Women were abolition's most effective foot soldiers. The best answer to anti-abolitionist violence came from black and white women who marched arm in arm to shield each other from the howling mobs during the Boston riot and at Pennsylvania Hall. As Angelina Grimké put it in a letter that caught Weld's attention, if abolitionists had to pay with their blood for the oppression of a guilty nation, they were prepared to do it. So seminal were women's contributions, effect, and influence on abolition that Hammond singled them out as women who “unsex themselves to carry on this horrid warfare against Slaveholders.”

Female antislavery societies were some of the first founded, and women abolitionists emerged as leading orators, writers, and organizers of abolition.

Historians have searched for the roots of nineteenth-century women's activism in the cult of true womanhood, which viewed women as religious creatures and custodians of moral virtue. In this reading, middle-class women often parlayed alleged moral superiority into political activism, transcending the confining domestic, private roles prescribed for them by the separate spheres theory. Women's participation in the growth of evangelical Christianity and in religious benevolence is often portrayed as the foundation of their activism in antislavery and women's rights. But most women abolitionists, like their male counterparts, hailed from humbler backgrounds. Female moral reform societies, temperance, and abolition, which required regulating male behavior and challenging social mores and political institutions, revealed class and ideological tensions among those who stuck to conventional gender roles and others who were radicalized by their activism.

If not all female abolitionists became women's rights activists, pioneering feminists owed their public careers to abolition. They questioned racial as well
The Woman Question

as gender hierarchies, posing a challenge to bourgeois gender conventions, religious authority, and the white man’s democracy.

WOMEN ABOLITIONISTS

African American women played a crucial part in the rise of militant black abolitionism. Despite its use of the language of manhood and conventional gender roles, Freedom’s Journal published anonymous letters and poems by black women, a certain Matilda pleading for female education, and notices of the African Dorcas Association. Black women established a tradition of activism in the church and in social and literary organizations. Associational activities were not confined to literate, churchgoing, middle-class black women. Nearly two hundred working-class black women formed the Daughters of Africa in Philadelphia, which supported its members with a weekly allowance of $1.50 when they were sick.3 Black women’s independent associations were staging grounds for political activism. Their claims to respectability and a public antislavery persona challenged the devaluation of black womanhood and the dehumanization of African Americans in the slaveholding Republic.

Black women’s abolitionism came of age in the writings and speeches of remarkable women like Maria Stewart, Sarah Mapps Douglass, Sarah Louise Forten, and Jarena Lee. Garrison published Stewart’s innocuously titled Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality in 1831. Many years later he recounted meeting her in the “flush and promise of a ripening womanhood.” The beautiful, brilliant Stewart was one of the first American women to speak publicly (Frances Wright was British). She included an introductory sketch of herself in her book: her birth in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1803, an orphan at the age of five bound to a clergyman’s family, how her “soul thirsted for knowledge,” her education in Sabbath schools, her marriage at the age of twenty-three to the War of 1812 veteran James W. Stewart, and her widowhood three years later. Mentored by David Walker and befriended by the “noble-hearted” Garrison, she issued an early call to arms against “slavery and ignorance.” She asked “ye daughters of Africa,” to “Awake! Arise!” and “distinguish yourselves.” Stewart’s message was not restricted to a plea for female education. She asked blacks to “promote and respect ourselves,” to “patronize each other,” “improve our own talents,” and be silent no longer. The “great and mighty men of America,” the “rich and powerful ones” may “kill, tyrannize, and oppress,” but they could not crush the “fearless and undaunted spirits of the Africans forever.” To Americans who had “acknowledged all the nations of the earth, except Hayti,” she emphasized, “WE CLAIM OUR RIGHTS.”
Stewart was soon lecturing before the NEASS and the African Masonic Lodge, the preeminent organization of black men in Boston, to mixed audiences of blacks and whites, men and women. She was hoodwinked out of her inheritance and criticized “prejudice, ignorance and poverty” for the plight of free blacks. She argued, “Continual and hard labor irritates our tempers and sours our dispositions, the whole system becomes worn out with toil and fatigue.” While Stewart clarified that she did not think it “derogatory . . . for persons to live out to service,” she resented the fact that “most of our color have dragged out a miserable existence of servitude from cradle to the grave.” She exhorted black men to speak out “in the defence of African rights and liberty” and to work for abolition: “Let every man of color throughout the United States, who possesses the spirit and principles of a man, sign a petition to Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and grant you the rights and privileges of common free citizens.” Her frequent admonitions against men’s vices like dancing, drinking, and gambling at the cost of antislavery activism may have bothered some. On the eve of her departure from Boston she justified her right to speak out. “What if I am a woman?” she asked, asserting that women were “by turns, martyrs, apostles, warriors” and “divines and scholars.” Well before the Grimké sisters, Stewart contended that neither sex nor race marked a person but the “principle formed in the soul.” She published her collected works in 1835.

A letter Alexander Crummell wrote on her behalf reveals that Stewart became a teacher at Williamsburg and a member of the Colored Ladies Literary Society (CLLS) upon moving to New York, where she probably lectured too. She attended the first Women’s Anti-Slavery Convention in 1837. Crummell recalled meeting her, “a young woman of my own people full of literary aspiration and ambitious authorship.” She moved to Baltimore in 1853 and then to Washington, where she ran Sabbath schools for black children. She did not stop lecturing and publishing, as is commonly believed. She delivered a suitably religious lecture on the proper training of children before the St. James’ Protestant Episcopal Church in 1860 and wrote a semi-autobiographical story on an orphaned black girl. Stewart heard the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation and, like many abolitionists, became involved in freedmen’s relief during the war. When she finally received her husband’s pension, she invested it in a new edition of her speeches in 1879, including a letter from Garrison reminiscing on their early collaboration. They both died that year. Black abolitionists also bracketed her life: Thomas Paul presided at her wedding and Crummell at her funeral.
Black women took the lead in female antislavery organizing too. Stewart was the moving force behind the organization of the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society (AAFIS) of Boston in 1832. Its constitution, written perhaps by her, was devoted to the “diffusion of knowledge” and “suppression of vice and immorality.” In her address to the AAFIS, Stewart declared, “It is useless for us any longer to sit with our hands folded.” Inspired by the Quaker free produce movement, black women in Philadelphia’s Bethel church formed the Colored Female Free Produce Society in 1831. That year Jocelyn proposed the organization of the all-black Female Literary Association (FLA) of Philadelphia, whose members critiqued one another’s work. The CLLS in New York and the Minerva Literary Society in Philadelphia were founded in 1834. At least five black women’s associations met in New York’s AME Zion church. Their membership cut across class lines. Garrison published the constitutions of the AAFIS, FLA, and the Colored Female Religious and Moral Society of Salem, formed as early as 1818, and the works of members of the “Society of colored ladies in Providence” and of the FLA. The Liberator had a “Ladies Department,” and Garrison published women in the main body of his paper too.

Abolition nurtured women’s activism. Susan Paul and Prudence Crandall were the only two lifelong female members of the NEASS and the first to join antislavery societies. Paul struggled to support her family on the death of her father, and Garrison bemoaned her early death in 1841, the result of her exposure to the elements while aboard a Jim Crow steamer. A black women’s Garrison Society, which may have included Paul and Stewart, met in Boston in 1832 to converse about the sufferings of “our enslaved sisters.” In February Garrison reported the formation of the first antislavery society in Salem (SFASS) made up entirely of “females of color.” He commended the black female antislavery societies in Middletown, Connecticut, led by women of the abolitionist Beman family, and in Rochester, New York, urging “colored and white ladies” to follow their example. In 1835 Ruggles published a pamphlet (previously attributed to George Bourne) on the sexual abuse of female slaves. He asked American women to join antislavery societies in order to protest the “debasing bondage colored women are held, by which they are defiled and destroyed.”

Black women were at the forefront of female abolitionism. Sarah Mapps Douglass of Philadelphia was the granddaughter of Cyrus Bustill, whose biography she wrote in 1854, and the daughter of the abolitionists Grace Bustill Douglass and Robert Douglass, a prosperous barber and leading black Presbyterian. Her brother Robert Douglass Jr., an artist of some repute, was known for his early portrait of Garrison. Garrison published his exuberant description of...
Haiti’s Independence Day celebrations and Sarah’s essays signed Sophonisba, which reminded free women to make “our captive sisters . . . the subject of our daily conversation, our daily prayers.” In letters she signed Zillah, Douglass reiterated that African Americans wanted to stay in the land of their nativity. She condemned colonizationists as “our enemies,” who feared that education would “elevate us to an equality with themselves.” Douglass began her teaching career in New York’s African schools and was secretary of the FLA. An address to the FLA, probably given by her, exhorted its members to “elevate yourselves to the station of rational, intelligent beings accountable for the use made of the talents committed to your care.” Similarly, Elizabeth Jennings, the daughter of Thomas Jennings, in her speech to the CLLS, asked black women to “stand forth in the field of improvement.” Douglass encouraged black women to patronize the *Genius* and the *Liberator*, as they were “devoted to your cause.” She importuned Garrison to publish the FLA’s constitution and purchased a copy of his colonization pamphlet for the society. Douglass married Rev. William Douglass, the pastor and historian of the city’s historic African church, St. Thomas’s. The first woman to attend the Female Medical College of Pennsylvania, she became known for her pioneering lectures on female anatomy and physiology.7

