

Gender, Race, and the Idea of Separate Spheres: Neo-Abolitionist Work in South Carolina Sea Islands

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*“It was WOMAN who guided that car!
It was woman who prompted Justice to the work.”¹*

INTRODUCTION

In 1836, James Forten, Jr., one of the most renowned free black abolitionists, eloquently spoke in front of white and black women of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Forten spoke of women’s special “reign” that must prevail throughout the nation in order that “the District of Columbia [the nation] may be freed, and washed clean from the stains of blood, cruelty and crime” of slavery.² In this same speech, Forten was critical of those who claimed that women “had better be at home attending to their domestic affairs,”³ countering such a perspective with the retort: “What a gross error—what an anti-christian spirit this bespeaks.”⁴ James Forten, Jr., knew from his own family how useful and active women could be in political and social causes. He grew up with four siblings who were all socially influential: Margaretta Forten was a schoolteacher and the secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society; Sarah Forten was a leading abolitionist poet and a leader of a national convention of Negro women in 1837; Harriet Forten Purvis was an abolition-

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ist and managed a way-station for fugitives in the Underground Railroad with her husband Robert Purvis; Robert Bridges Forten was a vigorous abolitionist.⁵ In the same speech mentioned above, James Forten, Jr., called for women's sympathy as it could aid enslaved women and "FREE—America!" He stated: "Sympathy is woman's attribute, By that she has reign'd—by that she will reign."⁶

Forten's speech allows us to see that there is another version of true womanhood in operation, one that does not accord with Barbara Welter's. Among "four cardinal virtues," i.e., piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, that were prescribed to women of the early and mid-nineteenth century, defined in Welter's now classic article,⁷ Forten's comment above more likely negates submissiveness and domesticity in the narrow sense that confines women's sphere to the household only. Instead he asserted that women would be able to fully demonstrate their "womanly" qualities such as piety, purity, wisdom and sympathy when they actively go beyond their ascribed domestic space.⁸ Forten's version of true womanhood thus explains the rapid increase in women's involvement in Christian and social—sometimes even political—reform movements in the mid-nineteenth century, in this instance, the abolitionist movement.

Within northern abolitionist communities that developed in Philadelphia, New York or Boston, abolitionism was one of the great opportunities in which both white and black women of the upper/middle classes could get involved in worldly affairs without their true womanhood being denied. Women abolitionists accused slave holders of destroying the heart of American domesticity—"sacred" relationships that must be protected: between a mother and children, and a husband and a wife—by greedily trading slaves or raping slave women. These activist women heard speeches like Forten's, and perceived that it was their ordained duty to save social "unfortunates" of slaves.

On October 28, 1862, twenty six years after Forten's famous speech, his niece Charlotte L. Forten (1837–1914) arrived at St. Helena Island, one of the largest islands in South Carolina Sea Islands. Here, where the northern Union had just occupied plantations and slaves had been emancipated, Charlotte Forten came in order to accomplish abolitionist work with these newly freed people in the midst of the Civil War.⁹ This article contends that the idea of separate spheres as a gendered, raced and classed concept is key to understanding the course of neo-abolitionist aid and educational work for freed-people in the post-emancipated South. Freedwomen were not subsumed under Welter's notion of true womanhood, and this was both positive and

negative; positive in the sense that they were not constrained by domesticity, but negative in that their productive work was appropriated. This article also demonstrates how white women struggled with the discourse of the separate spheres as well, hoping to circumvent it themselves by relying on freedwomen to perform domestic work for them, but also insisting that domesticity was a part of normative womanhood for freedwomen. Here again we see a mixture of positive and negative; the insistence that freed women were to be included in the normative category of true women was progressive, even as it allowed for the exploitation of freedwomen's domestic labor.

GAINING AUTHORITY, PROVOKING HOSTILITY: THE TEACHING
PROFESSION AS WOMEN'S SEPARATE SPHERE AND
YANKEE SCHOOLMARMS AS "LADIES IN PUBLIC"

The ideology of separate spheres—theorized by second wave feminists of the 1960s—had functioned as a legitimizing logic in relegating women to a subordinate “domestic” or private sphere.¹⁰ Since then, the discourse of separate spheres has generated numerous studies among feminist and gender scholars.¹¹ Whereas pioneer historians of this subject cautioned against the careless use of this concept as a neat binary (private vs. public, domestic vs. world, home vs. work, and women vs. men),¹² a majority of scholars today agree that this concept as a contested terrain remains a useful analytic tool.¹³ It can provide a lens to perceive how people of certain historical periods understood their appropriate roles, places and opportunities and how they attempted to negotiate or protest those conditions and environments. Based on economic and political aspects of the ideology often examined in the past,¹⁴ this article focuses on the social and educational application of the construct.

