculine and feminine social roles, recreating the domestic roles of father and mother as well as the political roles of male and female citizen. As the middle-class family became a “haven”

where parents nurtured their children, politics became an arena of conflict where interests competed. As the new political parties consolidated the voting rights and political authority of white men, the political power of Native Americans, freed and enslaved African Americans, and women declined. At the same time, benevolent and reform groups associated with evangelical sects consolidated the moral authority and social power of middle-class men and women. Although the ministry remained almost entirely male, other forms of educational and religious labor, such as teaching and missionary work, became increasingly female.

Educational labor was not the only work available to young women in New England. Thomas Dublin's *Transforming Women's Work* provides a crucial context for understanding the relation between women's wage labor and class formation. From about 1820 to 1850, rural outwork—the household practice of weaving cloth or making hats from raw materials distributed by an entrepreneur—gradually gave way to the social labor of factory production and domestic service. As some young, single women began working in factories or as domestic servants, others began teaching. In the 1830s there was little difference between the economic/social status of a female mill worker and a female schoolteacher. A young woman might choose either path as a way of developing her own economic independence and contributing cash to her family. By the 1850s, the lower wages and status of mill work combined with the moral capital associated with women's educational labor had established the difference between the two as primarily one of class.⁴

Women's educational labor was central not only to the formation of class identity,

but also racial identity. During the first half of the nineteenth century, teachers, missionaries, and benevolent workers in the Northeast developed and circulated ideas about their labor that privileged the labor and moral sensibilities of women like themselves. Although there were exceptions during this period, most notably Maria Stewart, African American women and immigrant women were mostly limited to the lower status and lower paying jobs. Nevertheless the ideals of a shared identity of womanhood shaped many of the reform movements, especially benevolent groups aimed at assisting widows and prostitutes. Abolition groups also appealed to womanhood as they marshaled arguments about the immorality of slavery based on its treatment of women. By the 1890s, as more Irish-Americans, American Indians and African Americans gained access to education, women from these groups used their own educational labor as evidence of their race's abilities and of their own middle-class status. For example, teaching and writing allowed Anna Julia Cooper, an African American educator, and Zitkala-Sa, a Sioux teacher, to rise to social and intellectual prominence at the end of the nineteenth century.

The historical development of social ideas about class and race complicates the claim that Willard represents "the elevation of woman," even as it challenges some of the ways white, middle-class women have been understood by historians. Writing over 25 years ago, Anne Firor Scott suggested that Willard represented a period when "new personality types and new forms of behavior" were coming into existence. Still, she wrote, "historians have paid more attention to the social constraints of woman's role than to the ways in which talented and ambitious women first began to break through those

constraints.” This remains true today, as scholars use domesticity as the primary framework for understanding the national roles of women like Emma Willard. Social ideas about women in the first decades of the nineteenth century were not centered on the home, but on the school. Addresses, pamphlets, and articles appeared offering arguments and questions about female education. What should women learn? Should the state support female educational institutions? How should female schools be reformed in the new republic? What sort of lives should female schools prepare their graduates to live? The answers to these questions are better understood in terms of civil society and sexual polarity than in terms of domesticity and separate spheres.⁵

Willard and Beecher, the chief theorists of female educational labor in this period, argued that women’s social roles were rooted in a sexual division of middle-class labor in which men exercised power through their work in business and politics, and women exercised power through their educational labor. In a move that has created no small amount of confusion, they imagined this social power as operating through what they sometimes called a “woman’s sphere.” However, Willard and Beecher never conceptualized this sphere as domestic, nor as entirely separate from men or from politics. Drawing on Scottish Enlightenment theories of civil society that argued that morality is crucial to the development of national political economy, they articulated a theory of female social power based on women’s moral influence and reason. Women would reform the social problems of the nation by organizing themselves within a moral economy of educational labor existing in civil society and operating through the polar energies of sexual difference.

Before tracing the history of this moral economy, it is worth considering the assumptions of this study. Did this generation of women think of themselves as engaged in anything like educational labor? Did they imagine their own work as teachers, writers, and organizers was distinct from the work of commodity production or domestic labor? Did their labor matter to their own sense of themselves? The answer is yes, if the word *labor* can be used to describe the activities of middle-class women. When Catharine Beecher wrote “The world is no longer to be governed by *physical* force, but by *the influence which mind exerts over mind*” or Willard asked “is it not in the power of our sex, to give society its tone, both as to manners and morals?” they were writing about influence and power exercised through the moral economy of educational labor. The fact that they did not use the terms *labor* or *work* to describe what they were doing is evidence that women’s educational labor was used to mark class difference. Middle-class women *influenced* society as teachers, writers, organizers, and mothers; poor women *worked* as seamstresses, domestics, loom operators, shoe makers, and farmers. The term *educational labor* marks the distinction between *female influence* and *female labor* as historically created rather than as inherent in the activities themselves.

Teaching: Educated Women and Educational Labor

Changes in women’s educational labor in the early nineteenth century extended and intensified changes that had been underway since the beginning of the eighteenth century. With its radical Puritan and Quaker influences, the northern colonies provided more educational and religious opportunities for girls than anywhere else in North

America. This trend is reflected in literacy rates for women, which developed unevenly, but gradually improved over the eighteenth century.⁶ In New England, the family's educational efforts had long been supplemented by a system of district schooling that educated younger children of both sexes together, but provided more advanced schooling for only boys. As advanced schooling for girls expanded in the late eighteenth century, so did the social possibilities for educated and literate young women. Initially, these possibilities were conceived in terms of family and household roles. Following the American Revolution, Benjamin Rush and others argued that the influence of wives and mothers were key elements of a strong republic. In the 1820s and 1830s, women educated to these important family roles began to enlarge the possibilities for labor beyond the household to include teaching, writing, and organizing reform associations.⁷

When precisely schooling for girls in New England expanded is obscured by the fact that it was a mostly local and haphazard process, but the broad outlines of this expansion are clear. During the eighteenth century, "dame schools," neighborhood schools run by a woman in her own household, and "summer schools," district schools run by a woman, offered instruction to girls and boys up to about age ten. These institutions focused mostly on reading and basic religious instruction. More advanced schools, often called "winter schools," were district schools run by a man teaching advanced subjects such as writing, arithmetic, and Latin. These advanced schools were available only to boys. This "two tiered system"—with women teaching younger children in households and in summer schools and men teaching older boys in winter schools—was typical of many communities in New England and New York from approximately

1730 to 1840.⁸

Starting around the time of the revolution, two related developments began to make schooling more available to older girls: winter schools began admitting girls along with boys and girls-only boarding schools began appearing in greater numbers.⁹ To confuse matters somewhat, both these kinds of institutions were called academies. For example, Benjamin Rush and Susanna Rowson each operated a single-sex boarding school called a “Young Ladies’ Academy.” Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s parents both taught at Franklin Academy, a mixed-sex district school in Massachusetts. Catharine Beecher’s *alma mater*, Miss Pierce’s boarding school for girls in Litchfield, Connecticut, was founded in 1792, but was incorporated in 1827 as The Litchfield Academy. Emma Willard attended and taught at what was essentially a winter district school in her hometown called the Berlin Academy.¹⁰ No matter what they were called, the impact of the entry of females into what are now called secondary or high schools had implications beyond simply expanding educational opportunities for girls. It also created new employment opportunities for women as graduates from these institutions sought jobs at similar institutions or founded their own. This range of activity, as well as its particular intensity in New England, is reflected in the experiences of Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody.¹¹

Emma Willard was born into a large family in Berlin, Connecticut in 1787 and learned to read prior to attending the local summer school. In 1802, “an academy”—in effect, the district’s new, advanced winter school— was opened in Berlin by a graduate of Yale University. Both Emma and her sister Nancy attended, using a bequest from their

Uncle's estate to pay the small tuition. After attending the academy in Berlin for two years, Willard began teaching at a nearby summer school whose pupils included her younger sister, Almira. In the winters, she enrolled in two different girl's boarding schools in Hartford. In 1806, Willard was offered what she later called "the uncommon honor (uncommon at the time for a female) to keep the winter school," the Berlin Academy she had attended as a girl. The next year she became a "female assistant" at a mixed-sex academy in Westfield, Massachusetts and the following year she accepted a position as "head preceptress" of a girl's academy in Middlebury, Vermont. Like many young women, she left teaching after only a few years to assume the role of wife and mother. She married a prominent supporter of her school, Dr. John Willard, in 1809. Her son was born the next year.¹²

Like Willard, Catharine Beecher translated her success as a student into paid work as a teacher. Beecher was born in 1800, the oldest daughter in one of the most famous families in nineteenth-century America. She enrolled in Miss Pierce's school for girls when her father, the Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher, brought his family to Litchfield in 1810. There she received an education focused primarily on her social and moral development, but structured through the process of writing and reciting journals. In 1821, Catharine Beecher started teaching in a girls school in New London to help with her family's finances.¹³

Beecher soon left her teaching post to prepare for her wedding. A brief time teaching prior to marriage was a typical experience for educated women in nineteenth-century New England. A detailed analysis of Massachusetts labor patterns suggests than

over twenty percent of all women spent at least some time teaching between the years 1834 and 1860, often leaving the profession if they decided to marry. Willard actually returned to teaching a few years after her wedding, founding the Troy Female Seminary in 1821. Beecher's marriage plans did not in fact work out, and after her betrothed died at sea in 1822, Beecher opened the Hartford Female Seminary. Both institutions became among the most influential educational institutions of their time, creating models for women's new curriculum for female education and launching the national careers of their founders.¹⁴

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's career focused on the education of young children rather than adolescent girls. She was born into a family of school teachers. Her father, Nathaniel Peabody, and her mother, Eliza Palmer taught at Franklin Academy, a mixed-sex secondary school in Andover, Massachusetts. They both continued to teach after they married in 1802. Just before their first child, Elizabeth, was born in 1804, the couple left for nearby Billerica where Nathaniel began studying medicine and Eliza opened a "dame school" in their home. The educational careers of the Peabodys were fairly typical. Nathaniel, like many young men, taught for a few years before moving on to a more lucrative and respectable profession. Eliza left a formal teaching role to focus on her family roles of wife and mother. But like many women in New England in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Eliza found a way to combine her family roles with teaching by opening a neighborhood school for younger children in her home.¹⁵

Although some dame schools were operated by school districts or churches, many were like the Peabody's schools, home schools open to children whose parents could pay

the tuition. Such an arrangement allowed Eliza to incorporate her skills as a teacher into the household duties of a wife and mother. When the Peabody family moved to Salem, Massachusetts in 1812, Elizabeth and her sister Mary began attending their mother's school. Eight years later, the family moved to a farm in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Here, Elizabeth Peabody, rather than her mother, took on the family responsibility of keeping school. Elizabeth's two sisters and younger brothers, along with the daughters of prominent members of the community, attended the school. Elizabeth and Mary Peabody, with occasional help from their sister Sophia, would run a number of similar family schools in Boston, Salem, and nearby towns throughout the 1820s and 1830s.¹⁶

The teaching experiences of Willard, Beecher, and Peabody were typical of women of their generation. They began teaching in a loosely defined system of dame schools and district summer schools taught by women. While household schools were entirely run by women, the educational labor of district schools was typically divided by sex, with women teaching in the summer and men in the winter. By 1850 in the Northeast and the Midwest, teaching had become thoroughly feminized and the school year had expanded slowly. Educated women continued teaching younger children and began teaching older children in the advanced mixed-sex schools and girls schools. District schools met for longer periods and the distinction between summer and winter disappeared. These reforms were mostly local decisions, but the national organizing and writing by educators including Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, Catharine Beecher, and Emma Willard played a crucial role in articulating social ideas that justified the common

school movement.¹⁷

The South participated in the expansion of female seminaries in the early nineteenth century, but nothing like the “two-tiered” district system existed there. Some seminaries were founded by graduates of the institutions in Troy and Hartford, but many were entirely the product of local women and men. Although graduates of the southern schools could and did find employment as teachers in female institutions, they did not “feminize” the publicly funded schools for younger children. Rather than district schools divided by season, southern communities created “old field schools”—schools built on a fallow field that taught a basic curriculum similar to that of New England summer schools. These schools were open to girls and boys, but were taught mostly by men. Without the history of summer teaching by women, the South did not have a history of employing women as teachers. Thus, educated women there did not enter the profession of teaching in overwhelming numbers until after 1870. The different patterns in the North and South of female teaching shaped the development of teaching in the Midwest. Areas settled by migrants from New England and New York employed greater percentages of women teachers relative to men than areas settled by southerners.¹⁸

The opportunities for work offered by the explosion of interest in female education were not confined to teaching. The work of writing school textbooks, religious tracts, and parenting and teaching manuals, as well as organizing associations for educational reform were increasingly performed by women. What is often called “the feminization of teaching” is only one aspect of an important shift in women’s involvement in education. First, there was an increase in writing and lecturing on the

topic of female education as reflected in magazine articles and the records of public meetings. Second, there were the new female academies and seminaries. Third, there was the increase in educational publishing as magazines and books aimed at parents and teachers were printed. Fourth, there was an increase in benevolent activity around schooling including Sunday schools, charity schools for the poor, and schools for freed slaves and American Indians. Finally, there was a change in the organization of teaching in which women filled the majority of classroom teaching positions in the newly developing systems of common schools.¹⁹

Educational Writing and Women's Influence

In the 1820s and 1830s, commercial publishing expanded dramatically, and so did the opportunities for women to earn money as writers. Like teaching for wages, writing and editing for pay developed directly out of the expansion of educational opportunities for girls. Literate and accomplished students in the late eighteenth century became the authors and readers who produced and purchased books and magazines in the early nineteenth century. Scholars frequently focus on domestic writing as the engine of this expansion, but education and history were far more popular and successful subjects in the earliest years of women's commercial writing. Given this fact, it is not surprising that the first forays into commercial writing by Emma Willard, Elizabeth Peabody, and Catharine Beecher were on education and history. In the 1820s, Emma Willard was writing geography and history textbooks, Beecher was writing on female education, and Elizabeth Peabody was writing about infant schools. Sarah J. Hale was editing the *Ladies*

Magazine, a precursor to *Godey's Ladies Book*, which in its early years focused more on promoting female education than on domestic issues.²⁰

Educational material for the home and the schools were key markets for women writers, and one of the key methods of exerting moral influence. Willard became one of the most successful textbook writers of the century. Her *History of the United States, or Republic of America* was reprinted 53 times between 1828 and 1873, including abridged versions and special editions with maps for use in schools. She followed it with *A System of Universal History in Perspective* in 1835. Beecher published two mathematics textbooks (1832 and 1835), two textbooks on moral philosophy (1831 and 1838), and turned down an opportunity to edit a series of readers, a job for which she recommended her friend Charles McGuffey. Peabody wrote her ambitious *Key to History* in three volumes during the 1830s, and textbooks on United States history and world history in the 1850s. In 1836, she launched a periodical titled *The Family School* which, as its title suggests, presented educational materials for families and schools. Although Peabody's journal only lasted for two issues, the commercial success of ventures like Willard's *History* and McGuffey's *Readers* demonstrate the rapidly expanding market in educational material.²¹

Boston was the home to two of the most significant educational periodicals of the 1820s, William Russell's *American Journal of Education* and Sarah Hale's *Ladies' Magazine*. Russell was a colleague of Elizabeth Peabody's, teaching in her school in Boston in 1826. Begun the same year, the *American Journal of Education* published reports on a wide variety of educational activities including women's seminaries, infant

schools, charity schools, and educational institutions from around the world. Its audience consisted of educational reformers, teachers, and parents. *Ladies' Magazine* (1828-1829) aimed at much the same audience, but with a focus on women. Hale sent two daughters to Troy Female Seminary during the 1820s, one of whom later founded her own female seminary. Although Russell included far more material of interest to professional educators and Hale provided more literary and domestic writing, both understood their primary purpose as moral education and educational reform. Both periodicals included articles giving practical advice on child rearing, discussions of reforming infant schools, reviews of books on education, and reprints of lectures on education given in Boston.²²

Despite her reputation for focusing on domestic concerns, Hale's magazine was far more interested in education, especially as it involved women. In the introduction to the first issue, Hale mentions domesticity only in passing, writing that her publication was part of the "public enthusiasm in the cause of education" and that "in this age of innovation, perhaps no experiment will have an influence more important on the character and happiness of our society, than the granting to females the advantages of a thorough and systematic education." Her purpose was "more expressly designed to mark the progress of female improvement and cherish the effusions of female intellect." Russell also proclaimed the importance of female education writing in the journal's prospectus that the subject "is one we deem unspeakably important." In keeping with the publishing practice of the time, most of the articles in both journals were published anonymously. Although this makes it difficult to judge the sex of the contributors,

Russell's journal included many contributions by women including Beecher's earliest writing on female education and Peabody's first account of a school, a description of Bronson Alcott's Common Street School. *Ladies' Magazine* was mostly written by Hale with support from contributors such as Lydia Sigourney.²³

Reformers writing in these journals frequently mentioned the connection between reforming female education and opportunities for educated women. Sarah Hale made the point that an educated woman's "influence in the nursery, important as it is" might also "be extensively employed in school-keeping." Making an argument about the economics of women teachers that Horace Mann would later use in his annual reports, she wrote, "Had none but men been suffered to teach a common school, the expense would have prevented schools from being continued in our thinly settled towns, except for a small part of each year." But Hale went further than this familiar argument, suggesting that the promotion of education, broadly understood, was the proper role for educated women. "Thus, their influence on society is continually active in promoting the *fashion* of learning." Anticipating Catharine Beecher, Hale wrote "Here then is the field to which I would direct the talents and energies of my own countrywomen." Writing was part of this field. "The most distinguished among female writers have likewise been distinguished as teachers of children and youth." Hale went on to mention British authors Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Anna Barbauld, along with French authors Madame de Genlis and Madame Campan.²⁴

The early educational writing by Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher was in the mode of European women's educational writing, most notably Hannah More's *Strictures*

on the Modern System of Female Education (1799). More argued for improving the education of girls from families of “rank and fortune.” Her book sold well on both sides of the Atlantic. In it, she argued that women must defend religion, order, and government with their “beauty, and rank, and talents, and virtue, confederating their several powers to come forward with a patriotism at once firm and feminine for the general good!” This was no call for “female warriors” or “exciting female politicians.” More understood female influence to exist primarily in the social structures of courtship, marriage, and the family. Her educational ideas were directed toward the latter. “The profession of ladies, to which the bent of *their* instruction should be turned, is that of daughters, wives, mothers, and mistresses of families.” What distinguishes the work of Willard and Beecher on female education from that of More is a focus on the practical issues of female education (e.g., curriculum, funding, facilities), an argument for teacher training as part of female education, and a consideration of the social impact of educated women on the more egalitarian society of the United States.²⁵

Emma Willard was an experienced teacher and educational administrator when she began writing on education. Her *Plan for Improving Female Education* (1819), published at her own expense, was a critique of women’s education as it was then practiced in most schools for girls. Addressed directly to “the members of the Legislature of New York,” Willard asked for public money to support a seminary for females similar to men’s colleges. Although she says a school for females “will be as different from those appropriated to the other sex, as the female character and duties are from the male,” she argued that educating women is as fully a public good as educating men. For Willard

educating mothers, the teachers of “the succeeding generation,” was an important goal of female education. “How important a power is given by this charge! yet, little do too many of my sex know how, either to appreciate or improve it.”²⁶

Willard also made clear the connection between women’s education and teaching: To place the “business of teaching children, in hands now nearly useless to society; and take it from those, whose service the state wants in many other ways” would allow men “to add to the wealth of the nation, by any of those thousand occupations, from which women are necessarily debarred” (71-73). Willard described a very clear sexual division of labor, with women performing educational labor and men performing commercial labor. These roles were not fixed. Rather, Willard’s was arguing for a dynamic sense of sexual difference. Teaching should *become* women’s business because women were socially useless. Female seminaries would provide the training necessary for women to conduct this business of education in the home and in the school.

Willard’s justification for female education was grounded in republican ideas about the importance of education to the public order. Female influence was the key to the survival of the nation. She asks, “But, is it not in the power of our sex, to give society its tone, both as to manners and morals? And if such is the extent of female influence, is it wonderful that republics have failed, when they calmly suffered that influence, to become enlisted in favour of luxuries and follies, wholly incompatible with the existence of freedom?” Willard believed that female education preserved female virtue which, in turn, preserved the republic. In order for education to be “the preservative of national purity” it must be applied to “every exposed part of the body politic.” This is especially

true of women who “have been exposed to the contagion of wealth without the preservative of a good education.”²⁷

Willard believed that, in the United States at least, a viable republican government was still possible. This was because American women retained the virtues of the revolutionary generation. Willard wrote that “women of rank and wealth” have, in Europe, done “nothing to promote their country’s welfare.” Instead, they “revel in its prosperity, and scatter it to the winds, with a wanton profusion: and still worse,—they empoison its source by diffusing a contempt for useful labour.” Willard’s plan offered “all that can be done to preserve female youth from a contempt of useful labour” To be sure “housewifery” was one form of useful labor, and Willard, anticipating Catharine Beecher’s ideas about domestic economy, suggested that if it “could be raised to a regular art, and taught upon philosophical principles, it would become a higher and more interesting occupation.” Still some women had greater needs and ambitions than “domestic life.” Willard wrote, “To leave such, without any virtuous road to eminence, is unsafe to community; for not unfrequently, are the secret springs of revolution, set in motion by their intrigues.” The political danger of such women would be addressed by the institutions created by Willard and her colleagues. She continued, “Such aspiring minds, we will regulate by education, we will remove obstructions to the course of literature, which has heretofore been their only honorable way to distinction; and we offer them a new object worth of their ambition; to govern and improve the seminaries for their sex.”²⁸

Willard’s suggestion regarding women’s role in “the business of teaching” is one

clear difference between her and the earlier generation of republican theorists like Benjamin Rush who supported female education, but never imagined teaching as a women's business. But there is another, more subtle difference. As the passage above makes explicit, women would assume leadership roles in the new institutions for female education. Her *Plan* carried the appellation "by Emma Willard." The act of writing about female educational reform would not be anonymous. Sarah J. Hale, Catharine Beecher, Mary Lyon, and many other women followed Willard's lead, attaching their names to their writing about female education. The significance of this action has been overlooked by historians because it provoked so little resistance, especially when compared to the radicalism of Fanny Wright or Mary Wollstonecraft.

I would argue that the acceptance of literary women arguing for female education was more significant because it changed actual social structures through the expansion of women's educational labor. Although later developments such as Angelina Grimké's public addresses opposing slavery and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's lectures supporting women's rights have received more attention from scholars, the emergence of women educational leaders in the early nineteenth century was as revolutionary a development as the emergence of women's rights. The response to Willard's pamphlet was quite positive, although public funding for female education was slow in coming. The *Plan* circulated widely among political figures interested in education, drawing the support of DeWitt Clinton, the governor of New York, who invited Willard to Albany to lobby for a female seminary.

The most influential women's seminaries of the 1820s were all funded through

philanthropy rather than taxes, but state legislatures became increasingly interested in funding female education, particularly institutions that would train teachers. In 1821, a group of parents and philanthropists funded Troy Female Academy and asked Willard to head the school. Zilpah Grant and Mary Lyon began their advanced schools for girls at the Adams Female Academy in 1821, moving to the Ipswich Female Seminary six years later. In 1837, Lyon left Grant to found the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Leading citizens and parents in Hartford funded Catharine Beecher's Hartford Female Seminary, which opened in 1823. These institutions and many others were conceived and funded in terms of the social benefits of female education laid out by Willard in her *Plan*. All of them understood their mission as preparing teachers, as well as mothers and wives. The first tax-supported normal schools, which usually educated men and women teachers, began opening in the 1830s and 1840s.²⁹

Benjamin Rush and Hannah More argued the benefits of female education as preparation for marriage and motherhood. Advocates for female education in the 1820s made similar arguments, but also suggested that female education should prepare students for social roles outside the home. The principle theorist of this shift was Catharine Beecher. In *Suggestions Respecting Improvements in Education* (1829), she followed Willard's lead in arguing the social benefits of female education, but Beecher more comprehensively addressed the relation between "the business of teaching" and the reform of women's education. Beecher made clear how different her assumptions about the educational roles of women were from the earlier generation of social theorists. Rush wrote that the influence of "mothers and schoolmasters" was as important as that of

statesmen and ministers in promoting “public and private order in society.” Social reform, he argued, “must begin in nurseries and schools.” Rush assumed that children would leave the private space of the family, presided over by a good, “republican mother,” for the public space of the schoolhouse, presided over by a well-trained, male teacher. Beecher believed women were far better suited for all aspects of educational labor. She wrote, “It is to *mothers*, and to *teachers*, that the world is to look for the character which is to be enstamped on each succeeding generation, for it is to them that the great business of education is almost exclusively committed.”³⁰

Beecher’s answer to the problem of maintaining social order included establishing a role for mothers and female teachers, but she also understood that the influence women exerted in the world extended even beyond the family and the school. Women’s educational labor, as Beecher broadly defined it, would reform the social order. Catharine Beecher’s early ideas on female education were based on her work as the founder of the Hartford Female Seminary, but by the 1840s the scope of her vision included the entire United States. In “Female Influence,” an excerpt taken from *Suggestions* that was widely reprinted in the early 1830s, Beecher wrote “The world is no longer to be governed by *physical* force, but by *the influence which mind exerts over mind*.” Although a woman “is bound to ‘*honor and obey*’ men, her particular kind of influence is based in reason and conscience.” In this form, “high and holy motives are presented to women for cultivating her highest powers.” She writes, “the quick perceptions of an active mind, the power of exhibiting truth and reason by a perspicuous and animated conversation and writing, all these can be employed by woman as much as

men.”³¹

Like Willard’s argument for the public funding of women’s education, Beecher’s argument for female influence is founded upon sexual difference rather than equality. The exercise of female influence required the sexual differentiation of social roles. Beecher wrote, “Woman has never waked to her highest destinies and holiest hopes. She has yet to learn the purifying and blessed influence she may gain and maintain of the intellect and affections of the human heart. Though she may not teach from the portico, nor thunder from the forum, in her secret retirements she may form and send forth the sages that shall govern and renovate the world.”³²

To a twenty-first-century reader, Catharine Beecher’s argument may seem self-defeating. In listing all the ways women may not influence society—she does not “thunder from the forum” or “sound the trumpet of war”—Beecher seems to undermine her call to power. In phrases such as “secret retirements” and “secret angel of mercy,” Beecher seems to suggest that whatever power women do have is limited to the private sphere. How can women exercise power if they are required to renounce it and exercise it only in secret? Why did women find Beecher’s ideas compelling if they are ultimately self-defeating? Beecher’s theory of female influence was not a step toward equal rights, or even a separate women’s rights. Like theorists of civil society writing during the 1990s, Beecher assumed civil society rather than the state was the key to social and moral reform.³³

The purpose of female influence was not to advance the cause of women, a cause that barely existed, but to reform the new nation. Beecher called on women to perform a

particular kind of action, one based on the morally superior, yet self-effacing power of women. She writes, “But where the dictates of [male] authority may over control, the voice of [female] reason and affection may ever convince and persuade; and while others govern by motives that mankind are ashamed to own, the dominion of woman may be based on influence that the heart is proud to acknowledge.” This passage shows Beecher updating both the republicanism of the founding generation and the social ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment. By influencing “the intellect and affections of the human heart,” women would change the world using the polar energies of sexual difference that gave women power to educate individuals and nations.³⁴

Just as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson believed that the disinterested benevolence of men of property and standing allowed them to govern the nation, Catharine Beecher believed the disinterested benevolence of women like herself allowed them to reform the nation. The political changes brought on by Jacksonian democracy made politics appear to be an increasingly debased and self-interested pursuit. The answer to this problem was to organize and energize the civil institutions that would educate the people to virtue. Just as Adam Smith believed that sympathy could counter the moral dangers of the self-interested pursuit of wealth, Beecher believed “female influence” could counter a political and economic order founded upon conflict and competition. Rising above such moral dangers and self-interest of the professions of politics, business, and law, women would “wake to her highest destinies and holiest hopes” and act through the institutions of civil society open to her specific powers, namely the family, the church, and the school. This theory yielded a consequential

argument for female social power exercised in civil society, one that was neither domestic nor sentimental.³⁵

Beecher highlighted the moral economy of women's labor, but she did not ignore its deep connections to political economy. "What is *the profession of a Woman?*" she asked. Her notion of "profession" directly addresses the need for women to participate in the expanding markets in wage labor. Beecher argued for elevating the contributions of women through the profession of teaching, "a *profession* offering influence, respectability and independence." Although she was specifically addressing teaching, she could just as easily have been discussing writing. Beecher cast this opportunity in historical terms: "Until this day no other profession could with propriety admit the female aspirant, nor till this day has the profession of a teacher been the road to honour, influence, and emolument." Yet, despite this "road to honourable independence, and extensive usefulness" Beecher believed women "need not outstep the prescribed boundaries of feminine modesty." As teachers and as writers, many women found the road to independence and usefulness, but "the boundaries of feminine modesty" were difficult to map.³⁶

The economic independence of this generation of women was far different from that of earlier generations of women. The influence of Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Elizabeth Peabody was founded upon their own labor as teachers and writers, as well as family capital provided by parents, husbands, and siblings. Their experience illustrates the new opportunities available to women in the early nineteenth century, opportunities for professional and intellectual accomplishment. Successful, independent, socially

prominent women challenged social conventions that placed women under the authority of fathers and husbands. This challenge developed out of a theory of sexual difference that stressed the moral dimension of women's educational labor. Even as the wage labor of teaching and writing became honorable paths for ambitious women, women exercised their influence through another form of educational labor. In the unpaid labor of benevolent, evangelical, and reform associations, women would confront the "boundaries of feminine modesty" in multiple, conflicting, and sometimes confusing ways.³⁷

The Moral Economy of Volunteer Labor

The examples of Beecher, Peabody, and Willard should not suggest that only unmarried women engaged in educational writing and reform. In fact, married sisters of each of these three women were also national figures. Thanks to the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe is the best known. She began her educational career as a teacher in the Hartford Female Seminary and followed Catharine to Ohio to continue teaching. After marrying Calvin Stowe in 1836, she turned her attention to writing. Mary Peabody also began her career teaching with her sister. She married Horace Mann in 1843 and was an active partner in his educational reform efforts. After being widowed in 1823, Almira Hart Lincoln joined the faculty of her sister's Troy Female Seminary and became one of the leading botanists of her day. She remarried in 1831, moved to Maryland, opened her own seminary, and published best-selling textbooks on botany and women's education. All three sisters balanced the roles of wife, mother, and writer after

leaving successful careers as teachers.³⁸

Writing was not the only form of educational labor open to married women. During the decades following the end of the American revolution, women began working in a wide range of charities and benevolent organizations dedicated to addressing social problems. Although men participated in these organizations and dominated some of their earliest manifestations, the first decades of the nineteenth century represent what Kathleen McCarthy has called “the feminization of republicanism.” Associations aimed at the public good, chartered by the state governments and funded through a combination of public and private funds, “gave the women who joined them a modicum of financial authority and a political identity that individual married women lacked.” In short, benevolent work provided women a collective form of public unpaid labor through which they could organize to advance the public good. Although the focus of the earliest of these groups was often economic support, moral and religious instruction became an increasingly important element of their missions.³⁹

Like teaching and writing, organizing reform associations was grounded in the expansion of women’s education during the 1780s and 1790s. As women developed intellectual and organizational skills at places like Troy Female Seminary or mixed-sex academies, they also developed social networks of like-minded friends. These networks led to the creation of associations that organized women’s religious and educational labor to include the work of benevolence, evangelism, and moral reform. No matter what the cause, *all these organizations were educational*. Sometimes that simply meant raising awareness about a specific social problem and raising funds to remedy it, but these

associations also funded educational institutions such as missions to non-Christian peoples or schools for the poor. Anne Boylan has identified patterns of organizing activities in New York and Boston in which three different kinds of groups developed: benevolent associations, mutual benefit or mutual aid societies, and reform associations. The benevolent associations developed first in the 1790s and “remained the most numerous and ubiquitous.” Initially, they focused on the economic and spiritual problems of widows, orphans, and poor women and children.⁴⁰

Between 1812 to 1820, benevolent associations, especially those run by Protestant women, turned increasingly to evangelical activities. They began incorporating religious instruction into their meetings and founded specifically evangelical organizations such as tract, Bible, and missionary societies. The 1820s saw both a turn to mutual aid societies, including those founded for and by African Americans and working women, and a turn toward moral reform work including temperance and abolition. By 1830, associations of women were engaged in a wide variety of educational labor that combined benevolence, evangelism, and moral reform. Many were auxiliaries of male dominated benevolent or evangelical societies, but a growing number were single-sex organizations. Bruce Dorsey has studied the ways gender structured the labor of both sexes in a range of benevolent and reform issues in Philadelphia during the mid-nineteenth century. He suggests that the language of sexual difference provided opportunity for “a shared religious activism among benevolent men and women” and that the presence of activist women using ideas about public virtue and women’s religion vision shaped “the dynamic of gender and religious activism in the new nation.”⁴¹

The work of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) among the Cherokee Indians shows how one organization combined benevolent and evangelical impulses in a way that both idealized and utilized female educational labor. Along with other missionary societies, the ABCFM, a Congregationalist organization based in Connecticut, sent missionaries to Cherokee territory starting around 1817. Although they were not the first Christian missionaries to the Cherokee, they brought with them their own particular concerns about schooling, particularly the education of females. In 1825, Rufus Anderson, a minister involved in the Cherokee mission, published an account of Catharine Brown, a Cherokee woman, whose education had been provide for by the ABCFM at their school in Brainerd, Tennessee. The *Memoir of Catharine Brown, a Christian Indian, of the Cherokee Nation*, by Jeremiah Evarts, a minister and missionary to the Cherokee, described its subject in terms that make her sound like one of Emma Willard's privileged, young students. Although she was "comely" and modest, "she had a high opinion of herself, and was fond of displaying the clothing and ornaments in which she was arrayed." The narrative describes how, through her own initiative and the guidance of her teachers, Brown was led to convert to Christianity and became a model, educated young woman. A letter excerpted in the text states, "if you were to see her at a boarding school in New England, as she ordinarily appears here, you would not distinguish her from well-educated females of the same age, either by her complexion, features, dress, pronunciation, or manners."⁴²

Published after Brown's death in 1823, the *Memoir of Catharine Brown* became a popular fund-raising tool for the ABCFM and was widely republished throughout the

1820s and 1830s. A letter from Brown, titled "To A Lady in Connecticut," was included in the appendix, and was a direct appeal for financial and spiritual support for the mission's work among the Cherokee. This work combined benevolence, evangelism, and education because in the minds of the ABCFM's supporters there was little or no difference between educational and spiritual assistance. Education meant instruction in reading and writing in order to know the Bible and do God's work. Catharine Brown was a particularly effective symbol of their efforts because she demonstrated the civilizing influence of her teachers by becoming indistinguishable from white girls her own age. That Brown wished to become a missionary herself added to her effectiveness as a symbol, an effectiveness her death at a young age only enhanced. However, the project to transform Cherokee Indians into model New England Congregationalists had its limits.⁴³

Even as Catharine Brown became a symbol for the work of the ABCFM, a scandal erupted over the marriage of two Cherokee students to white, New England women involved in missionary work. The two Cherokee men, John Ridge and his cousin, Elias Boudinot, studied at the Board's Foreign Mission school in Connecticut in the mid-1820s and met the young women at social events involving the school. Like Catharine Brown, the young men were similar to their New England counterparts in manners and appearance, but the fact that they were Cherokee scandalized Congregationalist society, and provoked condemnation from Catharine Beecher's father, Lyman. A well-educated, female Indian was one thing. Handsome young Indian bachelors marrying the daughters of New England was another thing entirely. Despite the outcry, the marriages did happen. Ridge married Sarah Northrup in 1824 and Boudinot married Harriet Gold in 1826.

