

Historical Dictionary of Women's Education in the United States

Edited by

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Contents

Preface	vii
Introduction	xi
THE DICTIONARY	1
Appendix: Timeline of Women's Educational History in the United States	503
Selected Bibliography	507
Index	511
About the Editor and Contributors	525

Preface

The *Historical Dictionary of Women's Education in the United States* is a concise reference tool for researchers, scholars, teachers, students, and laypersons interested in examining significant events, ideas, movements, institutions, and people concerned with the history of women's education in the United States from the colonial period to the present. More an encyclopedia than a dictionary, the book discusses the history of women's education in America through a series of 245 original entries contributed by 104 scholars from the United States and abroad. Each entry defines a subject and explores its significance to women's educational history. When presenting a wide-ranging topic like a biography or a historical movement, the entry emphasizes the particular contributions to education.

Creating a reference book may be, by nature, a conservative activity. That is, the editor is capturing the state of knowledge at a particular point in time and "conserving" it for future use. However, the editor can also hope to alert readers to areas where knowledge is newly growing, where interpretations are changing or contested, and where research is underdeveloped. Selecting entries to cover this range, especially in burgeoning fields like women's history and educational history, poses true intellectual challenges and may, on occasion, present inconsistencies in coverage. For example, *Dictionary* readers will find an essay on deaf education for women but not one for visually impaired women. Such a discrepancy results because a historian of the hearing-impaired has recently treated the issue of women's education, making an up-to-date scholarly analysis readily available. Similar discrepancies may appear throughout the volume, although by using the index readers can find coverage of topics that did not receive a separate alphabetical entry. For instance, working-class women do not have a separate entry, but their issues receive good coverage in the entries on Hull-House, labor colleges, the Women's Trade Union League, and labor unions.

Several criteria guided selection of topics. First, the volume tries to represent

the geographic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity of schooling for girls and women throughout the various eras of U.S. history. Here, too, coverage varies depending on the availability of solid scholarship. Many of the entries treat the history of white women and girls, an accurate representation of the bulk of scholarship in educational history. However, a wider array of ethnic and class perspectives increasingly informs historical studies, providing better coverage of Native American women, immigrants, and students at nonprestigious institutions. African American women, for example, have received considerable historical attention in recent years, so the number of entries on their efforts is relatively full; however, the histories of both Hispanic American women and Asian American women in U.S. schools are only beginning to receive sustained attention. There, single entries examine the issues through a historiographic approach.

A second selection criterion was the inclusion of both formal and informal educational settings, since women's history has demonstrated that the full picture of women's participation in American life involves traditional institutions as well as alternate routes. Thus, schools and colleges, school founders and leaders, and educational movements are included; but less traditional sources of women's education also appear, such as suffrage organizations, women's clubs, advocacy groups, and popular writers. Comprehensive entries on movements or themes such as female literacy, teaching, or the Progressive Era provide good sources for an overall presentation on women's roles and educational opportunities.

Third, the number of biographies is minimized in favor of issues, events, and themes that cover the range of women's education in a topical format. The *Dictionary*, therefore, provides a wider context for understanding individual accomplishments, and readers are urged to consult the cross-referenced topics.

Cross-references, indicated in the text by **boldface** with an asterisk (*), will expand information about any particular subject. For example, some entries, such as Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, have a narrowly defined scope. However, the reader should also turn to entries on seminaries, academies, teaching, common schools, and separate spheres to complement and extend understanding of this particular institution. Each entry also provides a short bibliography directing readers to good sources on each topic as well as related issues. A selected bibliography at the end of the volume provides a list of the strongest general sources on women's educational history. Finally, the introduction to the *Dictionary* and the appendix, "Timeline of Women's Educational History in the United States," both can help readers put this particular educational history into a wider perspective.

Numerous scholars, including the more than one hundred *Dictionary* contributors, offered sound advice on the inclusion of topics and the availability of scholarly work. In particular, I am grateful to two colleagues who served as advisers to the entire project. Professor Barbara Beatty of Wellesley College, an expert in the histories of preschool education and teacher education, and Professor Sally Schwager of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a scholar

in women's educational history with a particular interest in secondary schooling, provided invaluable guidance. In addition, a group of able research assistants, each of whom is a student of women's education, provided scholarly as well as administrative support to the project. I thank Sarah Burley, Amelia Kaplan, Renée Sbaschnig, Kimberley Dolphin, Karen Philipps, Christine Brown, and Heather Sullivan. I learned a great deal from each scholar's contributions and suggestions; however, as editor, I assume responsibility for editorial decisions or omissions.