Because the discourse of separate spheres prescribed that women be in charge of the domestic sphere, it also authorized women to cross the boundary between private and public in a particular way. For example, teaching, nursing, and missionary work became acceptable vocations for women in the mid-nineteenth century because of their link to the domestic sphere and the “cult of true womanhood.” In the teaching profession, especially, women replaced male teachers in the public sphere in schools. Jo Anne Preston and Yukako Hisada, among others, have shown that the feminization of teaching rapidly took place among (white) middle-class women in New England during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Some of these women became abolitionists and were qualified as freedpeople's school teachers by freed-

men's aid societies in the north. They sought out teaching positions as an opportunity to seek economic independence through earning a wage.¹⁶ For example, the Boston Educational Commission reported that although the Educational Committee of this Commission had a limited capacity to accept applicants due to financial constraints, several hundred applied for the teaching posts they advertised.¹⁷ The commission sent a total of seventy-two teachers and superintendents to the Union-occupied Sea Islands by May 1863.¹⁸ The organization paid these teachers an average monthly salary of \$25–50.¹⁹

Though the proportion of women among the earliest members of the Port Royal mission was smaller than men at the beginning (twelve women out of fifty-three members on board the *Atlantic*),²⁰ freedmen's aid associations considered women's hands most appropriate for performing such duties as taking care of destitute ex-slaves on abandoned plantations and providing food, clothes and other essential items. These organizations assumed that women could use their advantage in helping with freedpeople and children.²¹ In May 1863, the Committee on Teachers within the Educational Commission of the Boston Freedmen's Aid Association reported very positively about the work of women sent by their Commission to the Sea Islands. They stated that "their success in their schools has been entirely satisfactory, while the influence which their presence has exerted in elevating and refining the character of the people has been invaluable."²² A scholar of freedpeople's education, Ronald E. Butchart, has also pointed out that because woman's moral well-being was considered to reflect society's well-being, the development of the feminine character of freedwomen was considered their foremost duty of northern missionary women, since they believed that the social institution of slavery had degraded them.²³ Inculcating northern middle-class family values was perceived as central to the "political regeneration of the Republic."²⁴ Thus, if the discourse of separate spheres originally defined different gendered places for northern middle-class men and women, it also produced ways for these women to expand their social and economic opportunities outside of the home without denying women's "intrinsic" qualities.²⁵ Moreover, by fulfilling the duties expected of women, these women gained recognition for the importance of their work, which in turn increased their opportunities to be in the public sphere.²⁶ Thus, the ideology of gendered separate spheres is crucial in understanding the links between the abolitionist movement, domesticity, and emancipationist relief and educational work for freedpeople.²⁷

While these northern women claimed women's authority and expanded their own space in classrooms, their images were ridiculed by the southern

public. “Yankee schoolmarm” was a derogatory term first used by contemporary southern male critics who played with the contradictory images of “ladies in public.”²⁸ Out of a total of approximately nine-hundred northern teachers sent down to freedpeople’s schools in the South, three quarters were women.²⁹ The majority of northern white women teachers crossed over multiple boundaries that defined their “proper sphere”; they crossed the border between women’s and men’s spheres, between North and South, and between white and black communities. For instance, by directly interacting with freedpeople in classrooms and “quarters” (i.e., cabins, or ex-slaves’ residences), these women broke a southern taboo by stepping over racially drawn lines, which enraged southern society. Moreover, according to William Link, schools established in the South during Reconstruction were a “symbol of the tyranny” of the northern invasion.³⁰ Among rural communities where traditional patriarchal authority (in all senses: parental, religious, governmental) determined the way in which schools operated, the sense of being ruled was felt especially strongly as schooling used to be so much about the “neighborhood affair.”³¹ With strong missionary zeal, schoolmarms inculcated the superiority of northern middle class values, morals, and modern ways of living, and labored to raise the ex-slaves’ status through education. Thus, threatening to weaken the white patriarch’s authority and to provide intellectual assets for the black population, the young Yankee schoolmarms became a visible representation of northern social control as well as an impermissible reminder of southern defeat within postbellum southern white society.