However, the Foreign Mission school closed down in 1827, and, two years later, the ABCFM became embroiled in an even larger and more political controversy, one that tested the limits of feminine modesty in another way.⁴⁴

As the state of Georgia, with support and encouragement from Andrew Jackson's administration, began planning to remove the Cherokee from their lands, missionary societies led the resistance. Jeremiah Evarts spoke throughout New England, organizing efforts to protect Cherokee rights. After hearing Evarts speak, Catharine Beecher decided to join the efforts by enlisting women to the cause. She wrote a circular which she and a group of Hartford women, including her sister Harriet and the other teachers at Hartford Female Seminary, sent to prominent women and women's organizations. This was the first practical test of Beecher's theory of female influence, and she made a point to note that it was written by a woman. Unlike her recently published *Suggestions on Female Education*, Beecher kept the circular anonymous. The document repeats Beecher's arguments that the exercise of female influence is predicated upon sexual difference. She wrote that women "are protected from the blinding influence of party spirit, and the asperities of political violence" and that they "have nothing to do with any struggle for power." Party spirit was precisely the power being mobilized to deprive the Cherokee of their land, and the campaign to resist that mobilization drew upon religious and moral feeling, to "sway the empire of affection" and to make reasoned arguments against injustice.⁴⁵

The response to Beecher's appeal was encouraging. Women from Boston and New York to Ohio organized petition drives collecting nearly 1500 signatures and

sending them to Congress. Predictably, politicians like Henry Clay who were working against the removal reacted favorably to this form of political intervention, but Jackson supporter Thomas Hart Benton mocked the political pretensions of the women petitioners. As Mary Herschberger has suggested, the women's campaign against Cherokee removal was an important precursor for the mobilization of women for the intense battles against slavery in the 1830s. This is true not only of the women activists, but also for the men who would resist their interventions into politics. Prior to the controversies over abolitionist petitions, women petitioning state and federal governments were an accepted part of American political life.⁴⁶

Indeed, if there was one aspect of the first amendment that clearly applied to women, it was the right "to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Following the revolution, women's petitions to state and federal governments increased, mostly in the form of divorce petitions and requests for widow's benefits. As women mobilized politically to address moral and social problems, their political opposition began crafting arguments against petitions. In 1836, the House of Representatives adopted a "gag rule" regarding all anti-slavery petitions sparking a constitutional crisis and a long-running political battle. The women's petition campaigns of the 1820s and 1830s reflected the growing power of the moral economy of women's educational labor. Like the marriages connected to the Foreign Mission school, the petition campaign raised questions about the limits of female involvement in evangelical and reform movements. Would entering directly into political debates undermine female influence? Could women maintain their rule over "the empire of affection" if drawn into "the struggle for

power”?⁴⁷

Emma Willard was one of the recipients of Beecher’s circular and appeal. She responded by writing to Beecher, questioning the propriety of women directly intervening in political controversy. Willard wrote that a woman who tries to teach moral duties to men by criticizing their actions as “cruel and oppressive” invited a dangerous response.” Instead of serving the cause she wished to serve, she would but destroy her own influence.” And, even more dangerous, such overstepping would lead to charges that female education was to blame. “You and I,” Willard wrote,” as guardians of the interests of our sex’s education, are alike desirous to avoid” such charges and suggested that “we cannot, without endangering those interests, interfere with the affair in question.”⁴⁸

There is no evidence that Beecher ever responded to Willard, but it is clear that she understood the dangers Willard described. The closing of the Foreign Mission school because of controversy over interracial marriage could not have been far from her mind as Beecher involved the teachers at Hartford Female Seminary in the campaign against removal. It may seem contradictory that Beecher would attach her name to essays on female influence and female education, but remain anonymous when she performed the labor of organizing women to use their influence in politics. Rather than evidence of conservatism or personal confusion, the more likely explanation is that Beecher understood anonymity as protection against charges that she was being self-serving or self-promoting. If she was acting entirely out of a selfless, disinterested desire to see justice prevail, then her contribution to the cause *should* be anonymous. Also, the threat to herself, her school, and to women’s education in general posed by a political backlash

was real. Beecher responded by carefully masking her leadership behind a movement that stressed the political intervention as a mass movement of women to resist a morally reprehensible act by the government. The petition campaign failed to prevent the Cherokee removal, but it was the first attempt at organizing women's educational labor to intervene in politics, one that blurred what Beecher had called, "the boundaries of feminine modesty."

The tension between Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher on the question of the Cherokee petition reflects the fluidity of masculine and feminine social roles during this key moment in the development of democratic culture. Willard enforced the "prescribed boundaries" by insisting that women risked destroying their ability to influence society when they intervened in political controversies. As Willard suggested, she and Beecher acted as the guardians of women's interests any time they acted publicly. In organizing the petition drive, Beecher pushed the limits of female influence. In 1829, their positions reflected questions posed by the emergence of the moral economy of women's educational labor. Should women use their influence to intervene in political controversies? What forms should this influence take? Should women organize petition drives or speak in public? Or, should they limit their influence to the exercise of reason and affection through their educational labor in the home and in writing? These questions were not answered by the Cherokee petition. They would become more and more central to American civil society as the nation struggled with the growing conflict between North and South over slavery, and the positions of Willard and Beecher on the function of women's petitions would shift dramatically in the years of controversy and war.

The question of how women could or should intervene in political controversies was far more important to the development of the United States from 1820 to 1870 than the question of women's rights. The different answers to this question over the course of the century reflect the polar energies of feminine moral authority as they developed in tension with the masculine energies of political authority. Beecher echoed Willard's concerns about the dangers of pushing the limits of female moral influence too far in her famous exchange with Angelina Grimké. As the nation found itself embroiled in a civil war, Willard reversed her position on petition drives, organizing her own in order to urge an immediate and peaceful compromise over slavery. The history of the problem of women's intervention into politics through the right of petition has been obscured by interpretive frameworks that focus on voting rights and social equality, issues that did not become central until the 1880s.

Conclusion: National and Global Civil Society

The development of the moral economy of women's educational labor is part of the story of American history, but it also part of world history. After finishing her *Plan for Female Education*, Emma Willard published an essay titled "Universal Peace to be Introduced by a Confederacy of Nations Meeting in Jerusalem," arguing for something very much like the modern United Nations. As Troy Female Seminary became known in educational reform circles, she began working actively toward internationalizing the movement. She sent a copy of her *Plan* to Colombian educational officials urging the establishment of a female seminary modeled on her own. Like many writers and

educators in America and Europe, she followed the Greek war against the Ottoman Empire, finding significance in a war for independence occurring in the birthplace of democracy. In the early 1830s, she organized an association to found a woman's seminary in Greece as a way of helping the newly independent Greek nation rebuild.⁴⁹

These examples of Willard's work represent the transnational aspect of women's educational labor. Just as Calvin Stowe, Horace Mann, Alexis de Tocqueville, Domingo Sarmiento, and Henry Barnard crossed the Atlantic to write about civil society and education, so too did Willard, Harriet Martineau, and Elizabeth Peabody. Although ideas about female influence were organized to address national problems and create national identities, civil society is global. The moral economy of women's educational labor continues to operate in both national and global frameworks. An essay by Kakenya Ntaiya, written in 2004 and titled "Why I Believe in Educating Girls," demonstrates the continuing impact of the work of nineteenth-century women who argued for female education. Ntaiya, who is Maasai and grew up in Kenya, argues for supporting female education in Africa using terms that echo Beecher and Willard. She writes that educating girls is "important because women play a central role in all essential aspects of society, from food production to health care to childbearing." Ntaiya is critical of Maasai treatment of women, especially of marriage practices that make men the owners of wives. She has no immediate plans for marriage. Rather, after completing her education at Randolph-Macon Women's College in Virginia she hopes to return to the village in order "to help build a school and a maternity hospital so others in my village can be educated and stay healthy."⁵⁰

Ntaiya's story resonates with that of American women in the early nineteenth century in that she is a woman arguing for female education. Her essay is, in fact, a plea on behalf of the United Nations Population Fund addressed to President George W. Bush in the hope that he will expand the funding for the program. Ntaiya's appeal that women's educational opportunities are crucial to democratic society continues the work of Emma Willard in her appeal to the New York legislature in 1819. Willard and her generation began a project that continues today with the educational labor of Kakenya Ntaiya and her generation. Such connections across time are easy to draw, perhaps too easy.⁵¹

While it is tempting to see each as a link in a progressive chain, it should also be noted that Emma Willard was among the large number of northerners who sympathized with southern slave holders. Willard went so far in 1861 as to petition the New York legislature to allow southern women visiting relatives in New York to bring their "servants" with them while visiting the state. Advocacy for female education was no more directly linked to some sort of universal moral progress than was women's suffrage. In both movements, women activists were guided by social ideas about race and class that make merely celebrating their achievements problematic. Willard could easily fit her ideas regarding the social benefits of female education with ideas about the social superiority of women like herself. Yet, Ntaiya's story is a reminder that Willard's achievements had social effects far beyond her own understanding.

Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Elizabeth Peabody represent the history of women's educational labor in the nineteenth century. They suggest the limitations of

domesticity as a framework for understanding the full range of women's lives in the nineteenth century even as they suggest the limits of a romantic celebration of their achievements. The social ideas developed by Willard in her appeal for funding for female education were among the first steps in a dramatic expansion of social opportunities for women in civil society. In the decades that followed, all three women would participate and write about that expansion in ways that illuminate the social development of the United States and the world.

If civil society frames these issues in ways that help explain their national and international dimensions, it also turns out attention back toward the family. All three women were nationally and internationally known educators, but they understood education to include the household as well as the school. Their ideas addressed the essential connections between family and civil society even as they explored the national and international significance of educational reform. A fully developed account of the moral economy of women's educational labor must include the way home and the school are educational institutions, even as it accounts for women's participation in national and global culture.

Endnotes

1. Henry Fowler, "Educational Services of Mrs. Emma Willard" in *Educational Biography: Memoirs of Teachers, Educators, and Promoters and Benefactors of Education, Literature, and Science*, ed. Henry Barnard (1861; Reprint Boston: Arno Press, Inc., 1969), 167.

2. Educational labor is meant to distinguish work performed by teachers, writers, social workers, ministers, missionaries, and reformers from the labor of commodity production or providing domestic services for pay. Often education is lumped in with services. After all, education is a service like household labor, healthcare or engineering. But, the idea of a service economy is a twentieth century concept that emphasizes training and technical skills. Education in the nineteenth century emphasized character formation, virtue, and morality. Thus, educational labor in the nineteenth century is distinct from service, a distinction that marked class difference.

One conceptual difficulty with the term educational labor is the tendency to conflate education and school teaching. I follow Lawrence Cremin in defining education broadly, as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended." See, Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980), ix.

3. The term moral economy is best known to historians through the work of E. P. Thompson on peasant rebellions and riots. See, E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century" (1971), reprinted in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: New Press, 1993); *Moral Economy and Popular Protest: Crowds, Conflict and Authority*, eds. Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000). Historians of the nineteenth century have applied moral economy to race relations in the American South. See, John S. Strickland, "Traditional Culture and Moral Economy: Social and Economic Change in the South Carolina Low Country, 1785-1910," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation* (Steven Hahn & Jonathon Prude eds., 1985). Emily Van Tassel, "Only the Law Would Rule Between Us: Antimiscegenation, the Moral Economy of Dependency, and the Debate over Rights after the Civil War", 70 *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 873 (1995). For recent work in economic history that uses moral economy to analyze markets in an illuminating ways, see Helen Tangires, *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003). For an especially useful exploration of economic and moral ideas in relation to

abolitionism, see Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

Moral economy is best understood through the lens of the British political economists of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century—Adam Smith, David Ricardo, James Mills—whose work stressed the importance of morality to the development of markets and national economies. One of the most influential writers on moral economy in the nineteenth century was Harriet Martineau. Her *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832), a monthly series of short narratives popularizing the ideas of British political economists which sold over 144,000 copies. The success of the series provided the funds for her travels to America in 1834. See, Claudia Claver, *A/Moral Economics: Classical Political Economy and Cultural Authority in Nineteenth Century England* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2003), 53-77.

4. Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). On women's wage labor, see also, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," *Mid-Continent American Studies Journal* 10:1 (Spring 1969). Dublin argues convincingly that wage labor "in the middle of the nineteenth century offered young single Yankee women a degree of economic independence unknown to rural women of earlier generations. Much of urban wage labor for women initially required that young women leave their families of origin and work and live on their own" (26-27). This wage labor included teaching. His analysis includes a chapter on teachers in rural New Hampshire after 1860 that shows teachers were more likely to have attended a local academy, that they married later in life, and had fewer children than women in other occupations, all patterns associated with the emerging middle class.

Dublin concludes his study with the argument that the economic independence created by women's wage labor was disappearing by the end of the nineteenth century, as women's work and wages were increasingly "reintegrated within a patriarchal family wage economy (251)." The one exception to that disappearance was women teachers, who saw a substantial increase in their wages, enough to enable them "to be self-supporting after the turn of the century in a way that had simply not been the case earlier" (250). Thus, the social status and wages of women engaged in factory work and domestic service declined, while those of women teachers increased. This class division was exacerbated by ethnicity and race, as minority women workers frequently had the lowest paying jobs.

5. Anne Firor Scott, "What, Then, is the American: This New Woman?" *Journal of American History* 65, no. 3 (1978), reprinted in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), p. 37.

6. For an overview of the scholarship on female literacy in New England see, Joel Perlmann, Sylvana Siddali, and Keith Whitescarver, "Literacy, Schooling, and Teaching among New England Women, 1730-1820," *History of Education Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer 1997), 117-39. The classic study is Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West*

(New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 38-43.

7. Margaret Nash, *Women's Education in the United States, 1780-1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) is a groundbreaking account of women's education in the early national period. Nash challenges two assumptions that have shaped the history of women's education: 1) there were significant differences in the curriculum between single-sex institutions for men and women; 2) there were widespread beliefs about women's intellectual inferiority that limited their access to education. In a comprehensive look at single-sex academies and seminaries, Nash finds that in the 1780s and 1790s these institutions offered a similar educational experience to both men and women. And, she demonstrates that although there were occasional reactionary voices raised against women's learning, ideas about women's intellectual ability derived from "the Enlightenment, the Revolution, and evangelicalism" allowed women's higher education to develop "in a relatively friendly atmosphere." 116.

Rush was among the most important advocates for female education in the United States prior to Willard and Beecher. His *Thoughts upon female education, accommodated to the present state of society, manners, and government, in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Prichard & Hall, 1787) was widely reprinted after he delivered it as an address at the Young Ladies' Academy in Philadelphia. He and other republican theorists of his generation understood female education both in terms of preparing them for the family roles of wife and mother, and as a way of ensuring national virtue.

The political significance of women's family roles of mother and wife has been explored most influentially by Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective" *American Quarterly* 28 (1976), 187-205, reprinted in *Women and the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) and Jan E. Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 44 (1987). See also, Ruth Bloch, "American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815" *Feminist Studies*, 4 (June 1978). For a thoughtful consideration of republican ideas about womanhood in relation to female education, see Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia" *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997), 171-191.

Republican motherhood is often conflated with ideas about female domestic roles after the 1820s. While the educational role of mothers was one reason among many offered by advocates for female education in the 1780s and 1790s, the virtue of women had political meanings outside motherhood. Nash argues persuasively that historians would be better served by thinking about "an ideal of republican womanhood" rather than "republican motherhood" in regard to political ideas about women. By the 1830s, ideas about motherhood had changed dramatically and the educational labor of women had taken on new meanings within and outside the home. See Chapter 3 of this study for a more comprehensive analysis of motherhood and domesticity in relation to educational labor.

8. Joel Perlmann and Robert Margo, *Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) provides an excellent overview

of the scholarship on New England schooling before and after the American revolution, as well as a comprehensive analysis of the feminization of teaching in the United States. The term “two-tiered system of instruction” is used on pages 11-33. On the general question of girls education in New England during the eighteenth century, see also E. Jennefer Monaghan, “Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England,” *American Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1988), 18-41; Kathryn Kish Sklar, “The Schooling of Girls and Changing Community Values in Massachusetts Towns, 1750-1800,” *History of Education Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1993), 511-42.

9. The best overview of mixed-sex schooling is David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American School* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Perlmann and Margo found that the lack of information about female schooling in the town records and documents make it impossible to precisely date girls’ entry into the more advanced winter schools. They suggest that “the process might have begun in the less prestigious reading and writing schools (perhaps in smaller towns or hamlets) during the last half of the eighteenth century, and no doubt accelerating, so that most change came in 1770 or later.” *Women’s Work?*, 25.

10. The terms *district school*, *academy*, and *seminary* can be confusing. Not only were many winter district schools called academies, both types of institutions charged tuition and operated with support from public funds. To confuse things even more, the terms “female academy” and “female seminary” were used more or less interchangeably. See Nash, *Women’s Education*, 5-6. On academies in the early republic, see William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995). The most comprehensive account of the growth of women’s institutions of higher learning in the early national period remains Thomas Woody, *A History of Women’s Education in the United States, Volume I*, (1929; repr. New York: Octagon Books, 1980), Woody writes “The names ‘academy’ and ‘seminary’ are not very significant. The former seems to have been preferred, however, in the early part of the period, and the seminary more common in the later” (329). Willard preferred the term “seminary” because she hoped it would distinguish between serious intellectual institutions and less rigorous girls finishing schools, but seminary and academy were used interchangeably until the women’s colleges of the late nineteenth century. The dates for Sarah Pierce’s school are from Woody, 340.

11. There are two ways female education created employment opportunities for women teachers. First, advanced schooling created a labor pool of educated young women interested in using their knowledge and skills as educators. These women continued to open “dame schools” and teach in summer schools for younger children, but increasingly they were hired to teach in district winter schools and to serve as tutors/governesses for wealthy families. Second, admitting girls to advanced schools created teaching positions for women in those institutions because both female academies and mixed-sex academies hired female staff to address the educational needs of the girl students.

Geraldine J. Clifford analyzes some of the social forces that helped create and sustain women’s interest in teaching. See, “‘Daughters into Teachers’: Educational and Demographic Influences on the Transformation of Teaching into ‘Women’s Work’ in

America” in *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching*, ed. Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); “Man/Woman/ Teacher: Gender, Family and Career in American Educational History” in *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1989); ““Lady Teachers’ and Politics in the United States, 1850-1930” in *Teachers: The Culture and Politics of Work*, ed. Martin Lawn and Gerald Grace (London: The Falmer Press, 1987).

12. These details are from an autobiographical essay “Emma Hart Willard” in *Educational Biographies, Memoirs of Teachers, Educators, and Promoters and Benefactors of Education, Literature, and Science, Part 1 Teachers and Educators*, 2nd ed. (New York: F.C. Brownell, 1861) excerpted in Nancy Hoffman, *Women’s “True” Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching*, 2nd, ed., (Boston: Harvard Education Press, 2003). On Willard’s education and early teaching career see, Alma Lutz, *Emma Willard: Daughter of Democracy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), 16-41 and John Lord, *The Life of Emma Willard* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), 16-28.

Willard’s statement regarding her “uncommon honor” is quoted from Lutz, p. 26.

13. On Beecher’s education and early teaching career see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 16-18. Despite its interpretive framework which stresses domesticity, Sklar’s biography makes clear the centrality of educational labor and theory to Beecher’s life.

14. On the percentage of women who taught school in Massachusetts, see John Bernard and Maris Vinovkis, “The Female School Teacher in Ante-Bellum Massachusetts,” *Journal of Social History* 10 (1977), 340. On the founding of Troy Female Seminary, see Lutz, *Emma Willard*, 83-93. On Beecher’s engagement and the death of her betrothed, see Sklar, *Catharine Beecher*, 33-37. The significance of Beecher and Willard as “pioneers” of female education is sometimes overstated. The almost exclusive focus on these two women, along with Mary Lyon, obscures just how widespread advanced schooling for women had become by the early nineteenth century. See Nash, *Women’s Education* for a detailed analysis. The significance of Willard and Beecher lies in the way they used their institutions to create a national platform from which to address social and political issues. Part of this process was being recognized as educational leaders, a process enhanced by their ability to promote their institutions and themselves by writing articles and books. The effects of this promotion helped the cause of female education, but by the mid-1830s both Beecher and Willard had left female education for broader national projects.

15. On Peabody’s parents and Elizabeth’s early life see Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005) 48-55; Bruce Rhonda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 38.

16. See Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*, pages 103-144 and 153-170; Rhonda, *Reformer*, pages 48-53 and 68-74.

17. For accounts that stress the contribution to school reform of women like Beecher and Willard alongside male reformers like Mann and Barnard to what scholars call the common school movement, see Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience*,

145-147; Tyack and Hanson, *Learning Together*, 41-45.

18. On schooling in the South, see Perlmann and Margo, *Women's Work?*, 35-70; Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 192-217. On patterns of migration and the ratio of female to male teachers, see Perlmann and Margo, *Women's Work?*, 71-85.

19. There is an unfortunate tendency to read the feminization of teaching as an effect of republican motherhood or domestic ideology. Women's education and literacy is a far more important context for the expansion of female teachers and educational writers than domesticity. For an alternate perspective see, Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England" *New England Quarterly* 66 (Dec. 1993), 531-551.

On the structural relationship between female teachers and educational publishing, see Michael Apple, *Teacher & Texts: A Political Economy of Class & Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1988). For theoretical account of the feminization of teaching, see Madeline Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). On Sunday Schools, see Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). On the development of teaching as female labor managed by male bureaucrats, see David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Managers of Virtue: Public School Leadership in America, 1820-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

20. On the development of writing as a form of wage labor see Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Lawrence Buell, *New England Literary Culture from Revolution through Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Michael Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States, Volume I: The Creation of an Industry, 1630-1865* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972); The classic study is William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968).

On domestic writing, see Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830-1860* *Women and History*, Numbers 2/3 (New York: The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, 1982). On early women historical writing see, *Women's Early American Historical Narratives*, ed. Sharon M. Harris (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003) and Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

21. Emma Willard, *Ancient Geography, As Connected with Chronology, and Preparatory to the Study of Ancient History* (Hartford: Oliver Cooke, 1822); *History of the United States, or Republic of America* (New York: White, Gallaher, & White, 1831); *A System of Universal History in Perspective* (Hartford: F. J. Huntington, 1835). For a general discussion of Willard's historical writing in the context of republicanism and women's writing, and for the printing history of Willard's *History of the United States*, see Nina Baym, "Women and the Republic: Emma Willard's Rhetoric of History" *American*

Quarterly 43 (1991), 1-23.

Catharine Beecher, *Arithmetic Simplified* (Hartford: D. F. Robinson & Co., 1832); *The Lyceum Arithmetic* (Boston: W. Pierce, 1835); *The Elements of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Founded upon Experience, Reason, and the Bible* (Hartford, 1831); *The Moral Instructor for Schools and Families: Containing Lessons on the Duties of Life, Arranged for Study and Recitation, Also Designed as a Reading Book for Schools* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1838). On Beecher's interest in writing textbooks for schools and on her relationship with McGuffey, see Sklar, *Beecher*, pp. 301-304.

Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *First Steps to the Study of History; Being Part First of a Key to History* (Boston: Hillard, Gray & Co., 1832); *Key to History, Part II; The Hebrews* (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1833); *Key to History, Part III; The Greeks* (Boston, Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1833). On Peabody's historical writing, see Rhonda, 90-95; on *The Family School*, see Rhonda, 141-142.

22. *American Journal of Education* ran under the editorship of William Russell from 1826 to 1830 when he left Boston to teach and lecture in Philadelphia. *Ladies' Magazine* was edited by Sarah J. Hale from 1828 to 1829 when she left to take over *Godey's Ladies Book* in Philadelphia. For an account of Hale's educational ideas see, Glenda Riley, "Origins of the Argument for Improved Female Education" *History of Education Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1969), 455-470.

23. "Introduction" *Ladies' Magazine* 2, no. 3 (March 1829), 130; "Prospectus" *American Journal of Education* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1826), 1-4. On Hale's significance to United States history, see Nina Baym, "Onward Christian Women: Sarah J. Hale's History of the World," *The New England Quarterly* 63, no. 2. (June 1990).

24. "An authoress.--No. II" *Ladies' Magazine* 2, no. 3 (March 1829), 131-132. The women mentioned by Hale were important to the development of American arguments for female education. Their writing, mostly early children's literature and arguments for female education, were reprinted in the United States.

25. Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education. With a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Fortune* (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 15 & 61. This is the first American edition. American women educational writers were as resolutely transatlantic in their perspective as any other early American intellectuals. Beecher was among the earliest champions of Tocqueville, using his recently published *Democracy in America* to frame her own analysis in *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841). Willard published *Journal and Letters from France and Great Britain* (1833), an account of her European travels. She and her sister arranged for the publication in the United States of Madame Necker de Saussure's *Progressive Education* in 1835. Like Margaret Fuller, Peabody was an early and important translator of European philosophy. She translated two works by Baron Joseph-Marie de Gerando's *Self-Education* and *Visitor of the Poor* in 1830. She also corresponded with William Wordsworth from 1825 to 1845 and traveled to Germany in the 1860s to learn more about Froebel's ideas about the kindergarten. See Rhonda, *Peabody*, 295-299.

26. Emma Willard, *An Address to the Public, particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New York, Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education*

(Middlebury: J. W. Copeland, (1819) Willard's *Plan* is reprinted in *Pioneers of Women's Education in the United States*, ed. Willystine Goodsell (1931; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1970), 46-47. Hereafter page numbers are cited in text from the widely available 1970 edition.

In "Women and the Republic," Nina Baym argues against "the commonly held notion that Willard's chief educational project was to train professional teachers" and suggests that Willard was far more interested in educating the daughters of wealthy families. This is true of both Willard and Beecher, who relied on the tuition paid by parents for the economic viability of their institutions. Baym's argument seems, at least in part, to be aimed at misunderstandings of the scholarship of Anne Firor Scott who documented Willard's impact on the educational history of the United States in essays collected in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*. There is no reason Willard could not be both an educator of wealthy girls and an important advocate for teaching as a female profession. In fact, Willard was both, and much more. As Baym demonstrates, Willard was an important republican political theorist. As Scott demonstrates, Willard was an important educational reformer.

27. Willard, *Plan*, 74-75. As Nina Baym suggests, "Willard's thematic is consistently that of a filiopietistic patriotism uniting American men and women in a common republican heritage and differentiating them by the necessarily gendered tasks they must perform to serve the nation." "Women and the Republic," 6. Despite Baym's dismissal of the importance of teacher education to Troy Female Seminary, she does recognize the importance that education plays in Willard's republican theory of government and the radical nature of Willard's arguments for women's social power:

Willard envisages education for women as a discipline that will implicate them constructively (from her perspective) in the political and economic advancement of the nation-state. The women who are constructed by this discipline are by no means romantic, intuitive, nurturing; they do not resemble the products of a cult of true womanhood. They are disciplinarians, rulers, governors of themselves and others. If, then, Willard's rhetoric has blurred the boundaries of the public and private spheres, so has it also blurred the boundaries of male and female sex typing. As all women (except the poor) are redefined as teachers—whether they teach at home, or in the seminary, dame, or common school—the woman teacher is redefined as the lawgiver and the law's embodiment... 9-10.

28. Willard, *Plan*, 76-79.

29. On the reception of Willard's *Plan*, see Goodsell, *Pioneers* 24-7; and Lutz, *Willard*, 61-75. On the founding of Troy Female Seminary, see Lutz, *Willard*, 76-93. On Mary Lyon, see Goodsell, *Pioneers*, 235-252. For an analysis of the impact of Willard's ideas see, Nancy Beadie, "Emma Willard's Idea Put to the Test: The Consequences of State Support of Female Education in New York, 1819-1867" *History of Education* 22 (Winter, 1993), 543-56.

30. "Dr. Benjamin Rush on the Occupation of the Teacher, 1790", *Readings in American Educational History*, ed. Edgar W. Knight and Clifton L. Hall (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), 403. Catharine Beecher, *Suggestions Respecting Improvements in*

Education, presented to the Trustees of the Hartford Female Seminary and published at their request. (Hartford: Packard & Butler, 1829) reprinted in Goodsell, *Pioneers*, 147.

All italics in original. All page numbers for *Suggestions* hereafter are from Goodsell.

31. I have found six appearances of Beecher's excerpt "Female Influence" in the following publications: *The Religious Intelligencer ... Containing the Principal Transactions of the Various Bible and Missionary Societies, with Particular Accounts of Revivals of Religion.* New Haven: Apr 17, 1830. Vol. 14, Iss. 47; p. 749; *The Bouquet: Flowers of Polite Literature.* Boston: Oct 6, 1832. Vol. 2, Iss. 9; p. 70; *Cincinnati Mirror, and Western Gazette of Literature, Science, and the Arts* Cincinnati: Oct 27, 1832. Vol. 2, Iss. 3; p. 20; *The Genesee Farmer and Gardener's Journal* Rochester: Sep 8, 1832. Vol. 2, Iss. 36; p. 288; *The Monthly Repository and Library of Entertaining Knowledge* New York: Dec 1832. Vol. 3, Iss. 7; p. 240.; and *Maine Farmer and Journal of the Useful Arts* Augusta: Oct 10, 1834. Vol. 2, Iss. 38; p. 304. Female influence was a popular title for essays during the period 1790 to 1840 on the topics of female education, and female missionary and benevolent work.

32. Beecher, "Female Influence."

33. Beecher's theory of civil society was grounded in her understanding of the revolutionary generation's ideas, her interpretation of Christian theology, and her reading of Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. On Beecher's ideas in the context of Scottish moral philosophy see, Sklar, *Beecher*, 78-84.

34. Beecher, "Female Influence." See, Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13, 1 (1987), 37-58 for a crucial analysis of virtue as a path for women to enter public life. She identifies "three understandings of virtue" beyond those of "classical republicanism" and "traditional Protestantism." The first two, Puritan piety theorized by Jonathan Edwards and moral sense as theorized Scottish enlightenment thinkers, were key in establishing a middle ground between "the atomistic individualism of Locke and Hobbes and the communitarian ethos of classical republicanism." The third "cultural movement" is literary sentimentalism expressed in the Richardsonian novel. Bloch's focus is on the 1780s and 1790s, so she does not address the work of Willard and Beecher in the 1830s, which I believe operates in the same middle ground between liberalism and classical republicanism. Willard and Beecher's ideas about virtue are clearly not equivalent to literary sentimentalism because they argued that a woman's virtue resided as much in her reason as her moral sensibility.

35. Beecher and Willard were both influential interpreters of Dugald Stewart and Thomas Reid. See, Emma Willard, "Female Education: Principles Contained in Stewart's Philosophy of the Mind, Applied to Show the Importance of Cultivating the Female Mind" *American Ladies' Magazine: Containing Original Tales, Essays, Literature, & History* 9 (January 1836); "Universal Terms-Disputes Concerning Them and Their Causes" *American Journal of Science and Arts* 23 (1833), p. 18-28; Catharine Beecher, *The Elements of Mental and Moral Philosophy, Founded upon Experience, Reason, and the Bible* (Hartford: 1831).