Introduction

The story of women's education in the United States is a continuous effort to move from the periphery to the mainstream in both formal institutions and informal opportunities. Because their needs seemed different and insignificant, and their very intelligence was questioned, females were seldom welcomed into schools or colleges. In response, they developed a two-pronged approach of separatism. While never abandoning the effort to open traditional educational doors, women created their own separate institutions. Thus, women's colleges and **normal schools*** for teacher training paralleled the older or better-known colleges and universities that trained men for business and the professions. Simultaneously, women used the **separate spheres*** of influence that had been designated for them since colonial times, taking advantage of the informal power ceded to them in domestic, familial, and religious arenas. There they created and educated themselves through nonschool opportunities and associations to become better mothers and community leaders. Organizations as diverse as the **Girl Scouts**,* the **National Council of Negro Women**,* the **General Federation of Women's Clubs**,* and the **National College Equal Suffrage League*** provided women opportunities to expand both their knowledge and skill.

A full story of women's educational history winds through both recognized and little-known leaders and settings and is not always a tale of continuous progress. Although some measures show steady improvement—for example, the **female literacy*** rate or graduation from schools and colleges—other issues recur with disturbing frequency, such as the continued push for full support of women's institutions and the ongoing battle for access and equity. The 1990s are demonstrating renewed struggles around **affirmative action**,* family values, and welfare, all issues that recur in the history of women's push for educational parity.

COLONIAL AND REPUBLICAN ERAS (1600s TO EARLY 1800s)

Both the colonial era and the early years of the new nation were marked by a lack of consistent educational institutions for either men or women. No system existed to provide schooling for boys and girls; most education was rudimentary and held in women's homes (**dame schools***) or makeshift **district schools.*** Teachers taught the basics of arithmetic and the alphabet. More important was religious training offered by whatever sectarian group dominated a town or settlement. Character formation constituted a prime goal of early education, and both girls and boys used the Bible as a basic text.

Women played a key role in spreading and strengthening religious values within both the family and the community. The **Great Awakening*** was a series of religious revivals that swept the eastern seaboard from 1700 through 1750. With its emphasis on personal conversion and public testimony for both men and women, the movement allowed females the chance to influence others in their religious activities and choices. Some women led prayer groups and spoke publicly or wrote about their conversions. This enhanced role for women in formal churches was an entering wedge that they used over many decades to strengthen their public role and their demands for adequate education.

Late eighteenth-century leaders recognized women's influence on the family as a significant way to foster the values of a newly independent Republic. Early advocates for women like **Abigail Adams,*** **Judith Sargent Murray,*** and Mercy Otis Warren pushed for women's role and women's rights in the new nation. Adams reminded her husband to "remember the ladies" in crafting laws that would enhance their participation; influenced by Enlightenment thought, Murray called for stronger educational opportunities that would allow women to exercise their political and moral reasoning. Although such direct calls did not always produce widespread change, the matching of women's familial role with the needs of the new nation did. The notion of "**Republican motherhood,****"* a modern term for the belief that women could influence the next generation's citizens, propelled the opening of formal education for girls. Although a somewhat limited way of asserting women's educational rights, the notion nonetheless justified women's need for schooling and influenced creation of stronger formal opportunities.

The sporadic availability of education in the early Republic led to vastly different educational achievement for women and men, depending on region of the country, urban or rural setting, social class, and gender. The rudimentary literacy rate in New England in 1675 reached about 45 percent for women and 70 percent for men; by 1790, the gender gap had closed, with 80 percent of women literate and slightly more for men. In the South and West, the figures diverged more significantly.

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY (1820–1860)

The decades preceding the Civil War showed significant advances in formal education for both genders, but they also reveal a vastly different story for the nation's white and black women. White women, who were beneficiaries of the legacy of Republican motherhood, found new justifications for their demands for education, while black women—the vast majority slaves in the South—found continued prohibitions against their formal schooling.

The concept of Republican motherhood rested on women's primary authority within the home. In colonial times, women and men had generally worked side by side in a domestic economy; certainly labor was divided, but both parents often produced their work from the homestead. With the antebellum rise in urbanization and industrialization, women's domestic role heightened as men were increasingly called into an economic sphere beyond the home. Although scholars are beginning to question the strength of the "separate spheres" ideology in actual practice, this powerful notion nonetheless limited female access to education. The market economy demanded increased skills from men but not from the majority of women.