NEGOTIATING A GAP BETWEEN THE IDEA AND REALITY OF SEPARATE SPHERES AMONG NORTHERN NEO-ABOLITIONIST WOMEN

A study of separate spheres in mid-nineteenth century America indicates that one of the requirements to be considered a “lady”—a respected status for women who had certain privileges granted to them—was that they must remain quiet or absent in public. For instance, Charlotte L. Forten entered a similar understanding of ladyhood in her journal when feminist Frances D. Gage appealed to mothers of freed sons at the local black church on St. Helena Island to send them to the army “willingly and gladly as she had done hers, to fight for liberty.”³² Forten assumed that the line was drawn between public and private for women, and she stated, “it must have been something very novel and strange to them to hear a woman speak in public, but they listened with great attention and seemed extremely moved by what she said.”³³ Forten’s understanding of ladyhood or “true womanhood” was con-

stituted by the appropriate woman's sphere.

Like Forten, other abolitionist women who went to work with freedpeople in the Union-occupied South brought their ideas of gendered separate spheres with them. In 1862, Mrs. A. M. French, wife of the Rev. M. French who was an agent of the National Freedman's Relief Association, published a large volume of anti-slavery accounts about the realities of slavery and the conditions of ex-slavery in South Carolina, based on her observations and interactions with ex-slaves of the Sea Islands region.³⁴ The Rev. and Mrs. French were the senior leaders within the first members of the Port Royal Mission. Among the many inhumane acts of slavery, Mrs. French was astonished by the fact that enslaved women were made to work as field hands and toiled "equally with man in the field."³⁵ Arguing for the abolishing of aged women's field-labor by the northern government, French criticized the present governmental policy on freedwomen's labor. She remarked: "We will have no woman-driving under our government! They are the guilty, who should have elected the most anti-slavery men to the high offices of trust, at the expense, if need be, of every other or opposite consideration."³⁶ In a chapter under the title of "Women and Civilization," French further discussed how hard New England women worked in order to make proper domestic arrangements, and that they became able "to live in a civilized and refined manner."³⁷ While being impressed with the cleanliness and order of slave cabins, French believed and argued that the enslaved condition held women only to be "half-civilized" because they had less time to engage in their domestic work. She continued: "[I]f Government makes them free, and gives them the chance . . . we shall soon have the highest civilization among them."³⁸ According to this northern neo-abolitionist lady, slavery's curse deprived enslaved women of domesticity and left them "half-civilized." It was only after inculcating them into New England middle-class domestic knowledge and skills that the abolition of slavery could finally be accomplished. Here also, "the cult of true womanhood" was in demand in order for these women to pursue the mission of civilizing freedwomen.

Another notable aspect of the domestication and feminization of the teaching profession in Preston's work mentioned in the previous section is that it revealed how women teachers behaved in ways that were contrary to those prescriptive roles assigned to women.³⁹ Somewhat parallel to these women in New England that Preston analyzes, most northern women teachers in the South Carolina Sea Islands were not fond of and oftentimes did not practice the same gendered domestic life styles for themselves that they instructed freedpeople to follow. For example, while emphasizing to freedpeople the

importance of domestic work in the household, some of them did not hide their own aversion to housekeeping. Susan Walker (1811–1887), who was sent to Port Royal by the Secretary of the Treasury Department, Salmon P. Chase, and taught at freedpeople’s schools from March to June 1862, complained in her diary on April 6th about the domestic duties that she had to perform:

Yesterday was a hard day for me—the hardest I have seen since I came to Port Royal, and I retired thoroughly disgusted and discouraged. If I had only to consider myself to Government rations and be thankful and cheerful, but three other ladies and one or two gentlemen are to be made comfortable through my efforts to provide. Mr. P[ierce] is extremely kind and brings many luxuries to be prepared and he likes a good table. Who does not? I like it too, but do not like to *do it* myself. If we only had a good waiter he might relieve the housekeeper of much disagreeable drudgery and save her more valuable time for more important service—for teaching and *preaching*, both of which are required every day.⁴⁰

On May 7th, when she was freed from housework, she entered the following comment in her journal: “Last day of my housekeeping. How I rejoice! I am ready to do harder work of different kind, but cannot do this.”⁴¹ According to Walker, another teacher at a freedpeople’s school, Laura Towne, also hated housekeeping.⁴² Eventually, some of these northern women hired freedwomen to attend to domestic work for them.

Domestic work was not the only way in which northern teachers contradicted the instructions they gave to freedpeople. Though they encouraged freedmen and women to get married and often oversaw their matrimony, the majority of these northern teachers were single and some of them remained single, forming partnerships with their girlfriends throughout their entire lives.⁴³ Thus, the realities of work and the lifestyles of neo-abolitionists did not fully match the ideal of true womanhood.