Few writers thought more deeply about preserving and adapting the revolutionary

generation's ideas about virtue than Willard and Beecher. In *Virtues of Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), James Kloppenberg provides a trenchant analysis of virtue as a political idea. He identifies three sources for American ideas about virtue: religious, republican, and liberal. I would argue that as Willard and Beecher wrote about women's social power in the early nineteenth century, they used all three vocabularies to construct their social ideas. As much as any other writers of their time, they challenged the emergence of "possessive individualism" with ideas about virtue rooted in Protestant theology, classical republicanism, and the liberal traditions of Scottish Enlightenment philosophy. When Kloppenberg writes, "Liberalism and democracy go hand in hand, not because they can carry us beyond ideology or beyond history but precisely because the clear-eyed study of their connections in history can signal not only the dangers of utopianisms left and right but also the fruitfulness of compromise and the value of balance—together with the inevitable frustrations such moderation brings along with it," I believe he could not ask for better historical examples than Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher (7).

36. Beecher, *Suggestions*, 160-161. Italics in original.

37. Novels receive most of the scholarly attention regarding women writers of the nineteenth century, but recent scholarship has expanded that attention to include a wider range of literary forms. In addition to addressing historical writing by women, *Women and the Work of History*, Nina Baym has also written on women writers of science. See, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences: Styles of Affiliation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001). Poetry written by women has received attention in Paula Bennett, *Poets in the Public Sphere: The Emancipatory Project of American Women's Poetry, 1800-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). See also, Mary Loeffelholz, *From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), especially her excellent analysis of the work of Lydia Sigourney, a friend of both Willard and Beecher, as well as a contributor to Sarah J. Hale's periodicals. Loeffelholz argues that Sigourney was an exemplar of the "poet as schoolmistress." A more complete account of women's educational writing would include the literary work of novelists and poets.

38. For biographical information on Stowe, Mann and Phelps see, Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*; Anne Scott, "Almira Lincoln Phelps: The Self-Made Woman in the Nineteenth Century" in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*.

39. Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), <p. ??>.

40. In her study, "The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary, 1822-1872" in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible*, Scott found that twenty-six percent of Troy graduates "worked at some point in their lives" and that thirty-eight percent "took part in some kind of volunteer association" 80-81. Ann Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 17.

41. The periodization here is from Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*. Bruce Dorsey,

Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 49. For analysis of a city outside the urban centers of Boston, New York and Philadelphia, see Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change, Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

No matter the precise periodization of these trends, the work of Boylan and Hewitt suggest that women's activism in the North demonstrates three distinct, yet not entirely separate impulses from 1800 to 1850: benevolent or charitable, evangelical or religious, and moral reform. All three types were essentially educational in their mission and the kinds of labor they performed.

For analysis that stresses the role of class in women's voluntary labor, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986). On southern women, see Suzanne Leacock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984).

The scholarship on women's activism by Scott, Boylan, Hewitt, Ginzberg, Leacock, Stansell, Dorsey, and others has provided the most important alternative to the interpretive framework of domesticity for explaining women's lives. Analyzing women's work in voluntary associations has challenged assumptions about women's confinement to a domestic sphere. Even as Scott helped continue an older tradition of scholarship on women's education by scholars in the early twentieth century such as Thomas Woody, Alma Lutz, and Willystine Goodsell, she also pioneered work on women's voluntary labor. For an account of Scott's impact and for other excellent work in the field, see *Visible Woman: New Essays on American Activism*, eds. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Leacock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

42. Kathryn Kish Sklar, "How Did the Removal of the Cherokee Nation from Georgia Shape Women's Activism in the North, 1817-1838?," *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600-2000*, <http://www.alexanderstreet6.com/wasm/>. This project brings together a number of documents related to Northern women's involvement with the members of the Cherokee Indian nation including excerpts from *Memoir of Catharine Brown, a Christian Indian, of the Cherokee Nation* (1825; repr. Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1832), 17-32. Citations below are from this online collection.

43. "Letter from Catharine Brown to a Lady in Connecticut, 12 January 1820" in *Memoir of Catharine Brown*, 138.

44. On the marriages and the Foreign Mission School, see Sklar, "How Did the Removal of the Cherokee Nation..." The fascination in the 1820s with American Indians included the best-selling historical novels *Hobomok: A tale of Early Times* (1824) by Lydia Maria Child and *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827) by Catherine Maria Sedgwick. Like Peabody and Willard, Child and Sedgwick wrote history in the 1820s. From 1826 to 1834, Child edited *The Juvenile Miscellany* a journal similar to Peabody's *The Family School*. Child's *The Frugal Housewife* (18??) and Sedgwick's *Home* (1835) anticipated Beecher's turn toward domestic writing in the late 1830s. See Carolyn

Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). On Sedgwick, see Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in the Nineteenth-Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

45. "Circular Addressed to Benevolent Ladies of the U. States" *Christian Advocate and Journal* (December 1, 1829) (N. Bangs and T. Mason for the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, NY, 1829) reprinted in Sklar, "How Did the Removal of the Cherokee Nation..."

46. Mary Hershberger. "Mobilizing Women. Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle Against Indian Removal in the 1830s." *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 17-25.

47. The figure of "nearly 1500" is from Alisse Portnoy, "'Female Petitioners Can Lawfully Be Heard': Negotiating Female Decorum, United States Politics, and Political Agency, 1829-1831." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 4, 573-610. On the "gag rule," see William Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

48. The letter written by Emma Willard to Catharine Beecher raises a tricky interpretive problem. The letter does not explicitly state that the appeal to which Willard is responding concerns Cherokee removal. However, given the recent scholarship on Beecher's activities regarding the controversy, there seems no other explanatory context. The letter itself is lost, possibly destroyed by John Lord, Willard's official biographer, at her request. Much of her correspondence, including this letter, is reproduced without any obvious editing in his *The Life of Emma Willard*, p. 117-119.

Lord suggests "those women who early began the agitation of those intricate questions which pertain to 'rights'" as the context for Willard's criticism of Beecher, apparently believing Beecher was such an agitator. In *Emma Willard, Daughter of Democracy*, Alma Lutz only quotes Willard's closing thanks to Beecher for sending her *Suggestions Respecting Improvements* which Willard calls "an able work" that advances "the cause it advocates (119)." Despite these differences in interpreting the letter, I believe Beecher must have sent Willard a copy of her circular on the Cherokee removal, a request for help in organizing a petition drive, and a copy of *Suggestions*. The bulk of Willard's response was aimed at making clear their differences over women's interventions into political controversies like the Cherokee removal. This crucial exchange and the development of both women's understanding of the politics of women's petitions is explored in later chapters.

49. Angelo Repousis, "The Trojan Women: Emma Hart Willard and the Troy Society for the Advancement of Female Education in Greece" *Journal of the Early Republic* 2004 24 (3): 445-476.

50. Kakenya Ntaiya, "Why I Believe in Educating Girls" September 16, 2004 published at <http://www.americanprogress.org/> (accessed June 14, 2005).

51. Ntaiya, "Why I Believe...." Ntaiya was the subject of a profile in the Washington Post in December 2003. See Amy Argetsinger, "Kakenya's Promise: A Girl Will Never Forget" <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35095-2003Dec27.html>> (accessed June 14, 2005).

Chapter Three

A Woman's Duties: Scenes of Educational Labor, 1835-1850

There is a power in society little thought of, because it is in some measure new. Could I at once infuse into the minds of those who are almost ready to despair of the cause of common schools, (seeing how much is to be done, and how little is doing) my own views of what might be accomplished by this unobserved force, I should receive the same smile from them as he would from the director of a train of unmoved cars, who should point out an engine that would complete the needed impetus and set them off. This power is that of a community of educated women, acting in their associated capacity. I do not hesitate to say, that this force might send forward the common school train in higher style than it has ever moved before, in this country or any other.

-Emma Willard

Emma Willard's phrase "a mother's is a teacher's duty" challenges the usual understanding of relationship between teaching and motherhood. Thanks to the prevalence of "republican motherhood" and "separate spheres" as frameworks for understanding women's history, scholars of the early national period have typically understood the "feminization of teaching" as an extension of maternal power into society. Willard's phrase suggests a more complex development of women's educational labor. The new understanding of a "mother's duty" as it emerged in the 1830s was as much an extension of ideas about teaching into the home as it was the reverse. Both motherhood and teaching changed in response to shifts in the political and moral economy of the new nation. Mary Ryan succinctly describes changes during this period: "the traffic around the American household went in two directions; as production exited, social reproduction entered in its place." The decade of the 1830s, which saw women enter civil society as teachers, writers and organizers, was also the decade in which new ideals and images of parenthood proliferated.¹

The previous chapter argued for the centrality of women's educational labor to

the development of civil society. Teaching, writing, and organizing were the forms of educational labor most important to women entering the civil institutions of the United States for the first time. This chapter integrates the family as an educational institution back into the historical development of civil society while attending to the new national role created by women educational reformers. If structural changes in the political and moral economy remade teaching, writing, and voluntary organizations, they also remade the household. Although domestic ideals including motherhood certainly played a role in these shifts, *domestic* is one of a constellation of terms, including *educational*, *literary*, *religious*, and *voluntary*, that describe the labor performed by middle-class women and men in nineteenth-century America.

As women redefined their roles in society and the family, many began arguing that women's educational labor constituted a distinct sphere of action. These arguments for a woman's sphere often took the educational labor of the mother as an ideal. But this ideal was only one element of a broader program of wide-reaching social and political reforms that included redefining the social meanings of feminine and masculine. Recently, as the sharp distinctions of separate spheres have blurred, scholars have turned their attention to the family lives of men and the role of sentiment in the construction of masculinity.² Similarly, there has been greater attention to the political lives of women, especially with regard to their involvement with the Whig Party.³ Yet, domesticity retains its almost exclusive hold on how historians understand the social ideas of women writers and reformers.⁴

This focus is rooted in the fact that social ideas about parenthood and family roles

changed significantly after the revolution. Although republican motherhood has dominated historians understanding of women's roles in the early republic, motherhood exists within a complex web of family roles. Jan Lewis's scholarship suggests that it was not until the 1830s that the mother became firmly established as women's key family contribution to the nation. Prior to that decade, ideas about women's roles tended to focus as much or more on the institution of marriage and a wife's duty to her husband as on motherhood.⁵ In *Life with Father*, Stephen Frank suggests that something like the reverse occurred with men's family roles, as "the husband's role displaced that of the father." From the 1830s to 1850s, Frank writes that, "the good father came to be seen as a companionate husband who provided his wife with the material means and, equally important, the warm emotional atmosphere she needed to carry out her essential role as mother." These polar shifts in the early decades of the nineteenth century reflected the anti-patriarchal social impulses of post-revolutionary society that challenged the meanings of fatherhood and changed the meanings of women's educational labor. In the middle-class imagination reflected in periodical literature and advice manuals, men went from being patriarchs ruling their households as kings to being "good providers" for their families; women went from being "good wives" to being nurturing mothers educating their children.⁶

Beyond the household, social roles of women and men were shifting in response to new educational and economic opportunities. New images of manhood and womanhood informed changes in civil institutions including the church and the school. In the newly disestablished Congregationalist church, ministers struggled to define their

authority and influence even though they no longer had a claim to state authority or state monies. Women in conservative sects like the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, as well as the more egalitarian Methodists and Baptists, found greater authority and influence as their voluntary labor in the form of Sunday school teaching, missionary work, and benevolent and charitable projects became central to Protestantism. Women's teaching in the nonsectarian, but decidedly Protestant, common schools was an important part of this shift. Although this religious and educational work was performed at the level of local community, the labor itself was increasingly conceived and organized through national movements.⁷

Evangelical reform movements such as temperance, Sabbath observance, and anti-slavery created new national roles for ministers including Lyman Beecher and William Ellery Channing. This was true of the common school movement. Horace Mann and Henry Barnard rose to national prominence by urging school reforms that included advocating nonsectarian moral education, eliminating corporal punishment, and hiring female teachers. Mann became the first Secretary of the Board of Education for Massachusetts Schools in 1837 where he edited the *Common School Journal* and wrote the annual reports that would make him the best known educational reformer in the nation. The next year, Barnard became Connecticut's Secretary of the Board of Education and founded the *Connecticut Common School Journal*. Beecher, Channing, Mann, and Barnard represent the development of a new set of political and moral sensibilities in the 1830s associated with liberal Protestantism and the Whig political party that imagined broad-based social reform as the answer to the problems of national

development.⁸

Women too participated in these moral and educational reform movements, increasingly, they began taking on leadership roles. The Grimké sisters, Lydia Maria Child, Lucretia Mott, and other women leaders of anti-slavery are the best-known examples, but anti-slavery was only one example of the broad participation of women in social and political movements. As women participated in Whig Party politics and in evangelical movements, their leadership was limited by conventions that kept them from voting and from the ministry. Such limitations did not exist in the areas of education and culture. As Emma Willard wrote of women, “St. Paul has said they must not speak in churches, but he has nowhere said they must not speak in school-houses.” As teaching became an increasingly female profession, women such as Willard and Beecher became leading figures of educational reform, working with and sometimes against, male reformers such as Mann and Barnard. As writing became linked to growing markets in book and magazines, women such as Fanny Fern and Margaret Fuller became some of the best paid and best-known intellectual figures in the nation.⁹

The new cultural and social roles of teacher, writer, and lecturer were not divided sharply by sexual difference; there was no separate women’s culture. Ralph Waldo Emerson who left the ministry in 1832 is perhaps the best example of the new possibilities for cultural and moral leadership that existed outside the church. As Emerson adapted the sermon form to the nonsectarian environs of the lecture hall and the essay form, Catharine Beecher, Elizabeth Peabody, and Emma Willard were involved in similar vocational projects. They began writing and speaking about intellectual and social

issues far beyond the topic of female education. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, writers and lecturers of both sexes began creating a democratic culture while addressing a national audience.¹⁰

Although Emerson's new vocation is understood as part of the creation of American culture, women writers and lecturers have been typically understood as interested primarily in the home rather than national culture. However, the public work of Beecher, Peabody, and Willard is better understood through the broad cultural framework of educational labor rather than the narrow family focus of domesticity. So too, the social dynamic of sexual polarity is a better way of understanding women's cultural and intellectual work than the creation of a separate women's consciousness. Understanding women's educational labor and sex roles requires attending to the way that the family, the school, and the nation were scenes in which women carried out their duties.

Beyond Domestic Economy: Catharine Beecher's Labor for Mothers and Teachers

One problem with using domestic ideals as the framework for women's lives is that not all women who articulated these ideals lived by them. Catharine Beecher never married, nor had children, nor owned her own home. Yet, her best-known work was *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), a book about the theory and practice of managing households. This contradiction has been a point of departure for critics of Beecher even as she was writing the book. Not only Beecher, but her entire generation has been understood through the seeming contradictions between a domestic ideology that stressed women's social roles within the family and the emergence of women into politics as

writers and reformers. The best scholarship on Beecher has approached her contradictions in the Whitmanesque sense of exploring the “multitudes” contained in her writing and her life. Kathryn Sklar describes her as a woman who “mixed innovation with conservatism, honesty with dissemblance, and feminism with antifeminism.”¹¹

Yet as Sklar’s account makes clear, Beecher herself understood her position as a childless and unmarried not as a contradiction, but as a necessarily independent point from which to write about the new household economics. The full title of her book, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School*, reflects the educational purpose of the work, and its broadly targeted market of both families and schools. Using educational labor rather than domestic labor as the framework for understanding Beecher’s life and writing suggests that domesticity was one element in a larger transformation of American social life. Domestic labor, especially the educational work of motherhood, was one important form of educational labor. But teachers were as important, if not more so, to the social ideas of Catharine Beecher.

In fact, Beecher’s writing shows the fundamental relationship between the family and the school, and between the educational roles of mother and teacher. A list of the full titles of some of Beecher’s books illustrates this point: *The Moral Instructor for Schools and Families: Containing Lessons on the Duties of Life, Arranged for Study and Recitation, Also Designed as a Reading Book for Schools* (1838); *Physiology and Calisthenics for Schools and Families* (1856); *The Religious Training of Children in the School, the Family, and the Church* (1856); *Principles of Domestic Science; As Applied to the Duties and Pleasures of Home. A Text Book for the Use of Young Ladies in*

Schools, Seminaries, and Colleges (1870). Beecher was far from alone in her understanding of the market for her educational writing. A great number of books and periodicals in the early nineteenth century were published for use in the home *and* the school.

Treatise on Domestic Economy and its follow-up, *Domestic Receipt Book* (1846), were the most commercially successful of Catharine Beecher's books. For Beecher, writing on domesticity was a logical and potentially lucrative decision to apply her ideas about female influence to the home. The commercial market in domestic manuals and fiction written by women was new, but there were already some notable successes. William Alcott's *The Young Mother* (1831) and *The Young Man's Guide* (1833), Lydia Maria Child's *The Frugal Housewife* (1832), Theodore Dwight's *The Father's Book* (1834), Catharine Sedgewick's *Home* (1837), and Lydia Sigourney's *Letters to Mothers* (1839) were earlier attempts by writers to reach the an audience interested in domestic and family topics. Child and Sedgewick had written successful historical novels on non-domestic themes prior to turning their attention to domesticity. Beecher was in a sense following their lead, except she was coming to domestic issues from educational writing rather than fiction.

Domestic writing in the 1830s and 1840s was not a call for women to retreat from the world. As Nina Baym writes this period, domesticity was far from "a simple injunction for woman willingly to turn the key on her own prison." Rather, it was "set forth as a value scheme for ordering all of life, in competition with the ethos of money and exploitation" associated with markets and politics. The public role of domestic writer

both articulated and represented this alternative framework, one that attempted to substitute Christian love and family feeling for competition and possessive individualism. But the complexities of Beecher's domestic ideology, however interesting, were only part of her much broader social ideas about women's educational labor.¹²

School and home were not the only institutions Beecher addressed. In the 1830s, theology and slavery occupied much of her time and energy. She published three works on religion and addressed pressing questions of women's anti-slavery work in her famous exchange with Angelina Grimké. In 1835, she addressed a female audience in New York City on the subject of female teachers. This address, published by the American Lyceum, was Beecher's first statement of the project that would occupy her for the next two decades: the mission to train women teachers for the developing nation. She specifically addressed "benevolent men" asking that they fund female seminaries charged with training teachers, but her true object was to awaken the social hopes of young women to serve the nation.¹³

In her address, Beecher grounded her arguments in an analysis of the expanding population in the United States. Based on population estimates and a teacher to student ratio of 30 to 1, Beecher estimated 30,000 teachers were needed with an additional 4,000 required each year. She wrote, "let statistics of the wants of the country be sent abroad, and the cry go forth 'Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?' and from amid the green hills and white villages of New England, hundreds of voices would respond, 'Here I am, send me;' while kindred voices, through the length of the land would echo the reply."¹⁴

This ambitious project combined all of Beecher's interests. It involved religion, education, and domesticity. Beecher's plan was that young, unmarried women would reform the nation through their educational labor, first as teachers, then after marriage, as mothers and benevolent ladies. Writing as a Protestant evangelical and as an advocate for female education, Beecher argued that the true remedy for the social problems of the nation lay in organizing women's educational labor. It would be far more accurate to say that Beecher was an educational theorist and activist who believed that the home was an important educational institution, than to say that she was a domestic writer who believed that teaching was an important profession for women.

Beecher's project focused on the development of the American West. This regional focus emerged out of Beecher's family life, a life dominated by the fortunes and misfortunes of her father, the Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher. As the 1830s began, Lyman decided to move to Cincinnati in order to establish his religious leadership in the growing population in the West. Lyman wrote to Catharine about his plans in terms that appealed to her own desires to lead: "The moral destiny of our nation, and all our institutions and hopes, and all the world's hopes, turns on the character of the West." Catharine, her sister Harriet, and several other members of the family joined Lyman in Cincinnati in 1832. The two sisters planned to establish a female seminary on the model of the Hartford Female Seminary.¹⁵

Despite their high hopes, neither Lyman nor Catharine were quite able to master the social and political currents of Cincinnati. The social problem is described by Kathryn Sklar: “The Beechers were middle-class Yankee evangelicals, and their moral edges were often too sharp to move smoothly in genteel Cincinnati society.” Whether the issue was Lyman’s criticism of the extravagant balls thrown by elite families for their daughters or Catharine’s attempts to run the local literary society, the Beechers found their attempts to exert leadership rebuffed by the old, aristocratic families of Cincinnati. However, more than regional and class differences were at play.¹⁶

Slavery as both a political and a moral problem prevented Lyman Beecher from exercising the kind of influence upon the West that he had imagined. Lyman came to Cincinnati to found Lane Seminary as evangelical institution for training preachers for Western pulpits with the financial support of the philanthropists Arthur and Lewis Tappan. The Tappans, like William Lloyd Garrison during this period, were becoming increasingly radical on the question of abolition. In 1834, a group of Lane students led by the Garrisonian Theodore Weld embraced radical abolitionism, pitting both the students and the financial backers of the school against most of the conservative leaders of the local community. By asserting social equality between the races and bringing radical abolitionists to campus, the radicals ignited a controversy that Beecher, despite his moderate anti-slavery views, was unable to mediate. Ultimately, the students left Lane to help found an institution at Oberlin, Ohio. The controversy at Lane contributed to Lyman

Beecher's being charged with heresy in 1835. Although he successfully defended himself, the trial represented deep conflicts between "old school" and "new school" theological movements within conservative Protestantism, and between northern and southern congregations, that played out over the ensuing decades.¹⁷

These social and political conflicts, along with the Panic of 1837, led to the failure of Catharine Beecher's school in Cincinnati. But Beecher had played very little role in running it, leaving most of the work to her sister Harriet. Freed of her institutional responsibilities, such as they were, Catharine turned her attention to literary efforts. All of Catharine Beecher's writing in the second half of the 1830s can be read as attempts to defend her father, even as she advanced her own leadership as a theorist of female influence. Her *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* (1836), "An Essay on Cause and Effect in connection with the Difference of Fatalism and Free Will" (1839), and *To those Commencing a Religious Life* (1840) were attempts to navigate the shifts in theology as doctrines like predestination and the damnation of the souls of unbaptized children were moderated or abandoned. Catharine and her father, indeed her entire family, were major contributors to the project of adapting the Calvinism of the eighteenth century to the social realities of the nineteenth. *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* was part of this religious work, asserting a moderate position on abolition that stressed a peaceful and gradual process for ending slavery. It attacked the radical extremism that had damaged her father's career, even as it articulated a vision for women's moderating influence on a divided nation.¹⁸

All of Catharine Beecher's ideas in the 1830s were rooted in her experiences in the political and social setting of Cincinnati, especially the failures her family experienced there. Sklar suggests that while "intending to meliorate local divisions, Catharine in a sense overshot her target and hit upon ideas that could be usefully employed to foster national cultural unity." But it was not only divisions in Cincinnati, but family divisions that Catharine was attempting to meliorate. At the height of his difficulties, Lyman remarried, causing no small amount of family tension. In addition, Catharine's brothers were taking more radical positions on abolition, frustrating their father. For the Beecher family, theology and morality were simultaneously family, vocational, and national issues.¹⁹

In *An Essay on the Education of Female Teachers* (1835), and in the later addresses *The Duty of American Women to their Country* (1845), *The Evils Suffered by American Women and American Children* (1846) and *An Address to the Protestant Clergy of the United States* (1846), Catharine Beecher crafted a moral and religious vision of women's educational labor that would bring her to national prominence. Like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, Beecher avoided political and sectarian controversies even as she articulated a cultural position that was fundamentally nationalist and Protestant. If Mann and Barnard represented the eastern movement for common school reform, then Catharine Beecher represented its western pole. Almost all of her time and energy in the 1840s went into traveling throughout the North and Midwest raising money and speaking to those interested in school reform about the role women should play in

establishing common schools.²⁰

If she is remembered today as a precursor to Martha Stewart, her reputation during her lifetime was as an educator. *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, her most famous work then and now, must be understood within Beecher's larger project of promoting a nonsectarian Protestant, democratic education provided by women. Drawing upon Tocqueville's arguments about the special character of American women, *Treatise* adapts republican ideas about the importance of education to the language of democratic theory and Protestant theology. Beecher writes "The success of democratic institutions. . .depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people." The words "democratic" and "mass" are new, but the central idea has little changed from Benjamin Rush's arguments about the crucial role that education plays in republican government.²¹

The difference is that in the 1830s the educational function of the family and the school had to contend with the steady breakdown in class distinctions since the revolution. As Beecher described it, a breakdown in which all, regardless of wealth or character differences, "all are thrown into promiscuous masses" (17). Like Mann and Barnard, Beecher imagined that a system of public schools staffed by professional female teachers was the answer to the social problems (e.g. westward expansion, increasing immigration, regional differences) facing the United States. The poor and undemocratic mob would be schooled into citizens of the rising democratic nation. More than any other common school reformer, Beecher placed the household alongside the school at the center of her

reform vision. These two educational institutions would recreate the social order.

Catharine Beecher argued that women, primarily in the roles of teacher and mother, should be the agents of educational reform. Yet, her vision of education within the household included other family roles: “The mother writes the character of the future man; the sister bends the fibres that hereafter are the forest tree; the wife sways the heart, whose energies may turn for good or for evil the destinies of a nation” (13). Family, though, is only one aspect of Beecher’s reform project. Her broader vision included women working together in ways that are both egalitarian and national. The image with which she concludes the first chapter of *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* is of a “glorious temple” whose builders “are of equal importance, whether they labor on the foundations, or toil upon the dome.” Those builders include “The woman who is rearing a family of children; the woman who labors in the schoolroom; the woman who, in her retired chamber, earns with her needle, the mite to contribute for the intellectual and moral elevation of her country; even in the humble domestic, whose example and influence may be moulding and forming young minds, while her faithful services sustain a prosperous domestic state” (14).

This vision of a “woman’s sphere” represents different roles within the moral economy of women’s educational labor: the mother, the teacher, the contributor to benevolent causes, and the domestic servant. This last was a particularly important figure in Beecher’s account of domestic economy. Careful to distinguish the situation of American women in domestic service from the

“cringing, submissive, well-trained servants of aristocratic lands,” Beecher urged women who “have the means of securing hired service” not to deny their daughters training in domestic labor (197). She even expressed the hope that the labor economics of domestic service would lead fewer families to be able to afford domestic servants, and thus, necessity would drive even wealthy women to develop the domestic skills of their daughters. But economics was not Beecher’s central point. Her primary argument about domestic service was that it required an educational response from the female employers. The answer to the problem of ignorance, bad manners, and poor work in domestic employees was to “make all proper allowance for past want of instruction, and the next, to remedy the evil, by kind and patient teaching” (203).

Beecher believed in the limitless moral and economic benefits of women’s educational labor. Natural resources, along with the “skill, industry, energy, and enterprise of our countrymen” would create unlimited wealth. “Intelligence and virtue” dictated that this wealth be used to “furnish the means for a superior education to all classes.” Labor, she argued, “is ceasing to be the badge of a lower class.” Eventually, “there will be such an equalisation of labor, as will afford all the time needful for every class to improve that many advantages offered to them.” While hardly envisioning a classless society, Beecher does imagine a United States in which democratic education and labor uplift “the lowest classes” to a position superior to that of any other nation. The engine of this nation building project would be women’s educational labor (132).

According to Beecher, women's educational labor would balance democratic freedoms with republican virtue by structuring class and gender relations. The family was at the heart of this social order, and it embodied important moral, religious, and political principles. Among these was the subordination of the wife to the husband, which was a model for the subordination of the child to the parent, the student to the teacher, the domestic worker to the employer, and the citizen to the state. According to Beecher, this subordinate relation "has attending obligations" so that the superior element has responsibilities for and to the subordinate. Crucial among these subordinate relations was the authority of parents over children, which could be delegated to "teachers and employers, as the interests of their children require"(2-3).

Although she believed in the subordination of women to men within marriage, Beecher also believed in the intellectual and moral equality of the sexes. This meant women were not naturally subordinate. Rather, in choosing marriage they sacrificed their own power for the good of the social order. The democratic value of choice meant that all subordinates have the power to choose his or her superiors, or choose not to be subordinate at all. Beecher wrote,

...in a truly democratic state, each individual is allowed to choose for himself, who shall take the position of his superior. No woman is forced to obey any husband but the one she chooses for herself; nor is she obliged to take a husband, if she prefers to remain single. So every domestic, and every artisan or laborer, after passing from parental control, can choose the employer to whom he is to accord obedience, or, if he prefers to relinquish certain advantages, he can remain without taking a subordinate place to any employer. (3)

Teaching provided a way for women to maintain the economic independence that allowed marriage to be a choice. As an unmarried educator and writer, Beecher chose to remain single. But, single life did not exempt Beecher from the family obligations of sister and daughter. Indeed, as a Beecher, Catharine felt those obligations keenly. Yet, as a Beecher, she also felt her obligations as a Christian intellectual. Her response to the complex array of influences and obligations of growing up as Lyman Beecher's oldest daughter was a theory that stressed both the choices and obligations associated with women's participation in the religious, cultural, and political life of the United States.

Even as she found commercial success writing about domestic obligations in the 1840s, she continued to return to the educational themes of her 1835 address. In *The Duty of American Women to their Country* she used the violence of the French Revolution as a frame for the political unrest in the United States, which she described as the "excitements of embargoes, and banks, and slavery, and abolition, and foreign immigration." She asks "What, then, has saved our country from the wide-sweeping horrors that desolated France?" In answering, Beecher offered the standard republican ideal: the virtue and intelligence of a broadly educated citizenry. Beecher notes that this ideal is increasingly precarious in the face of westward expansion, abolitionist controversies, foreign immigration, and regional differences. Only women, in their role as educators, are capable of answering the social problems of the United States. This crucial duty weighs on all American women. "No woman is free from guilt, or free from the

terrific responsibilities of the perils impending over her country, till she has done all in her power to secure a proper education to all the young minds within the reach of her influence.”²²

The plan outlined at the end of *Duty* was the primary focus of Catharine Beecher’s literary and organizational efforts. In an address delivered to women-only audiences throughout the country and published as *The Evils Suffered by American Women and American Children* in 1846 she urged women to support her project of training female teachers to be sent to the West. This “employment of female talent and benevolence in educating ignorant and neglected American children” was her answer to the evils facing the nation’s children. That neglect was most felt in the western territories, where in a statistic she repeated often, there are “nearly a million adults who cannot read and write, and more than two millions children utterly illiterate, and entirely without schools.” The “illiterate masses” would benefit from both the labor and the example of the female teacher. Beecher wrote, “In each neglected village or new settlement, the Christian female teacher will quietly take her station, collecting the ignorant children around her, teaching them the habits of neatness, order, and thrift; opening the book of knowledge, inspiring the principles of morality, and awakening the hope of immortality.”²³

This missionary image begins with the female teacher ministering to community, but Beecher’s plan included the hope that many women would choose to marry. Beecher imagined that teaching “will gradually increase in

honor and respectability” and young women “of whatever station” will “enter this profession, and remain in it till pure affection leads her to another sphere.” Thus, “the Christian female teacher” who traveled west would also create the middle-class, Christian home. But Beecher’s analysis extends beyond the school and the home. She hoped her plan would transform the labor economics of the Northeast and of the nation, getting women out of the mills and into the schoolroom and the home. Employing women as teachers in the West would create a demand for more female educational labor. “Thus, the surplus of female population will gradually be drawn westward, and in consequence the value of female labor will rise at the East, so that capitalists can no longer use the power of wealth to oppress our sex.”²⁴

To be sure, Beecher did not aim to organize women workers to resist capitalist power, nor did she imagine her organization would demand women’s professions as a political right. In fact, she argued against “mistaken champions” of women who want to bring women into “professions and pursuits which belong to the other sex.” Instead, surplus women workers would become “mothers, teachers, nurses, and domestics” who would be respected for their work and educated to their social purposes. This transformation of female workers would solve the problem of labor and political unrest in the urban East, at least with regard to women, by sending enough of them westward. The result would be to force better conditions in mills and eliminate female factory labor. Once Beecher’s plan were put into effect, “there would be no supernumeraries found to

put into shops and mills, or to draw into the arena of public and political life.”²⁵

It is tempting to pounce upon the contradictions of Beecher’s arguments for keeping women out of politics even as she herself was drawn into “the arena of public and political life.” After all, Beecher’s addresses and organizing for women teachers were both public and political. But few of Beecher’s contemporaries would have noted this contradiction. They would have assumed that a woman of her class and family would have every reason to act as she did, as the disinterested guardian of women less fortunate than herself. However, Beecher’s performance of her class did create major difficulties. The ethic of Christian self-sacrifice that informed Beecher’s ideas and her own arguments about the social operations of female influence made her particularly concerned about the appearance of being self-important or self-serving. Thus, it was crucial to her not to overstep the bounds of modesty as she conducted the business of the organization.

For Beecher, this meant finding a man to serve as a figurehead as she did much of the organizational work. As Beecher began organizing an association to promote her project, she asked her brother-in-law, Calvin Stowe, to serve as its President. In 1846, Beecher lectured to women’s groups throughout the North, conducting a fund-raising campaign in Stowe’s name. Having raised enough money to hire a full-time agent, Stowe recruited William Slade, the out-going Whig governor of Vermont, for the position of Secretary and General Agent of the association, which came to be known as the National Board of Popular

Education.