Like Douglass, the Forten sisters of Philadelphia, Margareta, Harriet, and Sarah, belonged to a distinguished black abolitionist family and with their mother, Charlotte, were active members of the interracial PFASS. Whittier was so impressed by them that he wrote a poem titled “To the Daughters of James Forten.” Margareta and Sarah taught school, and Harriet married Robert Purvis and was active in his Vigilant Committee, which assisted fugitive slaves. Sarah published poems and essays in the *Liberator* under the pseudonyms Ada and the Indian Magawisca. In “The Abuse of Liberty” she decried northern racism. In a poem published by the first women’s antislavery convention, she wrote, “Our skins may differ, but from thee we claim, / A sister’s privilege, and a sister’s name.” Sarah noted that her family frequented only familiar places out of fear of encountering racial proscription. Douglass complained of racism even in Quaker meetinghouses. Their efforts and those of people sympathetic to them, like the Grimkés, bore fruit in the resolution passed by the convention condemning “prejudice against color” as the “spirit of slavery.” Sarah’s career was cut short by her marriage to Joseph Purvis. Unlike his brother, Joseph was not an activist, and she settled for domesticity.8

Black women preachers championed abolition and breached the barriers of female decorum. Jarena Lee was the first in a list that included Zilpha Elaw, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Julia Foote, and Sojourner Truth. Lee, who published
her spiritual narrative in 1836, traced her conversion to a sermon by Richard Allen. She approached Allen for permission to preach, and he suggested that she hold prayer meetings since the Methodist Discipline did not “call for women preachers.” Lee abided by his decision but queried, “And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach, seeing the Saviour died for the woman as well as the man?” She commenced itinerant preaching but resigned herself to married life with a black clergyman. After his death, Lee felt the call to preach again. Witnessing her sermonize spontaneously, as the pastor “seemed to have lost the spirit,” Allen finally agreed to let her preach. Lee took the greatest delight in converting “a great slave holder” who “had been very cruel” to his slaves. In 1840 she joined the AASS and subsequently published two more editions of her narrative. Lee mentored Elaw and contested the AME’s ban on women ministers. Like the more famous Truth, who donned Quaker garb to evoke respectability and the Friends’ tradition of female preaching, she used religious testimony to condemn slavery and female inequality.9

Quaker women were an early mainstay of antebellum abolition. Laura Havi-land called on “American women” to shed their “indifference manifested to the cause of the female slave.” “We wish,” she concluded, “that every woman should feel her accountability on this subject.” Originally from Canada, Havi-land migrated to Michigan via New York with her husband. She and Elizabeth Margaret Chandler founded the first western antislavery society in October 1832. The most notable was Lucretia Coffin Mott, who was born in Nantucket and settled with her husband, James Mott, in Philadelphia. She was active in the free produce movement and an early supporter of Lundy and Garrison. Used to speaking in Quaker meetings as a minister, Mott became a formidable proponent of abolition. She was the only active female participant in the found- ing convention of the AASS, which called for the formation of female antislavery societies.

Quakers such as Mott, Esther Moore, and Lydia White and black women abolitionists founded the interracial PFASS in December 1833. James McCrum- mell presided over their meeting, May addressed them, and Mott became cor- responding secretary. Margaretta Forten and Sarah McCrummell, the wife of James, helped draft its constitution, and Sarah became its recording secretary. The wife of Joseph Cassey, Amy, was also a member. Not all the black women in the PFASS were related to black abolitionists. Its managing board included Hetty Reckless, who was active in the underground railroad and moral reform, and Hetty Burr, a founding member. Sarah Pugh was its president for much of its existence, and Mary Grew, its longtime corresponding secretary, wrote
most of the annual reports. Writing to Elizabeth Whittier, the sister of the poet, Sarah Forten, also a member, commended Thompson’s lecture on Haiti before the PFASS. The society grew dramatically in the 1830s to over two hundred members and retained an activist core of around ninety women in later decades. Roughly 12 percent of its membership was black. It supported Douglass’s school, meddling with its management to her ire, until 1840.10

Even before the PFASS, a group of twelve women founded the BFASS in October 1833. It would not formalize its constitution until a year later and its rationale for female abolitionism was a combination of traditional and radical ideas on gender. Its first annual report claimed that the women became abolitionists “for our CHILDREN” but also called on those who were ready to “cast away pride, prejudice, self-interest, coldness, timidity and aristocracy” to join it. The BFASS was prodded by Garrison to include black women, and twenty-five, including Paul, became members. In 1836 the BFASS protested the treatment meted out to “free women of color, of high moral and intellectual character and cultivation, and of those strong powers which no prejudice can entirely crush, have been refused the accommodation of public conveyances, out of deference to the prejudice of the south against freedom.” The BFASS was larger than its Philadelphia counterpart, drawing nearly six hundred members from Boston and the surrounding areas. While historians know a lot about a coterie of prominent women, we know little about a larger group of women married to artisans. The society also contained a substantial number of single women, most of whom, like Paul and Julia Williams, were teachers, and some working-class women, seamstresses, and domestic servants. Williams, who had enrolled in Crandall’s school and Noyes Academy, taught a school for black children run by the BFASS members Martha and Lucy Ball. Phillis Salem and her Quaker employers, Sarah and Thankful Southwick, were members. The BFASS supported the Samaritan Asylum for Colored Orphans. Its first president was Charlotte Phelps, the wife of Amos Phelps.

Much like the Forten sisters, the Weston sisters, especially the formidable Maria Weston Chapman, who stood up to anti-abolition mobs, were active in the BFASS. Chapman was known for her annual reports, Right and Wrong in Boston, her expert editorship of the BFASS gift book Liberty Bell, published as a fund-raiser, and her management of its extremely successful antislavery fairs, which inspired similar efforts by other female antislavery societies. As the foreign corresponding secretary, she initiated correspondence with British and French abolitionist women, including Madame de Staël and Duchess De Broglie. The lucrative Liberty Bell showcased the feminist and internationalist nature of Garrisonian abolition, containing articles by Martineau and Lady Byron’s plea for
black education and equality. Chapman wrote a history of Haiti, complaining that whereas the history of the American Revolution fills volumes few knew the history of the black republic. Quincy wrote “Two Nights in St. Domingo,” detailing the start of the slave rebellion in 1791. Chapman published articles by the Irish abolitionists Richard D. Webb, James Haughton, and Richard Allen and an article on the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society by the MASS agent John A. Collins. It also published leading abolitionists as well as BFASS members like Eliza Follen, the wife of Charles Follen, who died in 1841, Maria’s sister, Ann Warren Weston, and Lydia Maria Child.11

Child, a writer and the wife of David Lee Child, a founding member of the NEASS, was the most famous abolitionist woman in Boston. Known for her iconoclastic novels, her popular advice book for housewives, and her expert editorship of the first children’s magazine, the Juvenile Miscellany, Child used her considerable talents to write an influential abolitionist text, An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans (1833). It led George Ticknor, a professor at Harvard, to boot her out of his literary salon, and the Boston Athenaeum revoked her membership. Child’s book was an exposé of slavery on the decidedly unfeminine grounds of history, philosophy, political economy, and ethics. She took on proslavery apologetics: the master’s property interest was the slave’s only security, but rationality could be upended by human passion and avarice. Child argued that the slave South ruled the Republic through the three-fifths clause, and the North, “grown opulent,” supported them. She deconstructed American racism—“We made slavery, and slavery makes the prejudice”—and the false idea that Africans did not resist their enslavement, which ignored the fact that thousands had “stabbed themselves for freedom—jumped into the waves for freedom—starved for freedom—fought like very tigers for freedom! But they have been hung, burned, and shot—and their tyrants have been their historians!” As for the alleged black tendency to crime, she retorted, “We hear a great deal of the negroes’ crimes, we hear very little of their provocations.” Northerners with their discriminatory laws, Child charged, were culpable for the real crime of racism.12

If Whittier was the poet laureate of the movement, Child was its muse. In 1834 she published The Oasis, an annual gift book containing abolitionist writings. Chapman modeled the Liberty Bell after it. A year later Child published Authentic Anecdotes of American Slavery. Culled from stories recounted by fugitive slaves whom she met in Philadelphia, abolitionists, and others, it was a precursor of Weld’s American Slavery As It Is. In 1836 she published the Anti-Slavery Catechism, which answered each objection to immediatism in a series of questions and answers. The same year she published The Evils of Slavery and
*The Second Wave*

The second wave of abolitionism included an increase in popular antislavery literature, which often took the form of fictional narratives that illustrated the inhumanity of slavery. In 1833, she published *The Cure of Slavery*, in which she quoted eminent southerners from Washington to Clay arguing that slavery was evil. She illustrated the efficacy of abolition in Haiti, in the newly independent Latin American nations, and in the British West Indies and concluded, “America has no excuse to screen her from the strong disapprobation of the world.” In 1835 she wrote a two-volume global history of women. It described women’s lives and gender conventions in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas without making an explicit argument for equality. Her sympathetic discussion of African women kept antiracism at the forefront of her writing. Child became the first female editor of an abolitionist newspaper, the NASS, and she edited Harriet Jacobs’s slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Child championed Native American rights, prison reform, an end to capital punishment, the rights of the poor and working classes, and women’s rights. She preferred integrated antislavery societies but acted as a liaison between the BFASS and the PFASS, encouraging the BFASS to emulate the free produce tactics of the PFASS and asking the latter to open correspondence with English abolitionists, as the BFASS had done.13