Harriet Tubman’s work in Beaufort during the Civil War is another significant example. In June 1863, Tubman, one of the most distinguished and legendary abolitionists, a conductor of the Underground Railroad, and self-freed black woman was at Beaufort, South Carolina, living about seven miles away from a freedpeople’s school where Charlotte Forten taught. Unlike Forten who had an elite background in education, Tubman was an illiterate runaway slave who had been a field hand. Tubman worked for three years as a nurse and a cook at hospitals for “contrabands of war” (a term first adopted by the Union General Benjamin F. Butler in May 1861 in reference to fugitive slaves who successfully entered Union territory and were thus treated as the

Union's possessions⁴⁴) and as a scout and a spy for Union troops in the Sea Islands.⁴⁵ Tubman often went on "expeditions" with northern troops into the Confederate territory to bring slaves back across the lines. When the expeditions were successful, the Union took charge of former slaves, granting them freedom and making them contrabands and soldiers of the Union Army. Tubman wrote to her friends in Boston to request a bloomer dress,⁴⁶ in order to be more useful and safer as she crossed enemy lines.

I want, among the rest, a *bloomer* dress, made of some coarse, strong material, to wear on *expeditions*. In our late expedition up the Combahee river, in coming on board the boat, I was carrying *two pigs* for a sick woman, who had a child to carry, and the order "double quick" was given, and I started to run, stepped on my dress, it being rather long, and fell and tore it almost off . . . I made up my mind then, I would never wear a long dress on another expedition of the kind, but would have a *bloomer* as soon as I could get it. So please make this known to the ladies, if you will, for I expect to have use for it very soon, probably before they can get it to me.⁴⁷

It is well known that the bloomer dress was a symbol of radical identity in the women's rights movement of the nineteenth century. For an activist and neo-abolitionist like Tubman, the dress would carry not merely a message of woman's rights, but carry herself between the enemy's territory and home as she thought it was her duty to work for the Union. Moreover, she attempted to instruct the fellow freedpeople about the importance of work for the government and of gaining respectability by wage labor. She stated: "Most of those coming from the mainland are very destitute, almost naked. I am trying to find places for those able to work, and provide for them as best I can, so as to lighten the burden on the Government as much as possible, while at the same time they learn to respect themselves by earning their own living."⁴⁸ Upon her return home with her parents to Auburn, New York, after the war, she raised funds for freedpeople's schools.⁴⁹

All the examples of neo-abolitionist women discussed in this section show the various ways in which they negotiated the concept of separate spheres and the idea of true womanhood, through and against the lived realities that already challenged the validity of these ideas.

RECONSIDERING SEPARATE SPHERES IN THE CONTEXT OF FREEDPEOPLE

While these neo-abolitionist women exercised independence from patriarchal structures (fathers, future husbands), freedwomen were re-categorized

as dependents of freedmen; through marriage, freedmen were now new “masters” replacing their previous white master.⁵⁰ More recent studies thus have pointed to the white and middle-class bias of the separate spheres ideology as well as to the complicit nature of true womanhood in obscuring racism.⁵¹ In the slavery period, neither domesticity nor the ideal of domestic space was guaranteed among enslaved men and women since white planters as masters had nearly complete access, including sexual access, to enslaved women. Ever since colonial Virginia enacted a law to have children take over their maternal status which established a racially codified slavery system in America,⁵² enslaved women became a source of profit for slave owners (through their reproduction of baby slaves as well as their production of field labor). As Jennifer Morgan’s study shows, unlike white women who were portrayed as too physically fragile to work in the field or bear many children, black women were symbolized as “beasts and monsters” in racist colonial depictions and expected (and forced) to serve supposedly contradictory roles in labor and family reproduction.⁵³ Therefore, even when enslaved women were assumed to be naturally talented or fit for “domestic” duties, they also performed presumably male work as field hands. This was of course not for their own merit but only to increase the white master’s “family fortune.”⁵⁴ It was in this context that freedmen desired to be the head of households, as perceived by Laura Towne (1825–1901) in 1867. Towne observed the change of relationship between freedmen and freedwomen: “In slavery the woman was far more important, and was in every way held higher than the man. It was the woman’s house, the children were entirely hers, etc., . . . the notion of being bigger than woman generally, is just now inflating the conceit of the males to an amazing degree.”⁵⁵ She added that as free men, they pursued “domestic freedom,” a concept she described as “the right, just found, to have their own way in their families and rule their wives” as their “inestimable privilege!”⁵⁶ Thus for freedmen, freedom and independence were realized by assuming the role of the patriarch in their new households where they were now masters.⁵⁷