In his new position, Slade proved far more active and able than Stowe, but also less willing to simply let Beecher have things her own way. During the late 1840s, Beecher organized the training program for the first few groups of female teachers and continued her fund-raising and traveling. She also began laying the ground work for a female educational institution in Milwaukee, where she hoped eventually to teach and live. Tension between Slade and Beecher over policy and control of funds flared through this period, and in 1849 Beecher resigned her position with the organization. Beecher wrote two texts in the aftermath of her resignation, each revealing in its own ways of some of the tensions between her ethic of self-sacrifice and her project of public advocacy and political leadership.

The two texts, a letter *To Benevolent Ladies in the United States* (1849) and *The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Woman; With a History of an Enterprise Having That for its Object* (1851), are accounts of Beecher's organizational labor to carry out the plans outlined earlier in the decade. But they are also accounts of that labor that aim to defend Beecher from charges that she profited from her labor, or that she acted inappropriately in making decisions that undermined Slade's authority. According to Kathryn Sklar, the details suggest Beecher was less than clear and above-board regarding her financial dealings. But the form of Beecher's defense is more significant than the details of her power struggle with Slade. Both *To Benevolent Ladies* and *The True Remedy* mark a return to early forms of public address, while the latter recalls her exchange with Angelina

Grimke from 1837 over the methods of abolitionism.

To Benevolent Ladies recalls the "Circular Addressed to Benevolent Ladies of the U. States" from Beecher's 1829 campaign against Cherokee removal. It is not anonymous, but Beecher adds a postscript stating that "It is important that this be regarded as a private communication to those to whom it is sent, at least so far as to prevent that transfer of any part of it to the public prints." The letter is essentially an attack on Slade's management and an attempt to reassert her own leadership of the organization by aligning herself with those who argued that funds should be raised for the establishment of teacher training institutes in the West, rather than continuing to send teachers from the East. The attempt to mark the communication as "private" may have been part of a calculation to outmaneuver Slade and his allies, but it was also an attempt to insulate Beecher from critics who might see her arguments as self-serving. She takes pains to present her new plan, "an auxiliary to the Board" that would allow Beecher's hand-picked agent to direct more funds toward training women from western communities and to give western political and religious leaders more say in the project. By casting her ambitious plan within a "private" in letter, Beecher was able to present her own political play as a disinterested appeal for further support for a benevolent project with which, she had long been associated.²⁶

The political calculation of Beecher's support for western control of the funds and her own desire to find a position at a female seminary in the West belay her repeated invocation of her own disinterested duty to support female teachers

and her own deference, at least rhetorically, to male advisors and philanthropists. Beecher's disinterested duty is at the center of her *The True Remedy*, which like *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* is written as a series of letters. *The True Remedy*, like her letter *To Benevolent Ladies*, defends her work with the National Board, but it is written as personal correspondence to her sister Harriet, rather than as an open letter. This allows Beecher greater intimacy of expression, even though the letters themselves were published as an essay on an important social issue. She notes that difference in her first letter writing that "I find it a difficult matter to write letters to nobody in particular" and that she seeks "that kind of access to those whom I would address, which I might gain if admitted to the private boudoir of each, and privileged to sit by her side in unrestrained and earnest conversation."²⁷

With its appendix detailing her financial dealings with the National Board and her account of her conflict with Slade, *The True Remedy* is as once a self-defense and a signal of a significant shift in Beecher's approach to her educational labor and leadership. The new intimate style allows Beecher to unburden herself of the difficulties she had been facing, the "load of responsibilities" that were "so wearing to my nervous energies" that "nearly one half of my time has been spent at water-cure retreats, in laborious attempts to repair the constantly-recurring exhaustion resulting from such over exertion." Beecher's experience at water-cure retreats at places led to a growing sense of solidarity with women and an interest in women's health issues. At the conclusion

of *The True Remedy* she conceives of herself as an instrument of women, acknowledging what Beecher herself owes “to them for the privileges of usefulness which have been conferred mainly by their instrumentality.”²⁸

What had been a rhetorical embrace of service to American women, became an personal imperative. Increasingly, Catharine Beecher understood her organizational work in terms of an ethic of service. The 1850s brought a great deal of personal and professional frustration to Catharine, even as they opened the door for Harriet. Catharine went to live with Calvin and Harriet Stowe, helping run the household in order to give her sister time to write. The sisters founded the American Women’s Educational Association in 1852, but Catharine never again played the role of leading educational reformer she had in the 1830s and 1840s. After *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* appeared she was not even the most famous daughter of Lyman Beecher. Yet, Catharine’s interest in the social and educational roles of women continued to develop, and if she lived in her famous sister’s shadow, she also benefitted from Harriet’s fame. They collaborated on *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, published as *An American Woman’s Home* in 1869. In the 1870s Catharine became a leading voice against women’s suffrage, adapting her arguments regarding women’s duties to argue against their entry into party politics.

Catharine Beecher’s writing on domesticity, her anti-suffrage writing, and her sister’s fame, all conspire to mask her great contribution to the development of the United States during the final decades of the nineteenth century: the social

idea that women should contribute to national development by teaching in the common schools. She was not this idea's only advocate, but she was its most influential. Her writing and organizing in the 1830s and 1840s provided the intellectual foundation for the organization of Northern women's labor as teachers. Following the Civil War, as women teachers from the northern states mobilized to go to the South, they imagined their labor in terms of nonsectarian, evangelical Protestantism and democratic nation building—precisely the terms laid out by Beecher in her speeches and addresses about female teachers going to the West.

Recording the School: Elizabeth Peabody Literary Labor

Catharine Beecher has been among the most significant figure in the history of women in nineteenth-century United States, a figure who engages fundamental questions of sexual equality and sexual difference, conservatism and liberalism. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody has barely figured in women's history. The reasons for this are not hard to see. Peabody did not participate in the social movements that have attracted attention from historians of women. She never taught in a female seminary, never wrote on domesticity, and was never an advocate for a women's profession or women's rights. Peabody is best known through her involvement in two social projects, transcendentalism and the kindergarten movement. Among the transcendentalists, Peabody is often marginalized by the dramatic presence of Margaret Fuller whose writings directly

address gender issues and whose life and tragic death are richly symbolical of both the social possibilities and limitations of women intellectuals in the nineteenth century. Although transcendentalism and the kindergarten movement included many women, neither movement fits the model of separate spheres. The result is that there are two Elizabeth Peabodys in American historical memory, neither central to the concerns of women's history.²⁹

The first Peabody is a leading figure in transcendentalism, publisher of *The Dial*, correspondent of William Wordsworth, translator of key texts of German Romanticism, and the “discover” and early supporter of Nathaniel Hawthorne. This literary Elizabeth Peabody barely figures in accounts of her work as the leading figure in the Kindergarten movement. This educational Elizabeth Peabody visited Germany in 1867 to learn about European ideas about early childhood education, founded the reform journal *The Kindergarten Messenger*, and published a number of key texts outlining Froebelian methods of teaching young children. To understand Peabody's significance, to bring the two Peabodys together, requires placing her within a broadly conceived cultural history beyond domesticity and motherhood. Like Beecher, Peabody was unmarried and childless. And like Beecher, Peabody's understanding of her duties encompassed a wide range of educational labor related to domestic roles, but not limited by them.

If literary scholars focus on Peabody's crucial role in the transcendentalism and educational scholars on her role in reforming early

childhood education, both treat her three-year involvement in Bronson Alcott's Temple School as significant. For scholars of transcendentalism, Peabody's *Record of a School* is a key text of what Perry Miller called the *Annus Mirabilis* of the movement, "the barrage of books and articles that exploded in 1836."³⁰ For educational scholars, Peabody's work with the Temple School is an early example of progressive educational ideas and prefigures her later involvement in the Kindergarten movement. At the intersection of both literary and educational movements, the Temple School presents an opportunity for cultural history that recognizes connections between the educational labor of teaching and writing. It also suggests some of the complex relations between the family and the school as both educational institutions changed in response to the wider social developments of the nineteenth century.

In 1834, Elizabeth Peabody was living at home in Salem with her parents, contributing to the family income by running a school with her sister, Mary. Already well-known in Boston Unitarian circles thanks to her friendship with William Ellery Channing, Peabody wanted to move back to more lively intellectual life of the big city. The problem was money. Running a school was a precarious enterprise and Peabody needed to help support her parents. When she heard that her old acquaintance Bronson Alcott was moving back to Boston to open a school, she decided to help him gather students. Having written about his teaching methods for the *American Journal of Education* in 1829, Peabody may have already been thinking about using her observations of his school for her

another writing project. The relationship between Alcott and Peabody involved significant personal and professional stakes, but it also proved beneficial to both. Peabody's offer to help was fortunate for Alcott, who lacked her connections to the sort of families who could afford the tuition. Alcott's radical ideas and methods provided Peabody with material to write what would become her best-known and most admired work.

Record of a School describes the literary and religious conversations Bronson Alcott conducted each morning. Peabody acted as a "recorder" for the school, keeping a journal of the dialogue between Alcott and his students. But Peabody does far more than simply record events. Barbara Packer notes that, "As the book proceeds, we gradually become aware of her artistry. She arranges the conversations with an unerring sense of what makes them at once touching and funny." As Packer makes clear, Alcott's conversations were hardly the simple conversion of the children to Alcott's point of view. The children frequently maintained philosophical positions opposed to Alcott's, even in the face of his charismatic attempts to convince them otherwise. Peabody's literary arrangement of these scenes of instruction was guided by an Romantic understanding of childhood as a path to truth; or, as Peabody put it, "the life of the Spirit as it reveals itself in the consciousness of the little child."³¹

The first edition of *Record of a School* (1835) was published at Peabody's own expense, and she took a significant financial loss when a number of copies burned in a warehouse factory. In the second edition (1836), Peabody attempted

to answer some of Alcott's critics by offering detailed descriptions and rationales for his methods and curriculum. She pays particular attention to Alcott's instruction in language which included not only his conversations, but also the keeping of journals by the students.³² Peabody's interest in the children's language reflected larger changes in the cultural meaning of childhood. By the early nineteenth century, childhood was the focus of a wide variety of writing including Romanticism and educational reform. *Record of a School* was a contribution to both these transatlantic cultural projects.

Like Catharine Beecher's speech about female teachers in 1835, *Record of a School* was Peabody's effort to move beyond the role of classroom teacher by establishing herself as a voice for new modes of education. But Peabody was not interested in establishing teaching as a female profession. Rather, she was interested in exploring educational ideas related to religious and spiritual truth as she understood it. Conversation was at the heart of this exploration. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture* (1836), Bronson Alcott presented this image of the ideal teacher: "Instead of seeking formal and austere means, he rested his influence chiefly on the living word, rising spontaneously in the soul, and clothing itself at once, in the simplest, yet most commanding forms." Alcott celebrated the power of words to inspire and he understood inspiration to be the primary work of the teacher. In his journal, he wrote, "To nurse the young spirit as it puts forth its pinions in the fair and hopeful morning of life, it must be placed under the kindly and sympathising agency of genius...teachers must be men of

genius. They must be men inspired.” Peabody would not have imagined teaching or genius as the sole province of men, but she agreed with Alcott’s romantic view of language and inspiration as crucial to education.³³

Alcott’s suggestion that teachers must be *men* of genius and *men* inspired is worth noting. Most of the students in the Temple School were under ten years old, and several were younger than six, which made it more an infant school than a grammar school. Teachers of young children were mostly women, either in “dame schools” or in summer district schools. As a male teacher, Alcott violated this convention. However, as a woman writer, Peabody was violating conventions of her own. A woman writer describing a male teacher’s methods challenges the usual conventions of Romanticism reflected in Margaret Fuller’s line, “Woman the poem, man the poet! Woman the heart, man the head! Such divisions are only important when they are never to be transcended.” When Fuller reverses the polarity of this relation—“The woman might have sung the deeds, given voice to the deeds, given voice to the life of the man, and beauty would have been the result.”—she describes something of Peabody’s achievement in *Record of a School*.³⁴

Peabody’s writing about Alcott undermines the usual conceptions of Romanticism’s construction of masculinity and femininity. In *Gender and Genius*, Christine Battersby argues that as part of Romanticism’s new definition and valuation of creative work, “a new rhetoric of exclusion...developed in the eighteenth century, and...gradually grew louder as the nineteenth century

progressed.” This rhetoric excluded women from consideration as geniuses even as it promoted different conceptions of creativity rooted in sexual difference.

Romantic heroes such as Byron were worshiped for their sensitive feminine traits, whereas successful women creative artists were explained as essentially male.

This contradiction was possible, Battersby explains, because “it was ‘femaleness’---and not ‘femininity’---that was consistently downgraded.” Thus, being a woman was a liability to a creative artist, whereas, feminine traits were essential to male artists. Women were capable of creating works of popular art, art for mass consumption, but only men were capable of creating works of genius.³⁵

The most famous example of this gender dynamic on the American scene is Nathaniel Hawthorne’s dismissal of women writers as “a d___d scribbling mob.” Such assertions of male authority are easily mis-read as merely exerting dominance, as reflecting the power men held over women. However, *Record of a School* suggests a more complex polarity of sexual difference at work. Women transcendentalists, especially Peabody and Margaret Fuller, were intellectually engaged in Romanticism to an extent that renders problematic assumptions regarding the place of intellectual women in American culture. For American Romanticism, sexual difference functioned as a central intellectual and social problem. Peabody and Fuller were neither excluded from consideration as creating artists because they were women, nor were they part of a “scribbling mob.” As Hawthorne’s intimate friend, publisher, sister-in-law, and literary defender, Peabody represents something far more interesting than a scribbler.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, her Boston contemporary, described her as “a woman of genius,” a description that spoke directly to her own hopes, and captures the significance of her work as a Romantic writer.³⁶

The sexual polarity of genius is one frame through which to understand Peabody’s cultural achievement. Another is what Richard Brodhead calls “disciplinary intimacy, or simply discipline through love.” Indeed, *Record of a School* remains one of the most complex accounts of a primal scene in American literature: the confrontation between teacher and student over discipline. In the book’s most famous scene, Alcott demands his students punish him for their transgressions. The scene begins with Alcott ordering punishment for deserving students. Unlike the usual punishment, in which Alcott struck the student on the hand with a ruler, this punishment consisted of sending the students out of the room during the reading of and conversation about *Pilgrim’s Progress*, a favorite text. When the students return, they expressed a preference for the old punishment, “Because the blow would have been over in a minute, said one boy. But the conversation can never be, another time, said another.” This leads Alcott to introduce “a new mode” of punishment.³⁷

He talked with them, and having again adverted to the necessity of pain and punishment, in a general point of view, and brought them to acknowledge the uses of this hurting of the body, (as he always phrased it,) in concentrating attention, & c., he said, that he intended to have it administered upon his own hand for a time, instead of theirs; but the guilty person must do it. The declared they would never do it. But he soon made them understand that he was serious. But he determined that they should not escape the pain and the shame of administering the stroke upon him, except by being themselves blameless. (24)

Whipping scenes like the one in *Record of a School* are endemic to this period's educational writing. Brodhead argues persuasively that their prevalence is not due to anti-slavery arguments or to political debates about ending naval flogging, but rather all three separate settings—schoolroom, naval vessel, and plantation—are social locations where new modes of discipline came into being. Literary works such as Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, Douglass's *Narrative*, and Peabody's *Record* represent the process of reimagining the technologies of discipline. For Brodhead, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* provides the framework to understand how scenes like the one above help to “replace the older disciplinary mode with new technologies—less visible but more persuasive, less ‘cruel’ but more deeply controlling—of modern social regulation.”³⁸

Peabody describes the effect of Alcott's one and only exercise of this mode of discipline in which student strikes teacher. The two boys being punished are admonished for striking Alcott too lightly, and so “they were obliged to give it hard:—but it was not without tears, which they never had shed when punished themselves” (24). Her explanation fits with Broadhead's Foucaultian analysis. This punishment, Peabody writes, “is not to satisfy the claims of any inexorable law; but to give a pain which may awaken a solemn attention, and touch the heart to love and generosity” (24-25). These disciplinary practices as more than simple changes in the structures of schooling. Brodhead argues that “disciplinary intimacy” is a crucial element of the redefinition of the American middle class “as that class redefines itself in the antebellum decades.” He identifies both the home

and the school as the social location of this redefinition. This insight allows us to understand more about the complex role that women's educational labor played in creating class difference. It was not just that women's work was educational, but that it was educational in a new and important way.³⁹

As Brodhead suggests, domestic writing like that of Beecher, Sedgewick, Lydia Maria Child, and Lydia Sigourney, along with the educational writing of Peabody, Horace Mann, and Henry Barnard show "the intimate alliance" between disciplinary intimacy and the "newly consolidating social form" of the middle-class family. The ideals for this new form are embodied in an idealized vision of motherhood. As productive labor leaves the household, the educational labor of the loving mother replaces the "goodwife" as the feminine ideal. Fatherhood also changed to accommodate these new social relations. Stephen Frank has found evidence that "fathers participated actively in child rearing" even as their work was increasingly performed away from the household.⁴⁰ As motherhood took on new cultural significance, parenting continued to be something families worked out in ways that incorporated both fathers and mothers. These forms of intimacy also inform the new disciplinary structures of schooling. Just as men and women performed the educational labor of parenting, they also performed the labor of teaching.

Peabody makes the connection between discipline in the family and the school explicit in a scene in which Alcott uses "motherhood" to establish his own authority. After a new boy fails to pay attention in class, Alcott teaches a lesson in

which the kind punishments of a mother are the model for his own mode of discipline.

Suppose you should go to your mother when she was speaking to you, said Mr. Alcott, and stop your ears, and say what, what? would you ever find out what she was saying? No. Well, some boys came here with their fingers in their ears, and how could we make them hear? They all laughed. (44)

Alcott then confronts the boy, who had recently joined the school.

Have you any faith in your mother, little boy? The child hesitated, and seemed not to understand. Do you believe she loves you? Yes, said he. Do you think she likes to have you happy? Yes. Do you think she is sorry to have you unhappy? Yes. Do you go to her when you are in trouble, and expect she will make you glad? Yes. Do you go to her when you are glad, and expect that she will be glad too? Yes. Do you think she is kind to you? Yes. Do you think she is kindest when she punishes you?—say all of you—do you think your mothers are the kindest to you when they punish you? They all held up their hands. Then you have faith in your mothers. But are you sure you feel that they are the kindest when they punish you?—when they give you pain? Sometimes it is necessary to give pain to the body, in order to get at the mind. (44)

The process of discipline described in *Record of a School* seldom involved actually inflicting physical punishment. The passage above is typical in that it is a conversation about punishment, rather than punishment itself. In fact, the boy in question immediately acts up again. But, rather than physically punish the boy, “Mr. Alcott sent him out of the room, saying, if he had been longer in the school, he would not behave so.” Alcott goes on to say that far from being “bad,” the boy “has not thought; he does not know;—his fingers are in his ears, his eyes are shut” (45).

The image of the boy’s body closed off to external communication

suggests an explanation for Alcott's reluctance to resort to corporal punishment. If pain is a "blessed instrument to produce good character," then it should only be administered to those open to its educational message (114-115). Alcott and Peabody both worked to convince the students that physical punishment was necessary to their education. When one little boy, "who has a horror of physical pain which is peculiar" refuses to agree that proposed punishment is just, Peabody enters the conversation. "I said to him, I cannot conceive why you should think that it is so dreadful to have a touch of pain on your body, that you can one moment weigh it with the improvement of your mind" (116).

In order to convince the boy, Alcott tells a story about his daughters that illustrates the "uses of pain, in developing the mind and awakening sympathy." After his elder daughter, Anna, pulled the hair and pinched her younger sister, Alcott does the same to Anna. "He said that she immediately understood how her sister had been hurt; and sympathy arose in her mind; and she spontaneously went and kissed her." This illustration of both the educational power of physical pain and the importance of family feeling appeared to be convincing. "The result of the conversation," Peabody reports, "seemed to be a universal agreement with Mr. Alcott" (116).

Whether the boy was really convinced or was silenced matters less than the teachers' attempts to persuade him. In scenes like the ones above, *Record of a School* explored the newly emerging disciplinary system that focused the attention of the middle-class family and the common school on the intellectual

and moral development of children. The authority of both parent and teacher had been feminized in that absolute patriarchal authority to determine justice and administer punishment according to “inexorable law” has been replaced by modes that emphasized Christian love and democratic conversation. In this, Peabody and Alcott were participating in a larger cultural trend which replaced the authority of the father and schoolmaster with the authority of the mother and schoolteacher.

The female teacher and the mother came to exemplify the new mode of discipline, even though men and women both actively created it. In his early annual reports, Horace Mann repeated Catharine Beecher’s arguments for female teachers, citing the economic advantages of employing women at lower pay, but stressing “the superior gentleness and forbearance of their dispositions.” Yet, when Mann visited Prussia on his honeymoon with Elizabeth’s sister Mary, his observations of the men teachers in Prussian schools caused him to rethink simple distinctions based on sexual difference. In his Seventh Annual Report from 1844, one of the most widely circulated and controversial, he writes of the Prussian schoolmasters, “in these male teachers, there was a union of gentleness and firmness that left little to be desired.” This was the report that led a group of Boston schoolmasters to attack Mann’s ideas about discipline and school government. Mann’s reforms represented multiple threats to the male teachers of Boston’s established grammar schools. Far more than a debate over corporal punishment, the debate between Mann and his critics played out over an intricate web of cultural conflicts including older Calvinism versus liberal, nonsectarian

Protestantism, authoritarian corporal punishment versus disciplinary intimacy, and local versus centralized control of schools.⁴¹

The controversy that ended the partnership between Alcott and Peabody, and led most of the parents to withdraw their students, was not over the school's modes of discipline. Rather, Alcott's genius led him too far beyond the boundaries of acceptable religious and social practices. Due to the descriptions in *Record of a School*, the Temple School became the topic of much discussion in Boston. The children themselves, sons and daughters of Boston's liberal elite, took enormous pride in their school and school master. Alcott's own pride at his success in the school blinded him to the reality that enterprises such as the Temple School required the active support of parents and the community, not just the loyalty and obeisance of students. This was a lesson Peabody knew very well, having closed her own school in Brookline after she involved herself in a family controversy that spilled over into the community.⁴²

Peabody clearly understood the danger to the Temple School and tried to prevent it. Oblivious, Alcott began to take a more active role in preparing the next set of conversations for publication, to be titled *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*. He insisted on changing some of the literary practices Peabody had used in preparing *Record*, including using the actual names of the children and altering some of the dialogues. The most serious problem came when Alcott wanted to include a conversation about conception and birth which included the name of child in the text and his speculation about the role that "naughtiness"

plays in birth. Elizabeth herself was not the recorder for the conversation. Her sister Sophia had been serving that role for much of the summer of 1836. When Elizabeth read the passage she became alarmed. Presenting a conversation in which a six year-old child discusses sex went far beyond acceptable boundaries as she understood them, and she began a long negotiation with Alcott over its appearance in *Conversations*.⁴³

The result of their conflict was that the controversial passage was placed in the appendix of *Conversations* and Peabody wrote a Recorder's Preface" which appeared at the beginning. In it, Peabody wrote "these conversations are not to be taken as complete representations of Mr. Alcott's views of the subjects introduced; still less are they to be regarded as any intimation of the recorder's." She was even more blunt in a letter to Alcott just before the book was published. "What ever may be said of the wisdom of pursuing your plan as you have hitherto done in the school-room, where you always command the spirits of those around you....I feel more and more that these questionable parts ought not go into the printed book, at least that they must be entirely disconnected with me." Alcott's determination to include the controversial exchange meant *Conversations* received a very different reception from that of *Record*. Critics charged Alcott with blasphemy and obscenity, and parents became concerned. Within months of the publication date, enrollment dwindled and the school closed in 1837.⁴⁴

During the summer of 1836, as Peabody tried to convince Alcott to remove the controversial passages, they had a domestic falling out that

exacerbated their professional disagreements. Their original agreement had not included Peabody getting a salary, but Alcott did arrange for her to have a room all to herself in the house he rented for himself and his family. Peabody enjoyed the opportunity to close herself away in order to read and to write. But this room of her own came at a price she was unwilling to pay. As she increasingly marked out her differences with Alcott over his methods, the Alcotts became worried about her loyalty. May Alcott, Bronson's wife, read Peabody's mail, including some letters from Mary Peabody that expressed concerns about Alcott's methods and the damage they could do to Elizabeth's reputation. After an angry confrontation, Elizabeth moved out of the house and back to Salem to live with her parents. There she began to work on two new projects: founding a periodical to be called *The Family School* and opening a bookstore in Boston.⁴⁵

Among the Alcotts biggest concerns was whether Mary or Elizabeth had been speaking to Horace Mann about them. Mann had become close friends to both Peabody sisters in 1832 when all three of them lived in a boarding house in Boston. As the Temple School controversy broke, Mann was launching his career as an educational reformer. In fact, the Alcotts had good reason to suspect that Mann did not appreciate Alcott's genius. Mann was pursuing a reform project that relied on building political and religious coalitions, not on following his genius where ever it took him. He very aware of community expectations and worked in his annual reports to mobilize a broad range of parents and school supporters. To Mann, the romantic experiments at the Temple School seemed reckless, and

though he admired *Record*, he worried about Elizabeth's Alcott-like tendency to pursue her vision of truth without considering propriety.

In a letter to Elizabeth after she returned to Salem, Mann advised her on *The Family School* in a way that both anticipates the controversy over *Conversations* and makes his own political sensibilities clear. Mann warned Peabody to avoid "touching one class of topics with which impure associations are connected, in the common mind." He meant topics such as sexual reproduction and doctrinal controversy, exactly the sort of thing that Alcott would insist on including in *Conversations*. Mann continues, "I know to be able to write them as you do, without certain associations, argues real purity, but there is not purity enough in the common mind to bear them, & a few passages would exclude any book or publication from most families, & you would not know why, for that is the last reason any body but an older brother would tell you of." Regardless of whether or not Peabody needed Mann to warn her about the possible controversy, Mann's letter shows that he clearly had a better sense of the public mind than did Alcott.⁴⁶

Elizabeth Peabody's career reflected both Mann's educational reform ambitions and Alcott's romanticism, but it developed within the particular range of possibilities open to an unmarried, woman teacher. Like Catharine Beecher and Emma Willard, Peabody used her teaching experience to launch a career as a writer and reformer. But unlike her two female colleagues, she remained a committed teacher, balancing her literary, spiritual, and political interests with her

work in the classroom. After the Temple School closed, she opened the West Street bookstore in Boston where she hosted Margaret Fuller's "conversations" and helped publish various transcendentalist texts including *The Dial*. At the same period, she worked as an assistant in the academy of Charles Kraitsir, a linguist and educator. In the 1850s, Peabody traveled the nation, championing a new system of teaching history using chronological charts. In 1860, even as she was writing letters of support for members of John Brown's band and attending abolitionist meetings, Peabody opened her first infant school since her collaboration with Alcott. She called it a Kindergarten to reflect the influence of the ideas of German educator, Friedrich Froebel, and to distance her methods from those used in the Temple School.⁴⁷

In the 1860s, Peabody continued to teach while writing a number of influential texts on the Kindergarten idea, many in collaboration with her sister Mary. In 1867, Peabody decided to travel to Europe in order to learn with greater precision how Froebel's ideas were put into practice there. To raise the money for the trip, she put together a lecture series and offered them in Concord, Boston, New York and Philadelphia. At age 63, Peabody left for Europe where she observed classrooms and made connections that would help her to continue as the leading voice of the kindergarten movement. During 1871 she served as an expert advisor to John Eaton, the United States Commissioner of Education, which published two reports by Peabody on the Kindergarten. Her duties still included her literary and cultural work as she completed several "reminiscences" of famous

friends including the painter Washington Allston, William Ellery Channing, and her brother-in-law, Nathaniel Hawthorne.⁴⁸

Women and the Cause of Common School Improvement: Emma Willard in Connecticut

Although they were both nationally known educational reformers in the nineteenth century, Catharine Beecher is better known today as a theorist of domesticity and Elizabeth Peabody as a writer and publisher. In contrast, Emma Willard's reputation remains directly connected to her work as an educator, especially as an educator of women. Yet, Willard's role as the founder of one of the most influential female seminaries is only half the story. In the late 1830s, Willard suffered a personal and professional crisis that led her to abandon female education as her primary vocation to pursue a far wider range of educational and political causes. In the 1840s and 1850s, Willard became a common school reformer with a national reputation comparable not only to Catharine Beecher, but also to Horace Mann and Henry Barnard.⁴⁹

The shift in Willard's focus from female education to common school reform was rooted in dramatic changes in her family and personal life. A growing interest in the role of women in schooling and a general boredom with the day-to-day responsibilities of running Troy Female Seminary led her to leave New York and female education. The more immediate reason was an offer of marriage from Dr. Christopher Yates. They married in 1838 and moved to Boston. The marriage

was a disaster, and within a year, Willard left Boston for her childhood hometown of Kensington, Connecticut. There she petitioned for a divorce, which was granted in 1843, and joined with Henry Barnard, a Whig whose political career as a school reformer followed the path laid out by Horace Mann.

Willard emerged from her divorce a single woman dedicated to the idea that educated women should take the lead in reforming schools. As the author of the famous *Plan* and as the principal of Troy Female Seminar, female education had been her focus. During the 1830s and 1840s, she began working on how educated women could lead the way in common school reform. If Catharine Beecher's focus was the developing West, Willard's focus was the institutional structures of the common school. Willard argued for utilizing women's educational labor as teachers to extend the school year and create graded primary schools, and that mothers and other women in the community should be involved in organizing schools. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century she wrote for educational journals, lectured to professional teachers, and became deeply involved in school reform efforts on the state-level in both Connecticut and New York. In 1854, she joined Henry Barnard in London in representing the United States at a world "Educational Exhibition" sponsored by the British Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce.⁵⁰

Willard's interest in common school reform was rooted in her experience as a teacher. She taught in the common schools of Kensington in the first decade of the nineteenth century prior to making female education her cause and career.

Like Horace Mann and Catharine Beecher, Willard's career embodied the shift in the Northeastern educational practices from the patriarchal, authoritarian discipline of old-line Calvinism to disciplinary intimacy of non-sectarian Protestantism.

Willard's father, Samuel Hart, was a dissenter from the Congregationalist church, holding far more liberal views on predestination and other doctrines than official church positions. In 1807, ten years before Connecticut would enact disestablishment, Hart was embroiled in a controversy when two of his neighbors refused to pay their tax assessment to the local congregation as a protest. When they were jailed, Hart paid the tax and withdrew from the church, joining the dissenting Universalist church. Although Willard does not make reference to the controversy in her reminisces about her career, they occurred the same year she left Connecticut to teach in a girl's school in Vermont.⁵¹

Conflicts over religious doctrine and education like those faced by Hart in 1807, Alcott in 1837, and Mann in 1844, permeated cultural and political issue throughout the early nineteenth century. Connecticut passed acts of disestablishment in 1818 and Massachusetts in the early 1830s. The nonsectarian Protestantism central to the educational reform work of Mann, Barnard, Beecher, Peabody and Willard was a response to the controversies of disestablishment. Common school reform aimed at avoiding the problem of religious differences (at least among the Protestant majority), in order to build a broad-based educational movement for a national culture. Although Willard's own religious beliefs were less sectarian than Beecher's moderate Congregationalism or Peabody's liberal

Unitarianism, she shared their general sense that the common school, reformed by the educational labor of female teachers, was the best hope for the nation. Female educational labor and the reformed common school would replace the authoritarian discipline of an older Calvinism with a set of social ideas more open to religious diversity. While not abandoning bodily punishment, these new disciplinary structures did seek to subsume it within a system of loving influence.⁵²

Writing in the 1840s about her first day as a seventeen year-old teacher in 1804, Willard narrated her experience in terms that demonstrated the shift in discipline. Willard recalled “That morning was the longest of my life” as she attempted to direct the students’ attention to their studies. “Talking did no good. Reasoning and pathetic appeals were alike unavailing. Thus the morning slowly wore away.” During her lunch break, Willard explained her problem to Mrs. Peck, an older friend and the parent of one of the students. Her friend “decidedly advised sound and summary chastisement.” Willard replied, “I never struck a child in my life.” When Willard returned to school that afternoon she “found the school a scene of uproar and confusion.” But Mrs. Peck’s son then “entered with a bundle of five nice rods.”

Resolving to try her friend’s advice, Willard made an example out of the first boy who disobeyed her. “I took one of the sticks and gave him a moderate flogging, then with a grip upon his arm which made him feel that I was in earnest,” she returned him to his seat. Hoping that one example would be enough,

Willard spoke to the students explaining in the “most endearing manner” that she was “there to do them good.” The children still would not obey and Willard “spent most of the afternoon in alternate whippings and exhortations, the former always increasing in intensity, until at last, finding the difference between capricious anger and steadfast determination, they submitted.”