While the BFASS and PFASS were the most prominent female antislavery societies, two others were founded in New York, the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham Street Chapel in 1834 and the Ladies New York City Anti-Slavery Society (LNYCASS) in 1835. The Chatham Street society was composed mainly of women active in the New York Moral Reform Society and Female Benevolent Society. The LNYCASS’s membership was dominated by women related to the evangelical wing, among them the eldest daughter of Lewis Tappan, Juliana, who was also the corresponding secretary of the Anti-Slavery Sewing Society. The LNYCASS was formed after a rousing lecture by Thompson, and the society thanked him in its first report. The Glasgow Ladies Auxiliary Emancipation Society financed Thompson’s tour, illustrating the transatlantic network of female abolitionism. The LNYCASS report noted that womanhood offered no protection to abolitionist or slave women. It was critical of the church, the “handmaid of oppression,” and it opened up a correspondence with the BFASS. Unlike the BFASS and PFASS, the two New York female antislavery societies did not have any black members. Angelina Grimké pronounced the LNYCASS “utterly inefficient” because of its exclusivity. The only formal restriction in the Chatham Street society’s constitution was against slaveholders, but its annual dues of a dollar excluded poor women. African American women in New York organized separately. The CLLS and the Rising Daughters of Abyssinia attended the antislavery women’s convention and provided funds to publish its proceedings. In 1840 black women formed the Manhattan Abolition Society.
Conservative on the questions of race and gender, the two New York societies disintegrated after the woman question tore the movement apart.14

By 1835 the AASS reported that it had acquired 24 female auxiliaries in towns such as Portland, Maine, Plymouth and Concord, New Hampshire, and Providence, Rhode Island, and it predicted a tenfold growth of women’s antislavery societies. The pioneering SFASS was reconstituted as an interracial society in 1834. A Providence Female Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1832 lasted barely a year. In 1834 Providence boasted of a new society with 166 members as well as a juvenile female antislavery society. Most of the officers of the Providence FASS were related to male abolitionists. As in New York, the Concord FASS in New Hampshire was formed at Thompson’s urging. Its first annual report, written by its erudite corresponding secretary Mary Clark, recorded the progress of female abolitionism in New England, which had bloomed into 65 female antislavery societies by 1836. The CFASS report invoked the names of historic forbears such as Anne Hutchinson and Anne Bradstreet and the history of women’s associations to justify their activism. An astute historian, Clark is a forgotten figure. She died in 1841.

The women’s antislavery movement spread west with the founding of numerous societies in Ohio. By 1837 Massachusetts had over 40, and by 1838 Ohio had 30 female antislavery societies. Women abolitionists formed a statewide Ohio FASS to coordinate their activities. The number of female antislavery societies that year jumped to 139, fueled by the petition campaign, and by 1855 over 200 had been formed all over the North. A majority of the women were wives and daughters of farmers and mechanics. The societies in Lynn, a center of the shoemaking industry that supplied the slave South, and in the mill town of Lowell were predominantly working class. The Lowell girls connected their oppression to that of the slaves, an imagined solidarity opposing the alliance of the “lords of the loom and lords of the lash” built on the slave-grown cotton that fed the textile factories of New England.

The female antislavery societies corresponded with each other, as did the individual members, encouraging themselves in a hostile environment. Frances Harriet Whipple of the Providence FASS appealed to American women to lead on the question of abolition, and Maria Sturges published a letter to the women of Ohio to circulate and sign antislavery petitions. Lucy Wright, the sister of the abolitionist Elizur Wright, writing on behalf of the Portage County Ladies Society of Ohio, reported that it had grown from a founding membership of 37 to nearly 400 and asked for exchange of “kindred sentiments” with other female antislavery societies, as their hopes, fears, and aims were similar. Some, like the
BFASS, PFASS, SFASS, and the FASS of Ashtabula County, Ohio, coordinated mass petition drives and antislavery fairs and developed new female auxiliaries. The Providence FASS encouraged the formation of local auxiliaries throughout Rhode Island. The CFASS developed its own auxiliaries in Dunbarton and Durham and a Young Ladies juvenile antislavery society in Concord. The LNYCASS, which obtained 800 signatures on an anti–slave trade petition the year it was formed, issued an address to the Christian women of America to act against slavery. The PFASS republished Heyrick’s pamphlets, including her defense of female antislavery societies. In their address to the women of Massachusetts, the BFASS exhorted them as “wives, mothers, daughters and sisters . . . responsible for the influence we exercise on the human race” to sign a petition against the slave trade in the District of Columbia. The Reading FASS, one of the first to be formed, declared that their enemies may rage but could not suppress women’s demand for justice.15

Abolitionists justified women’s activism and challenged bourgeois gender conventions. In his address to the CFASS, John Putnam noted that it was women who tipped the scales for abolition in Britain and charged his audience, as “members of the great human family” and as “rational, immortal and social beings,” to do their duty for abolition. James A. Thome’s Address to the Females of Ohio was a thoughtful defense of female abolitionism and challenged the idea of separate spheres. He condemned the fact that a “sphere is arrogantly assigned to woman, narrowed down to the circuit of the parlor, or measured by the circumference of her spinning wheel” and that the moment she steps out of it, “she is branded with every ungenerous and abusive epithet, and bid back to her proper sphere.” He asked them not to shrink from a “political subject” and to empathize with the abuse of slave women. Thome listed specific tasks for abolitionist women to petition Congress, circulate abolitionist material, write on behalf of the slave, support black schools, and convert other women and their own families to abolition.16

Women abolitionists did yeomen’s work that was critical to sustaining the movement. The female antislavery societies were efficient fund raisers, selling subscriptions to abolitionist newspapers, purchasing pamphlets and tracts, financing the underground railroad, and paying the salaries of antislavery agents. The unpaid voluntary labor of countless unknown women kept abolition afloat. Goods with antislavery logos, mottoes, and illustrations were effective propaganda devices and a tribute to the creativity and productivity of abolitionist women. Female antislavery writing, the essays of Child and the poems of Sophia Little of Rhode Island, figured prominently in the Liberty Bell, sold annually at the BFASS fair. Antislavery sewing circles created articles, spreading
abolitionist homilies like “May the use of our needles prick the consciences of slave-holders,” sold at antislavery fairs and bazaars. Besides a fair sampling of abolitionist women’s handiwork, items sold in the fairs could range from fashionable imports to homegrown goods donated by local abolitionist farmers. Most female antislavery societies emulated Chapman’s elaborate fairs for the MASS, which succeeded the BFASS fairs. The Liberator published maps of the huge MASS fairs with specific tables displaying items from female antislavery societies all over the state. In Ohio Sarah Otis Ernst founded the Cincinnati Anti Slavery Sewing Circle and held a successful antislavery fair. These fairs usually coincided with the state antislavery conventions and meetings of local societies. While Ernst’s fair funded an annual abolition convention in Cincinnati uniting all factions of the movement, the Salem Garrisonians held their own annual Western Anti-Slavery fair. Black women in Cincinnati and Philadelphia held fairs to fund black newspapers. The largest was held in New York by wives of the city’s black clergymen on the eve of the war to raise funds for the Colored Orphan Asylum. The Providence FASS held its fair during commencement at Brown University to attract the largest number of buyers, while others held their gatherings during the holidays.17

Abolitionist women sewing, baking, and holding bazaars did not explicitly challenge gender norms, but their participation in the massive petition campaigns catapulted them into the political realm. Northern women involved in religious benevolence had petitioned against Indian removal earlier, but the female antislavery societies formed the backbone of the abolitionist petition campaign, Garrison noted. Women outnumbered male signatories, sometimes by a margin of two to one, and coordinated the campaign to gather signatures. They soon graduated from handwritten petitions to the standard printed versions handed out by the AASS and state antislavery societies. The BFASS asked the women of New England to cast aside selfishness and indolence and receive four rolls of paper each to affix their names to first and then canvass door to door for signatures. The petition campaign not only allowed women to participate in the national political debate over slavery in the District of Columbia, the interstate slave trade, the annexation of Texas, and the Gag Rule but also proved to be a stepping-stone to demands for female citizenship. Sturges remarked that the nation’s capital was a “citadel of slavery,” and they would not be “bantered from the field” just because they were women. Couched initially in deferential terms to the “fathers and rulers” of the country, female petitioners came to identify themselves as citizens. Gathering signatures was hard, daunting work but also a political education, introducing a whole generation of women, even those who were relatively conservative, to grassroots campaigning. Juliana
Tappan remarked, “I met with more intelligence in the families of some col-
ored persons in my district, than in the splendidly furnished drawing rooms of
wealthy citizens in Hudson Square.”

In Congress, southern slaveholding politicians caricatured the women as
unsexed spinsters, “grannies and misses,” and the abolition movement as con-
sisting supposedly of hoydenish women, effeminate men, and uppity blacks
overturning natural gender and racial hierarchies. They disdained receiving
petitions from women, noncitizens in their view. But the BFASS reminded the
women of New England that representation was based on numbers, not on sex.
Long after the national campaign was over, abolitionist women in Massachu-
setts coordinated a successful petition drive to overturn the state law against
interracial marriage, and the women of Rhode Island, along with the black
community, petitioned against Jim Crow. The petition campaigns were a foun-
dational experience for many women’s rights activists, who received their first
political education in networking, canvassing, mobilizing, and movement for-
mation in abolition.18

