

It is possible, reading standard histories, to forget half the population of the country. The explorers were men, the landholders and merchants men, the political leaders men, the military figures men. The very invisibility of women, the overlooking of women, is a sign of their submerged status.

When Amelia Bloomer in 1851 suggested in her feminist publication that women wear a kind of short skirt and pants, to free themselves from the encumbrances of traditional dress, this was attacked in the popular women's literature. One story has a girl admiring the "bloomer" costume, but her professor admonishes her that they are "only one of the many manifestations of that wild spirit of socialism and agrarian radicalism which is at present so rife in our land."

In *The Young Lady's Book of 1830*: "... in whatever situation of life a woman is placed from her cradle to her grave, a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required from her." And one woman wrote, in 1850, in the book *Greenwood Leaves*: "True feminine genius is ever timid, doubtful, and clingingly dependent; a perpetual childhood." Another book, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*: "If any habit of his annoyed me, I spoke of it once or twice, calmly, then bore it quietly." Giving women "Rules for Conjugal and Domestic Happiness," one book ended with: "Do not expect too much."

The woman's job was to keep the home cheerful, maintain religion, be nurse, cook, cleaner, seamstress, flower arranger. A woman shouldn't read too much, and certain books should be avoided. When Harriet Martineau, a reformer of the 1830s, wrote *Society in America*, one reviewer suggested it be kept away from women: "Such reading will unsettle them for their true station and pursuits, and they will throw the world back again into confusion."

A sermon preached in 1808 in New York:

How interesting and important are the duties devolved on females as wives . . . the counsellor and friend of the husband; who makes it her daily study to lighten his cares, to soothe his sorrows, and to augment his joys; who, like a guardian angel, watches over his interests, warns him against dangers, comforts him under trials; and by her pious, assiduous, and attractive deportment, constantly endeavors to render him more virtuous, more useful, more honourable, and more happy.

Women were also urged, especially since they had the job of educating children, to be patriotic. One women's magazine offered a prize to the woman who wrote the best essay on "How May an American Woman Best Show Her Patriotism."

The cult of domesticity for the woman was a way of pacifying her with a doctrine of "separate but equal"-giving her work equally as important as the man's, but separate and different. Inside that "equality" there was the fact that the woman did not choose her mate, and once her marriage took place, her life was determined. One girl wrote in 1791: "The die is about to be cast which will probably determine the future happiness or misery of my life.... I have always anticipated the event with a degree of solemnity almost equal to that which will terminate my present existence."

Marriage enchained, and children doubled the chains. One woman, writing in 1813: "The idea of soon giving birth to my third child and the consequent duties I shall be called to discharge distresses me so I feel as if I should sink." This despondency was lightened by the thought that something important was given the woman to do: to impart to her children the moral values of self-restraint and advancement through individual excellence rather than common action.

The "cult of true womanhood" could not completely erase what was visible as evidence of woman's subordinate status: she could not vote, could not own property; when she did work, her wages were one-fourth to one-half what men earned in the same job. Women were excluded from the professions of law and medicine, from colleges, from the ministry.

Putting all women into the same category-giving them all the same domestic sphere to cultivate- created a classification (by sex) which blurred the lines of class, as Nancy Cott points out. However, forces were at work to keep raising the issue of class. Samuel Slater had introduced industrial spinning machinery in New England in 1789, and now there was a demand for young girls-literally, "spinsters"-to work the spinning machinery in factories. In 1814, the power loom was introduced in Waltham, Massachusetts, and now all the operations needed to turn cotton fiber into cloth were under one roof. The new textile factories swiftly multiplied, with women 80 to 90 percent of their operatives-most of these women between fifteen and thirty.

Some of the earliest industrial strikes took place in these textile mills in the 1830s. Eleanor Flexner (*A Century of Struggle*) gives figures that suggest why: women's daily average earnings in 1836 were less than 37 1/2 cents, and thousands earned 25 cents a day, working twelve to sixteen hours a day. In Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1824, came the first known strike of women factory workers; 202 women joined men in protesting a wage cut and longer hours, but they met separately. Four years later, women in Dover, New Hampshire, struck alone. And in Lowell, Massachusetts, in

1834, when a young woman was fired from her job, other girls left their looms, one of them then climbing the town pump and making, according to a newspaper report, "a flaming Mary Wollstonecraft speech on the rights of women and the iniquities of the 'moneyed aristocracy' which produced a powerful effect on her auditors and they determined to have their own way, if they died for it."

A journal kept by an unsympathetic resident of Chicopee, Massachusetts, recorded an event of May 2, 1843:

Great turnout among the girls . . . after breakfast this morning a procession preceded by a painted window curtain for a banner went round the square, the number sixteen. They soon came past again . . . then numbered forty-four. They marched around a while and then dispersed. After dinner they sallied forth to the number of forty-two and marched around to Cabot. ... They marched around the streets doing themselves no credit. ...

There were strikes in various cities in the 1840s, more militant than those early New England "turnouts," but mostly unsuccessful. A succession of strikes in the Allegheny mills near Pittsburgh demanded a shorter workday. Several times in those strikes, women armed with sticks and stones broke through the wooden gates of a textile mill and stopped the looms.