Willard found it necessary to establish the old forms of masculine, corporal discipline in order to establish her own mode, the feminine discipline of intimacy and self-control. The student’s submission was not to Willard’s anger, but to her determination to do them good. Like Alcott’s discipline, the purpose of Willard’s flogging was not only to establish authority over bodies, but to open young minds to the moral and intellectual lessons of the school. In Willard’s narrative, once her determination to use bodily punishment was established, it was no longer necessary. She wrote, “This was the first and last of corporeal punishment in that school. The next morning and ever after, I had docile and orderly scholars. I was careful to send them out for recreation, to make their studies pleasant and interesting, and to praise them when they did well, and mention to their parents their good behavior.”⁵³

In Willard’s account of her first day, the use of corporal punishment must be embraced in order for it to be overcome. The threat of bodily pain remains embedded in the new disciplinary mode. As actual flogging is banished, love enters in its place and the memory of physical punishment serves to remind both teacher and students of the need for self-control. Indeed, self-control is at the

heart of the moral lesson of both the home and the school. These lessons and stories do not necessarily describe the actual experience of teaching—Willard's memory of her first day is drawn too neatly—but they do provide a frame for understanding the cultural changes embodied in the new structures of the common school. Such narratives show how women's educational labor can ally the home and the school. It is a small, but telling detail that the friend who suggests corporal punishment is also the parent of one of the boys in class.

This blurring of family and school authority was reflected in the institutional arrangements of many schools, so that common school and female seminaries were also family schools. Just as Elizabeth Peabody taught her sisters in school and then taught alongside them as colleagues, Catharine Beecher's sister Harriet was her pupil and then served as her assistant teacher in both the Hartford Female Seminary and Catharine's school in Cincinnati. Troy Female Seminary was also a family enterprise. Emma Willard taught her younger sister, Almira, as a student in the Kensington Academy, and then alongside her at Troy. Willard's first husband, John, managed the finances of the seminary once it was founded, and provided medical care to its students. Almira taught and served as an Assistant Principal at Troy following her first husband's death. When Willard's son married one of the students at Troy Female Seminary, the young couple began taking an increasing role in managing the school, ultimately taking over its operations from 1837 until 1872, when Willard's grandniece became its principal.

Troy Female Seminary was a family enterprise in another, more

metaphorical sense. Willard considered those students who followed her example, becoming teachers and founders of female seminaries, as her daughters. In a letter to teacher graduates who Willard was organizing into an association for educational reform, Willard wrote: “My heart calls you my children. God, in his providence, had made you so. And let us, scattered as we are, throughout the extent of this vast country,—as one family call to mind his dealings with us in devout thankfulness [...] how little did I think, when educating these, that a family of such would one day be mine, comprising so great a number of efficient teachers, some risen and others rising to eminence.”⁵⁴

Willard was surely not the first teacher to imagine her students as part of her family, but she was the first to conceive of them as a part of a national mission to reform teaching. The letter was published as a circular in 1838, and served as a founding document of *The Willard Association for the Mutual Improvement of Female Teachers*. The organization was created as Willard embarked on a dramatic series of life changes. A widow for twelve years who had recently celebrated her fiftieth birthday, she married Christopher Yates and left Troy. Willard apparently hoped to travel with her husband, visiting her students, and use the new association to help organize school reform and secure her legacy as one of America’s most prominent educators.

Unfortunately, both the marriage and the association dissolved within a year as Willard’s life was embroiled in a scandal that ended in her divorce. The divorce and a public attack on her immodesty orchestrated by her husband did not

force Willard to retire from public life. Rather, she emerged phoenix-like from the ashes of her marriage, recovered the use of the name Emma Willard, and began to pursue new educational reform projects. The story of Emma Willard's courtship and marriage to Christopher Yates suggests something of the complicated social life of a public, independent woman. A letter from Willard's sister, Almira Lincoln Phelps who had herself remarried late in life, reveals some of the social pressures on Willard as she contemplated her engagement.

I conclude that, having decided, you will not wish to delay the consummation of this event for any length of time, as your position, at the best, is a very trying one, though you will, no doubt, carry it through with dignity. But the case of a widow, at your time of life, being engaged, is somehow so regarded by the world, and is so awkward, that the sooner you change your position the better. I trust you will remember the good advice you gave me in respect to keeping the command of your property; and I pray that all your counsels may be aided by Divine wisdom. You have not mentioned whether Dr. Yates is a pious man. I trust you would not engage yourself to one who did not, at least, respect religion; and real piety would be truly desirable. I hope, also, he is of your own denomination; for, those these things do not enter into the romance of life, they are of great importance in realities.⁵⁵

Her sister's question about Yates's piety spoke to a major problem, one that had led Willard to break off the engagement in 1837. When Willard heard rumors that Yates was a gambler and irreligious, she had written him to call off the wedding. The reputations of both Yates and Willard were at stake. Canceling the wedding would have given credence to the rumors about Yates and raised questions about Willard's judgment. As Willard did not uncover solid evidence behind the rumors, she was in no position to end the relationship without damage to her reputation, perhaps even exposing herself to a lawsuit. As it turned out, the

marriage took place, with results far more damaging to Willard's reputation than a broken engagement. According to the divorce petition filed with the Connecticut legislature on Willard's behalf, it had quickly become clear that Yates had married Willard for her money and that his piety was merely for show. Despite agreeing to a pre-nuptial "marriage settlement" that protected Willard's school, property, and copyrights, Yates demanded Willard pay the rather extravagant expenses of their household.⁵⁶

Willard left their household in Boston in 1839 and moved back to her childhood home in Connecticut to live with an older sister, Mary. Yates responded with a public attack on her professional reputation which appeared in the February 1839 issue of Burton's Gentleman's Magazine. The attack focused on the circular she published as the president of The Willard Association for the Mutual Improvement of Female Teachers, calling the document "an open display of vanity and self-importance" and accusing Willard of "doffing the simple and graceful attire of feminine modesty, and substituting in its place the flaunting robes of a more than masculine self-complacency." The anonymous attack, which may have been written by Yates himself, denigrates Willard's writing ability, questions her standing as an leading educator, and accuses her of setting up the Willard Association as a "mercenary" enterprise to collect outstanding debts from former students.⁵⁷

The main point of the attack was the public nature of Willard's actions. After suggesting that she "would have served the cause of education more

effectually” if she had made the circular a private letter to her former students, the reviewer makes plain the underlying framework for assessing Willard’s impropriety: “that modest, unobtrusive mode of doing good, which is so eminently appropriate to the female character, would not comport with her passion for notoriety.” It is difficult to assess the impact of this attack on Willard. On one hand it seems to have ended The Willard Association, for no record of it exists after the divorce. Willard’s correspondence with friends shows that she did indeed suffer some damage to her reputation. Sarah J. Hale, Willard’s friend and correspondent from the 1820s, cut off contact. Willard urged their mutual friend Lydia Sigourney to intervene, but the two remained estranged until 1846.⁵⁸

Despite anxiety over her reputation, Willard’s work following the scandal was far from modest and unobtrusive. Willard returned to Kensington seeking a comfortable, safe environment in which to weather the storms of her divorce. In 1840, at Henry Barnard’s prompting, the local school society invited Willard to oversee the reorganization of the district’s summer school system. The fact that the society voted to issue the invitation led Henry Fowler to write, and later scholars to repeat, that Willard “was unanimously elected by the voters of the parish as Superintendent of the common schools of Kensington.” In fact the only election held was at the local school society meeting which voted to ask Willard to oversee the district summer schools and the older girl’s school. In twenty-first century terms, Willard was more like an educational consultant brought in by the local school board than an elected school superintendent.⁵⁹

Willard's work that year marked an entirely new direction, away from her advocacy for female education and toward reorganizing the common school to better utilize female educational labor. Her efforts involved two different projects, the reorganization of the district's summer schools to use female teachers and the creation of a new kind of educational association, one that would bring female teachers and mothers together to reform common schools. Both projects were popularized in Barnard's *Connecticut Common School Journal*, which circulated nationally. These reform projects and the attention they received were the first steps in Willard's road to prominence as a common school reformer. When Willard left Connecticut after her divorce was granted in 1843, she assumed a national role as a common school reformer, expanding upon the two projects she pursued with Barnard in Kensington.⁶⁰

The first project involved advocating a much longer school year. The old structure of seasonal schools included a summer school and winter school. The former were essentially elementary schools taught by women during the warmer months when older children worked on farms. Winter schools, usually taught by men, included older children and provided a more advanced curriculum. Like many communities in the Northeast, Kensington experienced economic and social changes that made this seasonal system less effective. Willard's plan reorganized the schools to create four schools for younger children and one school for advanced girls. The four elementary schools would class students by age and be open during the winter months. Willard argued "that the common schools should

have settled teachers,” and “that these teachers as far as concerns girls and young boys, should be females.” The older boys would be taught by a man, but not a professional. Rather, the male teacher who would be a farmer able to leave his work during the winter, “would not depend for his living on the school; and hence moderate prices would satisfy him.” Willard’s plan included hiring female assistants from among the best recently graduated students to assist the full-time female teachers in the elementary schools.⁶¹

The reorganization of schools in Kensington demonstrated how far the feminization of the teaching profession had proceeded since Willard had laid out the logic of hiring women teachers twenty years earlier. Hiring full-time female teachers and assistants, while regulating the one male teacher to part-time status, put into action her suggestion in 1819 to place the “business of teaching children, in hands now nearly useless to society; and take it from those, whose service the state wants in many other ways.” Willard, along with other common school reformers including Barnard, Horace Mann and Catharine Beecher, were successfully linking the hiring of female teachers to other structural changes in the schools such as grading the students by age and ability, discouraging corporal punishment, and creating a longer school year. By the end of the nineteenth century these structures would dominate American schooling, but in the 1840s they were still radically new developments.⁶²

Emma Willard’s second reform project in Kensington—a “Female Association for the Improvement of Common Schools”—would also become a

standard feature of public schooling by the end of the century. Known today as the Parent Teacher Association, Willard imagined this reform organization as driven entirely by female educational labor.⁶³ This voluntary association would be made up of women who would pay annual dues and participate in the oversight and management of the schools. In September of 1840, Willard wrote a constitution and organizational plan for the association. The plan included committees charged with such activities as identifying needy families who required financial assistance to send children to school, inspecting the school facilities and making recommendations for improvements, and observing and evaluating classroom instruction. The association was to support the teachers by generating public support for improvements and raising funds for purchasing equipment and books. In a 1840 report to Barnard, a Kensington school official writes that the female association formed at Willard's behest, "has been sustained, with a good degree of spirit, ever since." And that, "a greater part of the mothers of the district belong to it, and a few unmarried ladies."⁶⁴

School reform in Kensington was gratifying to Willard, and she and Barnard began planning other collaborative ventures including creating a state normal school for Connecticut to be administered by Willard. Before the plan could be realized, Barnard's political support collapsed when the Whig party was voted out of office in the election of 1842. In the aftermath, both Willard and Barnard began working on the national stage of common school reform. Barnard continued writing and lecturing on education, became the President of the

American Association for the Advancement of Education and served as the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin. In 1867, he became the first commissioner of the new federal Department of Education. After leaving Connecticut for Philadelphia, Willard considered a number of projects and ideas. One was a national educational journal, much like Barnard's *Connecticut Common School Journal*, aimed at women. Among the titles for the journal that she discussed with her sister were "The School-Mistress," "The Educator" and "Women's Mission."⁶⁵

Although she did write a column for the *New York Teacher* under the title "The Schoolmistress," Willard did not develop an educational journal. But she did continue to publish and update her history textbooks, traveled around the country visiting former students and observing schools, wrote extensively on educational reform, and became involved in common school reform in New York. Willard's last major contribution to national discourse was not in the field of education, it was an attempt to serve the nation itself. In 1861 as violence broke out between the North and the South, Willard led the first major women's peace movement in an effort to end the Civil War. Her "Memorial" presented "In the name of and by the authority of American Women" proposed a "plan of settlement" offering "a reasonable prospect that peace might be restored.." The following year, she published *Via Media: A Peaceful and Permanent Settlement to the Slavery Question* which argued for an end to the war by solving the problem of slavery through a resolution that would allow the institution to continue in the

South.⁶⁶

The path from Emma Willard's first major public address advocating female higher learning to her final major address, an intervention in the most contentious political debate of the nineteenth century, winds through various institutions of civil society. It connects the family to the state through Willard's educational labor as a teacher, writer, and organizer. Thanks to her work at Troy, her textbook writing, and her second career as a common school reformer, Willard was among the most prominent women of her generation. Like Horace Mann, who became the leading anti-slavery figure in the US Congress during the 1850s, Willard translated her national prominence as an educational reformer into a position of political authority directly opposed to Mann's abolitionism. Although she remained firmly opposed to women's suffrage, Willard developed a complex sense of women's political duties. Her sense of a mother's and a teacher's duty extended well beyond the household and the schoolroom.

Conclusion

The duties of American women were never limited to domesticity because the domestic economy was never disconnected from the political and moral economies that organized the nation. American women of the middle class participated in all three overlapping economies through their religious and educational labor which created roles that ranged from parenting to organizing political parties. As Bruce Dorsey has shown, women and men worked together in a variety of reform causes. Education fits his picture of reform as driven by

contributions from both men and women, working together and apart. The partnerships between Emma Willard and Henry Barnard, Catharine Beecher and William Slade, and Elizabeth Peabody and Bronson Alcott are concrete examples of the role men and women together played in reform the nation.⁶⁷

Social ideas about sexual difference were not simply a way to create opportunities for women to participate in reform movements. They provided the social structures through which those movements were organized. As women took on leadership roles in educational and moral reform, the meanings of manhood and womanhood shifted. Teaching and parenting became associated with womanhood, and so did moral reform. But these shifts were not polarizing in the sense that they separated masculinity and femininity, or actual men and women. Rather, social ideas about sexual difference created polar social dynamics that allowed men and women to work side-by-side and through sex-segregated structures to reform society. This flexibility confused rigid distinctions between feminine and masculine characteristics, and created social spaces where men and women could meet and work together as citizens and as Christians.⁶⁸

Yet boundaries existed. The most important boundary, at least to historians, was the social convention against public speech by women to mixed-sexed audiences. The Grimké sisters' famous anti-slavery speeches and the split in the abolitionist movement over women's leadership are the hallmarks for historians analyzing political activism by women in the nineteenth century. This has led to a picture of women activists as either members of a vanguard espousing

political ideas about sexual equality or as a mass of unenlightened social conservatives clinging to older ideals of domesticity and cloistered women. This picture obscures the significant work of women educators and writers who did not follow the ultraist path, but who did publicly address social and political issues.

The reform work of Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher has been defined against the radical position of the Grimké sisters and the democratic activist, Frances Wright. But was Angelina Grimké's spoken address before the Massachusetts legislature really so different from Emma Willard's written address to the New York legislature in 1819? Were Frances Wright's speeches before mixed-sex audiences in New York City in 1829 really so different from Beecher's speech to an all-woman audience in New York City in 1835? Romantic histories celebrating the radical heroism of Grimké and Wright have created an impression that in the 1830s and 1840s women's public speaking and political involvement were only for the most radical women. Yet, Willard's arguments for public funding of female education and for immediate peace during the first year of the civil war and Beecher's arguments for women's duty to dedicate themselves to the education of the nation were both public and political. All four women are examples of the increasing political involvement of women during the 1830s and 1840s through the work of reform. The willingness of Grimké and Wright to address a mixed-sex audience marked them as a particular kind of political woman. The reluctance of Willard and Beecher to speak to mixed-sex audiences—a reluctance shared by Elizabeth Peabody—was an indication of a

different kind of female political engagement.

As Beecher, Peabody, and Willard used their expertise as teachers to construct a platform on which to address the nation, they respected what Beecher called the “boundaries of feminine modesty.” This was a necessary condition for creating an audience. As these women rose to national prominence, they were neither secret radicals clearing a path for women’s liberation, nor were they repressed conservatives trapped in contradictions of their own making. They were moderate reformers participating in the creation of a democratic culture. All three were identified with the expanding educational and intellectual opportunities available to women. Although they believed in intellectual equality, they grounded their understanding of women’s social roles in sexual difference, not political equality. But this was not a refusal to think or act politically. It was an attempt to act as effective agents of reform. As they entered into various reform projects and political controversies, maintaining their own reputations as respectable women was crucial both to the success of those projects and to their own sense of identity.

If respectability seems a suspect goal today, it was not for women who had ambitions to become national educational leaders in nineteenth-century America. In the 1830s, the radicalism of Frances Wright became synonymous with the extremes of working-class democratic ideas and sexual license. For conservative and moderate reformers who worked to organize evangelical reform movements, “Fanny Wrightism” represented the most threatening aspects of the

dramatic social changes of the early nineteenth century. In the 1820s, Willard, Beecher, and Peabody depended upon the good will of the wealthy families to pay tuition to their schools. In the 1830s, as these three women educators began writing for national audiences and organizing national educational movements, their social ideas about education remained aligned with wealthy, reform-minded men and women. Politically, these men and women made up the emerging Whig party, a movement that transformed the elitism and conservatism of the Federalists into a viable organization. They opposed everything Fanny Wright represented. These middle-class, reform-minded moderates were the audience for books, articles, and lectures by Willard, Beecher, and Peabody. Writing and speaking in ways that respected conventions of class and gender was neither false consciousness, nor clever stratagem. Respecting such conventions aligned women reformers against dangerous forms of radicalism and provided the opportunity to build networks of like-minded men and women and gain access to cultural institutions and financial benefactors.⁶⁹

It is tempting to cast these women in the role of conservatives, women who tried to maintain traditional family and gender roles in the face of dramatic social change. The problem with this description is that there was nothing traditional about the reforms they pursued or the ideas they espoused. The “broad Christian humanitarianism” that informed “new-school Whiggery” may have been the basis of “a revolution of American conservatism,” as Sean Wilentz describes it, but as he makes clear, this was a conservatism grounded in a new social vision

of American democracy. In the North, the Whig party brought together politically-minded reformers like William Slade, Horace Mann, and Henry Barnard with religiously-minded preachers like Lyman Beecher and William Channing to argue for a new moral vision for the nation. Women, including Willard, Beecher, and Peabody, were at the center of this intellectual and cultural network of new-school Whigs, providing much of their intellectual and organizational labor.⁷⁰

Public funding for female education, teaching as a woman's profession, and reforming the disciplinary practices of schools and prisons were expressions of this new moral and political vision. So too, was the post-Calvinist theology that liberalized doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election, popularizations of Scottish theories of political economy that emphasized sentiment and moral feeling as crucial to the expansion of markets, and the shifts in the disciplinary arrangements of the family and the schools that emphasized emotional intimacy and self control. The political expressions of these social ideas involved direct engagement with politics by both men and women in order to effect new laws and public policies supportive of their reform goals. But one issue, slavery and its abolition, came to dominate the politics of the nation. Women's central role in that issue was deeply connected to their educational labor in the home, in civil society, and in politics.

Endnotes

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1. Emma Willard, *Connecticut Common School Journal* (June 1840), 244. Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830-1860* (New York: The Institute for Research in History and The Haworth Press, 1982).
 2. For example, see *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, eds. Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
 3. The growing literature on women's participation in Whig Party suggests the 1840s were something of a watershed in terms of women's involvement in political journalism and party organizing. See Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia" *Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 494-521; Mark David Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest: The Political Theory and Practice of Evangelical Women in Antebellum America" *Journal of Church and State* 44 (2002), 477-499; Christopher Olsen, "'Molly Pitcher' of the Mississippi Whigs: The Editorial Career of Mrs. Harriet N. Prewett" *Journal of Mississippi History* 58 (1996), 237-254; Ronald and Mary Zboray, "Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press during the 1840s" *Journal of American Studies* [Great Britain] 34 (2000), 413-446 and "Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts" *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997), 277-315.
 4. A list of recently published scholarship on the nineteenth century illustrates this point: Jane Simonson, *Making Home Work : Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Betsy Klimasmith, *At Home in the City: Urban Domesticity in American Literature and Culture, 1850-1930* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2005); Julius Bailey, *Around the Family Altar: Domesticity in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Amy Richter, *Home on the Rails : Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Francesca Sawaya, *Modern Women, Modern Work: Domesticity, Professionalism, and American Writing, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Deborah De Rosa, *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830-1865* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). The most influential scholarship on domesticity shows how women both used domestic roles and resisted them in order to create meaningful lives. But even at its most complex and flexible, domesticity provides a limited understanding of the changes in women's social power during the early nineteenth century. Some of the foundational texts of women's history taking domesticity as their frame include Barbara Welter, "The Cult of

True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (summer 1966): 151-74, reprinted in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973); Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977; 2nd edition with new preface, 1997); Nina Baym, *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978, 2nd edition with a new preface, 1993); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Onieda County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford Press, 1984). None of these path-breaking studies suggested women were passive victims of a patriarchal plot to confine women to the home. Nonetheless, their focus on domesticity has contributed to a popular perception of women in the nineteenth century as little more than mothers and housewives.

Recent scholarship develops and extends this interpretive framework in important ways. See, Nicole Tonkovich, *Domesticity with a Difference: The Nonfiction of Catharine Beecher, Sarah J. Hale, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997), Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). My argument here is that although domesticity was important, its domination of the interpretive frameworks for understanding of the lives of women in the nineteenth century has obscured the importance of women's education and educational labor to the national life of the United States in the nineteenth century.

5. On the shift from wife to mother, see Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic" *William and Mary Quarterly*, 44 (1987); "Mother's Love: The Construction of an Emotion in Nineteenth-Century America" in *Social History and Issues in Human Consciousness*, ed. Andrew Barnes and Peter Stearns (New York: New York University Press, 1989); "Motherhood and the Construction of the Male Citizen in the United States, 1750-1850" in *Constructions of the Self* ed. George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

6. Stephen Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth Century American North* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1998), 25. William Alcott, Bronson Alcott's older cousin, was a physician and author who wrote advice literature for men and women. In their titles as well as their advice, his books illustrate shifts in sexual polarity with regard to parenting: *The Young Mother, or Management of Children in Regard to Health* (Boston, 1836) and *The Young Husband, or Duties of Man in the Marriage Relation* (Boston, 1840).

7. Barbara Welter, "Coming of Age in America" in *Dimity Convictions* explores the image of adolescent girls within a national and religious frame. It is an essay every bit as provocative as her more famous essay on true womanhood. On the increasingly national organization of benevolent work, see Clifford Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral*

Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1860 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960); Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Ann Boylan, *Sunday Schools: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

8. See Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Howe's suggestion that Catharine Beecher and Sara Josepha Hale represent a "feminine version of Whiggery" is especially pertinent to my argument that women participated in politics through their educational reform work. See also, Howe's analysis of Catharine Beecher in *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

9. Willard to Austin Holden, Sept. 5, 1846, quoted in Alma Lutz, *Emma Willard: Daughter of Democracy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), 226. The growing literature on women's participation in Whig Party suggests the 1840s were something of a watershed in terms of women's involvement in political journalism and party organizing. See Elizabeth Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia" *Journal of American History* 82 (1995), 494-521; Mark David Hall, "Beyond Self-Interest: The Political Theory and Practice of Evangelical Women in Antebellum America" *Journal of Church and State* 44 (2002), 477-499; Christopher Olsen, "'Molly Pitcher' of the Mississippi Whigs: The Editorial Career of Mrs. Harriet N. Prewett" *Journal of Mississippi History* 58 (1996), 237-254; Ronald and Mary Zboray, "Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press during the 1840s" *Journal of American Studies* [Great Britain] 34 (2000), 413-446 and "Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts" *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (1997), 277-315.

10. On Emerson's professional development see Mary Kupiec Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Henry Nash Smith, "Emerson's Problem of Vocation" in *Emerson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, eds. Milton Ridvas Konvitz and Stephen E. Whicher (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962). On the cultural history of lecturing see David M. Scott, "The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth Century America" *The Journal of American History* 66 (1980) 791-809.

11. Sklar, *Beecher*, xiii.

12. Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (1978; rev. ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 27.

13. The address was published under the title of *An Essay on the Education of Female Teachers* in New York and in Cincinnati in 1835. See Sklar, *Beecher*, 113.

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14. Beecher, *Education of Female Teachers* is reprinted in *Pioneers of Women's Education in the United States*, ed. Willystine Goodsell (1931; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1970), 182 & 186.
15. Quoted in Sklar, *Beecher*, 102.
16. Sklar, *Beecher*, 123.
17. For a comprehensive account of the Lane Seminary controversy and Lyman Beecher's trial for heresy, see Vincent Harding, *A Certain Magnificence: Lyman Beecher and the Transformation of American Protestantism, 1775-1863* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991).
18. "An Essay on Cause and Effect" was published in the *Biblical Repository* 2 (October 1839): 381-408. That essay, along with *Letters on the Difficulties of Religion* and *To those Commencing a Religious Life* are reprinted in volume two of *The Social, Political and Philosophical Works of Catharine Beecher, Six Volumes*, ed. Therese Dykeman and Dorothy Rogers (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002), hereafter referred to as *Works of Beecher*. On Beecher's 1833 attempts to moderate the extremes of conservative supporters of Colonization and radical supporters of immediate abolition in ways that anticipated Catharine's *Essay on Abolitionism* four years later, see Harding, *Certain Magnificence*, 38-340.
19. Sklar, *Beecher*, 124. On the theological development of theology and morality of the Beecher family, see Stephen Snyder, *Lyman Beecher and His Children: The Transformation of a Religious Tradition* (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1991).
20. These texts are collected in volume five of *Works of Beecher*.
21. Catharine Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841; reprint New York: Source Book Press, 1970), 13. Page numbers in text hereafter.
22. *Duty of American Women* in *Works of Beecher, Vol. 4*, 69.
23. *The Evils Suffered* in *Works of Beecher, Vol. 4*, 12.
24. *The Evils Suffered* in *Works of Beecher, Vol. 4*, 12.
25. *The Evils Suffered* in *Works of Beecher, Vol. 4*, 12.
26. *To Benevolent Ladies in the United States* in *Vol. 4*, 22.
27. *The True Remedy for the Wrongs of Woman; with a History of an Enterprise Having that for its Object* in *Works of Beecher Vol. 5*, 1.
28. *The True Remedy* in *Works of Beecher Vol. 5*, 243-245. On Beecher's personal and intellectual involvement with the water-cure movement see, Sklar, *Beecher*, 205-209.
29. The "literary" Peabody can be seen in the scholarship on American romanticism that extends as far back as Perry Miller, *The American Transcendentalists, Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957) and continues up to Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005). The "educational" Peabody is on display in Ruth Baylor, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, Kindergarten Pioneer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965) and Elizabeth Dale Ross, *The Kindergarten Crusade: The Establishment of Preschool Education in the United States* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976). Bruce Rhonda, *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on Her Own Terms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) successfully brings the two Peabodys together in one

comprehensive account of her life.

30. *The Transcendentalists*, ed. Perry Miller, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 12.

31. Barber Packer, “The Transcendentalists” in the *Cambridge History of American Literature, Volume 2, 1820-1865*, ed. Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 388.

32. Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, *Record of a School, Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture*, 1st ed. (Boston: J. Monroe, 1835); *Record of a School : Exemplifying the General Principles of Spiritual Culture*, (Boston: Russell Shattuck & Company, 1836).

33. *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*, ed. Odell Shepard (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1938), 64; Bronson Alcott, *Essays on Education, 1830-1862* (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1960). 45.

34. Margaret Fuller. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century, A Norton Critical Edition* ed. Larry Reynolds, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 47.

35. Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 3.

36. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Letters, 1853-1856*, ed. Thomas Woodson. Vol. 17 of the *Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbus: Ohio State Press, 1987), 304. For an illuminating discussion of the phrase’s career in American literary scholarship, see Nina Baym “Again and Again, The Scribbling Women” in *Hawthorne and Women: Engendering and Expanding the Hawthorne Tradition*, eds. John L. Idol Jr. and Melinda M. Ponder (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). Catharine Sedgwick called Peabody a “woman of genius” in her review of “Record of a School” in *The Knickerbocker* (February 1836), 129.

37. Richard Brodhead, *Culture of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1993), 17-18. *Record of a School* (1836; Reprint edition, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 24. Page numbers in text hereafter. For the argument that this is a primal scene of American literature, consider the presentation of school discipline in Washington Irving’s *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Men*, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Laura Ingles Wilder’s *Little House* series, and the 1955 film *Blackboard Jungle*.

38. Brodhead, *Culture of Letters*, 16.

39. Brodhead, *Culture of Letters*, 17.

40. Frank, *Life with Father*, 25.

41. The key documents of this debate,—Mann’s “Seventh Annual Report,” his opponents’ “Remarks on the Seventh Annual Report of the Hon. Horace Mann, Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education” and Mann’s “Reply to the ‘Remarks’ of Thirty-One Boston Schoolmasters on the Seventh Annual Report”—are collected in *The School Controversy* (Boston: 1844). For Brodhead’s discussion of these texts in the context of disciplinary intimacy, see *Culture of Letters*, 23-25. Michael Katz views the controversy through the lens of his concerns over bureaucratic centralization in *The Irony of Early School Reform: Educational Innovation in Mid-Nineteenth Century*

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- Massachusetts* (1968; Rev. Ed. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001), 139-153. Another controversy, this one pitting religious conservatives against Mann's nonsectarian vision for public schools, also swirled in 1844. The attacks along with Mann's replies are collected in *The Common School Controversy* (Boston: J. Bradley and Co., 1844).
42. On the Brookline controversy, see Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*, 166-170.
43. On Sophia's role in the Temple School, see Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*, 323-330.
44. *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* (Boston: James Munroe & Co., 1837), vi-vii; *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody* ed. Bruce Rhonda (Middletown: Wesley University Press, 1984), 180-181.
45. On the domestic controversy between Peabody and the Alcotts in the context of the failure of the Temple School, see Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*, 324-326.
46. Horace Mann's letter to Elizabeth Peabody is quoted from Marshall, *Peabody Sisters*, 541-542.
47. For details of Peabody's life during this period, see Ronda, *Peabody*, 210-300.
48. Ronda, *Peabody*, 293-294, 300. Mary and Elizabeth collaborated on *Moral Culture of Infancy and Kindergarten Guide* (Boston: Burnham, 1863). Peabody's publications for the US Commissioner of Education were *Kindergarten Culture*. Reprinted from the Annual report for 1870 of the National Commissioner of Education (Washington DC: James H. Holmes, N.D.) and *The Kindergarten* (Washington DC, Government Printing Office, 1872).
49. The focus on Willard's work in female education is due in large part to the influence of Anne Firor Scott's work, especially "What, Then, is the American: This New Woman?" and "The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary, 1822-1872" collected in *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). There has been no comparable work on Willard's later life, nor has there been a book-length biography of her since Alma Lutz published hers in 1929.
50. On the mutually beneficial, professional relationship between Willard and Barnard, see Edith Nye MacMullen, *In the Cause of True Education: Henry Barnard & Nineteenth Century Educational Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 86-88 and 198-200.
51. Lutz, *Daughter of Democracy*, 6-8.
52. On the ideas of the common school movement, see Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).
53. This account of Willard's first day of teaching first appears in Henry Fowler, "Educational Services of Mrs. Emma Willard" in *Educational Biography: Memoirs of Teachers, Educators, and Promoters and Benefactors of Education, Literature, and Science*, ed. Henry Barnard (1861; Reprint Boston: Arno Press, Inc., 1969), but is clearly quoted from another document, possibly a lost memoir or sketch by Willard. The story reprinted from Fowler appears in *Woman's "True" Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching, Second Ed.*, ed. Nancy Hoffman (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2003), 51-53.

54. *Letter, Addressed as a Circular to the Members of the Willard Association for the Mutual Improvement of Female Teachers* (Troy, NY: Published by Elias Gates, 1838),

26. This and many other key documents related to Emma Willard are reprinted in *The Papers of Emma Hart Willard, 1787-1870*, eds. Lucy F. Townsend and Barbara Wiley (Bethesda, MD : UPA collection from LexisNexis, 2005). Hereafter referred to as *Emma Willard Papers*..

55. Letter is quoted from John Lord, *The Life of Emma Willard* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1873), 183-184. Like many of the letters quoted in Lord, this one was either lost or destroyed.

56. For a comprehensive account of Willard's marriage and divorce from Christopher Yates see, Lucy Townsend and Barbara Wiley, "The Divorce of a Domestic Educator: The Case of Emma Willard" *Review Journal of Philosophy and Social Science* 27 (2002).

57. Anonymous, "Review of New Books Letter Addressed as a Circular..." *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine and American Monthly Review* (February 1839), 124-125. The controversy continued in print with *The Reviewer of Mrs. Emma Willard Reviewed* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman & Co., 1839) and "The Reviewer of Mrs. Emma Willard Reviewed" *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine and American Monthly Review* (June 1839) available in the *Emma Willard Papers*.

58. "Review of New Books: Letter Addressed as a Circular...", 125. On Willard's falling out with Hale see, "Letter to Lydia Sigourney" from August 23rd, 1839. On their reconciliation, see Willard to Lydia Sigourney Sept. 18, 1846 (Reel 3, Frame 0133 in *Emma Willard Papers*).

59. Fowler, "Educational Services of Mrs. Emma Willard," 161. Much of the confusion over Willard's "election" to the superintendency is due to Willard's own description in a 1846 letter to Austin Holden, the superintendent of common schools in Warren County, New York which is likely Fowler's source. In that letter, Willard describes her role as "that of "superintendent or overseer" of schools and suggests that this "was the first time that an elective office has been conferred upon a woman in this, or perhaps any republican country." At the time, in a letter to Henry Barnard reprinted in the *Connecticut Common School Journal* (June 1840), she described the situation differently: an address by Willard that was read at a "festival of the common schools" of Kensington "induced a vote of the society to give me an invitation 'to take charge of the common schools for the ensuing season.'" There is no mention of a parish-wide vote, or a superintendent position in 1840.