As the heads of families, freedmen sought to be breadwinners, and frequently sent petitions and letters to the government asking for the ration they should have been getting for their work in the army. For example, on 18 July 1864, seventy-four members of the colored infantry had written from Folly Island, South Carolina, insisting they should be paid for their work in the U. S. Colored Troops.⁵⁸ The following year on June 25th, George G. Freeman had written at General Hospital in Beaufort, South Carolina:

I want them to Give me my discharge and let me go and worke and suporte my Familey for they are nearly starved and hav not suitabal cloathing to hide thair neckedness my famley depends upon my daily labor for thier suporte. . . I went with out Pay nearly all of the time I hav ben out. . . If I hav don wrong in writing to my superior i pray Pardon me For so doing But I should like to Recieve some money from the Government and go and see after my fanliey.⁵⁹

Another soldier on Morris Island, South Carolina, wrote a similar message on 13 January 1866: “Run Right out of Slavery in to Soldiery & we hadent nothing atall & our wifes & mother most all of them is aperishing all about where we leave them or abbout the Country. . . Half of our money got to use up in the Regtal Sutler for somthing to Eate & we all are perrishing our self & our Parent & wifes all are Suffering.”⁶⁰

As these testimonies show, fighting for the Union army did not provide economic security for ex-slaves as the Union promised. Slaves believed that they were going to be given the “forty acres of land and a mule” promised by the Union; however, the land and cattle were never provided by the government after the north’s victory. The labor and economic system in Union-occupied areas, a place considered to be the antithesis of domesticity, “paid such low wages to black men that they could not protect their wives and children from the marketplace.”⁶¹ Especially after black men’s enlistment in the Union army, black women’s and children’s field labor became highly necessary in order to fill a male labor shortage in the fields.⁶² They picked cotton, planted corn and potatoes. Unlike white women, and counter to the ideal of domestic womanhood, henceforth black women were in reality easily pushed to work beyond the domestic sphere. Their sphere extended to the fields, mills and other public spaces wherever their enduring physical labor was required and appropriated.⁶³ From this example, it is apparent that the discourse of separate spheres had to be modified when the women under discussion were newly-emancipated black women. It would not have been deemed appropriate for a white “lady” to work in the fields—white women who did so (and there were many who did)⁶⁴ were thus disqualified from the social status of ladyhood. This re-gendering of a raced physical space was significant because it was utilized to rearrange social class for reinstalling the white race’s control of the South.

CONCLUSION

Most of these northern white and black women who engaged in neo-aboli-

tionist work with freedpeople were adherents of Garrisonian abolitionism, which called for the abolition of “distinctions of sex” in addition to that of race. William Lloyd Garrison emphasized that their goal was “universal emancipation,” meaning that not only racial and chattel slavery but also women’s servitude at home was under attack. Therefore, Garrisonian abolitionists “call[ed] into question the prevailing conception of the women’s sphere as purely domestic.”⁶⁵ However, as we have seen throughout this paper, for the actual work of aiding and educating freedpeople, women were called because their womanly qualities were in high demand. While fulfilling their “duties” as women, some of them started to question their “rights” as women, or rather as “men” in the universal sense of the word. It is well known that the women’s rights movement of the nineteenth century emerged out of anti-slavery activism: more specifically, when some abolitionist women faced sexual segregation at the anti-slavery conference in London in 1840.⁶⁶

Similarly, despite the fact that these neo-abolitionist women dedicated themselves to aiding, educating, and doing other kinds of work for freedpeople, and that they also contributed to warfare and to the political advancement of the Union and the government, they were denied voting rights (which was a ticket for direct political participation) by ratification of the fifteenth amendment in 1870. In this sense, it was inevitable that some women who worked with freedpeople in the Beaufort area, such as Harriet Tubman, Laura Towne, Ellen Murray, and Abbie Holmes Christensen, among others, became women’s suffragists while they contributed to black education.⁶⁷ Had these women heard James Forten, Jr.’s speech several decades later, they would have agreed wholeheartedly with his assertion:

[M]ounted on the car of *Freedom*, [woman] betook her way to the spot where *Slavery* was stalking over the land, making fearful ravages among human beings . . . [T]he supplicating cry of mercy did not fall unheeded upon her car. No. She smote the monster in the height of his power; . . . *eight hundred thousand human beings sprung into life again.*

It was WOMAN who guided that car! It was woman who prompted Justice to the work.⁶⁸

The ideology of true womanhood thus played an important role in how northerners—both white and black—constructed themselves and others, and its application to the South on the eve of emancipation was rather complex and problematic. White northern women who went south to teach freedpeople struggled to escape it, sometimes depending on the labor of black women.