Catharine Beecher, a woman reformer of the time, wrote about the factory system:

Let me now present the facts I learned by observation or inquiry on the spot. I was there in mid- winter, and every morning I was awakened at five, by the bells calling to labor. The time allowed for dressing and breakfast was so short, as many told me, that both were performed hurriedly, and then the work at the mill was begun by lamplight, and prosecuted without remission till twelve, and chiefly in a standing position. Then half an hour only allowed for dinner, from which the time for going and returning was deducted. Then back to the mills, to work till seven o'clock. ... it must be remembered that all the hours of labor are spent in rooms where oil lamps, together with 40 to 80 persons, are exhausting the healthful principle of the air ... and where the air is loaded with particles of cotton thrown from thousands of cards, spindles, and looms.

And the life of upper-class women? Frances Trollope, an Englishwoman, in her book *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, wrote;

Let me be permitted to describe the day of a Philadelphia lady of the first class...

This lady shall be the wife of a senator and a lawyer in the highest repute and practice.. . . She rises, and her first hour is spent in the scrupulously nice

arrangement of her dress; she descends to her parlor, neat, stiff, and silent; her breakfast is brought in by her free black footman; she eats her fried ham and her salt fish, and drinks her coffee in silence, while her husband reads one newspaper, and puts another under his elbow; and then perhaps, she washes the cups and saucers. Her carriage is ordered at eleven; till that hour she is employed in the pastry room, her snow-white apron protecting her mouse-colored silk. Twenty minutes before her carriage should appear, she retires to her chamber, as she calls it; shakes and folds up her still snow white apron, smooths her rich dress, and . . . sets on her elegant bonnet . . . then walks downstairs, just at the moment that her free black coachman announces to her free black footman that the carriage waits. She steps into it, and gives the word: "Drive to the Dorcas Society."

Middle-class women, barred from higher education, began to monopolize the profession of primary-school teaching. As teachers, they read more, communicated more, and education itself became subversive of old ways of thinking. They began to write for magazines and newspapers, and started some ladies' publications. Literacy among women doubled between 1780 and 1840. Women became health reformers. They formed movements against double standards in sexual behavior and the victimization of prostitutes. They joined in religious organizations. Some of the most powerful of them joined the antislavery movement. So, by the time a clear feminist movement emerged in the 1840s, women had become practiced organizers, agitators, speakers.

When Emma Willard addressed the New York legislature in 1819 on the subject of education for women, she was contradicting the statement made just the year before by Thomas Jefferson (in a letter) in which he suggested women should not read novels "as a mass of trash" with few exceptions. "For a like reason, too, much poetry should not be indulged." Female education should concentrate, he said, on "ornaments too, and the amusements of life. . . . These, for a female, are dancing, drawing, and music."

Women struggled to enter the all-male professional schools. Dr. Harriot Hunt, a woman physician who began to practice in 1835, was twice refused admission to Harvard Medical School. But she carried on her practice, mostly among women and children. She believed strongly in diet, exercise, hygiene, and mental health. She organized a Ladies Physiological Society in 1843 where she gave monthly talks. She remained single, defying convention here too.

Elizabeth Blackwell got her medical degree in 1849, having overcome many rebuffs before being admitted to Geneva College. She then set up the New York Dispensary for Poor Women and Children "to give to poor women an opportunity of consulting physicians of their own sex." In her first *Annual Report*, she wrote:

My first medical consultation was a curious experience. In a severe case of pneumonia in an elderly lady I called in consultation a kind-hearted physician of high standing. . . . This gentleman, after seeing the patient, went with me into the parlour. There he began to walk about the room in some agitation, exclaiming, "A most extraordinary case! Such a one never happened to me before; I really do not know what to do!" I listened in surprise and much perplexity, as it was a clear case of pneumonia and of no unusual degree of danger, until at last I discovered that his perplexity related to *me*, not to the patient, and to the propriety of consulting with a lady physician!

Lucy Stone began lecturing on women's rights in 1847 in a church in Gardner, Massachusetts, where her brother was a minister. She was tiny, weighed about 100 pounds, was a marvelous speaker. As lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society, she was, at various times, deluged with cold water, sent reeling by a thrown book, attacked by mobs.

When she married Henry Blackwell, they joined hands at their wedding and read a statement:

While we acknowledge our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife ... we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority. . . .

She was one of the first to refuse to give up her name after marriage. She was "Mrs. Stone." When she refused to pay taxes because she was not represented in the government, officials took all her household goods in payment, even her baby's cradle.

Women, after becoming involved in other movements of reform- antislavery, temperance, dress styles, prison conditions-turned, emboldened and experienced, to their own situation. Angelina Grimke, a southern white woman who became a fierce speaker and organizer against slavery, saw that movement leading further:

Let us all first wake up the nation to lift millions of slaves of both sexes from the dust, and turn them into men and then ... it will be an easy matter to take millions of females from their knees and set them on their feet, or in other words transform them from babies into women.

It was at that time that Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott and others, and began to lay the plans that led to the first Women's Rights Convention in history. It was held at Seneca Falls, New York, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived as a mother, a housewife, full of resentment at her condition, declaring: "A woman is a nobody. A wife is everything." She wrote later:

I now fully understood the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, and the impossibility of woman's best development if, in contact, the chief part of her life, with servants and children, . . . The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic condition into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women, impressed me with the strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general and of women in particular. My experiences at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul.... I could not see what to do or where to begin-my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion.

An announcement was put in the *Seneca County Courier* calling for a meeting to discuss the "rights of woman" the 19th and 20th of July. Three hundred women and some men came.