However, the same ideology that had encouraged women's education for instructing their nascent Republican citizen-sons took on a new aspect in the hands of female educational leaders. A strong group of institution builders including Sarah Pierce, **Emma Willard**,* **Catharine Beecher**,* **Mary Lyon**,* and **Zilpah Polly Grant Banister*** borrowed this ideology to assert a strong need for women's education. Women's domestic authority stemmed from belief in their moral superiority, a notion that had been enhanced by women's role in the First and **Second Great Awakenings**.* As men moved further into the economic and political spheres, women were expected to sustain the purity of the home. An ideology of "**true womanhood**"* appeared in the **prescriptive literature*** of the antebellum era, exhorting women to be pure, pious, submissive, and domestic. As women developed these qualities, they asserted themselves as the community's moral leaders. What Willard, Beecher, and others recognized in this division of authority was a keen opportunity for women to move more publicly into the role of educating children. If women could lay claim to being more pure and pious than men, then surely they should be the formal teachers of children as well as their informal guides within the family.

The opportunity for women to assume public roles as teachers was enhanced in the mid-1800s by the growth of the **common schools**.* Starting in Massachusetts and Connecticut through the efforts of **Horace Mann**,* Henry Barnard, and others, local public schooling was organized and systemized for the first time. The casual outlines of district schooling were being replaced by early efforts to standardize curriculum, attendance, and teacher qualifications. Girls as well as boys increasingly entered elementary schools, raising the need for additional teachers.

Teaching,* like schooling, had been haphazard work before the growth of common schooling. Men—often college students with a need to earn their tuition money—served as teachers whether or not their skills or inclinations suited the job. Yet women had been recognized, at least within the home, as the proper guardians of youngsters. With formal training to strengthen their own academic skills, they could make better—even professional—teachers.

The **academies*** and **seminaries*** founded for young women in the early 1800s did not have the sole purpose of training teachers. Some institutions like **Litchfield Female Academy*** sought to provide solid academic training for pupils, sometimes in conjunction with **ornamental education**,* offering needlepoint, sewing, and music instruction in an integrated curriculum. But the schools created by Willard, Lyon, and Beecher pursued a new direction with their clear focus on preparing good Christian teachers. The seeds of women's collegiate education, which would not flower for several decades, were planted in these seminaries.

Parallel with this push for formal schooling, many women pursued informal educational opportunities in the widespread antebellum reform movement. French observer Alexis de Tocqueville had identified Americans' propensity for creating organizations to advance their communal interests, and the antebellum era saw women leading many efforts. The women's rights movement coalesced at the 1848 **Seneca Falls*** Convention when a group of women and men issued a call for women's equality in its **Declaration of Sentiments**,* a document modeled on the Declaration of Independence. **Abolitionism**,* an organized push for elimination of **slavery**,* attracted radical women and men throughout the North. Christian women with an interest in advancing their faith appealed to the **Board of Foreign Missions*** to send them abroad. Each of these movements educated its participants and allowed women to influence others through public advocacy.

Antebellum African American women enjoyed few such opportunities for either formal or informal education. Of the 4.5 million blacks in the United States in 1860, 4 million were slaves, all in the South. Although initially schooling of slaves had not been prohibited, over time laws declared that slaves could not be educated. Punishments for those who learned to read or write were severe; nonetheless, clandestine **moonlight schools*** and other informal efforts managed to allow about 5 percent of slaves to become literate. Although some records show free blacks in the North and the South receiving academy education, many free blacks were effectively denied education as well.

MID-LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY (1860–1890)

The latter half of the nineteenth century produced huge advances in formalized educational opportunities for women of all backgrounds. In an era of institution building, several efforts began as firm bases for women's ongoing educational involvement. Collegiate education opened to women, both through

separate **women's colleges*** and, more reluctantly, in coeducational universities. Normal schools thrived as providers of **teacher education*** to women nationwide. **High schools**,* although not mass institutions until after 1900, began to serve a portion of the population. Common schooling spread throughout the country, formalizing its systems and its goals. With Emancipation, educational institutions for African Americans burgeoned, from elementary schools to colleges and training institutes. Education for Native Americans grew, although its purpose of assimilating Indians into white culture often defeated the self-determination of native people.

Oberlin College* in Ohio generally wins distinction as the first true college to open to women, welcoming its first female students in 1837. Oberlin further staked its radical claim by inviting African American students into its coeducational setting and, for years, trained most of the nation's prominent black women educators. Collegiate education remained limited for women until the establishment in 1865 of **Vassar College**,* the first of the so-called **Seven Sisters*** women's colleges. By 1894, **Wellesley**,* **Bryn Mawr**,* **Radcliffe**,* **Barnard**,* and **Smith Colleges*** had opened specifically for women, and **Mount Holyoke Female Seminary*** had converted to collegiate status. These seven institutions soon took the lead in offering strong classical curricula to women and in providing most of the professorial jobs open to women.