Black activists like Tubman perhaps thought it was rather nonsensical. It was likely to be ignored in the case of freedwomen who were field laborers with the exception of the neo-abolitionist Mrs. French. The construct of separate spheres, therefore, was more contested in the 1860s than previous studies have shown, even as it surely shaped women's lives.

NOTES

This article is developed out of a paper I presented at the "Historicising Whiteness Conference" held at the University of Melbourne in November 2006. While the paper I presented (which dealt with the historical intersection between whiteness and gender studies) will be part of the conference proceedings, this paper focuses on the separate spheres in the context of freedpeople's aid and education.

¹ "Speech by James Forten, jr., Delivered before the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 14 April 1836," *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 3., *The United States, 1830–1846*. ed. C. Peter Ripley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 163.

² "Speech by James Forten, Jr.," 162.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ All of these siblings carried on the legacy of their father, James Forten (1766–1842), one of the wealthiest free blacks in early America, who was educated at the earliest school established for black people in Philadelphia by radical anti-slavery Quaker, Anthony Benezet. Anthony Benezet not only voiced his dissent against slavery as early as the 1750s, but also devoted his life and his estate to co-education for blacks as well as to the education of girls. Rufus Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (New York: Norton Library, 1966), 515–516; Roberts Vaux, *Memoirs of the Life of Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia, 1817); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 23, 83–87. The Bird school, one of the earliest public schools for black people that was opened in Philadelphia in 1830, was called "James Forten" by local people. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro*, 84. A women's group within an abolitionist association established after Benezet was one of the most active freedpeople's aid and educational organization. Robert Forten was a believer in women's leadership in social reform and a supporter of female education. He sent his daughter Charlotte L. Forten to schools in Boston, where she not only acquired knowledge and skills in literature, music, French, Latin, and a little German and Algebra, but made friends with major abolitionist leaders William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and John Greenleaf Whittier. Charlotte L. Forten, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimke*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 7–27. Perhaps it was no coincidence that James Forten helped Garrison to organize the American Anti-Slavery Society and that his granddaughter Charlotte Forten became a Garrisonian abolitionist. Consequently, Charlotte Forten also taught at a freedpeople's school (called the Penn Freedmen's School) in the Sea Islands that was supported by the Benezet Society for more than a century and a half. Margaret Hope Bacon, "The Heritage of Anthony Benezet: Philadelphia Quakers and Black Education," *For Emancipation and Education: Some Black and Quaker Efforts 1680–1900: Essays Prepared for Awbury Arboretum and the Germantown Historical Society Fall, 1994*, ed. Eliza Cope Harrison (Philadelphia: Awbury Arboretum Association, 1997), 26–35. The Anthony Benezet Association was one of the major financial contributors for Penn Freedmen's School on St. Helena Island, S. C.

⁶ "Speech by James Forten, Jr.," 163.

⁷ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966), 151–74.

⁸ "Speech by James Forten, Jr.," 163.

⁹ Forten started teaching at Penn Freedmen's school on 5 November 1862, and went back to her northern home in June 1864 due to illness. Diary of Laura Towne, 28 October and 5 November 1862, Penn School Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

¹⁰ Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood."

¹¹ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, 2d edition, 1997); Cott, ed., *Domestic Ideology and Domestic Work Part 1, 2*, *History of Women in the United States: Historical Articles on Women's Lives and Activities*, vol. 4 (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 1992).

¹² In 1988, Kerber criticized historians' careless use of the abstract term "separate spheres." According to Kerber, though the term "separate spheres" was a metaphor, one that was often applied loosely, scholars attached several different meanings to it without clear specification. For example, it could mean "an ideology imposed on women, a culture created by women," or "a set of boundaries expected to be observed by women." Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* vol. 75, no. 1 (June, 1988), 9–39. Recently, Ryan has added several criticisms as well. According to her, the assumption of this concept, which automatically categorizes male and female in dichotomous spheres, was problematic. She has contended that "male and female are not mapped onto public and private" and "man is not to public as woman is to private." Ryan also has noted that it was gender-biased lines drawn between public and private that were a problem, not the term "public and private" itself. Mary P. Ryan, "The Public and the Private Good: Across the Great Divide in Women's History," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 15, no. 2, (Summer 2003), 10–27. Overall, the major criticisms of these concepts (the separate spheres, domesticity, and "true" womanhood) are based on their constructed nature as well as on their limited applicability. Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* vol. 36, no. 2 (January 1993), 383–414.

¹³ Landes has shown that the category of public and private is "an indispensable framework for gender analysis." Joan B. Landes, "Further Thoughts on the Public/Private Distinction," *Journal of Women's History* vol. 15, no. 2 (Summer 2003), 34; Cott, ed., *Domestic Ideology*, Introduction, xi–xiii.