FEMALE ABOLITIONISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

As women came to define abolition, their presence became controversial.
Sarah and Angelina Grimké of South Carolina were instrumental to that de-
bate. Sarah, who nursed her dying father in Philadelphia, converted to Quaker-
ism. Her sister and goddaughter Angelina, thirteen years her junior, soon fol-
lowed. Sarah’s antislavery was shaped by an abolitionist of another generation,
John Woolman, whose journal she read. Angelina rejected her slaveholding
destiny, noting in her diary in 1829 on the eve of her departure to Philadelphia
that “a Carolina mistress was literally a Slave Driver & I tho’ it degrading to
the female character.” In 1835 she wrote her eloquent letter to Garrison and
joined the PFASS. The next year Angelina published Appeal to the Christian
Women of the South, asking them to penetrate the wall that southerners had
built around their states against abolitionist reasoning. Slavery, she wrote, viol-
ated God’s laws, the Declaration of Independence, and human rights. Ange-
lina exhorted southern women to read, pray, speak, and act for abolition, even
if it entailed persecution. She claimed that abolition was women’s work. Like
most incendiary religious women in world history, she asked women to obey
God rather than man. Her pamphlet was published in three editions, one with
an introduction by Thompson for an English audience. In 1836 Sarah also pub-
lished An Epistle to the Clergy of the Southern States, a more religious and
less successful document than Angelina’s pamphlet. She admonished that they
were stoning and killing the prophets sent to deliver them and ignoring God’s “awful denunciations against those ‘who rob the poor because he is poor.’” Ministers bore a “tenfold weight of guilt” for preaching that God approved of slavery with its “infinity of horrors.” By converting humans into property, a “chattel personal,” southern laws of slavery violated divine decrees. In their letter of 1837 to “Clarkson,” the Grimké sisters delineated the actions northerners could take against slavery.19

The Grimkés earned notoriety not for their writings but for speaking publicly before what were called promiscuous audiences of men and women. Elizur Wright invited Angelina to attend the convention of antislavery agents in 1836. The sisters were the only women to have attended the training sessions conducted by Weld. They launched their famous speaking tour the following year and were deluged with invitations from female antislavery societies. In New York and New Jersey they had spoken before mostly female audiences, except in one black gathering that included men. In Massachusetts, men curious to hear or debate them attended their meetings. The Grimkés addressed over forty thousand people during their tour. Alarmed at their success, the General Association of Massachusetts Congregational ministers issued a pastoral letter in June 1837 written by Rev. Nehemiah Adams, who would compose the proslavery tract A South-Side View of Slavery (1854). The “clerical bull,” as Garrison called it, was an attempt by conservative ministers to bar abolitionists from New England’s churches. The ire of anti-abolitionist ministers was concentrated on the Grimkés and the Garrisonians who supported them. They were accused of threatening “the female character with widespread and permanent injury.” It condemned abolitionists for encouraging “any of that sex who so far forget themselves as to itinerate in the character of public lecturers and teachers.” As Angelina observed, “We have given great offense on account of our womanhood, which seems to be as objectionable as our abolitionism.”

Female antislavery societies rallied to the Grimkés’ defense. The BFASS and PFASS issued directives asking women to support them. The BFASS denounced the pastoral letter and praised the sisters as “women of genius and eloquence”; its members left Adams’s church. The PFASS predicted that Angelina, like any abolitionist, would not only have to endure the “sneers of the heartless multitude” but also be subject to “grave charges of infractions of the laws of female delicacy and propriety.” Garrisonians also came to their defense. In his address to the CFASS, Rogers maintained that it was not women who had lost sight of their sphere but gentlemen. If men would not perform the “rouger work” of abolition, then women had to step in. In the religious press Angelina was called Devilina, and the devout sisters, loose women. Clerical abolitionists
like Phelps deplored their speaking to mixed audiences, but Henry C. Wright cheered them on. Angelina was exhausted after numerous lectures and depressed when Weld, with whom she had fallen in love, and Whittier warned the sisters to avoid the woman question. She protested that she lectured for the slave rather than for women’s rights. Weld had early encouraged the sisters and designated them agents. He now asked them to assert their rights through their actions rather than engage their critics extensively. Sarah was determined not to “surrender my right to discuss any great moral subject” and heartened by the bolstering of “dear brother Garrison,” who “united fully with us on the subject of the rights of woman.” Similarly, Angelina felt that a “woman could do hundred times more for the slave if she were not fettered.”

The Grimké sisters could ill afford to ignore the woman question. In Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females, Catharine Beecher, an advocate of female education and colonization, criticized Angelina. Unlike Mary Lyons and Emma Willard, Beecher is less known for founding schools than for her writings on domestic management, women’s health, religion, and education. Ironically, Angelina had wanted to attend her Hartford Female Seminary but was refused permission by her Philadelphia Quaker meeting. The debate between Beecher and Angelina can be cast as one between difference and equality feminism, but abolitionist women employed a range of arguments from a conservative domestic rationale to a more activist, public one for their work. The more meaningful divide was one between reformers involved in religious benevolence and colonization and abolitionists. Beecher had participated in the movement against Cherokee removal coordinated by her father and other ministers in New England, which included calling public meetings, a petition campaign to Congress, and the publication of a circular. For her, acting against Indian removal was an exercise in female virtue but not abolition.

Beecher noted that Angelina mistook the opinion of northerners, who were averse to both slavery and abolition. Instead of attacking racism, she said, abolitionists should make the disagreeable object, African Americans, more agreeable. Abolitionists irritated whites and apparently made blacks envious and revengeful. She deplored Garrison’s harsh language for inciting slave rebellion, sectional hatred, and lack of respect for Christian institutions. Beecher delineated the “just bounds of female influence” and objected to organizing women into antislavery societies. Abolition threw women out of their “appropriate sphere” of “piety, charity, maternal and domestic duty” and exposed them to the ridicule of the public sphere. She opposed women’s lecturing, “if the female advocate chooses to come upon a stage, and expose her person, dress,
and elocution to public criticism, it is right to express disgust.” She likened the Grimkés’ lecturing to that of the much-reviled Frances Wright. Beecher eventually signed an antislavery petition in 1854 but opposed woman suffrage.21

Beecher’s critique and ministerial censure provoked the Grimké sisters. Angelina replied to her in a series of thirteen letters, and Sarah vindicated the equality of the sexes in her fourteen letters. They were published in the Liberator and reprinted as pamphlets in 1838. Angelina reasserted the abolitionist argument: slaveholders were man stealers, and the North was complicit. She rejected gradualism and held up Heyrick as a model for immediatists. Angelina vouched “as a southerner” that slavery was the mother of all abominations. In a rebuke of Beecher’s colonizationist views, she professed that Haiti was ample proof of black men’s capabilities. The colored man was not an “unfortunate inferior” but “an outraged and insulted equal.” She even argued that “it is now the duty of the slaves of the South to rebuke their masters for their robbery, oppression and crime.”22

The Grimkés broadened the abolitionist conception of human rights to include gender. In one of her last letters, entitled “Human Rights not Founded on Sex,” Angelina famously averred, “The investigation of the rights of the slave has led me to a better understanding of my own.” This was no simplistic equation of women’s oppression with that of the slave but a philosophical argument that linked abolition to the cause of human rights in general. She wrote that women were just as guilty of the crime of slavery as men, and it was incumbent on them to fight against it. In republican America the right to petition was one of the few political rights available to them. The doctrine of human rights equated the slave to Lyman Beecher, she argued, and made woman equal to man. Had she ever thought of enslaved black women, she asked Beecher, in writing her “cold and heartless pages.” Turning the tables on her, Angelina seemed to be asking who the true woman was here.

In her letters on the equality of the sexes addressed to Mary Parker, the president of the BFASS, Sarah sought to correct a “corrupt public opinion” and a “perverted interpretation” of the scriptures on the province of woman. Holding that woman was subject only to God, she indicted male domination: “All history attests that man has subjected woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasures, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort.” Relying heavily on Child’s book, she argued further that “the page of history teems with woman’s wrongs, and it is wet with woman’s tears.” Ranging widely on the intellect, dress, and legal disabilities of women as well as on marriage, she constructed a full-throated feminist argument on their contemporary oppression and moral equality. Sarah
concluded her letters with a plea for women’s ministry, a subject close to her heart. Exemplifying the abolitionist turn against Christian fundamentalism, she reasoned that if Paul’s injunction on female silence was taken literally, then women could not sing in churches or conduct Sabbath schools.23

The high point of female abolitionism was the annual meetings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. The BFASS issued the call for the first convention to form a national executive committee to better coordinate the petition campaign. The Boston, Philadelphia, and New York women, with seventy-one delegates, dominated the first convention, held in May 1837 in New York City. Parker was elected president and Sarah, Mott, Child, Martha Storrs, Gerrit Smith’s wife, Ann, and Abby Cox of the LNYCASS were elected vice presidents. Angelina, Grew, Pugh, and Ann Weston were secretaries. Black women played an important role as well, Grace Douglass serving as vice president and the Forten sisters as delegates. The wives and daughters of New York’s black abolitionists, such as Mrs. Rebecca Downing, Mrs. Maria Vogelsang, Misses Matilda and Sarah Jennings, and Julia Williams of the BFASS, attended. The delegates voiced their preference as to whether or not they should be addressed as Mrs. or Miss.

The Grimkés, Child, and Mott took a prominent part in the proceedings, proposing resolutions on the rights of fugitive slaves and against prejudice, segregation in the churches, the complicity of northern merchants and manufacturers in upholding southern slavery as well as on the right to petition and women’s rights. The compromise resolution, passed by the convention, defended women’s activism as the legitimate work of mothers. Angelina composed its pivotal document, *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States*. A call to abolitionist action, the appeal eschewed simple notions of gendered solidarity. Slave women were victims of slavery, and slaveholding women were “female tyrants.” Abolitionists must conquer prejudice before they “storm the citadel of slavery” and defeat the “ministerial advocates of slavery.” Northern women should avoid using slave grown products, fight against the prejudice visited on their “colored sisters,” join antislavery societies, sign and circulate petitions against slavery. She asked, “Are we aliens?” because they are women or “bereft of citizenship” because they are mothers, wives, and daughters.24

The next year Angelina made history by becoming the first woman to address the Massachusetts House of Representatives, defending women’s activism and the right to petition. The notion that women ruled the world by influencing men, she argued, appealed to the “baser passions of man” rather than to women’s moral and intellectual power. Women should be regarded as citizens, as “moral being[s], endowed with precious and inalienable rights.” Weld
and Angelina married on May 14, 1838, just prior to the meeting of the second antislavery women’s convention in Philadelphia, marred by the burning of Pennsylvania Hall. Angelina made the most riveting speech of the convention, which was also addressed by Mott and Chapman, with a loud mob heckling outside. She said that even if they were attacked, it would not compare with what slaves had to endure. While men may use the ballot box, women must petition. Evoking the example of British women, she concluded that Congress would be forced to legislate when “all the maids and matrons of the land” come knocking at its doors. It would be her last speech. Waiting in the wings was a Quaker schoolteacher from Lynn, Massachusetts, Abby Kelley, whose speech so impressed Weld that he anointed her Angelina’s successor.