Writing to an elected superintendent perhaps led Willard to slightly exaggerate just how "elected" her own position in Kensington had been. But her description of herself as an "elected superintendent" was aimed, as she puts it later in the same letter, at enlarging women's sphere, "from the walls of their own houses to the limits of the school district." (Willard to A. W. Holden, Reel 3, Frame 0117, *Emma Willard Papers*).

60. Willard looks back on her collaboration with Barnard and its importance to her own standing as an educational reformer in an 1852 letter to Barnard (Willard to Henry Barnard, Reel 3, Frame 0606, *Emma Willard Papers*).

61. "Berlin. Kensington, or Third School Society [Report] *Connecticut Common School*

Journal 2 (June 1840), 13 in *Emma Willard Papers*.

62. Emma Willard, *An Address to the Public, particularly to the Members of the Legislature of New York, Proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education* (Middlebury: J. W. Copeland, (1819) Willard's *Plan* is reprinted in *Pioneers of Women's Education in the United States*, ed. Willystine Goodsell (1931; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1970), 71-73.

63. Histories of the Parent Teacher Association are resolutely focused on the twentieth century, tracing the organization back to the first meeting of the National Congress of Mothers in 1897. For example, see Charlene Haar, *The Politics of the PTA* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002) and Julian Butterworth, *The Parent-Teacher Association and its Work* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929).

64. "The Relation of Females and Mothers Especially to the Cause of Common School Improvement" was first published in the *Connecticut Common School Journal* (March 1842). It was reprinted in the *Teachers Advocate* (November 1846) in abridged form. Both are in *Emma Willard Papers*. The official report is from "Berlin, First School Society [Report]," *Connecticut Common School Journal* (November 15, 1840).

65. On the impact of the election of 1842 on Barnard's professional life, see MacMullen, *Cause of True Education*, 94-99. Willard discussed her plans regarding a Normal School and the possibility of an educational journal in an exchange of letters with her sister Almira which are included in Lord, *The Life of Emma Willard*, 209-215.

66. The "Memorial" circulated as a pamphlet in 1861 and was presented to Congress in March of that year with the signatures of over 4,000 women. See Lutz, *Daughter of Democracy*, 250-251.

67. Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) focuses on four major areas of reform: poverty, drink, slavery, and immigration. Education is another area that benefits from the framework he uses to ask questions about the dynamic relations between men and women in reform movements.

68. See Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 11-49 for a particularly insightful discussion of this topic.

69. Lori D. Ginzberg, "Fanny Wright," in *The American Radical* eds. Buhle, Buhle, and Kaye (New York: Routledge, 17-23). Celia Morris, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

70. Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2005), 490-493.

Chapter Four

Black Antigone: Abolition and the Educational Labor of Women

“There are scattered among us materials for mournful tragedies and mirth-provoking comedies, which some hand may yet bring into the literature of the country...”

-Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy*

Black women entered civil society through a different path than that taken by Catharine Beecher, Emma Willard, or Elizabeth Peabody. Women such as Maria Stewart, Harriet Jacobs, and Frances Harper began their public careers as advocates of racial equality and the abolition of slavery, not as teachers. By writing and speaking as representatives of their race and of their sex, they helped create a new political language of liberty and established the presence of formerly enslaved and free black people in the movement for abolition. During the 1830s through the 1850s, the majority of their educational labor consisted of literary and political efforts to end slavery. These included Stewart’s public addresses in Boston, Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Harper’s anti-slavery addresses and poetry. To be sure, there were black women teachers in the North, and “unofficial” black women educators in the South, but there was no “feminization” of teaching for African-Americans until after the Civil War.

During Reconstruction, opportunities for black women to teach proliferated in the South. As abolitionist societies reformed themselves into associations for supporting freed slaves, support for northern women, black and white, to go South to teach provided Harriet Jacobs, Charlotte Forten, Mary Peake and many others opportunities as teachers and writers. This group of women established teaching as a female profession for black women and created the school alongside the church, as a social location for the

educational labor for middle-class black women. There were struggles between black teachers and white teachers over control of funds, curriculum development, and school leadership, but the model that emerged was a political process in which Northern white philanthropy provided the infrastructure for a separate system of schools for black children.¹

This chapter argues that race is central to understanding the political effects of women's educational labor. Like Willard, Beecher and Peabody, Maria Stewart, Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper created the institutions of civil society through their educational labor. Sometimes this labor was aimed at racial uplift, as with teaching in black schools or forming blacks-only organizations. Sometimes it was explicitly biracial, as with work in radical abolitionist societies or publishing anti-slavery literature. But always, performing the educational labor of anti-slavery and racial uplift required complex negotiation with predominantly white social and economic structures. The fundamental difference between white women and black women was the means through which they established roles in civil society. For white women, these roles were created through promoting female education and in finding useful labor for educated women. Black women's educational labor was first organized through the work of anti-slavery and through activism and writing that included both the educational labor of racial uplift and the political work of abolishing slavery.

Black Antigone

Following her husband's death, Maria Stewart had a conversion experience similar to many evangelical Protestants in the nineteenth century. She was "brought to

the knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus in 1830.” During the following three years, Stewart made public professions of her faith, preached in various locations around Boston, and published essays and lectures in William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*. Finding truth in Jesus led Stewart to “devote the remainder of her days to piety and virtue” and gave her the strength to “possess that spirit of independence” that would lead her to say that she would die for “the cause of God and my brethen.” She became a “doer of the word,” the phrase that Carla Peterson uses to describe the religious and cultural work performed by Stewart and other black women activists of the nineteenth century.²

The development of white women’s schooling in the early decades of the republic created greater opportunities for women to teach. Black women’s educational labor appears to have developed differently. Abolition mobilized women such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs to write and speak for radical abolition and some northern free black women did teach school, especially in urban areas in the North where there were large, free black populations. Perhaps because there were so few opportunities for educated black men, female teachers did not outnumbered male teachers in northern black schools during the nineteenth century. It was not until the end of the Civil War that large numbers of black women entered the teaching profession in the newly created schools of the defeated southern states.³

Stewart’s dramatic role as an advocate for women’s educational labor in civil society serves as an important reminder that despite discrimination and limited opportunities, black women were actively involved in moral and social reform

movements in the nineteenth century. Their experiences were often starkly different than the women teachers, writers, and organizers described in the previous chapters. In 1833, as Emma Willard arranged to publish journals and letters from her trip to Europe, Stewart left Boston believing it was “no use for me as an individual to try to make myself useful among my color in this city.” In 1837, as Peabody was reading positive reviews of her *Record of a School* and Beecher was beginning work on *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, Harriet Jacobs lay hidden in her grandmother’s storeroom hoping to escape North Carolina and slavery. In recognizing the racial social structures that prevented black women from following the same paths as white women, it is important to see the extent to which black women understood their opportunities in terms similar to the moral economy of women’s educational labor described in chapter two.⁴

Despite the fundamental differences, black women engaged in the same forms of educational labor as white women. After moving to New York City, Stewart published a collection of her writing, became a schoolteacher, and joined anti-slavery and literary societies. Following her escape in 1842 Harriet Jacobs entered the service of the Willis family as governess and later wrote a narrative of her life, which was published as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1860. During the Civil War, Jacobs and Charlotte Forten, who taught in the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia, were among the first northern teachers and to begin providing educational and social services to slaves freed by the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1864, Jacobs ran a school in Alexandria, Virginia with her daughter, Louisa. Following the war, Harriet and Louisa joined the hundreds of

women, black and white, who traveled to the south in order to teach schools for newly freed slaves.

The educational labor of Stewart and Jacobs was not political in the narrow sense of working for the state or for political parties, yet they engaged in the most profoundly political work of the nineteenth century, ending slavery and working for racial equality. Abolition involved the labor of men and women, blacks and whites. Much of this labor was explicitly educational. Publications like *The Liberator* or Frederick Douglass's *The North Star*, lectures like those of the Grimké sisters and Sojourner Truth, and organizations like the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society organized the educational labor of men and women. Abolition was different from the projects discussed in earlier chapters. Women created very little controversy when they spoke about education, taught in common and Sabbath schools, wrote novels and textbooks, or formed benevolent organizations. This was not the case with abolition. In the tension-filled debates over slavery, women's presence created a great deal of controversy over what Catharine Beecher had called "the boundaries of feminine modesty." This was as true for black women as it was for white women.

Very little is known about Maria Stewart's early education. She reports that she was "deprived of the advantages of education" as a young girl, but that at fifteen she began attending Sunday schools (28). Presumably, that experience included instruction in reading and writing. Unlike Emma Willard or Elizabeth Peabody, Maria Stewart did not begin her educational labor as a schoolteacher, but as a writer and public lecturer. Stewart addressed black audiences in Boston aiming "to enforce upon your minds the

great necessity of turning your attention to knowledge and improvement.” She published her writing in William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, and so her words were also aimed at the wider, biracial group of abolitionists whose numbers were growing in the 1830s.

The difference between Emma Willard and Maria Stewart was not only in the educational opportunities they had as girls. Economic security was far more precarious for black women, even those of the small, black middle class. Stewart was cheated out of a large inheritance she was due following her husband’s death. Unlike Willard’s teaching career, Stewart did not have opportunities beyond manual or domestic labor to work for wages. As a black woman struggling to define her place in civil society she encountered difficulties unimagined by women like Willard or Beecher. Yet, Stewart like the two white women created a social role grounded in her educational labor and a in her evangelical call to other women to perform such labor.

In *Religion and The Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build* (1831), she called upon her black sisters to “Awake! Arise! No longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties.” These faculties are at once intellectual and moral, and must be directed toward the labor of educating future generations. “What examples have ye set before the rising generation? What foundation have ye laid for generations yet unborn?” (30-31). For Stewart, as for Beecher, this foundation is an evangelical Protestantism that stresses moral virtue as the necessary condition for social reform. Women are the keepers of virtue, and through their influence, they promote

virtue in society. Stewart wrote, “Did the daughters of our land possess a delicacy of manners, combined with gentleness and dignity; did their pure minds hold vice in abhorrence and contempt, did they frown when their ears were polluted with its vile accents, would not their influence become powerful? Would not our brethen fall in love with their virtues?” (30-31).

Like the ideals of republican womanhood articulated by Emma Willard, Stewart’s understanding of female influence operates through social ideas about marriage and motherhood. But it also incorporates female education. “O woman, woman, would thou only strive to excel in merit and virtue; would thou only store thy mind with useful knowledge, great would be thine influence” (31).

For Stewart, the purpose of this influence is the uplift of her race, not simply the reform of American society. In a lecture given in 1832, she sharply distinguishes her own social position from that of whites—“Few white persons of either sex, who are calculated for anything else, are willing to spend their lives and bury their talents in performing mean, servile labor”— even as she asserts her membership in American society—“I am a true born American; your blood flows in my veins, and your spirit fires my breast” (46). In Stewart’s rhetoric, the Christian ethic of sacrifice for the nation is embodied most clearly in American black women’s labor.

By asserting both her difference and her fundamental Americanness, Stewart followed her model, abolitionist David Walker. Walker died in 1830, possibly poisoned by pro-slavery enemies. As Stewart began her public speaking, his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* was at the height of its popularity, having just been printed for its

third and final time. Walker's heated attack on the hypocrisy of white Americans inspired Stewart even as she adapted and altered his ideas. Carla Peterson has suggested that Stewart's lectures represent "a reconfiguration of the black jeremiad as articulated by Walker" by directing the invective "primarily against her own people rather than her people's oppressors." This reconfiguration allowed Stewart to offer examples of white America for her community to emulate. Thus, even as she criticizes racial prejudice and social inequality between black and white, Stewart held up "American ladies" efforts for domestic and educational reform as a worthy example for black Bostonians.⁵

The American ladies have the honor conferred on them, that by prudence and economy in their domestic concerns, and their unwearied attention in forming the minds and manners of their children, they laid the foundation of their becoming what they now are...Why cannot we do something to distinguish ourselves, and contribute some of our hard earnings that would reflect honor upon our memories, and cause our children to arise and call us blessed? (37).

Stewart goes on to propose a plan for "the building of a High School" so that "the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us." She then suggests "Let each one strive to excel in good housewifery, knowing that prudence and economy are the road to wealth" (38). As with Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, it would be easy to see Maria Stewart's exaltation "to excel in good housewifery" as evidence she operated under the constraints of "true womanhood" and "separate spheres." Like Beecher, Stewart understood domesticity as part of a larger educational project, one that included evangelical preaching, eliminating racial prejudice, and uplifting her race through building educational institutions. A woman might strive to be a good wife and mother, but the means she had to exercise her influence included educational labor outside the

home. For Stewart, that meant the religious and educational labor of professing the word of God in the cause of moral reform. This work placed her those institutions central to civil society during this period, the church and the lecture hall.

As Fanny Wright already knew, and the Grimké sisters would soon discover, the lecture hall was not a comfortable place for women addressing mixed-sex, what was then called promiscuous” audiences. Wright caused a sensation when she gave a series of lectures in New York City in 1829. The Grimkés caused an even greater controversy in the late 1830s when they addressed promiscuous audiences in support of abolition. Beyond her own words, little is know about the response of black Boston to Stewart’s public lectures. In addition to the essay *Religion and Pure Principles of Morality* published in *The Liberator*, she gave four lectures in public places in Boston including a lecture to The Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America, and “An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall” which was advertised as “convenient to accommodate ladies and gentlemen” (56). Stewart was among many women, white and black, who were creating the new cultural and social roles of female teacher, female writer, and female lecturer during the 1830s.

Her last public address, published in *The Liberator* as “Mrs. Stewart’s Farewell Address to Her Friends In The City of Boston” hints that she had been criticized for overstepping her bounds. Stewart writes, “St. Paul declared that it was a shame for a woman to speak in public, yet our great High Priest and Advocate did not condemn the woman for a more notorious offence than this.” She goes on to suggest that “Did St. Paul but know of our wrongs and deprivations, I presume he would make no objections to our

pleading in public for our rights” (68). Stewart is working within a tradition of evangelical Christianity that is deeply conflicted over women’s public action. Like Emma Willard’s interpretation of Paul’s injunction— “St. Paul has said they must not speak in churches, but he has nowhere said they must not speak in school-houses”—Stewart is seeking a justification for the necessarily social and political aspects of women’s educational labor.

Stewart’s justification for taking the public stage is religious feeling, expressed both in a sense of historical necessity and as an attempt to educate her people away from sin and error. She says not to be surprised “that God at this eventful period should raise up your own females to strive, by their example both in public and private, to assist those who are endeavoring to stop the strong current prejudice that flows so profusely against us at present.” But she also speaks of “contempt for my moral and religious opinions in private that drove me before a public” (69-70). Carla Peterson suggests that Stewart’s fluid understanding of private and public may represent “a kind of cultural unconsciousness” that recalls West African societies that do not make sharp distinctions between women’s involvement in the domestic life and the political community. But Stewart need not have reached into her cultural past for models of female political interventions. Such interventions were part of the democratic political culture in which she lived.⁶

The moral economy of women’s educational labor that led Emma Willard to ask for public funding for female education or Catharine Beecher to organize resistance to the Cherokee removal are surely related to Maria Stewart’s taking the speaking platform.

The Grimké sisters are the most famous example of the way private religious feelings about sin and moral error could drive women “before a public.” The moral and spiritual obligations of Protestant Christianity were important to the educational labor of Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, and Elizabeth Peabody. For the most part, the public reaction to these women who went before the public was relatively muted. Despite some reactionary essays or statements in periodicals, there was no major backlash against women’s public speaking, writing, and organizing in support of female education and moral reform.

Like Frances Wright in New York City, Maria Stewart apparently sparked some controversy, but the historical record is silent on what form the controversy took. In 1833, Stewart left Boston and moved to New York City, where continued her education and joined the “Female Literary Society” and attended the Women’s Anti-Slavery Convention held in New York in 1837. In 1853, she moved to Baltimore and Washington DC where she taught Sunday schools and in small private schools for younger children. In 1879, she republished her earlier essays and addresses under the name *Meditations From The Pen of Mrs. Maria A. Stewart*” and died later that year.⁷

As Maria Stewart was giving her farewell address in Boston during the fall of 1833, Harriet Jacobs was giving birth to her second child, Louisa. A slave, Jacobs hoped to be purchased by her children’s father and freed, but her jealous owner refused to sell. Two years later Jacobs ran away, determined to escape North to freedom. The dramatic story of her escape is told in one of the best-known slave narratives, her autobiographical *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Like Maria Stewart and many other northern women, Harriet and Louisa Jacobs became schoolteachers in the years following the Civil War. With support from abolitionist friends, they founded the Jacobs school in Alexandria, Virginia in 1864. In fact, Harriet's work in Alexandria began earlier. Traveling to Union-occupied northern Virginia, Jacobs reported on the need for abolitionist to shift their work from anti-slavery to support for newly freed slaves. In 1862, Alexandria and Washington DC were being filled by slaves who escaped the war-ravaged South. These "contrabands" faced harsh living conditions as war refugees, and Jacobs wrote about their difficulties in an essay for *The Liberator* called "Life Among the Contrabands." As Jean Fagan Yellin suggests, the voice Jacobs uses in this essay is very different from the deferential (to her white abolitionist readers) tone in *Incidents*. Yellin writes that in *The Liberator* piece, Jacobs "writes without explanations or apologies, addressing her audience as equals, an audience with whom she shares the values of hard work, literacy, cleanliness, and Christianity. She assumes that Garrison and his readers know who she is and that they value her words. In the deliberate, compassionate manner of a teacher, she informs her readers of the plight of the less fortunate."⁸

As Yellin's description suggests, Harriet Jacobs was writing for an audience of middle-class reformers as a member of the middle-class. She describes the conditions of the refugees in terms that are meant to open the hearts and wallets of Northerners. Although much of her report consists of the material needs of the freed slaves, she also attends to their educational needs suggesting that "their great desire to learn to read" be met with "female teachers who could do something more than teach them their A,B,C,

They need to be taught the right habits of living and the true principles of life.”

Jacobs’s appeal is aimed at mobilizing her northern audience’s benevolence, but she also aims at mobilizing young women’s educational labor for the task of educating freed slaves.⁹

After the end of the Civil War and the establishment of the Freedman’s Bureau, Harriet and Louisa left Virginia for newly freed Savannah, Georgia. Like hundreds of northern women teachers, they found schools struggling with the needs of post-war reconstruction, especially the overwhelming desire of freed slaves for education. As in Alexandria, Jacobs chronicled her experiences for the formerly abolitionist press, this time for *The Freed-Man*, a British publication. Although her primary purpose in writing for the abolitionist press is to generate support and charitable donations for freed people, she is also demonstrating her own capacity for living and teaching “the right habits of living.” Once again, Jacobs performs her own middle-class status by marking the difference between her own role as a chronicler and a teacher, and the status of the former slaves she describes.

Jacobs ignores her own status as a former slave and her own race in offering her first-hand account of the contrabands. She speaks as a middle-class woman reporting on the conditions in the South. She uses dialect when rendering her conversations with freed people. For the report to *The Freed-Man* she describes one old woman who tells her “We hear miss ob de kind of tings you hab sent to de poor; we come to beg for any ting you can spare.” In “Life Among the Contraband” she writes of a poor mother who was willing to take in an orphan despite a house full of her own children, “I said to this

mother ‘What can you do with this child, shut up here with your own? There are as many as you can attend to.’” The mother replied that her husband works for the Union “when dey pay him. I can make home for all. Dis child shall hab part of the crust.”¹⁰

The contrast between Jacobs’s prose and the freed women’s dialect reflects the class difference between them. Jacobs identifies herself with the middle-class benevolence of her readers and the freed women as deserving of the benevolence. The old woman’s grateful neediness and the mother’s willingness to take care of the orphan render them worthy of benevolence. But Jacobs’s role is to educate her readers about these things. She herself does not ask for benevolence, nor does she describe herself in maternal terms.

Jacobs and other women who traveled to the South in the years following the war, understood themselves as teachers, and as respectable members of the middle class. Teaching became for black women what it had already become for white women in the North: a means for respectable independence. Although the promise of post-war reforms collapsed in the aftermath of the election of 1876, the elements of that era that survived—black churches and black schools—provided the social and economic means of establishing the black middle class and of launching the careers of black intellectuals and educators.¹¹

Sisters and Abolitionism: Moderate Abolitionism and White Women’s Anti-slavery Labor

Debates over slavery played out within families as well as within the nation. In fact, the issue of slavery and its abolition ran through American civil society mobilizing

women's educational labor for political intervention in the question of slavery. There is no more significant example of this labor than Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which is as much an expression of the Beecher family's political and theological development as it is the individual thought of its author. From Lyman's controversy at Lane Seminary to Catharine's exchange with Angelina Grimké to Henry Ward's radical embrace of John Brown, Harriet's publication of her anti-slavery novel was part of a Beecher family tradition of taking public positions on abolition. The Beecher's growing radicalism over the question of slavery reflected the development of many reform-minded moderates who responded to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law with outrage.

Elizabeth Peabody was another moderate reformer who became increasingly radical after 1850. Her struggle with her sister Sofia and brother-in-law Nathaniel Hawthorne is another example of the way slavery figured in both family and national affairs. The argument began with Sophia and Nathaniel Hawthorne's refusal to allow their daughter Una to read letters Elizabeth Peabody wrote regarding anti-slavery—letters Elizabeth believed essential to Una's moral development. In addition to letters the Hawthornes deemed too graphic in their descriptions of slavery, Peabody sent an abolitionist pamphlet she had written. When Hawthorne returned the pamphlet unread, Peabody resent it. Irritated, Hawthorne responded by criticizing her writing: "Upon my word, it is not very good; not worthy of being sent three times across the ocean; no so good as I supposed you would always write, on a subject in which your mind and heart were interested." In an earlier letter, Hawthorne criticized Peabody by lumping her with

abolitionists writing that “like every other Abolitionist” she “looks at matters with an awful squint, which distorts everything within your line of vision,” and that they “think everybody squints except yourselves.” The Hawthornes believed they were protecting Una from her aunt’s “distorted” politics. Sofia defended their decision to censor Peabody’s letters to Una , writing that it was a relief to have Una away from “all the excessive and morbid excitement of America” over slavery.¹²

The family drama was heightened by the anti-slavery positions of Elizabeth’s other brother-in-law, Horace Mann, who had replaced John Quincy Adams in the US Congress. The family was split with Mann a leading Whig, and Hawthorne firmly a Democrat. Hawthorne owed his appointment to the Democratic President, Franklin Pierce, whose campaign biography Hawthorne had written. After Mary and Elizabeth both questioned the Hawthornes’ moral understanding of slavery, Sophia suggested that her sisters imagined that she had been “corrupted by being in a democratic aura.” Sophia continued, “It seems stereotyped into your mind that I have personal reasons for defending slavery, because you think Mr. Pierce defends it and other administrative men, and that because Mr. Hawthorne has accepted a post from Government, he therefore subscribes to everyone of its opinions, and modes of action, and that as he does, I do, of course, and so on.” Sophia’s defensiveness on the issue and Nathaniel’s critique of Elizabeth’s anti-slavery activism reflected political and moral divisions over abolition. But they also reflected family disagreements and guilt over the recent deaths of the Peabody sisters’ parents, who died while the Hawthornes were abroad.¹³

The family drama among the Peabody sisters was more complex than a simple division between pro- and anti-slavery positions. Slavery was always bound up with other issues, domestic and political. So too, were debates among women activists over the boundaries of their anti-slavery labor. The famous exchange between Angelina Grimké and Catharine Beecher was over those precise boundaries, not over whether women should engage in politics. The differences were drawn primarily in terms of Christian beliefs about women's social roles and the subtext of the debate was a battle over whether Beecher or Grimké would exert leadership over the growing numbers of abolitionist women. The politics of this struggle played out within the anti-slavery movement, as debates over methods political engagement, the roles of black activists, and the question of the boundaries of women's labor fragmented the national organizations. Despite these conflicts, or perhaps because of them, the anti-slavery movement created opportunities for a number of women, including black women, to take leading national roles in politics and education.

The Grimké sisters grew up in a slave household in South Carolina, and so relied on their personal knowledge to testify and argue for their cause. Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet grew up in an abolitionist household, and had their own personal knowledge of when anti-slavery mobs in Cincinnati turned violent. They were living in Ohio as their father was caught up in the abolitionist controversies at Lane Seminary that derailed his career. The Beecher sisters' experiences led them to argue for a less confrontational form of anti-slavery labor than that advocated by the Grimké sisters. But the differences should not obscure the fact that both sets of sisters were abolitionists

during a period in which all those advocating the end of slavery were regarded with hostility. By the 1850s, the Grimke sisters had all but abandoned the work of abolition, but the Beecher sisters remained at the center of the controversy through the Civil War.

The very different political climates of 1837 and 1851 have led to some confusion over the differences between Catharine and Harriet on the issue of slavery. In 1837, Catharine's defense of moderate abolitionism on the British model seems conservative in contrast to Grimké's Garrisonian radicalism. In 1851, due to the electrifying effect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the entire nation, Harriet seemed as much an ultraist as Grimke. In fact, the two Beecher sisters take the same moderate position on abolition. The differences between Catharine's essay and Harriet's novel are of form and political context, not social ideas. In fact, Harriet's representation of women's educational labor for anti-slavery follows Catharine's ideas about female influence. There are no fiery Garrisonian women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but there are a number of women exercising their influence within the moral economy of education. From Mrs. Bird's lessons for Senator Bird on the Fugitive Slave Law to Eva's lessons on disciplinary intimacy for Ophelia and Topsy, the work of anti-slavery education proceeds through the terms of female influence laid out by Catharine Beecher in the 1820s and 1830s.

Angelina Grimké's own ideas about women's educational labor need to be understood in the context of Beecher's ideas about female influence. The Grimkés pushed the boundaries of modesty further than Beecher did, but like Beecher's work against Cherokee removal and in organizing female teachers, the Grimkés were attempting to create a female role for educating the nation. The Grimké sisters decision to

speaking radical ideas to mixed-sex audiences in 1836 provoked a much stronger conservative reaction than Beecher's addresses on education. The Congregationalist Church of Massachusetts issued its *Pastoral Letter* condemning "those who encourage females to bear an obtrusive and ostentatious part in measures of reform, and countenance any of that sex who so far forget themselves as to itinerate in the character of public lecturers and teachers." This condemnation could have been aimed at Beecher as much as Grimké, and Beecher's essay tried to establish that her theory of female influence did not violate Protestant doctrines about the role of women in civil society. The possibility of a backlash against educated women acting in public would have seemed as real in 1837 as the possibility of a backlash against gay marriage does today.¹⁴

The Grimkés' arguments about female educational labor directly address the difficult problem of women's social roles within the Protestant tradition. St. Paul's attempts to organize the church around exclusively male authority in the early days of Christianity can be countered with the essentially egalitarian message of Jesus's own words. To the Massachusetts ministers' account of the New Testament as stating that "woman's duties are unobtrusive and private," Sarah Grimké protests "against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the MEN who undertook to write commentaries thereon." She references the "Sermon on the Mount" which she says does not "reference sex or condition."¹⁵

Of course, the most serious danger to the Grimkés was not the anxiety of conservative ministers over the rising numbers and influence of female reformers and

teachers, but the violent mobs of anti-abolitionists who were beating people in the street and burning down buildings. The growing civil violence, as well as the threat of backlash against women reformers, are important contexts for understanding Catharine Beecher's entry into public debates over abolitionism. Beecher responded to Angelina Grimké's *Appeal* in order to direct female influence toward peaceful solutions to the problem of slavery, not simply to limit or deflect women's involvement in anti-slavery.

Beecher's *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with reference to the Duty of American Females* is sometimes interpreted as if it was little more than a restatement of the *Pastoral Letter*, directing women to use their influence only within their domestic lives. However, Beecher's address was a *published* address by a woman, so its very form asserted a public role for women in the controversy. Like the ministers who published *The Pastoral Letter*, Beecher was asserting her leadership in a time of great conflict and violence. Although she shares the conservative clergy's assumptions about, as they put it, the "social influences which females use in promoting piety and the great objects of christian benevolence," Beecher argued for women should be involved in anti-slavery debates through their educational labor in the home and in society. In publishing her *Essay*, Beecher was establishing a middle ground between the ministers' demand that women's duties are "unobtrusive and private" and Grimké's demand that women's Christian duties did not "reference their sex and condition."

The biggest obstacle to understanding the nuances of Beecher's position is the misconception that she was opposed to women's petitions. Her statement that "it is neither appropriate nor wise, nor right, for a woman to petition for the relief of oppressed

females” is simply read out of context. The full passage restores important qualifications regarding the effectiveness of petitions.

If it is asked, “May not woman appropriately come forward as a supplicant for a portion of her sex who are bound in cruel bondage?” It is replied, that, the rectitude and propriety of any such measure, depend entirely on its probable results. If petitions from females will operate to exasperate; if they will be deemed obtrusive, indecorous, and unwise, by those to whom they are addressed; if they will increase, rather than diminish the evil which it is wished to remove; if they will be the opening wedge, that will tend eventually to bring females as petitioners and partisans into every political measure that may tend to injure and oppress their sex, in various parts of the nation, and under the various public measures that may hereafter be enforced, then it is neither appropriate nor wise, nor right, for a woman to petition for the relief of oppressed females.¹⁶

Beecher is arguing for political pragmatism here, not for an idealism that places petitions outside women’s sphere of action. The crucial clause here is “if they will increase, rather than diminish the evil which it is wished to remove.” From Beecher’s perspective, the Garrisonians were doing exactly that. The increasingly strident methods of the radicals resulted in civil violence. In Stephen Browne’s words, “Beecher did not see antislavery as any less pressing than Grimké did, nor as any less the province of female agency, but as an end to be effected through a categorically different language of reform.” Beecher’s language of reform stressed peace and conversation. Her objections were specific to abolitionist petitions, especially their language of violent righteousness. She never objected to women’s petitions in general, and in fact organized and signed several during her life.¹⁷

In taking this position, Beecher was not defining a separate woman’s sphere, but restating her vision of a Christian democracy in which women were responsible for education. She writes that women must attend to “peace and charity, which it is in the

power of the females of our country to advocate, both by example and by entreaties.

These are the principles which alone can protect and preserve the right of free discussion, the freedom of speech, and liberty of the press” (137). It was not that women should refrain from public discourse, rather they should, in times of violence and discord, write and speak in ways that promote peace and understanding. This role was crucial, because Beecher understood the capacity of the question of slavery to incite violence, and in her understanding, women advocates of peace and charity were the last hope to avoid catastrophic violence.

There probably will never arrive a period in the history of this nation, when the influence of these principles will be more needed, than the present. The question of slavery involves more pecuniary interests, touches more private relations, involves more prejudices, is entwined with more sectional, party, and political interests, than any other which can ever again arise. It is a matter which, if discussed and controlled without the influence of these principles of charity and peace, will shake this nation like an earthquake, and pour over us the volcanic waves of every terrific passion. The trembling earth, the low murmuring thunders, already admonish us of our danger; and if females can exert any saving influence in this emergency, it is time for them to awake. (137-138)

Beecher’s call for women to awake was tempered by a need to outline the complex and delicate task of creating a public discourse that contains sharp disagreement, rather than incites violence. This is the ground for her dispute with Angelina Grimké: how were women to save the nation from the both the evils of slavery and the dangerous violence over abolitionism? Beecher is no apologist for slavery. She leaves no doubt that slavery is evil and that “All who act on Christian principles in regard to slavery, believe that in a given period (variously estimated) it will end” (28). Nor is she an advocate of colonization, instead positioning herself as a mediator between an

older generation of anti-slavery activists of the American Colonization Society and the younger Garrisonians.

As Beecher understands it, her argument with Grimké is over the methods women should use to bring about a peaceful end to slavery. The important question is *how* to end slavery. She writes, “The Abolitionists claim that their method will bring it to an end in the shortest time, and in the safest and best way. Their opponents believe that it will tend to bring it to an end, if at all, at the most distant period, and in the most dangerous way.” When Beecher writes “the abolitionists,” she means the Garrisonian radical abolitionists like Grimké, not the larger anti-slavery movement. She casts herself among the radical’s opponents, and much of her essay criticizes Garrisonian tactics, offering instead William Wilberforce and the British abolitionist movement as the model for the anti-slavery movement in the United States.

Much of their disagreement is over Christian doctrine. One reason Beecher argues women should not join radical abolitionist societies is that the Garrisonian methods are ineffective and dangerous. But another is that they are not Christian in tendency because they provoke violence. Beecher’s describes the “character and measures” of the abolitionists as generating “party spirit, denunciation, recrimination, and angry passion.” Grimké answers this charge in her *Letters to Catherine Beecher* (1838) with the question of “whether the character and measures of our holy Redeemer did not produce exactly the same effects?”¹⁸

Just as Sarah turns to the egalitarian radicalism of the Sermon on the Mount to refute the *Pastoral Letter*, her sister turns to the radicalism of *Matthew 10* in which Jesus

says “I came not to send peace, but a sword” to argue against Beecher’s theology of peace and charity. For Grimké, Beecher’s vision of Christianity is “just as weak, dependent, puerile creature as thou hast described woman to be.” Grimké’s vision is of Christianity as “preeminently aggressive; it waits not to be assaulted, but moves on in all the majesty of Truth to attack the strong holds of the kingdom of darkness, carries the war into the enemy’s camp, and throws its fiery darts into the midst of its embattled hosts.”¹⁹

In contrast to Grimké’s vision of righteous embrace of violent action, Beecher is conciliatory toward moderate anti-slavery activists, and even southern slaveholders. Her arguments are less about limiting women’s role than they are about making women more effective agents in preventing violence while ending slavery. Beecher argues that by avoiding overly antagonistic public agitation in favor of more subtle forms of persuasion women can intervene educate the nation in democratic culture.