¹⁴ In her groundbreaking and pioneering work of the new social history of American Feminism first published in 1988, Natsuki Aruga pointed out that Japanese feminist circles often focused on the economic aspect of the ideology of the separate spheres. Aruga contended that the historical examination of the separate women's sphere would show the political aspect of the ideology more clearly. Natsuki Aruga, *Amerika Feminism no Shakaishi* [New Social History of American Feminism] (Tokyo: Keisou Syobou, 1988).

¹⁵ Preston concludes that the teaching profession became increasingly feminized and that the (white) women's sphere in New England expanded. Jo Anne Preston, "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *The New England Quarterly* vol. 66, no. 4 (December, 1993), 531–551; Kerber, "Separate Spheres," 9–39; Nancy Cott, Gerda Lerner, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Ellen DuBois, and Nancy Hewitt, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 145–163. Hisada demonstrates that while 56.3 per cent of the women in Massachusetts engaged in the teaching profession in 1834, the percentage went up to 77.8 per cent by 1860, preceding other New England states. Yukako Hisada, "Between Factory and School: Women School Teachers in Early Nineteenth-Century

New England," *The Japanese Journal of American Studies* no. 17 (2006), 114.

¹⁶ Jacqueline Jones, *Soldiers of Light and Love: Northern Teachers and Georgia Blacks, 1865–1873* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 8, 207.

¹⁷ *First Annual Report of the Educational Commission for Freedmen. May, 1863* (Boston: Prentiss and Deland, Book and Job Printers, 1863), 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ One pre-staged "experiment" of Reconstruction took place as early as March 1862. Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1964); Akiko Ochiai, "The Port Royal Experiment," *Harvesting Freedom: African American Agrarianism in Civil War Era South Carolina* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 51–82. For first-hand accounts by people on board the *Atlantic*, see "Journal of Miss Susan Walker March 3d to June 6th, 1862," Henry Noble Sherwood, ed., *Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio* vol. 7, no. 1 (January–March, 1912), 47–48.

²¹ *First Annual Report*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ Abolitionist women were against slavery, claiming that it was a sin against the whole nation. In their viewpoint, slavery not only destroyed family and bonds between mothers and children, but also provided white masters sexual access to slave women. Moreover, Mary Boykin Chesnut's writings indicate that southern planters' wives were also abolitionists deep in their minds, since slavery facilitated their husbands' sexual double standards. Ultimately, however, southern women aligned with their husbands accepting their dependent role that benefited them because slavery offered plantation mistresses the ownership of slaves and their labors, which made them "ladies." LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 12–14.

²⁴ Ronald E. Butchart, *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862–1875* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980).

²⁵ Kerber's work on republican motherhood has shown that the domestic roles of (white) mothers during the early nineteenth century enabled them to expand the realm of their participation (albeit indirectly) into the public arena without denying their domesticity. The idealized gender role as good wives and mothers of (white male) citizens gained value since the fate of the future Republic was perceived as dependent upon their domestic and maternal performance. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986).

²⁶ The best example of this case is, of course, Catharine Beecher who argued for social recognition of women's authority in domestic affairs in her domestic advice manuals. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). Also Catharine's sister, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote the best selling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) which vividly depicted slavery's domestic destruction through the dreadful escape of slave mother Eliza and her baby, thus capturing northern women's sympathies and reinvigorating abolitionist sentiment. Whites, *Gender Matters*, 11–24. However, these famous writers' stances toward women's abolitionism differed. For Catharine's stance against abolitionism, see Catharine E. Beecher, "An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism Addressed to Miss A. E. Grimke," ed., Mason Lowance, *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 207–20.

²⁷ According to Michael D. Pierson, the conflicting views and practices of women's public and political involvement regarding anti-slavery or abolitionism stirred sectional discontent, and ultimately caused the war. Pierson demonstrates a gendered political landscape of the mid-nineteenth century as well as public support or reaction to such timely issues as domestic

feminism, radical republicanism, women's rights, patriarchy, and most importantly, stances toward slavery. Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

²⁸ Sandra Eileen Small, "The Yankee Schoolmarm in Southern Freedmen's Schools, 1861–1871: The Career of a Stereotype" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1976).

²⁹ Nina Silber, "A Compound of Wonderful Potency: Women Teachers of the North in the Civil War South," *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed., Joan E. Cashin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 36.