With Parker presiding again, the convention’s vice presidents included Paul and Chapman of the BFASS; Juliana Tappan was one of its secretaries, Sarah M. Douglass treasurer, Angelina and Hetty Burr served on its business committee. It passed resolutions upholding the right to petition and decrying the effort to deprive black men of the vote in Pennsylvania, an issue that would haunt the abolitionist–feminist coalition after the Civil War. Two hundred and eight delegates attended, and it had seventy-five corresponding members. It received letters from local female antislavery societies, for instance, Harriet Kimball reported that the Fitchburg FASS had grown from a membership of thirty to over a hundred. In its address to antislavery societies, the convention justified women’s activism as a matter of justice, humanity, religion, and patriotism. Women were encouraged to devote themselves to the education of black children and use free produce. Its address to the free people of color buttressed their efforts against disfranchisement in Pennsylvania. Filled with didactic advice on good conduct and racial unity and tightly braiding notions of uplift with resistance, it asked them to patronize Haitian goods so that Haiti might be accorded respect as an independent nation and to take part in vigilance committees assisting fugitive slaves. An overtly political address to Congress proclaimed that the quarter million members of the antislavery societies were “wielding a power stronger than political parties.” It criticized northern representatives for being overawed by the “dark spirit of slavery” and thanked William Slade and Thomas Morris for their manly defense of their insulted petitions.

The third convention of antislavery women met again in Philadelphia the following year. Presided over by Sarah Lewis, it was a smaller affair with half the number of delegates, as abolitionists became divided over women’s proper role in the movement. But black women made their concerns central to it. Grace Douglass was once again vice president and her daughter Sarah, treasurer. Julia Williams and Harriet Forten Purvis attended both Philadelphia conventions.
Clarissa Williams of the SFASS spoke of the “monster” prejudice that black women confronted daily: “We are blamed for not filling useful positions in society; but give us light, give us learning and see what places we occupy.” An address to the Society of Friends demanded more abolitionist activism. The convention’s most interesting document was an appeal to American women on “prejudice against color.” It chided them for doing nothing about their own “violent prejudices” or the fight against the racism that was grinding African Americans into the dust. It criticized the delicacy of white women, compromised by “social intercourse with a colored sister” but “her worldly dignity increased in a wonderful ratio by every additional colored servant whom she can display in her train,” exposing racial and class fissures. Its circular asked women to work on canvassing petitions as “our only means of direct political action.”

Women also redefined the personal politics of abolition. Angelina’s marriage to Weld was made by the movement. The wedding, presided over by a black and a white minister and attended by Garrison, who read the certificate of marriage, and by black friends and former Grimké slaves, was an abolitionist ceremony. It was, both Lewis Tappan and Ann Weston observed, a first for a women’s rights advocate, an experiment in whether a marriage of equals was possible. The passionate letters Weld and Angelina wrote to each other reveal that they elevated the idea of companionate marriage into a shared commitment to human rights. Weld formally renounced his authority over his wife and spelled out his vision of an equal marriage. Angelina’s lecturing was cut short by the births of her children, which resulted in a painful prolapsed uterus and a hernia, and by Weld’s and Sarah’s preference to avoid the limelight.

To marry anabolitionist was to marry the movement. Contrary to the claim that while Garrison was committed to women’s rights in theory he consigned his wife to a domestic position, Garrison urged Helen to form a female antislavery society. Helen demurred, though she became a member of the BFASS. Their courtship in letters is comparable to the Weld–Grimké correspondence, and theirs was a happy, long marriage. Ann Phillips was an abolitionist, although her debilitating illness prevented her from gaining the recognition Wendell enjoyed. In the case of the Childs and Motts, it was the women who were the more gifted. On James’s sixty-first birthday Lucretia wrote to him about the “forty years that we have loved each other with perfect love.” Abolitionist friends and family celebrated the Motts’ fiftieth anniversary before James’s death in 1868. Gerrit and Nancy Smith shared a passion for reform, and all the -isms of their day, including abolitionism and spiritualism. Henry B. Stanton, who married the young Elizabeth Cady, and David Lee Child were supportive of their wives’ activism, though their marriages were not idyllic. Henry G. Chapman
bankrolled his wife Maria’s abolitionism until he died in Haiti. Marius Robinson and Augustus Wattles married the “Cincinnati sisters” Emily Rakestraw and Susan Lowe, who taught in black schools. The Philadelphia Quaker Benjamin Jones and his wife, Elizabeth Hitchcock Jones, lectured with Kelley and jointly edited the Anti-Slavery Bugle.

Some abolitionist couples personified what the women’s rights activist Lucy Stone called “true marriages,” or an equal partnership in the cause. Charles and Gertrude Burleigh, Oliver and Mary Ann Johnson, James and Charlotte Forten, Robert and Harriet Forten Purvis, Robert and Grace Douglass, Henry Highland and Julia Williams Garnet, Charles and Henrietta, and his second wife, Charlotte, Ray were activist couples. Garnet, who met Williams at Noyes Academy and courted her at the first antislavery women’s convention, wrote, “She seems to have everything that beautifies a female, a good Christian and a scholar.” Kelley and Stone married men who lived out their commitment to abolition and women’s rights. Stephen Foster raised their daughter while Abby lectured, and Henry Blackwell joined Lucy in the struggle for women’s rights. Stone was probably the first woman in America who did not take her husband’s name after marriage inspiring latter-day “Lucy Stoners” to do the same.

Some feminist abolitionists, such as Grew, Parker, Betsey Mix Cowles of Ohio, and Susan B. Anthony, chose to remain single. A few abolitionist couples like Sherman and Mary Booth of Wisconsin parted company after Sherman stood accused of molesting their young babysitter. Charles and Josephine Grif- fing of Ohio got divorced. Charles was convinced that his wife had come under the influence of the free love doctrines of the abolitionist Parker Pillsbury. Black women like Mary Ann Shadd Cary, who lived apart from her considerably older husband, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and Forten’s granddaughter Charlotte, who married the much younger Francis Grimké, the nephew of the Grimké sisters, had unconventional marriages. Fugitive slave abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown failed to find marital happiness, being married with women not particularly involved in or positively hostile to abolition. But William and Ellen Craft embarked on an abolitionist career together after their remarkable escape from slavery. The lives of ex-slaves seem to bear out the abolitionist indictment of slavery as destructive of marital bonds. Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Jacobs had partners who left them or whom they left.28

If Garrisonians supported women in the movement, evangelical abolitionists were troubled by their presence. Though a proslavery minister wrote the pastoral letter against the Grimkés, it was the opening blow of a wide-ranging clerical offensive against Garrisonian notions of female equality. The last straw for many
of them was Garrison’s support of women’s rights, which, they argued, violated Christian doctrine and brought infamy to abolition. Most female abolitionists tended to side with Garrison, grateful for his support and his critique of the church, as clergymen were opponents of women’s rights. In 1838 the NEAS convention became the first abolitionist organization to formally grant women equal voting rights, much to the dismay of the clerical abolitionists led by the Reverends Charles Torrey, Alanson St. Claire, and Phelps. Torrey and Phelps complained that the MASS had become a “woman’s rights, non-government Anti-Slavery” society. From then on, Garrisonians fought to include women in their definition of persons participating in an antislavery organization, and their critics sought to restrict the word as applying only to men. At the AASS’s annual meeting in 1839 Garrison and Smith successfully pushed for the equal participation of women in the society over the objections of the anti-Garrisonian faction led by Rev. Nathaniel Colver, Lewis Tappan, and James Birney. The meeting passed an amendment allowing women to be included in the roll call by 184 to 141 votes. Phelps tried to confine women’s participation by excluding them from speaking or holding office, but his resolution was defeated. Tappan argued that while he valued “female cooperation,” women should act separately. Birney presented the protest, signed by 123 delegates, against women voting or holding office in antislavery societies. When it came to female voting, Garrisonians rather than their opponents became advocates of the suffrage. Lydia Maria Child expressed surprise at some abolitionists’ newfound opposition to women’s equal role in antislavery societies. Despite his opposition to introducing the woman question into abolition, Birney defended Angelina against Rev. Leonard Bacon’s strictures that likened her to Quaker women who allegedly ran around naked disrupting church worship in early New England. Birney’s daughter-in-law wrote the first biography of the Grimké sisters.