In the present aspect of affairs among us, when everything seems to be tending to disunion and distraction, it surely has become the duty of every female instantly to relinquish the attitude of a partisan, in every matter of clashing interests, and to assume the office of a mediator, and an advocate of peace. And to do this, it is not necessary that a woman should in any manner relinquish her opinion as to the evils or the benefits, the right or the wrong, of any principle or practice. But, while quietly holding her own opinions, and calmly avowing them, when conscience and integrity make the duty imperative, every female can employ her influence, not for the purpose of exciting or regulating public sentiment, but rather for the purpose of promoting a spirit of candour, forbearance, charity, and peace. (69)

Before such calls for moderation are dismissed as reactionary, it is worth noting the importance of Beecher’s vision of female influence to the early development of the anti-slavery movement in the United States. In *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*,

Julie Roy Jeffrey suggests that “Common assumptions in the 1830s that associated women with virtue and characterized abolitionism as a moral reform made female support for the cause almost a legitimizing device. If the presence of women reinforced the moral character of abolitionism, women’s moral character should make them naturally interested in the plight of the slave.” What Beecher called “the social circle” was crucial to the dramatic increase in anti-slavery organization among women during the 1830s.²⁰

The women who helped found the women-only societies or women’s auxiliary organizations, wrote letters to the anti-slavery press, organized the “free produce” movement which sought to boycott Southern goods, and who engaged their families and friends in discussions about the evils of slavery were engaged in important religious and educational labor, not confining themselves to their “proper sphere.” The seeming contradiction between Beecher’s arguments for women’s peace activism and her arguments against women joining Garrisonian abolitionist societies should be understood in terms of women’s educational labor, not domesticity. Beecher argued for preserving the social power described in Jeffrey’s scholarship, a power that was exercised in civil society as well as the home.

The religious context of the Grimké-Beecher debate deserves more attention. It was not only women’s educational roles, but also a contrasting vision of religion in civil society that shaped their disagreement. It is easy to side with Grimké on the question of *gradual* versus *immediate* abolition. Today, we are all immediate abolitionists. But what about Grimké’s description of the aggressiveness of a religious perspective that “waits

not to be assaulted, but moves on in all the majesty of Truth to attack the strong holds of the kingdom of darkness”? Beecher’s vision of a soothing and rational female influence would seem much closer to liberal democratic thought, even if her understanding of moral influence as exclusively female labor is problematic. On the other hand, Grimké’s fanatical embrace of Truth against the “kingdom of darkness” might give pause about her reputation as the representative of modern feminist thought in their exchange.

This is not to merely defend Beecher against Grimké. The point is to see their exchange in terms of women’s role in civil society, and to recognize that Beecher’s arguments for women’s influence laid the groundwork for later forms of women’s activism, especially the peace movement. Their arguments were over the best methods to mobilize women’s religious and educational labor for moral and political good. For Beecher, the problem and the solution were obvious. Claiming the domestic and social circle as her purview required that women embody the principles of democratic discourse. Candor, forbearance, peace, and charity were no mere “private” expressions of religious piety. They were social and political values, necessary to protect the nation from the violent conflicts that threatened civil violence.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Beecher Sisters

The influence of Catharine Beecher on her sister’s novel has been understood almost entirely through the lens of domesticity, usually through reading *Treatise on Domestic Economy* in relation to the domestic images of Harriet’s novel. In a literal

sense, Catharine's domestic ideas played an important role in the creation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Catharine lived at Harriet's house in 1851 so that Harriet could devote herself to finishing the novel. But *Uncle Tom's Cabin* owes far more to the Catharine's political and social ideas than her domestic writing. Like Catharine's writing on women's educational labor, Stowe's novel is concerned with the domestic economy in a much larger sense than family and marriage. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, domesticity is only one aspect of a much larger web of female social power. In fact, the most powerful white women characters in the novel, Ophelia and Eva, are unmarried and childless. The most powerful black woman, one who survives Legree's plantation, is the unmarried mother, Cassy.

The critical tradition of reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through the lens of domesticity was inaugurated by Jane Tompkins in "Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History". She argued that the "sentimental power" of "the popular domestic novel"—"the *summa theologica* of nineteenth-century America's religion of domesticity"—has been ignored by the "academic parochialism" of literary critics who refuse to see women's writing as literature. The power of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was grounded in a vision of "new matriarchy" that Stowe received from Catharine's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* and which the sisters together elaborated in *The American Women's Home* in 1869. Tompkins's argument against male-dominated canon of American literary history was to show that the Beecher sisters created a female-dominated literature centered in the home.²¹

The problem with domesticity or patriarchy as interpretive frameworks for *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is that with the exception of Eliza, none of the major female characters are married and only major black women characters are mothers. Eva is, of course, too young to marry. Stowe never hints anything about Ophelia's romantic past. However, it is easy to imagine a romantic backstory for Ophelia something like Catharine Beecher's engagement to Alexander Fischer. A fiancé dies tragically, leaving Ophelia free to make her own way in the world, much as Fischer's death left Catharine free to pursue her educational labor at Hartford Female Seminary. If Eva's tragic death suggests something of the limits of female moral power, Ophelia represents something of the freedom of women who choose not to marry or have children.

Black women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* have much less freedom. As a slave, Eliza's choices are defined by her responsibilities to Mrs. Shelby. She escapes because her responsibilities to her son, who is sold along with Tom, are more important. Once she escapes, Eliza is helped by a series of domestic exemplars until she is reunited with the father of her son, George Harris. When she is reunited with her husband in the Halliday's home, her character is defined by her responsibilities as a wife. Cassy is never subsumed in this way, indeed her story demonstrates the way that slavery prevents any such choice for women. If Eliza's submission to her husband can exist only in the freedom of her escape from slavery, then Cassy's resistance to the authority of her master can exist only in the terrible fact that she is a slave. Cassy cannot love or marry because she does not have the freedom to choose, which within the Beecher's framework is fundamental to American womanhood.

If domesticity provides the theoretical grounding for the novel, it must be a radically expanded version that moves beyond motherhood and marriage. Several scholars have addressed Tompkins argument in ways that complicate her understanding of the politics of domesticity. In *Domestic Individualism*, Gillian Brown reads *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a critique of the marketplace, offering a "matriarchal domestic economy" as an alternative to the "slave economy and Northern capitalism." In *Home Fronts*, Lora Romero uses Foucaultian analysis of power and bodies to suggest "bio-political resistance" as a way of understanding Stowe's interest in bodily hygiene and domesticity as ways to oppose slavery and authorize "women's interventions into politics."²²

In this analysis, the Beecher sisters become the representative of a complicated domestic ideology, one that both resists and subverts the social and economic order. But if the social ideas of the Beecher sisters have such subversive potential, does it make sense to call them domestic? Like the scholarly obsession with Catharine's domestic ideas, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been read as entirely domestic even the domestic has been understood as constituting the entire range of social and political power of women. Reading the actions of the novel's female characters through social ideas about women's educational labor creates an alternative interpretive framework. This alternative recognizes the importance of the family and domestic economy, but does not limit women's social and political power to a separate sphere, or more generally to the household. Instead, Stowe's social ideas about the family are understood in relation to her ideas about civil society and the state.

As a novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is primarily concerned with character and plot. Although the authorial voice intrudes upon the narrative to make Stowe's beliefs clear, the crucial educational work of anti-slavery happens in the dialog between characters and the movement of the plot. Myra Jehlan suggests in her essay, "The Family Militant: Domesticity versus Slavery in Uncle Tom's Cabin," that the novel gets its power from the contradiction between "the terms that engender modern characters and plots and those that authorize modern slavery." The modern novel assumes its characters have "self-possession," that is, they are autonomous subjects. American slavery presumed precisely the opposite. Thus, because *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a "triumph of conventional form" incorporating the emotional power of sentimental novel and middle-class conceptions of family into its depictions of slaves and households, it was understood by pro-slavery ideologues as "an overwhelming challenge to the existing law and order" of a republic founded upon slavery.²³

Ophelia's question to her southern cousin, Augustine St. Clair, "Why didn't you free your slaves?" is paradigmatic of the novel's challenge to the South, and an example of how action advances in the novel. Yet, as Jehlan demonstrates, advancing the plot is not precisely the same thing as revolutionizing the social order. For "although they are virtually the only ones to cause things to happen (to forward the plot), women in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do not even try to run the world. Their contribution is not only more circumspect, circumspection is its cardinal principle, even its goal." 75 In fact, women's interventions are precisely to ask questions that educate men who then do take action. Mrs. Bird, the senator's wife, is the obvious example. Confronted by the moral problem

of Eliza's escape, the Senator asks should he help an escaped slave in need, even though he has supported the fugitive slave law? In conversation with his wife, Mrs. Bird asks "Now, John, I want to know if you think such a law as that is right and Christian?" When he replies "I do," Mrs. Bird treats him to a discourse on Christian duty to the poor and hungry. After receiving his wife's lesson, the Senator decides to intervene personally to give the escaped slaves transport. In so doing, he comes to understand how fundamentally wrong he has been to support political compromise over the problem of fugitive slaves.²⁴

Mrs. Bird, like Rachel Halliday, the Quaker mother who shelters Eliza later in the novel, is a representation of female educational labor in the home. Just as Mrs. Bird educates Senator Bird, Mrs. Halliday educates her children and her guests. Presiding over reunion of the escaped slave, George Harris, with his wife Eliza, and their young son Harry, are treated to the power of a Christian mother and wife.

Rachel never looked so truly and benignly happy as at the head of her table. There was so much motherliness and full-heartedness even in the way she passed a plate of cakes or poured a cup of coffee, that it seemed to put a spirit into the food and drink she offered.

George is awkward at first, when faced with the prospect of eating as an equal with a white family, but such feelings "went off like fog, in the genial morning rays of this simple overflowing kindness" (138).

Such scenes of the power of domesticity are crucial to the novel's political argument that the domestic power of women can be used to intervene in the moral and political problems of the nation. Domestic economy, as embodied in the spirit Mrs. Halliday put "into the food and drink" and in the images of her well ordered kitchen educates George in democracy and social equality.

Undeniably, domesticity is a crucial framework for understanding women characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But if domesticity defines women's moral power, then how do we understand Ophelia's question to her cousin? As neither a mother nor a wife, what domestic power does she employ? It is clear that Ophelia is as powerful as Mrs. Bird. Each advances the plot in much the same way: by educating a male member of her household to take right action. Ophelia's moral arguments, along with a crisis of faith brought on by Eva's death, lead St. Clair to the verge of freeing his slaves. Only St. Clair's sudden death prevents his signing Tom's emancipation papers, resulting in Tom's sale and his death at the hands of the Simon Legree. But St. Clair's death does not prevent Topsy's rescue. Ophelia's influence over her cousin saves her from Tom's fate. The young female slave is saved because Ophelia insists St. Clair sign the girl over to her immediately, in effect freeing her.

If Topsy is saved in a material sense through Ophelia's female influence over her cousin, she is saved in the moral and spiritual sense because Eva's love redeems her. Eva's dying admonition as she hands Topsy a lock of hair is "every time you look at that, think that I love you, and wanted you to be a good girl!" Together, Ophelia and Eva represent a female social power that operates morally and socially. They each have family roles; they are cousin and daughter to the household's patriarch. But their power operates educationally rather than domestically. Unlike the mothers Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Halliday, Miss Ophelia and Miss Eva, do not have matriarchal power. Eva is an image of "virgin womanhood," to use Margaret Fuller's term, who embodies Christian love in her relations with everyone, and who teaches Tom to read. Ophelia has no husband or

children of her own, but embodies the ideal of female moral influence exercised through reasoned persuasion. In addition to leading St. Clair to see the necessity of emancipation, their central educational task is “civilizing” Topsy, Stowe’s wild caricature of slavery’s barbarous effects on a bright, young girl. Both are symbols of female educational labor, not domesticity.

Stowe’s vision of the anti-slavery work of women is not limited to white women’s educational labor. Cassy’s narrative reveals an often-overlooked aspect of Stowe’s critique of slavery: it limits the choices of female slaves to love and marry. Critics have made clear the way the break-up of slave families is a central element of the novel’s plot. The practices of slavery make true domesticity impossible for enslaved people. Tom’s separation from Chloe and George’s reunion with Eliza function as arguments against slavery. Cassy’s experience of love functions as an argument against slavery, but one of a different sort. To be sure, Cassy is separated from her children. More importantly, she is denied the ability to choose her husband, even though her story makes clear that, given the choice, she would have chosen the man who fathered her children. Ultimately, she is redeemed not by becoming reunited with her estranged children, but through teaching her young protégé Emmeline how to survive and escape Legree’s plantation.

Cassy’s sheltered life in a convent came to an end when her father (and owner) died suddenly. Like Tom, she had been promised freedom, but her father had not acted in time. As the estate was settled, Cassy was listed among the property. The family lawyer brings a young man to see her, who Cassy thinks “the handsomest I had ever seen.” The man had seen her in the convent and fallen in love. Cassy reports that he said “he would

be my friend and protector;—in short, though he didn't tell me, he had paid two thousand dollars for me, and I was his property,—I became his willingly, for I loved him. Loved!" Cassy's love is real, as real as Eliza's for George. She makes this point emphatically. "O, how I *did* love that man! How I love him now,—and always shall, while I breathe!" (361).

Cassy's love was doomed, not because she could not sustain it, but because her slave status makes true marriage impossible. She cannot become a wife because she cannot choose. She says "I only wanted one thing. I did want him to *marry* me. I thought, if he loved me as he said he did, and if I was what he seemed to think I was, he would be willing to marry me and set me free" (361). The young lawyer deems this impossible, but assures Cassy "if we were only faithful to each other, it was marriage before God." Cassy fulfills her end of this promise, but the lie is exposed when the manipulations of the man's cousin bankrupt him and he is forced to sell Cassy and their children. When her new owner sells Cassy's children, she attempts to murder him and is sold again, and again, until she finds herself owned by Legree.

Like Tom, Cassy finds herself in the hell that is Legree's plantation because the legal and economic structures of slavery allow, even require, the sale of virtuous slaves to corrupt owners. Stowe's depiction of Cassy's predicament is at root, a depiction of the impossibility of romantic love within a slave system, the impossibility of a woman's choice that Catharine Beecher argues is crucial for women in a democratic society. Cassy's redemption comes, not from a martyred death like Tom's, nor in the violence she contemplates against Legree. Cassy is redeemed through educating Emmeline, a virtuous

young slave girl—a virtual copy of the young Cassy—who Legree has purchased to take Cassy's place as his mistress.

At first Cassy teaches hopelessness and nihilism. As Emmeline sits frightened by the sounds of Legree's drinking and carousing, Cassy comes to her. Emmeline asks about the possibility of escape, "*Couldn't we get somewhere away from here?*" and Cassy answers "Nowhere but into our graves." When Emmeline says that Legree has tried to make her drink Brandy, Cassy tells her "You'd better drink" because "One must have something; things don't look so dreadful when you take that." Emmeline responds with "Mother used to tell me never to touch any such thing," which prompts an outburst on the contradictions between slavery and idealistic notions of motherhood. The exchange ends with Emmeline turning away and hiding her face in her hands (374).

After a confrontation with Tom in which he urges Cassy to give up her dreams of murdering Legree and to take Emmeline and escape, Cassy begins planning. Their escape involved Cassy's instructing Emmeline on the ways of resistance and subterfuge necessary for the women to survive, but Emmeline instructing Cassy on faith. At the novel's conclusion, as Cassy is reunited with her lost children, Emmeline travels with Cassy to France, much as Topsy travels with Ophelia to Vermont.

If Mrs. Bird represents a domestic influence within political society and Eva represents a moral influence that is too good for this world, then Ophelia and Cassy represent a women's educational labor fully engaged in the project of reforming society. This reform requires self-education as well as instruction. Ophelia must overcome her own prejudice and feelings of revulsion at touching a black person in order to teach

Topsy to read. Cassy must overcome her own degradation and nihilism in order to teach survival to Emmeline. Ophelia and Cassy are not defined by the domestic labor they perform, or by their moral example (Ophelia is a racist; Cassy is a “fallen” woman). Their work is fundamentally educational. They each teach a young woman how to survive, and through that process, find redemption. Ophelia overcomes her initial racial prejudice to rescue Topsy from ignorance and immorality. Cassy overcomes her nihilism to rescue Emmeline from exploitation and degradation.

Representations of Black Antigone: *Iola Leroy*

As a former slave, Cassy suggests something of the life story of Harriet Jacobs who escaped bondage in North Carolina to work as a governess and an abolitionist in the North. But the romantic narrative of escape from sexual exploitation shared by Jacobs and Stowe’s character is too limited a frame for understanding black women’s experience during the nineteenth century. Of course, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is an example of women’s educational labor in the service of anti-slavery. But so is the work of teaching and fund-raising that Jacobs and many others engaged in during the aftermath of the Civil War. Black women teachers were at the center of the educational project of establishing schools for freed men, women, and children. In fact, they were at the center of creating the new structures of civil society in the South, especially black churches and black schools that were the backbone of resistance against the reassertion of white violence and domination that followed the election of 1876.²⁵

Frances Harper's novel, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted*, captures the hopes and ideals of reconstruction as it concerns women's educational labor. Iola Leroy is a freed slave who like Cassy, is the product of an inter-racial union. Unlike Stowe and Jacobs, Harper does not explore themes of sexual exploitation. Iola is rescued from slavery and the unwanted attentions of her owner by the arrival of Union troops. Her potential for useful labor is immediately realized and she becomes a nurse in the field hospital. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harper's novel tells the story of the dissolution and reunion of a black family. Iola discovers her first cousin as a patient in the hospital and together the two find the living members of their family. Like Harriet Jacobs's journalism, Harper uses dialect to distinguish between the ignorance of the laboring class and her own more refined and intellectual class.

Some critics focus on the bi-racial choices Iola confronts.²⁶ Both she and her brother are light-skinned enough to pass for white but repeatedly choose to identify as black. Dr. Greshom, the white surgeon at the hospital falls in love with Iola and asks her to marry, knowing that she is black. She must choose between accepting the life of a respectable white woman or remaining committed to her project of racial uplift. When Iola attempts to find work as a clerk in a northern city, she finds she can work at the finest stores if she hides her race, but is fired as soon as the other clerks discover she attends a black church.

The last example suggests that questions of labor confront Iola as often as race, and in ways that show deep connections to Harper's vision for racial justice. The different forms of labor she in the novel performs—nurse, teacher, shop clerk—were by

1892 respectable employment for middle-class women, black or white. But the labor Iola performs and the racism she confronts are intertwined.

Throughout the novel, Iola Leroy performs the role of a middle-class, black woman. In her moral bearing, personal responsibility, and in her choices of work, she remains well within the boundaries of middle-class respectability. Yet, by maintaining those standards while identifying herself as black, she challenges social injustice and works to uplift her race. As a wartime nurse, she ministers to black and white soldiers. As a teacher, she establishes a school that is burned by locals. In the North, working as a clerk Iola confronts the contradictions of middle-class respectability and race.

Iola refuses to hide her race when applying for jobs, telling one employer during an interview that she is black. He hires her anyway because she is well qualified, but suggests that she not tell the other clerks. Iola refuses to lie, answers questions about where she attends church, and is fired because the other clerks refuse to work with her. Ultimately, Iola does find employment with an employer who announces her race to the other staff and tells them they may leave if they do not wish to work alongside a black woman.

Harper's novel participates in the conventions of women's fiction in which a young girl is abandoned by her family (through death or bankruptcy) and faces the world alone, but after a series of trials, is able to establish a respectable independence, and ultimately finds happiness in a good marriage. *Iola Leroy* concludes with the protagonist's marriage to Dr. Latimer and their settling in a town in North Carolina. Hazel Carby has argued persuasively that the novel transforms the conventions of

women's fiction. Making race central to the narrative requires turning the convention away from merely personal or individual concerns toward political or social concerns. As a black woman, Iola Leroy's attempts to navigate questions of labor and marriage require that the novel redefine middle-class respectability to account for racial difference.²⁷

According to Carby, to understand the novel's "historical significance" requires considering "the wider discourse of black women intellectuals at the turn of the century" such as Harper, Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper. I would add the social ideas of a previous generation of women including Catharine Beecher and Emma Willard.

Although the novel offers a political and an educational message about racial uplift, it draws upon the vision of women's central role in education within the family and the institutions of civil society. Yet, just as the formulas of women's fiction cannot account for the plot of *Iola Leroy*, the moral economy of women's educational labor as theorized by Beecher and Willard cannot account for Harper's moral vision.²⁸ It is not enough for Iola to perform the educational labor of family, school and church to protect and extend the social order. Her race requires that she work for social justice. Iola Leroy works to change the social structures that define and often denigrate her labor. The proposal of marriage by Dr. Gerhom offers the material comforts and family feeling of the conventional women's narrative. But it is not enough for Iola, who accepts Dr. Latimer because he offers the shared work of racial uplift. So too, the opportunity to pass as a white clerk at a department store does not satisfy Iola. The shop clerks must know Iola's race and accept her as an equal.

The novel concludes with the couple returning to North Carolina. The scene between Iola and the old freedwoman, Aunt Linda, offers a clear example of both racial progress and of class difference that is different from the vision offered by Beecher and Willard. As white women from prominent families, they do not have the legacy of slavery to confront. In this scene, Iola Leroy speaks to her slave past.

“Well, Aunt Linda, I am going to teach in the Sunday-school, help in the church, hold mother’s meetings to help these boys and girls to grow up to be good men and women. Won’t you get a pair of spectacles and learn to read?”

“Oh, yer can’t git dat book froo my head, no way you fix it. I knows nuff to git to hebben, and dats all I wants to know.” Aunt Linda was kind and obliging, but there was one place she drew the line, and that was at learning to read.²⁹

Literacy is the clearest marker of difference between the two women. Her education offers Iola a range of possible work, from Sunday-school teaching, to church activities, to the benevolent labor of training good mothers. Linda’s refusal to learn to read is a mark of generational difference, as well as class difference. Linda was the cook on the plantation where the novel begins. She represents both the indignities of slavery and a narrow domesticity. Her appearance at the end of the narrative contrasts with Iola Leroy as the symbol of moral and educational progress of her race.

Reading is not the most important element of Iola Leroy's achievement. In a chapter titled "Friends in Council" Iola and her friend Miss Delaney participate fully in an intellectual exchange about race in America made up of well-educated, black men and women. Miss Delaney reads a poem while Iola offers a paper on the "Education of Mothers." After the salon, Dr. Latimer asks her "Why not write a good, strong book?" During their discussion he says, "out of the race must come its own thinkers and writers.

Authors belonging to the white race have written good racial books...but it seems almost impossible for a white man to put himself completely in our place." Iola teasingly suggests that he would be the subject of her book, because of his heroic willingness to identify with the black race. Dr. Latimer turns the tables and suggests that he knows of a woman who would make an even better heroine: Iola.

This conversation marks the beginning of their courtship, and the point at which they fall in love is their mutual recognition of the others voluntary identification with blackness (both had the opportunity to pass for white and choose not to). Dr. Latimer's encouraging Iola to write a good, strong book indicates Frances Harper's social ideas regarding the educational and intellectual labor of black women. For Harper, writing *Iola Leroy* was to participate in the "writing of good racial books" like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and to write what she calls, in words that Dr. Latimer speaks to Iola, "a book to inspire men and women with a deeper sense of justice and humanity." This is the complex role of Black Antigoné. Maria Stewart, Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and many others helped create a moral economy of women's educational labor that functioned within the black community during and after Reconstruction.

Endnotes

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1. Kay Ann Taylor, "Mary S. Peake and Charlotte L. Forten: Black Teachers during the Civil War and Reconstruction" *Journal of Negro Education* 74 (Spring 2005) 124-137. Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedman's Education, 1862-1875* (Greenwood Press: Westport, CT, 1980), Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865-1873* (University of Georgia Press: Athens, 1980), Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979), James McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).
 2. *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 29. Carla L. Peterson, "*Doers of the Word*": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 66. Peterson's larger point is that Stewart's lectures create a greater possibility for agency than Walker because Stewart clarifies the movement from "the present condition of black degradation to a future state of social equality, thereby rewriting the genre of the jeremiad." What Peterson calls "the cultural work of black women" which is positioned between the work of black men and white women, seems very close to what I mean by the educational labor of Black Antigone. Such labor would include the work herself Stewart performed, appropriating the jeremiad and to do the work of racial uplift and the work of teaching and reform activism.
 3. Joel Perlmann and Robert Margo, *Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001) have found a striking increase in the number of black women teachers following the Civil War. Drawing on census data they found that in 1860 black teachers comprised perhaps 1% of teachers in the United States. In the North and West, that did not change in the decades following the war, but in the South black teachers were 20% of the total number of teachers in 1880 (17% in 1910) with black women making up roughly the same proportion as white women teachers (52% of black teachers were women in 1880 versus 56% of white; for 1910 the numbers were 77% and 76% respectively). See pages 92-94 for a discussion of their methods for arriving at these numbers. Just as their research on the feminization of teaching in New England is the basis for the arguments of chapter 2 regarding the moral economy of women's educational labor, their research on black women's teaching in the south underpins the argument of this chapter that black women entered the middle-class through their teaching during the years following the Civil War.
 4. *Maria W. Stewart*, 70. All page numbers in text hereafter.

5. Peterson, *African American Speakers*, 66.
6. Peterson, *African American Speakers*, 72-73.
7. For biographical information on Stewart, see Marilyn Richardson, "Introduction" *Maria W. Stewart*.
8. Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 161.
9. Harriet Jacobs, "Life Among the Contrabands" *The Liberator*, September 5, 1862.
10. "Savannah.---Harriet Jacobs says" *The Freed-Man*, May 1, 1866 (London), 248-249. Jacobs, "Life Among the Contrabands" *The Liberator*.
11. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Free Press, 1st Reissue edition, 1998).
12. Bruce Rhonda treats this exchange in detail in *Elizabeth Palmer Peabody: A Reformer on her Own Terms* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 264-265. Sofia's letters are quoted from those pages. Hawthorne's letters are quoted from the *Selected letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Joel Myerson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), 111-115.
13. Rhonda, *Peabody*, 265.
14. "Pastoral Letter: The General Association of the Massachusetts to Churches under Their Care" was originally published in *New England Spectator*, July 12, 1837.
15. *Sarah Grimké: Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and Other Essays*, ed. Elizabeth Ann Bartlett (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 38.
16. Catharine Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with reference to the Duty of American Females* (Boston: Henry Perkins, 1837), 55. Her statement that "Petitions to congress, in reference to the official duties of legislators, seem, IN ALL CASES, to fall entirely without the sphere of female duty." is more difficult to understand, especially in light of her organizing petitions to Congress in 1829 regarding Cherokee removal and in 1871 regarding Women's Suffrage. I would suggest that the qualifying phrase "in reference to the official duties of legislators" might have allowed Beecher a sense that abolitionist petitions were somehow more directive than the more conciliatory petitions she organized.
17. Stephen Howard Browne, *Angelina Grimke: Rhetoric, Identity, and the Radical Imagination* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 94.
18. A. E. Grimké, *Letters to Catherine Beecher, in reply to An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* (Boston: Issac Knap, 1838), reprinted (New York: Arno Press, 1969), Letter V, p 29.
19. *Letters to Beecher*, Letter V, 29-30.
20. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 54.
21. Jane Tompkins. "Sentimental Power: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Literary History" in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).
22. Gillian Brown, *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century*

America (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992), 24; Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Nineteenth-Century Domesticity and Its Critics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 88.

23. Myra Jehlan, "The Family Militant: Domesticity versus Slavery in Uncle Tom's Cabin"

24. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), Original publication in 1851-1852, 77. Page numbers are in the text hereafter.

25. See Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* (1994), 107-146.

26. For example, see Cassandra Jackson, "'I Will Gladly Share with them my Richer Heritage': Schoolteachers in Frances E. Harper's *Iola Leroy* and Charles Chesnut's *Mandy Oxendine*" *African American Review* 37 (2003), 553-568; Elizabeth Young, "Warring Fictions: *Iola Leroy* and the Color of Gender" *American Literature* 64 (1992), 273-297. For an exploration of the meaning of black women's public voices in the context of sexual politics and American citizenship, see Lauren Berlant, "The Queen of America goes to Washington City: Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, Anita Hill" *American Literature* 65 (1993), 549-574.

27. Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 62-94.

28. Hazel Carby, Introduction to *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), xiv.

29. Frances Harper, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 276.

Chapter Five

Antigone's Politics: Subordination and 'Something Better than the Ballot'

The grand difficulty, which those who are seeking the ballot would remedy, is, the want of honorable and remunerative employment for unmarried or widowed women. It is not clear how the ballot would secure this; while a long time must elapse before public opinion would arrive at this result.

---Catharine Beecher

Elizabeth Peabody led an active and public life. Few women of her generation could match her intellectual achievements or her energy for reform. Yet, she never turned her intellect or energy toward the issue of women's rights and remained uncomfortable when younger colleagues like Caroline Healey Dall gave public lectures. Why? Emma Willard was among the most politically active women of Civil War era, lobbying politicians and organizing a women's peace movement to end the war. Yet, she remained opposed to the suffrage movement led by her former student Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Why? Catharine Beecher was a leading voice for women's educational and economic rights for four decades, never wavering in her belief that women's labor and moral vision should structure American society. Yet Beecher organized a petition to prevent the extension of suffrage to women and opposed her younger sisters' suffragist activism. Why?

One explanation for the resistance of these women to the idea of political equality for women is generational. The new social roles for women in civil society—teaching, writing, petition drives, benevolent and reform work—were taken for granted by subsequent generations of women who saw suffrage as the means to women's social and political progress. The granting of voting rights to black men following the Civil War

was a turning point for this later generation of women. The resolution made at the famous Seneca Falls convention in 1848 “That it is the duty of women of this country to secure themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.” became a crucial issue for women activists in the 1870s, especially those born after 1840. If people who had been formally excluded from the political system were going to be enfranchised, women activists Stanton believed women should be the first.

Elizabeth Peabody, Emma Willard, and Catharine Beecher retained an older generation’s political sensibility and it informed their understanding of women’s suffrage. Peabody believed that public displays for women’s rights betrayed the essential nature of women’s place “above the slough of human nature.”¹ Willard believed political structures should be changed so that elite women could participate in state decisions related to their interests, but that such participation should be organized through a separate “council of women.” Beecher believed that the time had not yet come to expand the right to vote to women because to do so would dilute the social and political power of middle-class women reformers. Their social ideas about women’s political power suggest that there were theoretical and practical reasons at work in their resistance to women’s suffrage, but that simply calling them “anti-suffragists” misses the significance of their ideas.

In terms of political ideas, the conservatism of the older generation represented what Catharine Beecher described as a centripetal force that balanced the radical centrifugal force of the advocates for suffrage. These forces worked so that together they “hold in steady curve every brilliant orbit.” In fact, in her public speeches Beecher did

not argue against women voting so much as she suggested that “it must be a very long time before woman suffrage can be gained.”² Like Beecher’s position on abolition in her debate with Grimké, her position on suffrage was about methods not principles. For Beecher, the sudden focus on voting rights must have seemed like an abandonment of everything she had worked to accomplish in the areas of education and moral reform. It was not so much that she resisted the vote for women, at least educated women of her class, it was that she believed that there was something better than the ballot.³

This is not how Beecher and other women educational reformers have been understood by historians of women’s suffrage. At best, the advocates of female education in the early nineteenth century are viewed as laying the groundwork of the far more significant political movement for equality at the end of the century. At worst, they have been viewed as reactionaries, actively resisting the progress of women’s rights. In *Feminism and Suffrage*, Ellen DuBois describes Beecher as a “domestic reformer” who “did not challenge the relegation of women to the domestic sphere, but only the relationship between that sphere and the rest of society.” Although Beecher’s interests far outstripped domesticity, DuBois captures something essential about the difference between women like Beecher and the younger generation of activists when she suggests, “the demand of for woman suffrage raised the prospect of sex equality in a way that proposals for domestic reform never could.”⁴ Beecher and her colleagues did not believe in sexual equality, and so their proposals imagined reform within an entirely different framework. From the perspective of a natural rights-based, liberal feminism, Beecher’s emphasis on educational and social opportunities sexual difference looks like a

reactionary conservatism.

Beecher would never raise the prospect of sexual equality within the home or within politics. For her, the best prospects of reform were for organizing civil society so that women could exercise their God-given, social and moral power. In this, women such as Beecher and Emma Willard were not merely opposed to suffrage and political equality, they offered an alternative based on their religious and theoretical understanding of sexual difference. These social ideas can be accurately described as conservative, especially given the subsequent history of evangelical Protestantism. But considered in the social context of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, their social and political ideas about women's political power adds complexity and depth to women's history.