³⁰ William A. Link, *A Hard Country and a Lonely Place: Schooling, Society, and Reform in Rural Virginia, 1870–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

³¹ The public school establishment that later took place also threatened southern ways of educating children because secular schools "corrupted" the moral sanctuary which was previously retained by church and home. Link, *A Hard Country*, 30, 48.

³² Forten, *The Journals*, 155.

³³ *Ibid.*, 155–156.

³⁴ Winchell M. French, ed., *Slavery in South Carolina and the Ex-Slaves; or, the Port Royal Mission*. By Mrs. A. M. French (New York: Winchell M. French, 1862).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 103–105.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106–7.

³⁹ Preston, "Domestic Ideology."

⁴⁰ "Journal of Miss Susan Walker," 27.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴³ The first and second generations of principals of Penn Freedmen's School, all of them northern white women, Laura Towne and Ellen Murray, and Rossa B. Cooley and Grace Bigelow House lived together to dedicate their entire lives on the Islands. Intimate and social relationships between women were more accepted and had very different connotations from today. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 53–76; Matthew Gallman, "An Inspiration to Work: Anna Elizabeth Dickinson, Public Orator," *The War was You and Me*, 159–82.

⁴⁴ Makoto Tsujiuchi, *Amerika no Doreisei to Jiyushugi* [Liberalism and American Slavery] (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1997), 114–15.

⁴⁵ "Speech by James Forten, Jr.," vol. 5, 220–23.

⁴⁶ A bloomer dress was a women's dress made up with balloon-like trousers which was often worn by women's rights advocates in the nineteenth century.

⁴⁷ "Harriet Tubman to 'Boston Friends' 30 June 1863," *The Black Abolitionist Papers* vol. 5, 220–223.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁰ Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to be Ladies: Women and the Obligation of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 3–46, 47–80.

⁵¹ Mary Kelly, "Beyond the Boundaries," *Journal of the Early Republic* vol.21., no.1 (Spring, 2001), 73–78; Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Deborah Gray White, *Ar'N't I A Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South; Revised edition* (W. W. Norton 1999); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and

Colonial Discourses,” *Feminist Review* 30 (Autumn, 1988), 65–88; Louise Michele Newman, *White Women’s Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Carby, White, Mohanty and Newman, among others, have criticized white women’s privileged status and their arrogance in presuming to represent half of the entire population in the world.

⁵² Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 107–36, 194–97.

⁵³ Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

⁵⁴ Davidoff and Hall’s pioneering work on the making of the British middle class demonstrates that women as unpaid domestic labor have always (both before and after their marriage) played a self-sacrificing role for family. Thus women as useful economic assets have helped men to accumulate a family fortune. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). In this paper, I am applying this framework to the relationship between enslaved women and their white master’s family in the U.S. South.

⁵⁵ Diary of Laura Towne, June 1, 1867, Penn School Papers.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; also in Rupert S. Holland, ed., *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne: Written from the Sea Island of South Carolina, 1862–1884* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1912; repr. New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 183–184; Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 245; Wakako Araki, “Educating Racial Others, Performing Gender: Freedpeople’s Education in the Postbellum South” in *Proceedings of the Kyoto American Studies Summer Seminar July 29–July 31, 2004*, Hiroshi Yoneyama ed. (Kyoto: Center for American Studies, Ritsumeikan University, 2005), 93.

⁵⁷ Ochiai keenly points out that the free labor ideology which was enforced by northerners upon freedpeople in Reconstruction “camouflaged gender and racial issues,” and that it excluded freedwomen “from the pursuit of economic independence.” Ochiai, *Harvesting Freedom*, 79–80.

⁵⁸ Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (New York: New Press, 1997), 86–87.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 94. In order to maintain the originality of freedpeople’s letters, the editors did not correct spelling and grammatical mistakes in the documentary. I take their lead, and I do not insert [sic] after incorrect spelling, which is a regular rule for historical writing.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶¹ Kerber, *No Constitutional Right*, 71.

⁶² Charles Nordhoff, “The Freedmen of South-Carolina: Some Account of Their Appearance, Character, Condition, and Peculiar Customs,” *Papers of the Day* (Boston Daily Advertiser Office, 20 March 1863), Harvard University Library, 2–5.

⁶³ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

⁶⁴ McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 74–80.

⁶⁵ Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, “A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 32, no. 1 (January 1990), 98–102; William Lloyd Garrison, “Speech at the Fourth National Women’s Rights Convention (1853),” *Against Slavery*, 98.

⁶⁶ Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

⁶⁷ Monica Maria Tetzlaff, *Cultivating a New South: Abbie Holmes Christensen and the Politics of Race and Gender 1852–1938* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press,

2002).

⁶⁸ "Speech by James Forten, Jr.," 163.