The formal division in the abolition movement came over the election of Abby Kelley to the business committee of the AASS in 1840. Garrisonians balanced nominations to the committee between the two factions, putting forward the names of Phelps, Tappan along with that of Garrison, and Kelley, the sole female nomination. Speaking in her own defense, Kelley noted, “I rise because I am not a slave.” Born in a modest farming family, Kelley, a schoolteacher, was educated, like Crandall, at the Moses Brown Academy. She represented the Lynn FASS at the women’s antislavery conventions. Predictably, the anti-Garrisonians led a walkout when the convention voted 557 to 451 to elect Kelley. Mott, Child, and Chapman replaced them in the business committee, sealing the women’s victory. Garrison’s vindication of women’s voting rights had set the stage for this outcome, as female delegates voted overwhelmingly for Kelley. As Whittier put it, the AASS had “blown up,” and Abby was the “bomb-shell
that exploded the society.” Ray nominated Hester Lane, a black woman known to purchase and free slaves. Her nomination was withdrawn: “The ‘principle’ could not carry her color,” he wrote. But Van Rensselaer contended that Lane was opposed to female equality in antislavery societies and had allied with the AFASS. The AFASS allowed women to form separate auxiliaries but with no right to vote, hold office, or speak publicly. Some women’s organizations, like the LNYCASS led by Juliana Tappan, affiliated with the new organization. Most remained Garrisonian, though many, such as the Holliston FASS in Massachusetts, favored political action.30

The abolitionist schism was replicated in the BFASS, where Chapman, Thankful Southwick, and Henrietta Sergeant led the Garrisonian women in passing resolutions commending the election of Kelley and vindicating their rights against the “spiritual mob.” In 1839 Parker attempted to dissolve the society and instigated the formation of the Massachusetts Female Emancipation Society (MFES), allied with the new Massachusetts Abolition Society. The MFES’s first address harked back to the conservative rhetoric of female benevolence. In the BFASS, religious liberals like the Unitarians and Quakers sided with the Garrisonians, and the more religiously orthodox with the new organization. The rivalry between the Weston, Southwick, and Sergeant sisters versus the evangelical Parker and Ball sisters, who controlled the BFASS offices on the eve of schism, extended back to 1837, when conservative clergymen started criticizing Garrison and the Grimké sisters. The Garrisonian women were also members of the New England Non Resistance Society. Most black women sided with the Garrisonians. An exception was the wife of Rev. Jehiel Beman of the AME Zion church, who opposed Julia Foote’s preaching and was allied with the “new organization” evangelical abolitionists. The evangelical women retired from active abolitionist work, and the MFES, like the LNYCASS, withered quickly. The Garrisonian women became agents and leaders in the integrated MASS.31

By contrast, the PFASS remained united and staunchly Garrisonian, a model of female abolitionism. Unlike Child and Kelley, Mott felt that women’s anti-slavery societies were necessary if integrated organizations were to be formed. As she wrote to Kelley, she was happy to see men and women “lose sight of distinctions of sex as to act in public meetings, on the enlightened and true ground of Christian equality,” but there was no “better or speedier mode of preparing them for this equality” than to act in separate organizations. Though she deplored the BFASS division in her letters to Chapman, Mott identified with the Garrisonian wing and attended the first anniversary meeting of the Non-Resistance Society in 1839. The next year she got the better of an anti-abolitionist mob in Delaware, which many viewed as the practical application
of nonresistance. Mott was a prominent spokeswoman of women’s rights, nonresistance, and abolition. Members of the PFASS like Mott, Grew, Pugh, and Elizabeth Neall became PASS officers without any controversy, four, including Mott, were members of its executive committee, and they became leading voices in the women’s rights movement. In 1853 Grew strongly opposed a proposal to dissolve the PFASS and admit men into the society. The female antislavery societies were important breeding grounds for the fight for women’s equality within abolition. The PFASS disbanded in 1870 after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment.32

The heyday of female antislavery societies was over after the schism. Some signaled their allegiances to the opposing abolitionist groups via their names, Garrisonian societies now using women rather than female, and those affiliated with the AFASS using ladies and emancipation in their titles, after the LNYCASS and the MFES. The strongly Garrisonian SFASS, the first female antislavery society, like the PFASS, persisted until the Civil War and was marked by the concerns of its original black members. But the dramatic growth of female antislavery societies and national antislavery women’s conventions came to an abrupt end. The untimely deaths of some early pioneers such as Susan Paul, Grace Douglass, Mary Clark, and Mary Parker and the withdrawal of others like Maria Stewart and the Grimké sisters facilitated the process. The west bucked the trend: sixteen new female antislavery societies were formed there in the 1840s. Relying on a pragmatic version of abolition, western women for the most part shied clear of the ideological divisions roiling the eastern societies. Some abolitionist women retreated to more gender-appropriate organizations like antislavery sewing circles, though they raised money to finance women’s rights activists such as Stone. Kelley was also a member of the Worcester Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle, and Ernst’s antislavery sewing circle in Cincinnati included Garrisonians like herself as well as more moderate abolitionists. Similarly, the AFASS-affiliated Ladies Anti-Slavery Society of Dover, New Hampshire, reconstituted as the Dover Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle, circulated petitions, tracts, and calls for meetings to protest the expansion of slavery into Kansas in the 1850s. Women’s abolitionism did not die out and was reignited by the fugitive slave issue, partisan politics, and eventually the fight for emancipation during the Civil War.33

WOMAN RIGHTS

The nineteenth-century woman rights movement, as it was called, grew out of abolition. Those abolitionist women who fought for equality, abolition-
ist feminists, inaugurated it. Their staging ground was the World’s Anti-slavery Convention in London. Historians of the women’s movement, who highlight the role of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, have downplayed its longer lineage among abolitionist women. In 1839 the newly formed British and Foreign ASS invited delegates to the first international convention of abolition societies the following year. Sturge sent out the call on behalf of the executive committee, better known as the London Committee, but the idea originated with the *Emancipator*. Garrisonians called it the World’s Convention, popularized by Whittier in a poem bearing that title. After the formal organizational split of 1840, both factions of American abolitionists sent competing delegations to it. The AASS selected Garrison, Rogers, Charles Remond, and Mott as its delegates, vindicating its belief in “equal brotherhood of the entire human family, without distinction of color, sex, or clime.” The MASS sent female delegates such as Emily Winslow and Abby Southwick, and it nominated Chapman, Child, and Kelley, none of whom could make the journey, and Martineau, who did not attend because of ill health. The PASS sent its PFASS officers, Grew, Pugh, Neall, and Abby Kimber. The AFASS sent political abolitionists, including Birney and Stanton, and ministers like Colver and Rev. Elon Galusha. Birney was elected as one of the vice presidents, and Phillips, who was touring England with his wife, Ann, and Stanton were made secretaries. Garrison, Rogers, and Remond arrived when the convention was well under way.

Accompanying Stanton was his wife, Elizabeth, who became the leading thinker on women’s rights. Born in 1815 to a distinguished upstate New York family, she was exposed to abolition from an early age. While her Federalist father, Judge Daniel Cady, was no reformer, her mother, Margaret, was an abolitionist and signed a woman suffrage petition after the war. Educated in Willard’s Troy Female Seminary, she recalled growing up at a time when “the anti-slavery question was up for hot discussion,” and famous abolitionists lived in her neighborhood. Her cousin was Gerrit Smith, whom she visited frequently. In his Peterboro estate, where abolitionists, former slaves, and assorted reformers were recipients of Smith’s largesse, she met her future husband. The newly wed Stantons visited the Grimké–Weld household. Weld recommended that she adopt the dual surname Cady Stanton. They spent their honeymoon at the world convention.

In the massive history of the woman suffrage movement, Stanton and her coauthors emphatically believed that “above all other causes of the ‘Woman Suffrage Movement,’ was the Anti-Slavery struggle in this country” and dated the start of their movement to the convention. This origins story should be stretched back to the black abolitionist women and female antislavery societies
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of the 1830s. Stanton was taken with Mott, who introduced her to the work of Wollstonecraft. Mott, she wrote, was “an entirely new revelation of womanhood” to her. In her eulogy for Mott, Stanton again recalled the importance of a “life . . . dedicated to the rights of humanity.” Whether Stanton planned the first women’s rights convention with Mott in London, as she recalled, or later, as historians contend, her encounter with some of the leading abolitionist feminists crystallized her commitment to women’s rights. When it came to the woman question, Stanton found herself in agreement with the Garrisonians rather than the wing of the movement represented by her husband. Garrison remarked, “Mrs. Stanton is a fearless woman, and goes for woman’s rights with all her soul.”

The World’s Convention was the site of another conflict over the woman question. The London Committee, many of whose members were wary of Garrison’s radicalism, was far more in sympathy with their American namesake the AFASS. Most British abolitionists, including women, wanted to avoid controversy. Sturge tried to persuade Mott and the American women not to insist on being seated, as it would hamper the convention’s business. The evangelical Charles Stuart was even more hostile to female equality. Thompson, who had done so much to inspire female abolitionism, was lukewarm on the question. O’Connell was absent when the vote to seat female delegates was taken and later had to clarify to Mott that he was for women’s equality. Clergymen, who composed one-fifth of the convention and included the anti-Garrisonian Rev. John Scoble, opposed seating women and invoked the theory of separate spheres. The other powerful group, orthodox, so-called aristocratic Quakers, who formed one-fourth to one-third of the convention, deplored the Hicksite Motts and joined in opposition. When the convention was over they issued a public letter disowning the Motts, which elicited a strong response from James. The London Committee refused to seat women delegates, and Lucretia’s idea to hold a separate women’s convention came to naught. Despite divisions, Phillips worked with Birney and Stanton to elicit British help, resolutions for dissemination of abolitionist literature, against Texas annexation, and for the right to petition, among others. After the convention, Garrison and Mott gave speeches on subjects dear to their hearts, the former on universal reform and the latter on free produce.

