

## Women in a Time of Division

Abolitionism, Suffrage,  
and the Civil War

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## Paper Questions

- 1. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is a primary source. What was the historical context that led to the publication of this story? Who was the intended audience for this book? How might these factors have shaped the actual narrative and the presentation of the narrative?
- 2. What does Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* reveal about gender roles and family life under the institution of slavery? Remember to consider both the gender roles and family lives of blacks and whites, free and unfree.
- 3. How did slave women and men resist the institution of slavery? Were there differences in their ability to resist and their decisions in how to resist? If so, how do you explain these differences?

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## Announcements

- Extra Credit Opportunity
  - Carrie Nichols Baker, Ph.D., J.D.
  - "Sex, Power, and Politics: The Origins of Sexual Harassment Policy in the United States"
  - Thursday, January 27, 2005
  - 1:00 - 2:00 PM
  - 156 University Hall
- Capturing the Subject Workshop
  - Fri., Jan. 28, MCC, Rm. 436
  - Tues., Feb. 1, Univ. 56, Prof. Nina [Ha.62@osu.edu](mailto:Ha.62@osu.edu)

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## Agricultural South

- Plantation dominated economy
  - ¼ whites slaveholders
  - Majority owned fewer than 5
- 52% of slaves on plantations (1860)
  - produced 75% or more of South's export crops
  - cotton 60% of nation's export (1840)
- 10% of nation's industrial workers in the South (1860)
  - Illiteracy rate for whites 20%



1860

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## Expanding Slavery



- Slave population
  - 700,000 in 1790
  - 2 million in 1830
  - 4 million by 1860
  - 1/3 Southerners black
  - 1/76 Northerners black
- End of slave trade (1808)
  - Native-born slaves
- Westward forced migration
  - at least 300,000 slaves

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## Impact on Slave Women

- Incentives for pregnancy and "marriages"
  - "I consider a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm... There is nothing I desire so much as that all the young people in the estate should intermarry with one another and stay at home." Thomas Jefferson
  - Yet possibility of forced separations
  - Children begin working at 5-6; field work by 11-12
- Sexual Coercion and Violence
  - "God forgive us, but ours is a monstrous system, a wrong and iniquity. Like the patriarchs of old, our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines; and the mulattos one sees in every family partly resemble the white children. Any lady is ready to tell you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household but her own. Those, she seems to think drop from the clouds." Diary of Mary Boykin Chestnut, South Carolina



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## White women in the South

- Lady on a Pedestal
  - Importance of sexual honor for white women
  - Dependent on male protection
- Plantation Mistresses
  - Household managers and supervisors of slave labor
- Lack of social reform tradition regarding gender or race
- Lack of female professional opportunities
- Southern Patriarchy tied to Slave Economy

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## African American Demands for Freedom

- Escaping Slavery
  - Difficulties for most women
  - Ellen Craft
    - Gender and racial passing
  - Harriet Tubman
    - Escaped from Maryland in 1849
    - Helped 700 more escape
- Underground Railroad
  - black neighborhoods and churches
  - 3,000 members
  - 75,000 freed by 1861
- Significance of escape
  - Forcing political recognition of slavery
- Ex-Slave Testimonies and Narratives
  - Frederick Douglass (1845) – 30,000 copies
  - Sojourner Truth



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## Free Black Activism

- Colored Female Religious and Moral Society of Salem
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Female Antislavery Society (1832)
  - Self-help and abolitionism
- Maria Stewart
  - Public lectures for black audiences, 1831
  - African American women should “strive by their examples, both in public and private, to assist those who are endeavoring to stop the strong current of prejudice.”
  - 1833 farewell address due to resistance against women speaking in public
    - “What if I am a woman; is not the God of ancient times the God of these modern days? Did he not raise up Deborah to be a mother and a judge in Israel? Did not Queen Esther save the lives of the Jews? And Mary Magdalene first declare the resurrection of Christ from the dead?”