Subordination and the Single Woman

Catharine Beecher believed that an individual's place in the social order was founded not on a natural equality but on a biblically-revealed principle of subordination. This principle operated "not only the family state but in all kinds of business where heads of establishments and master workmen demand implicit faith and obedience."⁵ This included the subordination of the citizen to the state, of the child to the husband, as well as the wife to the husband. A woman's social role demanded she embody this high ideal of Christian subordination as an educator both in the family and in society. Teaching the duty of subordination was a woman's great contribution to the social good.

Contradiction is not the best way to understand this position. Neither is

domesticity. Beecher argued forcefully that a wife's submission to her husband's authority was the foundation of social order both within the household and in society. This was not lip-service paid to clothe her radical ideas in moderate garb. This was one of her core beliefs. Her understanding of Christ's self-sacrifice led her to believe that female submission was a form of power. Her commitment to democracy led her to argue that women should always be free to choose whether or not to marry. Although a woman chose to become subordinate to her husband upon marriage, she gained a compensatory power through her Christ-like submission and through the obligations their sacrifices placed on her husband. As described by Beecher, educational labor performed in the service of family, God, and nation was self-sacrifice and love as well as female influence and social power.

In "An Address to the Christian Women of America," published in her 1872 book *Women's Profession as Mother and Educator, with Views in Opposition to Women's Suffrage*, Catharine Beecher connects her Christian vision of female self-sacrifice directly to the American nation by drawing on two fundamental national images. She opens the address with a set of rhetorical questions about the relation between life in this world and the Christian after-life. She asks a series of questions about death and life after death concluding with this image: "Suppose that Abraham Lincoln, after his body had lain in state for three days, had risen from his coffin and for thirty days had been surrounded by his family, his cabinet, his personal friends, and by as many as three hundred persons who knew him well; can we conceive of anything more satisfactory to prove that death does not destroy the soul?" (172).

She then links that image of a risen Lincoln to the Christian belief in the lessons of Jesus Christ's resurrection as evidence of ever-lasting life. This "was to teach us not only that an immortal existence stretches before us after death, but that happiness of that immortality depends *on the character which is formed by education.*" (173, italics in original). In exploring what this character means, Beecher turns to the Sermon on the Mount and introduces the second image linking Christianity and America. In enumerating the standard lines of "Blessed are the poor in Spirit" Blessed are the meek: Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness" she concludes with "Blessed are the happiness-makers." In a note, Beecher tells her readers that "This is a more exact translation than 'Blessed are the peacemakers.'" suggesting that properly understood, Jesus and Thomas Jefferson are pursuing the same thought (173).

Having linked the Christian belief in resurrection to the national mission of the United States, Beecher offers her own sermon on the importance of women to that most Christian and most American of social projects: the formation of character. She begins with what she calls "the family state" which is "instituted to educate our race to the Christian character." Women is this institution's "chief minister" and "her great mission is to train immature, weak and ignorant creatures, to obey the laws of God." There is a logical development to this mission which proceeds "first in the family, then in the school, then in the neighborhood and then in the world." As Beecher had argued her entire life, this mission of educational labor gave women enormous responsibility and power. But the very nature of the mission required women to exercise that power in a

way that emphasized self-sacrifice and subordination.

Now the Christian woman in the family and in the school is the most complete autocrat that is known, as the care of the helpless little ones, the guidance of their intellect, and the formation of all their habits, are given to her supreme control. Scarcely less is she mistress and autocrat over a husband, whose character, comfort, peace, and prosperity, are all in her power. In this responsible position is she to teach, by word and example, as did Jesus Christ? Is she to set an example to children and servants not only of that of a ruler, but also of obedience and as a subordinate? In the civil state her sons will be subject to rulers who are weak and wicked, just as she may be subject to a husband and father every way her inferior in ability and moral worth. Shall she teach her children and servants by her own example to be humble, obedient, meek, patient, forgiving, gentle, and loving, even to the evil and unthankful, or shall she form rebellious parties and carry her points by contest and discord? God has given man the physical power, the power of the purse, and the civil power, and woman must submit with Christian equanimity or contend. What is the answer of common sense, and what are the teachings of Christ and His Apostles? (179-180)

Beecher's answer is directly opposed to John Stuart Mill's position that sexual equality should define marriage. Beecher says that woman "is *subordinate* in the family state, just as her father, husband, brother, and sons are subordinate in the civil state. And the same rules that are to guide them are to guide her" (180). These rules demand obedience to authority except when such civil authority conflicts with the higher authority of God. This is precisely the problem that Antigone explores, and it is one of the reasons that work exerted such a hold on the nineteenth century imagination. But such conflicts or exceptions are not Beecher's subject, for she goes on to say that "a woman has no more difficulty in deciding when to obey god rather than man in the family state than her husband, father, and sons have, in the civil state. And obedience in the family to "the higher power" held by man, is no more a humiliation than is man's obedience to a civil ruler" (181).

The subject of Beecher's sermon is the importance of the family state to nation and church, and so she addresses herself to the biblical passage that articulates that importance, Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. As Beecher gives it, the passage reads "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands *as unto the Lord*. For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church: Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (183). Leaving aside today's questions about Paul's assertion of patriarchal authority in the history of the early church, Beecher finds in this passage a powerful articulation of women's mission. Although she believes that "there is a moral power given to women in the family state much more controlling and abiding than the inferior, physical power conferred on man," she believes this power is rooted in a voluntary subordination rather than a natural equality. The ultimate ground for this belief is her faith. In her closing passage on Ephesians 2, she writes:

No wonder these directions close with "this is a great mystery"; for the most advanced followers of Christ have but just begun to understand the solemn relations and duties of the family state—man the head, protector, and provider—woman the chief educator of immortal minds—man to labor and suffer to train and elevate woman for her high calling, woman to set an example of meekness, gentleness, obedience, and self-denying love, as she guides her children and servants heavenward. (184)

The gender trouble at the heart of Beecher's duty of subordination is the same as that at the heart of Antigone's story. What happens when duty to God conflicts with duty to head of state, family or civil? In this context, the character of Beecher's feminism as distinct from the liberal feminism that follows political equality becomes clear. In the face of injustice inflicted on the weak, the temptation to argue from a position of equality

is great. As Beecher puts it:

The duty of subordination, though so fundamental and important, is one to which all minds are naturally averse. For every mind seeks to follow its own judgment and wishes rather than another. Especially is this the case with persons of great sensibilities and strong will. It is owing to this that so many women of this class are followers of Stuart Mills' doctrine that a wife is not subordinate in the family state. (189)

These persons of great sensibilities and strong wills who follow Mills are the supporters of women's suffrage. In following their own judgment and wishes and demanding individual rights, they forget the social good. Beecher's arguments against Mills do not downplay the "many wrongs, both to married and unmarried women" that exist because of the "false and unchristian state of things" (191). These include lower pay for women teachers, the dedication of far fewer resources to women's higher and professional education, and the denial of leadership positions in "schools, hospitals, jails, and all public institutions of benevolence" to women. But Beecher does not follow the suffragists in their belief that "the only sure and effective remedy for these and all other wrongs" is the vote. Beecher's vision of social justice follows the duty of subordination, for reasons of political pragmatism and democratic principle.

As she puts it, "Almost all persons of intelligence will concede that justice and mercy call for changes and improvements in these particulars. The main question is, what is the best method for securing such improvement?" (192). For Beecher, a method that preserved the principle of subordination was best. Suffrage was inferior because it assumed that men were incapable or uninterested in effecting the necessary political changes. "As a matter of policy, to say nothing of justice, how much wiser it would be to

assume that men are ready and willing to change unjust laws and customs whenever the better way is made clear and then to ask to have all evils that laws can remedy removed.”

Beecher’s optimism about men’s benevolence might seem, by the standards of Millsian liberal feminism, as weak-minded and puerile as her opposition to abolitionist petitions seemed to Angelina Grimké. But Beecher’s deep commitment to the transforming potential of women’s educational labor as fundamentally different from the men’s political work. To push women too far in the direction of self-interested politics or commerce would erase their moral power even as it erased sexual difference. The idea that women’s subordination is the key to female influence and social power was connected to Beecher’s religious faith and her dedication to the ideal of Christ’s self-sacrifice. But a full account of Beecher’s social ideas cannot stop with subordination and self-sacrifice. For she never abandoned her commitment, articulated in *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, that a woman should always be able to choose whether or not to subordinate herself within marriage.

In *The American Woman’s Home*, the updated and expanded edition of *Treatise on Domestic Economy* that Catharine co-wrote with her sister Harriet in 1869, the Beecher sisters extend this democratic principle of choice to a radical vision of the Christian household. They write, “the blessed privileges of the family state are not confined to those who rear children of their own. Any woman who can earn a livelihood, as every woman should be trained to do, can take a properly qualified female associate, and institute a family of her own.”⁶ Later in the book, they make the legal aspects of this

arrangement clear.

After complaining that “the duty of wives to obey their husbands has been more strenuously urged” than the “great mystery” of Paul’s admonition that husbands should love their wives “as Christ loved the Church,” the Beechers write:

Here it is needful to notice that the distinctive duty of obedience to man does not rest on women who do not enter the relations of married life. A woman who inherits property, or who earns her own livelihood, can institute the family state, adopt orphan children and employ suitable helpers in training them; and then to her will appertain the authority and rights that belong to man as the head of a family. (156)

They go on to remark that once this innovation is enacted, women will only be obligated to marry, exempt for that “love for which there is no need of law.” In other words, the Beecher sisters extend the traditional republican idea that voting rights should rest with the head of household to include female heads of household. On one hand, this is not particularly radical, as during the colonial and early national periods, widows often took over the households and businesses of their deceased husbands. On the other hand, the idea that an unmarried woman who earns her own livelihood could institute her own household with a female associate was as radical in 1872 as it was in 1972.

This vision of female “honorable independence” remained true to Catharine Beecher’s earliest arguments about women’s educational labor. If there is something better for women than the ballot box, it is the ability to “secure equal advantage for their professional duty.” The method for securing such equality is the funding and creation of institutions for women’s education. Beecher ends her 1872 address with a call for a petition, “which might be used in every State.” The petition asks for an endowment to a

Woman's University that would "train school-teachers and house-keepers in all that relates to health in schools and families, and that this endowment be made equal to what has been or may be given to endow Scientific Schools for young men; and also that this be given on condition that the citizens of the place give an equal sum to promote the scientific and practical training of women for their distinctive professions" (201).

The picture of Catharine Beecher as figure of centripetal conservatism marking the limits of women's social power is belied by one key element of her biography: Beecher never subordinated herself to a husband and argued consistently that women should be supported in efforts to "earn an honorable independence." More radically, she argued that the family state should not be restricted to husband and wife, but should be opened to unmarried women. This proposal never sparked much public attention, even as the Beecher sisters took a moderate position in the debates over women's rights in the 1870s.

Whatever the implications of woman-run households, neither Beecher sister was an advocate of sexual freedom. In 1872 just after Catharine's last major public addresses, Victoria Woodhull, a leading advocate of sexual freedom for women and for sexual equality, sparked a scandal when she accused Catharine's brother, Henry Beecher, of having an affair with Elizabeth Tilton. The ensuing scandal put the family on the defensive, especially in regard to sexual propriety. Protecting the reputation of their brother was more important than promoting the social idea of same-sex households. In the subsequent decades, the idea of same-sex households became associated with sexual deviancy and remained on the margins of the discourse on women's rights.⁷

Emma Willard's Politics of Sexual Difference

Emma Willard is another woman of Catharine Beecher's generation who combined a belief in the subordination of women within marriage with a life of honorable independence. Her work as an educator and scientist, her divorce from her second husband, and her success as a text-book writer suggests no small tension between her belief in a wife's subordination and her accomplishments as an individual. A few months after her death in 1870, her sister Phelps wrote an address for a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science on Willard's theory of respiration and circulation. She found it necessary to say "though Emma Willard might have seemed to step out of the province of woman in her physiological researches, she had no sympathy with the declaimers upon *women's rights*; those who advocate the mingling of women in political strife, or who would change the order of God's providence in fixing her condition in social and domestic life."⁸

What her sister said was true. It is impossible to imagine Willard suddenly embracing suffrage at the end of her life. Like Beecher, Willard's sense of the province of women was elastic enough to allow for some radical social ideas regarding women's role in society and state, but her theoretical commitments to different social roles for women prevented her from embracing political equality. Nonetheless, Willard's work as a historian gave her a proprietary sense about national affairs. In a 1861 letter to President Lincoln, written in 1861 she writes, "Presuming that I am known to you as a writer of my country's history, and having just heard that the great cares which weigh

upon you being to tell upon your physical health, I determined to write to you my high approval of your general course and leading measures.” She goes on to suggest that Lincoln “will go down to posterity near to that of Washington.” Such historical judgment and correspondence with politicians were not the only way she intervened in American politics. As the war came, Willard launched the most ambitious political project of her life, bringing a peaceful end to the Civil War.⁹

Horrified by the thought of secession and the coming war, she wrote an “Appeal to South Carolina” published in the *New York Express* on December 19, 1860. This was Willard’s first public attempt to argue for a solution that would allow the South to maintain slavery and bring peace to the nation. As Alma Lutz puts it charitably, “In it, she strayed from her old-time clarity of reasoning and made some pitifully weak concessions to slavery.”¹⁰ In fact, Willard was a consistent apologist for slavery, arguing that “the master owns not the man, but his time” and insisting that southern slaves should more properly be referred to as “servants.” In 1862, she published “Via Media” a peace plan organized around the ideals of the American Colonization Society arguing that talented slaves could be sent to Africa and freedom. If such a position seems hopelessly out of date by the Civil War, it is worth noting that George McClellan, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1864, wrote her a letter saying that it reflected his own thinking.

Willard’s pro-slavery ideas and racism should not obscure the fact that she led the first women’s movement for peace in the United States. At the center of this movement was a petition, or a “Memorial, presented by Emma Willard, in the name and by the authority of American Women.” Willard traveled to Washington, DC in February of 1861

to lobby for its presentation to Congress. In a letter to her daughter-in-law, Willard wrote, "I felt that I *must* come; and I feel that the voice of the women in this crisis will not be unheeded, but will tend to peace." Unlike the petitions presented by women abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s, there was apparently little or no negative reaction to Willard's memorial for peace. She met with leading politicians and found encouragement but ultimately, no success.¹¹

The first sentence of Willard's Memorial reads, "That we are impelled to address your Honorable Body by intense anxiety for the fate of our beloved country, now in the conflicts threatened with destruction." Not only does their "intense anxiety" impel them, but so does history with its "examples that when deadly strife was raging among men, women came between hostile parties and persuaded them to peace." But the Memorial is less a plea for peace than a proposal for female political action. "So we would do now; and if we could, in addition to our persuasions, bring forward some new ideas, or a plan of settlement...a plan which offers a reasonable prospect that peace may be restored, and when attained, may endure and be made permanent." In other words, the women petitioners are proposing to do what the male legislators cannot bring peace to the nation. The plan, "as coming from that sex, whose mission on earth is peace, duty, and righteousness," might have a better chance at success.¹²

The plan as detailed in the rest of the Memorial recommends the creation of a commission to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and adjudicate the issues dividing the country. But the pertinent issue here is less the peace plan, which was merely one among many circulating in Washington during the early years of the war, but the

justification of female intervention in politics. Despite the rhetorical obsequiousness in such lines as “Our humble petition is, that those to whom, in our feebleness, we look for help, will not allow party or sectional prejudices to prevail over a spirit of mutual conciliation,” the overall tone is very much that of a schoolteacher explaining a lesson.

The Memorial of 1861 was not Willard’s first intervention into politics. In 1848, the same year as Seneca Falls Women’s Convention, she published a “Letter to French statesman Dupont De L’Eure On the Political Position of Women” in *The American Literary Magazine*. Though coming at a great moment in American politics (not only were women’s conventions being organized, but New York had just held a constitutional convention), Willard’s essay focuses entirely on the possibilities for women in the newly forming French government. She writes in an introduction that she would not have addressed the members of the New York convention, nor would she address the French body if she were French, because “it would at once be said, here is an ambitious woman who wants a new order of things to make a high place for herself.” The French political situation in 1848 offered Willard a theoretical space distant enough to demonstrate her own disinterestedness even as it created an opportunity to advance her political ideas.¹³

In contrast to Beecher’s image of gravitational forces, Willard imagines politics in terms of “the uses of steam and of the electric fluid.” Such forces were just being used to power ships and trains, and Willard asks “What would you think, sir, of the mechanic, who having a heavy weight to move by steam, should so miscalculate his force as to make no account of one half, which was generated, but to leave that half so out of reckoning in his machinery as not even to take the pains to know whether it would be, as

to his intended direction, a conspiring or opposing force?" (247). This "one half" of the force is women and the engineer who ignores it cannot control the political mechanism. Willard writes, "Female influence is a force which is and ever must be generated in society, and men as legislators have left its operation to chance" (248).

Willard's argument is that female influence must be mobilized within governmental structures, in order to ensure the state's stability and direction. "The wise politician should consider this power and in constructing the machinery of government he should not only guard against its becoming an opposing force, but he should provide a machinery by means of which it will aid to propel the political train in the right direction" (248). Willard liked using images of the steam train to represent women's social power. Suggesting, as she does here, that this power should be incorporated into the machinery of the state could very easily be used in the service of an argument for women's voting rights. But Willard had different ideas about how to direct this force.

Willard's recommendations are very different from the Seneca Falls Convention's resolution "that it is the duty of women of this country to secure themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." Yet, she directly addresses the issue of representation in government that runs through that convention's Declaration of Sentiments. Willard's proposal is grounded upon what Beecher called the principle of subordination, the idea that women in family, society, and state, are subject to men's authority, but that they also have a special mission with regard to education.

Willard performs the subordinate role rhetorically, even as she advances her argument for female political power. As she begins to lay out her plan, she pauses and

writes “Yet I hesitate—for who am I that I should rise up and speak to nations. But God, who has made me feel it a duty, can at my fervent prayer, give me the needed wisdom” (250). Describing her appeal as God-inspired is additional insulation against those who would accuse her of ambition. She then describes the family state in the same biblical terms offered by Beecher: “The husband, the father and the master is here, a natural sovereign. Woman, as wife, is the chief subject in his domain; while as mother, and common ruler of the servants of the household, she is the companion of his sway. On the death of her consort she stands as the sole head of the little kingdom” (250). Note that Willard’s notion of an honorable independence describes her own circumstances as a widow.

Both Beecher and Willard support the Pauline injunction that wives should obey their husbands, but both also hedge their description to allow for women’s independence outside of marriage. Willard makes clear that she shares Beecher’s understanding that in a conflict between male authority over women and religious authority, religion trumps man. “Limited Obedience, a free man or woman, may rightly owe to other human beings: unlimited obedience is due to God alone” (251). Beecher avoided any attempt at reconciling female subordination with female political participation by arguing that women act through the institutions of civil society. In her view, educational equality would lead to a kind of social balance that would allow women to influence the nation and the world according to their different social roles.

Willard tackles the issue directly, arguing that women should have a role in governmental institutions, but one that reflects their different social roles. She asks “If it

be said, as is truly the case, that men are the natural guardians of women, then we would ask, how is it proposed to convince them that their interests are to be regarded, when they, who alone know them, are to be left wholly unconsulted?" (252). Her answer is to suggest that men should recreate representative government in a way that allows for female participation. To put Willard's ideas in Beecher's terms, she asks that the civil state be organized along the lines of the family state. For Willard, this means organizing government according to "the principle, that while men, the heads of the natural kingdom, confederate to do for the common political household, what the individual father and master does for his own,—that woman, on the other hand, should confederate also, to do for the great common family, what it is the duty of each mother and mistress to do for her own household" (252).

The structure Willard proposes to fulfill this principle is a "female body invested with powers to act for the sex" (254). Such a body would control some of the public funds, just as households are often organized so that the wife has a budget for household needs. Willard recommends four specific areas of responsibility for the council of women: care of infant schools, care of the poor, care of the public morals, and care of female education beyond the primary schools (254-255). Essentially, Willard proposes a women's legislative body to organize and regulate the moral economy of women's educational labor. But the most radical aspect of her proposal is not the separation of women's legislative responsibility from that of the men's, but her recommendations for the relation between the two. She couches these suggestions in deferential terms.

Wherever the rights, duties and liabilities of women are concerned, there you may find it wise as well as just, to defer to them, so far as to give them a negative upon

any law which you may propose; and also to permit them on these subjects the right of introducing into our convention any bill which they may judge expedient, with the reasons by which they sustain it, leaving it for the supreme power to decide. This would be in fact a modification of the right of petition. But with the negative proposed, there would be reciprocity in the arrangement. (252-253)

Willard's proposal uses male-female relations with the family state to imagine a government in which women would exercise power in ways never before seen. It grants this power without seeming to violate the principle of subordination. Along with control of some public funds and the ability to directly introduce bills, the proposal grants women the power of the veto or negative. This is indeed, a modification of the right of petition, one that reimagines representative government as an expression of a family and civil society as made up of men and women whose social roles are regulated by their sex. It grants men greater authority in most areas, but not in those related directly to female social roles involved in family, schooling, and social services.

Willard's sense of "the reciprocity in the arrangement" makes it clear that this is not simply a governmental separation of spheres. "On subjects where each sex is alike concerned, as in the laws of marriage, each party could introduce bills which the other might negative. This it appears to me would constitute such a check and balance to prevent bad legislation, as nature herself has instituted" (253). A governmental structure based on sexual difference that includes a system of checks and balances to ensure reciprocity offers a different method for achieving social justice. Even as she refuses to recognize the "inalienable right to elective franchise," Willard addresses the complaints in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments that women have no voice in the making of laws that affect them and that they lack representation in the legislature. She also

addresses concerns about marriage and divorce laws, making both bodies of government responsible for proposing legislation and giving both veto power.

Ultimately, what Willard offers is a state organized on principles antithetical to the equal rights arguments of women's conventions, but one that imagines women directly participating in the political work of governance. Between her work petitioning and lobbying for peace in 1861 and her minor foray into political theory in 1848, Willard offers a glimpse of what a fully-formed, nineteenth-century women's politics founded on sexual difference might have looked like. To be sure, nothing of the sort existed as a large-scale social movement, but then the conventions for women's rights were by no measure large-scale until late into the century.

There is no evidence that Emma Willard's proposal for a female legislative body had any impact on political thought in France or in the United States. Both nations were occupied with other, far more explosive political issues at the time. But in 1848, an observer who read Willard's essay and the reports of the Seneca Falls convention would have had a hard time deciding which set of proposals might have the most influence on a future feminist politics. It is impossible to say whether or not Willard's ideas *could* have generated and sustained a social movement. The fact is that they did not. And when the nation turned its attention to women's rights after the Civil War, the passage of the 15th amendment granting black men the right to vote meant that the question before the nation was women's suffrage and not how to restructure government to represent women.

Conclusion

Both Catharine Beecher and Emma Willard believed their political ideas offered “something for women better than the ballot.” They believed that conserving and extending the great expansion in female educational opportunities that they saw as the great achievement of their generation was more important than the vote. Education was the answer to the growing number of women who worked in increasingly dangerous and poor-paying jobs as well as for the idleness and consumerism of wealthy women. In her 1869 essay, “Something Better for Women Than the Ballot,” Beecher made this point explicitly with frank descriptions of women’s working conditions in factories and the economic dead-ends that led women to choose prostitution.¹⁴ Willard imagined that direct engagement with male legislators and political leaders would be a more effective way to address women’s social problems than joining national political parties and voting. As Beecher put it:

The grand difficulty, which those who are seeking the ballot would remedy, is, the want of honorable and remunerative employment for unmarried or widowed women. It is not clear how the ballot would secure this; while a long time must elapse before public opinion would arrive at this result.¹⁵

Given the history of women in the United States following the passage of the 19th amendment, it would be hard not to credit Beecher’s point that educational and economic problems of women are not remedied by granting them voting rights. So too, Willard’s argument for a council of women charged with mobilizing governmental action regarding issues related to women and the family looks far more interesting given the neglect of such issues by the major political parties. One reason these arguments seem so unfamiliar is what Sue Cobble has called “the ‘equal rights teleology’ that shapes the narrative of

twentieth-century feminist history.” Domesticity and separate spheres have been a way of dismissing women who first articulated some of the political ideas of “difference feminism.”¹⁶ The development of evangelical Protestantism into a reactionary political force in the twentieth century made this dismissal even easier. As time passed, statements about the subordination of wives to husbands sounded more anti-feminist even as statements supporting women’s educational opportunities sounded less radical.

If the reputations of Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher suffered as the movement for political equality came to dominate historical narratives about women, then recent shifts in scholarship might suggest new understandings of their social ideas.¹⁷ This would not mean an uncritical celebration of their lives, nor would it mean describing their ideas as lost possibilities. It would mean finding connections between their ideas and future possibilities. For Beecher, it would mean translating her radical commitment to the family state to the emerging movement for the adoption rights of gay families. For Willard, it would mean recognizing the way that her political plans for a high-level advisory council of women have been realized in advisory political bodies such as the President’s Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. This is not to suggest that the scholarship of Judith Butler or Joan Scott would have been embraced, or even understood, by these two nineteenth-century social theorists. Rather, it is to say that the obvious discontinuities of ideas across time should not blind historians to the connections.

Beecher’s idea that unmarried women should be able to “institute the family state” has been noted by scholars, but seems to have been little noted at the time it was

published. Catharine and Harriet made that argument in the context of describing the ideal Christian household, extending this idealized vision to women like Catharine who chose not to marry. For the Beecher sisters, the argument for encouraging unmarried women to establish a household would have been entirely economic. Within a few decades, the question of unmarried women living together would begin to be understood as a problem of sexual morality. By the turn of the twentieth century, the question of adoption was far less important than the question of whether women living in so-called “Boston marriages” should even be allowed to teach school.¹⁸

Catharine Beecher lived prior to the “discovery” or “invention” of homosexuality as sexual deviancy. Her relationship with her traveling companion Nancy Johnson in the 1840s carried no hint of sexual scandal.¹⁹ For Beecher, the issue of women earning an honorable independence and establishing households together carried none of the sexual hysteria that such ideas would carry in the twentieth century. Although such hysteria is far from absent in the twenty-first century, the idea of single-sex households raising children has returned to the mainstream, as has the question of whether lesbians and gay men should be allowed to teach. Although this redefinition of the family state and of educational labor is emerging in a moment when homosexuality is being redefined as something other than sexual deviancy, it is worth recognizing the connections between Beecher’s social ideas and the emerging movements for gay and lesbian adoption and support for gay and lesbian teachers and students.

It is worth asking similar questions about the legacy of Emma Willard’s plan for a council of women. Was this idea just another lost possibility for women’s political rights

of the nineteenth century? If the meeting at Seneca Falls represents an idea that took more than 70 years to come to pass, then could Willard's plan can be considered in the same light? The political movement for equal rights for women has always included recognition of sexual difference. Indeed, such recognition is a necessary step in demanding women's rights. Sue Cobble's history of the Presidential Commission of Women suggests that it functioned in a way that recalls the political and social ideas of Willard and Beecher. Conceived as an alternative to the "single category intervention" of the Equal Rights Amendment, the Commission was created to address both sex-based employment discrimination and the difficulties of women's labor within the family and society. Although men and women served on the commission, the scope and orientation of its work recalls Willard's proposal for a council of women.

Beecher and Willard would not necessarily recognize their own ideas in these later developments. But the work of history is to trace the unexpected and complicated connections between the past and the present. Even more than this, the historian should make sense out of the past, drawing meaning from what Northrop Frye called the "shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence."²⁰ Mary Ann Evans writing as George Eliot describes beautifully the way that those who wish to change society are swept into history, and thus never control the effects of their action. They "are never fighting against evil only; they are also placing themselves in opposition to a good," one that is represented in the very social order they seek to challenge.

Wherever the strength of a man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, there is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong—to shake faith, to wound friendship, perhaps, to

hem in his own powers. Like Antigone, he may fall a victim to the struggle, and yet he can never earn the name of a blameless martyr any more than the society—the Creon, can be branded as a hypocritical tyrant.

Rather than see historical actors as doomed, as tragic figures incapable of understanding their actions, Eliot urges her readers to draw a different moral from Antigone's struggle for justice and Creon's struggle to maintain the social order.

Perhaps the best moral we can draw is that to which the Chorus points—that our protest for the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence, and that lofty words—*megaloi logoi*—are not becoming to mortals.²¹

Antigone's power as a symbol for women in the past is that she reminds us to treat with sympathy those who seem to have been on the wrong side of moral questions. As a representation of civil society and of sexual polarity, Antigone offers an alternative to choosing between sexual difference or women's equality. She disrupts the easy equation of woman equals wife/mother and reminds us that women matter to the nation in complex and multiple ways. Above all, Antigone provides a framework for understanding women's moral and political claims across time, and, more specifically, for understanding how women's social ideas in nineteenth-century America matter to the present and future.

Endnotes

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1. *Letters of Elizabeth Palmer Peabody*, ed. Bruce Rhonda (Middletown: Wesley University Press, 1984), 296-297.
 2. Catharine Beecher, *Woman's Profession as Mother and Educator, with views in opposition to Women's Suffrage* (Philadelphia and Boston: Geo. Maclean, 1872), reprinted in Volume 6 of *The Social, Political and Philosophical Works of Catharine Beecher, Six Volumes*, ed. Therese Dykeman and Dorothy Rogers (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2002), 3-5. Hereafter referred to as *Works of Beecher*.
 3. Beecher explicitly states her view on suffrage for women in a footnote in *Woman's Profession*, Vol. 6, *Works of Beecher*, 205 (italics in original):

If the best good of society requires women to be law-makers, judges and juries, she has a right to those offices; if it does not, she has no right to them. As to taxation, it is probable that the best good of society *does* require that *women holding property* shall have the ballot, for this would increase the proportion of responsible and intelligent voters, and not add a mass of irresponsible and ignorant ones, as would universal woman suffrage.
 4. Ellen DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978). The literature on women's suffrage has followed this framework of anti-suffragist, domestic theorists versus suffragist political theorists, which seems much more productively applied to the period after 1890. For example, see Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984), 620-647.
 5. *Women's Profession*, Vol. 6, *Works of Beecher*, 188. Page numbers in text, hereafter.
 6. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Woman's Home*, ed. By Nicole Tonkovich, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 25. Page numbers in text, hereafter.
 7. On this topic see, Lisa Cochran Higgins, "Adulterous Individualism, Socialism, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Anti-Suffrage Writing" *Legacy* 21 (2004) 193-209. For the role that the politics of women's rights played in sparking the Beecher-Tilton scandal, see Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 370-379.
 8. Alma Lutz, *Emma Willard: Daughter of Democracy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), 237.
 9. Lutz, *Willard*, 253-254. This letter was among the least of Willard's political labors in the 1850s and 1860s. She updated her national history textbook with an appendix celebrating John C. Fremont just as he was being championed as a possible presidential candidate. She wrote appreciatively of the aging Whig politicians, Webster and Clay, as they succeeded in the compromises of 1850.
 10. Lutz, *Willard*, 250.

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11. Susan Zaeske, *Petitioning, Antislavery, & Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) focuses entirely on anti-slavery petitions, but places them in the wider context of the right of petition in Anglo-American politics. Catharine Beecher's petitions against Cherokee removal and Emma Willard's petitions for peace should also be considered within a tradition which predates and survives social ideas about the individual's right to vote.
12. The Memorial itself is included in *The Papers of Emma Hart Willard, 1787-1870*, eds. Lucy F. Townsend and Barbara Wiley (Bethesda, MD : UPA collection from LexisNexis, 2005). On the reception of the Memorial in Washington see Lutz, *Willard*, 250-253.
13. Emma Willard, "Letter to French statesman Dupont De L'Eure On the Political Position of Women" *The American Literary Magazine* (April, 1848), 246. Page numbers in text, hereafter.
14. Catharine Beecher, "Something Better for Women Than the Ballot" *Appletons' Journal of Literature, Science and Art* (Sep 4, 1869), 81.
15. Beecher, "Something Better....," 82.
16. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005). The tension or polarity between "difference" and "equality" feminism operated within what I have called "the moral economy of women's educational labor" and has continued to play out within feminist social ideas ever since. Cobble's statement about the labor feminists of the twentieth century also describes the middle-class women educational theorists of the nineteenth century who argued that women should have "equal" educational and intellectual opportunities and "different" family and social roles:
- The continuing inequality of women should not be laid at the doorstep of either "difference" or "equality" feminists. Indeed, most labor feminists in this book never resolved the tension between equality and difference strategies, nor did they see the necessity of doing so. They wanted equality and special treatment, and they did not think of the two as incompatible. They argued that gender difference must be accommodated and that equality can not always be achieved through identity in treatment. Theirs was a vision of equality that claimed justice on the basis of their humanity, not on the basis of their sameness with men. (7-8)
17. The scholarship I am thinking of here includes the work of Judith Butler and Joan Scott on gender as well as historical scholarship on middle-class reformers in the nineteenth century best represented by *Visible Woman: New Essays on American Activism*, eds. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsack (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993) and Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002)
18. Jackie Blount, *Fit to Teach: Same-Sex Desire, Gender, and School Work in the Twentieth Century* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005).
19. On Beecher's relationship with Johnson, see Sklar, *Beecher*, 186-203.
20. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), 237.
21. George Eliot, "The Antigone and its Moral" *Leader* (March 1856), reprinted in *The*

Essays of George Eliot, ed. Thomas Pinney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 262.

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Imaging the West, American Studies, Rutgers-NB, Fall 2001
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