Garrisonians noted their debt to women. Phillips introduced the motion to seat them. He drew attention to the self-devotion of female abolitionists, who had traveled thousands of miles, leaving their families and occupations to attend and whose aid in abolition could not possibly be enlisted if their male colleagues deserted them. Col. Jonathan Miller pointed out that women in
The Woman Question

Vermont had preceded men in the movement. In silent protest, Garrison, Rogers, Remond, William Adam, and George Bradburn joined the rejected female delegates in the galleries. Remond stated that he would not dishonor the female antislavery societies, which had paid for his trip to England. On behalf of the “American women delegates from Pennsylvania,” Pugh wrote a letter protesting the decision to “exclude women from a seat in the convention as coequals in the advocacy of Universal Liberty.” Some of those in opposition, like Sturge, acknowledged women’s contributions but still viewed it as an extraneous issue. Phillips entered a protest, written by Adam, against the discrimination. It was tabled and not recorded in the convention minutes. Garrisonians found new British allies, the radical lawyer William Ashurst, the Quaker abolitionist Elizabeth Pease, and feminists like the physician John Bowring, who predicted, “AMERICA . . . WILL INSTRUCT ENGLAND” on women’s rights. Lady Byron also sympathized with them. Pease, of the Darlington Ladies’ Antislavery Society, had corresponded with Angelina. After the convention, British women breathed life into the “transatlantic sisterhood of abolitionists,” raising funds for the Americans and supporting fugitive slaves. The emergence of British feminism remained behind that of its American counterpart, but a female public sphere allied with abolition helped birth the women’s rights movement there too.

The woman question dominated abolitionist debates. Before leaving for the convention Garrison had pointed to the fact that a woman ruled Britain and asked in what assembly “is that almost peerless woman, Lucretia Mott, not qualified to take an equal part?” In a superb speech on his return, Garrison argued that women’s rights was not an extraneous issue for abolitionists. “I wrong the slave,” he said, “in dishonoring or casting one obstacle in the way of his female advocate.” Exposing the class-based hypocrisy of Victorian gender conventions in Britain, Garrison remarked that he had seen women breaking stone in the highway, carting dung from the streets, laboring in the fields, and yet they were not allowed to participate in an antislavery convention. Rev. Charles Denison, in a long letter to Garrison in which he fondly recalled his past associations with him, regretted the division. Denison conceded that women should be allowed to vote but, he demurred, not hold office. At the tenth anniversary meeting of the AASS in 1844, he was still debating Garrison and Kelley on the propriety of women’s public speaking. Phelps tried to explain away his initial support of the Grimkés, holding that women’s “physical constitutions” unfit them for public life. In his reply to Colver, Garrison retorted that to claim women’s rights overthrew the institution of marriage was similar to charges that abolitionists incited insurrection and murder when they argued for black rights.
Garrison and Henry C. Wright planned a world’s convention of human rights to prove their point.

Abolitionists’ differences over women’s participation were at times a family quarrel. Stanton clarified that he had not voted to admit women into the London convention, even though Cady Stanton later claimed he had made a speech asking them to be seated. Rev. Henry Grew voted against seating women delegates at London and withdrew his subscription from the *Liberator* by the end of the year. His daughter Mary was a PFASS stalwart and suffragist. At the women’s rights convention in 1854, when he objected to women speaking in public, Mott silenced him by referring to his accomplished daughter.37

The most important theoretical defense of women’s equality at this time came from the pen of Margaret Fuller. Born in 1810, Fuller was educated by her father in the Western classics and read widely in Italian, German, and French literature after graduating from Miss Prescott’s seminary. On her father’s death, she taught young girls in Boston and at the transcendentalist Bronson Alcott’s Temple School. By 1840 Fuller had become the editor of the transcendentalist *Dial*, an “avant garde intellectual journal.” Besides Sarah Josepha Hale, the longtime editor of *Ladies’ Magazine* and then *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, who was a colonizationist and conservative on women’s rights, Fuller and abolitionists such as Chapman and Child of the NASS and Grew of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* were the first female editors. Antislavery women’s rights advocates like Clarina Nichols and Jane Swisshelm soon joined them. Though not an abolitionist, Fuller admired Child and the *Liberator*, which she said was the only American newspaper with fresh insights.38

In the *Dial* Fuller published fellow transcendentalists and her own pieces, one of which, “The Great Lawsuit. Man versus Men. Woman versus Women.,” advocating gender equality, led to her pathbreaking feminist text *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Fuller’s ideas on gender, marriage, sexuality, and women’s equality were revolutionary. She was well aware of the abolitionist origins of feminism, writing, “Of all its banners, none has been more steadily upheld, and under none have more valor and willingness for real sacrifices been shown, than that of the champions of the enslaved African. And this band it is, which, partly from a natural following out of principles, partly because many women have been prominent in that cause, makes, just now, the warmest appeal in behalf of Woman.” She singled out Angelina and Kelley, “women who speak in public” and who have the ability to “subdue the prejudices of their hearers.” She facetiously suggested the founding of an antislavery party for women. In a letter to Chapman she also expressed dissatisfaction with the abolitionist argument for women’s rights: “There is a reason why the foes of African
slavery seek more freedom for women; but put it not upon that ground, but on the ground of right.”

Fuller reasoned that women’s equality must be raised independently on the basis of women’s self-dependence, self-reliance, self-respect, and self-help. Her demand for complete equality—“We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man”—was accompanied by innovative ideas about gender and marriage. Heroic and intellectual qualities, she wrote, were just as womanly as they were manly. Rather than an androgynous notion of gender, Fuller sought to uncouple conventions of femininity and masculinity from man and woman. She argued that “there is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman” and that man “partakes of the feminine” and “woman of the masculine.” Her notion of marriage rejected shallow romantic “idolatory,” quoting John Quincy Adams to “love and revere the female sex” and “not to flatter them.” Commending Child’s defense of a woman who had killed her lover, Fuller rejected sexual double standards and the notion of female and male sexuality as inherently distinct. It is a “vulgar error” to think “a love” is a woman’s “whole existence,” she wrote, even though her own life was marked by passionate love affairs. Fuller is often critiqued for only highlighting women’s inequality, but she called for a gendered solidarity: “Women are the best helper of one another. Let them think; let them act; till they know what they need.” She was known for her famous “Conversations” for women on various subjects. The abolitionists Child, Louisa Gilman Loring, the wife of Ellis Loring, and Ann Phillips as well as Cady Stanton attended sessions that “nurtured” women’s “autonomous intellectual tradition.” They set an early precedent for women’s conventions and clubs. The author of three books, a memoir, and several articles, Fuller thought of Woman in the Nineteenth Century as her life’s “foot-print” on earth. The authors of the history of woman suffrage, in search of foremothers, anointed Fuller a harbinger of the women’s rights movement.

As a critic for the New York Tribune, Fuller moved closer to abolitionist and labor concerns. Her many reviews praising abolitionist writings, particularly Frederick Douglass’s narrative, popularized them for larger audiences. Repeatedly, she asserted that black works proved “their claims need no argument.” In her most forthrightly antiracist piece in support of black suffrage, “What fits a man to be Voter? Is it to be White within, or White without?” she did for race what she had done for gender. Beginning with an allegorical story of a woman and a black man, Mary and Jesus, sent to enlighten their dimwitted countrymen, it ends with a critique of racism as learned but unjust behavior. In her review of Charles Burdett’s The Wrongs of American Woman, Fuller took issue with the notion of a “hallowed domestic sphere” that ignored the sufferings and
difficulties of laboring women. Her articles addressed the plight of the working poor, prostitutes, and criminals. Like Child at the NASS, she drew attention to class inequality and urban poverty. Fuller’s cosmopolitan life illustrated the intertwining of international and domestic radicalism. Utopian socialists such as Robert Owen, Charles Fourier, and Henri de Saint-Simon were early champions of women’s equality and influenced not only Fuller but also European feminists, Jeanne Deroin in France, Catherine Barmby in England, and Louise Otto in Germany. With the prominent exception of the anarchist journalist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, European radicals championed women’s rights. Fuller’s departure for Europe in 1846 and her marriage to Giovanni Ossoli put her in the thick of the Italian Risorgimento and the revolutions of 1848. Confessing her conversion to socialism and “red republicanism,” Fuller wrote partisan dispatches on the revolutions. Representatives of the “first international women’s movement” created by the revolutions, including the Jewish feminist Ernestine Rose and the German abolitionist feminist Mathilde Anneke, joined the American women’s movement. Anneke formed a close partnership with the wife of the abolitionist Sherman Booth, Mary Booth. The polyglot Rose, who had lived in Germany and France, corresponded with Deroin and translated Anneke. After the fall of the Roman republic, Fuller sailed back with her husband and young son in 1850, only to drown in a shipwreck within sight of the American shore. Viewed from a transnational perspective, women’s rights was part of a wave of international radicalism.

In 1848, the year Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published The Communist Manifesto, a group of abolitionist women and men issued the first declaration of women’s rights at Seneca Falls, New York. Rather than a singular event, a synergy of international, national, and local activism led to that founding moment. Local campaigns for women’s legal and marital rights jump-started the women’s movement. In New York the struggle over women’s property rights, begun in 1836, had involved activists like Rose, who addressed the legislature five times, and Stanton, who briefly lobbied for it. Assemblyman Thomas Hertell’s speech vindicating married women’s property rights as a matter of equal rights was widely disseminated in 1839. Petitions supporting women’s property rights, and one by six women from Jefferson County demanding political and civil rights, including the right to vote, to the state constitutional convention preceded Seneca Falls. Hertell sponsored New York’s Married Women’s Property Rights Act of 1848, which became a model for other northern states and some southern states that passed similar laws to protect property from creditors.
Grew circulated petitions for women’s property rights, and Pennsylvania passed a married women’s property law the same year.