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## Inter-racial Abolitionist Movement

- American Colonization Society (1817)
- By 1837, 1300 local antislavery societies
  - ¼ million men and women (10 million total in North)
  - 700,000 petitions in 1830s
- Abolitionist Literature
  - William Lloyd Garrison, weekly *Liberator* (1831)
  - Lydia Maria Child, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833)
  - Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life among the Lowly* (1852) sold 300,000 in one year
- Northern Resistance to interracial organizing
  - 1834-1848, more than 100 incidents of mob violence against abolitionists or free blacks
  - Antislavery societies not all integrated

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## Fugitive Slave Act

- 1793 federal law authorized slave owners to enter other states to recapture slave property
- 1830s – Northern states pass “personal liberty laws” to offer some protection for fugitives
- Fugitive Slave Act (1850 Compromise)
  - Slaveholder or agent swears before commissioner about ownership
  - Commissioner receives \$10 for every slave; \$5 for those set free
  - All citizens required to assist officials
- “We went to bed one night old fashioned, conservative, Compromise Union Whigs & waked up stark mad Abolitionists.” Amos A. Lawrence, cotton textile owner



Margaret Garner, 1855

Historical origins of *Beloved*

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## Women’s Activism

- Abolitionism as training ground
  - Political organizing
  - speaking in public
- Defending the expansion of women’s sphere
- World Antislavery Convention in London (1840)
  - Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton



Oberlin College, class of 1855

Founded as coeducational school in 1833

1835-1865, at least 140 black women attended

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## Seneca Falls (1848)

- 1<sup>st</sup> convention for women's rights
- Declaration of Sentiments – full citizenship
  - "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."
  - "We hold these truths to be self-evident...that all men and women are created equal."
  - Women should "have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States...[particularly] the inalienable right to the elective franchise."
- 200 women, 40 men, male chair
- Nearly two dozen other women's rights conventions before 1860
- Difference or equality?

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## Women's Rights Agenda

- Married Woman's Property Act (1848-NY)
  - Keep own earnings and inheritances
  - Invest and conduct business in own name without husbands' permission
  - Women removed from legal category of "children, idiots, and lunatics"
- Divorce Laws
  - Dissolution based not just on adultery
  - desertion or failure to provide
  - Brutality, drunkenness or incompatibility
- Women's clothing
  - Corseted dresses weighed up to 12 pounds
  - "In male attire, we could travel by land or sea; go through all the streets and lanes of our cities and town by night and day, without a protector; get seven hundred dollars a year for teaching, instead of three, and ten dollars for making a coat, instead of two or three, as we now do." Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1855
- Voluntary motherhood
  - "the right of a wife to her own person...Man in his lust has regulated this whole question of sexual intercourse long enough...let the mother of mankind...set bound to his indulgence."



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## The coming of war

- Civil War
  - 1861-1865
- 633,000 died
  - Loss of life almost equal to all other U.S. wars
  - Old tactics; modern weaponry
  - Poor healthcare
    - 337,000 died from disease



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## Women and War

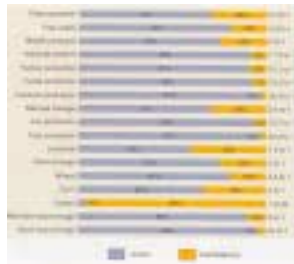
- Organized volunteer work
  - Bureaucratization and professionalization
  - U.S. Sanitary Commission
    - Distributed clothing, food, medicine, and recruited doctors and nurses
    - Raised over \$15 million
  - American Missionary Society
    - "Freedman's Relief"
    - Teaching and the beginnings of Reconstruction
- Women and manufacturing
  - 1/2 of workforce to 1/3 1860-1865
- Female clerks
  - Government offices
  - 1/2 of male pay
- Paid military nurses
  - 3,000 women



Dorothea Dix, head of the Dept. of Female Nurses, required nurses to be 30 years old and "very plain-looking women. Their dresses must be brown or black, with no bows, no curls, no jewelry and no hoop skirts."

## Managing at Home

- Inflation
  - Prices rose 80% in the North
  - 9,000% in the South
  - Effectiveness of northern blockade
- 1863 bread riots in dozen cities and villages
  - Richmond, 1,000 women involved
- "Managing" slaves
  - 100,000 fled slavery
  - "As to the idea of a faithful servant, it is all a fiction."
    - North Carolinian white woman



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## Women in a Time of Division

- racial equality and women's rights
  - Interracial cooperation and conflict
- equality or difference argument
- Increasing Complexities
  - How to reconstruct the nation?
  - Immigration and increasing diversity
  - Manifest Destiny and Colonization
  - Industrialization and Class inequality

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