Not just women’s legal rights but advocacy of their marital and sexual rights came to the fore. Marriage reformers built on the work of the Female Moral Reform societies that challenged the sexual double standard and illicit male behavior. In 1843 the Maine Quaker reformer John Neal published his stinging critique of the supposed privileges of women, which anticipated demands for women’s equality in all spheres of life, public and private. According to the women’s rights activist Paulina Wright Davis, it was “extensively copied” and reviewed. Mary Gove, who escaped her abusive husband, lectured on female physiology and sexuality. Together with her second husband, Thomas Nichols, she became an advocate for sexual reform. Similarly, Clarina Howard Nichols, whose eloquent editorials helped secure the passage of the married women’s property act in Vermont in 1847, struggled to secure a divorce and recover her children from her first husband. The Garrisonian Francis Jackson became a benefactor of women’s rights after his daughter was involved in a lengthy custody case with her estranged husband. Henry C. Wright was a leading spokesman not just for children’s rights but also for marriage reform. The fight for women’s marital rights allowed opponents to tar abolitionist feminists with accusations of free love.42

Abolition laid the groundwork for the women’s rights movement in upstate New York. It was long the site of Quaker and abolitionist activism, represented by the Hunt, McClintock, Wright, Post, and Hallowell families. Members of the Liberty Party, whose stronghold was in central and western New York, presented petitions for equal property rights. May recalled how the Grimké sisters had “dispelled my Pauline prejudice” against women speaking in public. He delivered a sermon, “The Rights and Condition of Woman,” that, when published in 1846, became a staple of tracts distributed by the women’s rights convention. May rejected the separate spheres theory and asked that women’s rights be “recognized as equal [in] every way.” He aided struggling needlewomen in Syracuse in forming a Sewing Protection Society, combining his advocacy of the rights of labor and of women, and opened his pulpit to former slaves as well as to women’s rights advocates. During her lecture tour that led to the formation of the Western New York Anti Slavery Society (WNYAS) in 1842, Kelley braved vicious misogynistic crowds and slander. After bruising meetings in Connecticut and Rhode Island, she took upstate New York by storm during the MASS’s “one hundred conventions” campaign. Garrison, Douglass, and Stephen Foster lectured with her. On her appointment as the general agent of
the AASS, one abolitionist grumbled at the “gynecrocy” of Chapman and Kel-ley. The indefatigable Kelley inspired Wright Davis and those who had to brave the wrath of their ministers to hear her. One of them, Rhoda Bement, ended up in Seneca Falls. The notion that black women were absent in the early stir-rings on women’s rights is false. M. E. Mills of Albany wrote to Smith in 1846, “The colored woman who would elevate herself must contend not only with prejudice against poverty [and] prejudice against color but prejudice against her sex. Which of these is most cruel I am not prepared to say. But that all three combined are enough to crush a Lion I am prepared to testify.”

When Stanton moved to Seneca Falls in 1847 she tapped into these strains of activism to articulate a distinct vision for women’s equality. A fellow traveler rather than an abolitionist, she became the leading spokeswoman for women’s rights by deploying abolitionist networks. Fortuitously, at this time Douglass relocated to Rochester and began publishing the *North Star* with its feminist abolitionist motto, “Right is of no Sex—Truth is of no Color—God is the father of us all, and we are all brethren.” Stanton had met Douglass in Boston, where she attended meetings of abolitionists and socialized with them. She, Mott, who was visiting her sister Marcia Coffin Wright, and Mary Ann McClintock issued the call for the first women’s rights convention at the home of Jane Hunt. All were Quaker women active in abolition. Douglass attended the historic meeting of nearly three hundred in July 1848 and backed Stanton’s controver-sial call for women’s right to vote, which even Mott thought would make the convention seem ridiculous. Douglass praised the “brilliant talents and excel-lent dispositions” of the women and gave a full-throated endorsement of female equality. As Stanton recalled, even though they were subject to widespread censure, the abolitionist press stood “manfully” behind them. James Mott, the longtime president of the PASS, presided. Other abolitionists and sympathizers, Thomas McClintock, Samuel Tillman, Ansel Bascom, Isaac and Amy Post, a founder of the WNYASS, attended. Mott gave the opening address, followed by Stanton, Wright, Elizabeth and Mary Ann McClintock, who also recorded the minutes.

Stanton, assisted by Elizabeth McClintock, formulated its founding docu-ment, the Declaration of Sentiments, modeled after the Declaration of In-dependence. Despite her contention that she rejected the antislavery model, Stanton used the title of Garrison’s AASS declaration, evoked abolitionist tac-tics in calling for agents, tracts, petitions, conventions, and words: the “imme-diately admission” of women to all the rights and privileges denied to them and enlisting “the pulpit and the press” on behalf of women’s rights. In their history of woman suffrage, Stanton, Anthony, and Matilda Gage not only pointed to
abolition as a source of their activism but also dedicated their volumes to the outstanding women who had fought for gender equality, including Wollstonecraft, Wright, Mott, Martineau, the Grimké sisters, Child, Fuller, and Wright Davis, among others. The dedication was not just a construction of a tradition but also an accurate genealogy of early feminist thought. Nothing illustrated Stanton's polemical powers better than her declaration. While paraphrasing Jefferson, she drew on the long history of women's protest writing: “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” Her rejection of separate spheres and demand for education, political and civil rights, and social and economic equality conjured earlier feminist protest. Sixty-eight women and thirty-two men signed it. The use of a revolutionary framework in Stanton's declaration was a stroke of political genius, but feminism rather than republicanism gave it its theoretical heft and met the ideological needs of the new women's rights movement.

A month later Stanton and Elizabeth McClintock attended a smaller convention at Rochester, where the Posts presided over an interracial reform community committed to peace, the rights of women, Native Americans, working men and women, and the abolition of slavery and capital punishment. Rochester was also home to the Anthony family, and Susan B. Anthony’s parents and sister attended the convention and signed the Seneca Falls Declaration, preceding her in the cause she came to personify. Garrison’s former apprentice William C. Nell, the son of William G. Nell, a founding member of the GCA, who was helping Douglass edit his newspaper, earned a rebuke from Mott for flattering women as superior beings. Unapologetic in its demand for political rights, the convention elected a woman, Abigail Bush, to preside over its proceedings and included Stanton’s demand for just wages for domestic servants. While relying on the natural rights theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau for its Declaration of Rights, Sarah Owen criticized him for excluding women from its purview. Like abolitionists, these women did not simply invoke revolutionary ideas, they reformulated them. The convention reprinted Chapman’s poem composed in response to the Grimké ministerial critics, “The Times that Try Men's Souls.”

Women’s rights activists responded to their critics after the conventions. Stanton and McClintock wrote a letter to those clergymen who based female subordination on the Bible, pointing out that it had also been used to defend slavery and war. In her first recorded speech on women’s rights, Stanton gave a spirited defense of the new movement. Though laced with a sliver of elitism that grew after the war (she resented “ignorant foreigners,” idiots, rowdies, and
“silly boys” being given the vote before women), like Child and Fuller, she reached back in history and across nations for examples of heroic women, from Joan of Arc to Zenobia. A new era was dawning, she predicted, when woman “will stand redeemed regenerated and disenfranchised.” In 1849 Mott’s answer to Richard Henry Dana’s address, which criticized the women’s movement for going against women’s alleged nature, was widely distributed as her “Discourse on Woman.” Adulation of women made them a “plaything or toy of society” and cultivated a “kind of effeminacy.” Nature had made women physically different, she said, but “neglect and mismanagement increased this difference.” She called for developing women’s physical, moral, and intellectual capacities by “suitable exercise” and “by reason of use.” Mott repeated the feminist demands, equality in education, marriage, political and civil rights, work, and wages.46

Abolition was the midwife of women’s activism and helped it grow organizationally in the 1850s. In conventions, women’s rights activists charted their own course but often in close collaboration with abolitionist and temperance movements, as many of them lent their energies to both causes. Anthony was a temperance activist before she became an abolitionist. Another temperance advocate, Amelia Bloomer, who started publishing the women’s rights magazine the Lily in 1849, popularized the pantaloons invented by Gerrit Smith’s daughter, Elizabeth Smith Miller. On the eve of the Civil War, some of the leading champions of women’s rights, like Lucy Stone, were abolitionists. An Oberlin graduate and popular agent for the MASS, Stone resolved to lecture for abolition during the week and for women’s rights during the weekends. With good reason slaveholders linked the dreaded -isms of their day, socialism, feminism, and abolitionism. Controversy after the war over the Reconstruction amendments that introduced the word male into the Constitution and restricted voting to men tested that alliance. A divided women’s movement took a longer time to achieve its goals in a conservative political environment not fertilized by abolitionist radicalism and antiblack politics. In losing its moorings in abolition, the American women’s movement lost its antebellum commitment to racial equality. Some things were gained, but much was lost.47
A Study of Christian Abolitionism” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1958); J. Brent Morris, “‘All The Truly Wise or Truly Pious have one and the Same End in View’: Oberlin, the West, and Abolitionist Schism,” CWH 57 (2011): 234–67.


CHAPTER NINE. THE WOMAN QUESTION

1. TL, September 19, 1835; Governor Hammond’s Letters on Southern Slavery . . . (Charleston, S.C., 1845), 32.


Notes to Pages 268–270


Notes to Pages 280–282


30. *TL*, March 20, April 19, May 17, June 28, August 16, December 20, 1839; January 20, March 20, May 22, 29, 1840; *TE*, June 19, 1840; *Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society . . .* (Boston,


37. TL, August 28, September 11, 25, October 23, 30, December 8, 1840; February 26, March 6, 12, 1841; NASS, May 23, 1844; William Lloyd Garrison, 2:361, 381; Brown, Mary Grew, 55–56.


45. Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, 3–6, 8–12; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., History of Woman Suffrage, 1:808–10; Wellman, The Road to Seneca Falls,
Notes to Pages 298–301


CHAPTER TEN. THE BLACK MAN’S BURDEN