Coeducation,* although customary in the common schools, proceeded cautiously at colleges and universities. In the late 1860s and 1870s, with a push from the federal **Morrill Land-Grant Act**,* state universities began to serve a wider population than had small sectarian private colleges throughout the country. Not all universities chose to open as coeducational, but the insistence of female taxpayers about the public nature of these schools encouraged universities such as Iowa, Wisconsin, and Kansas to serve women as well as men. The shunting of women into "ladies" or **normal departments**,* however, revealed the lack of enthusiasm that often greeted widespread coeducation.

Normal schools were not officially women's institutions, but in practice, women far outnumbered men at these teacher-training schools. Often less rigorous and with shorter degree programs than colleges, normal schools allowed students to strengthen their own educations and to gain valuable marketable skills as teachers. Although usually headed by men, some normal schools had female presidents, or preceptresses, and offered another avenue for women to test their leadership skills.

High schools, a late-century innovation sandwiched between normal schools and colleges, did not attract a steady clientele until after the turn of the twentieth century. Before then, high schools generally drew boys and some girls who planned to attend college but still less than 7 percent of the age group. When these institutions took on a more comprehensive nature after 1900, offering general and **vocational education*** along with English and classical programs, they would prove to be greater draws to women than men, a development of considerable consternation to educational planners.

Common schooling was successful first in New England where systematization proved easiest. The older district system of education disappeared in Massachusetts by 1882. By the turn of the century, the South and Midwest strengthened local and state systems of schooling, although regional differences, frequently exacerbated by racial issues, made implementation variable. Nonetheless, the common schools served girls in numbers equal to boys, offering solid literacy training for females, as well as providing the single largest opportunity for women to work as teachers.

Emancipated blacks in the South—or **freedmen**,* as they were known—were not welcomed enthusiastically into the growing common school systems. The first schools for newly freed slaves were missionary efforts by the **American Missionary Association*** and the Freedmen’s Bureau, a federal agency that provided basic needs as well as schools. The educational demands of this population were huge, spanning children to adults. Night schools, Sunday schools, and common schools were created, with both local and northern teachers serving crowded schools and classrooms. Women constituted three-quarters of these teachers, and about one-eighth of teachers were African Americans.

Although advanced education for African Americans lagged behind white schooling for several decades, the first black colleges and training institutions began in this era. Many African Americans had been trained at Oberlin or elsewhere and created their own institutions to help spread educational opportunities among black Americans. **Anna Julia Cooper**,* **Fanny Jackson Coppin**,* **Nannie Helen Burroughs**,* and others joined the better-known Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois as educational leaders of African Americans. While the two men vied for philosophical prominence in educating black Americans—Washington arguing for mass industrial and vocational training, and Du Bois for liberal education of a professional “talented tenth”—the women generally negotiated an educational practice that served both the vocational and the professional needs of the African American population. **Bethune-Cookman College**,* **Spelman College**,* the **Institute for Colored Youth**,* and **Howard University*** all served African American women pushing for a share of educational opportunity.

Native Americans were subject to policies of assimilation throughout the nineteenth century; the government-sanctioned goal was to blend Indians into the white population, with education as one strong means. The **Bureau of Indian Affairs*** (BIA) held primary responsibility for “civilizing” native people through schooling, and it contracted with missionary groups to provide basic education for Indians. This system proved ineffective, however, and after the 1880s, the BIA ran its own Indian schools, usually boarding institutions like **Carlisle Indian School*** that took Indian children from their homes and educated them at some distance. Returning to reservations, these Indians fit neither their old way of life nor the new style pushed on them in the schools. The domestic arts program created by the women of the **Field Matron Program***

of the 1890s was similarly unsuccessful in substituting Euro-American values, as many Indians resisted efforts to obliterate their traditional life.

By 1900, an array of educational options served girls and women throughout the country, sometimes in mainstream schooling, but just as often in separate institutions that treated white women, black women, and Indian women as groups with different needs. Although resources and opportunities rarely equaled those of men, most of these late-century institutions provided strong bases for women's subsequent activity.

PROGRESSIVE ERA (1890–1920s)

Progressive Era* reformers recognized that government and other public institutions could play a large role in ameliorating the vast changes Americans were experiencing as immigration, urbanization, and industrialization buffeted their lives. Institutions of all types grew: Businesses consolidated and expanded, school systems formalized, government agencies proliferated, professions coalesced, and civic organizations burgeoned. Women, some college trained but all civic minded, assumed leadership roles in many Progressive movements.

In terms of access, the late Progressive Era marked a high point for women students' participation in collegiate life, not reached again until the 1980s. In 1920, women constituted 47 percent of all college students; in the elementary schools, female students matched their proportion of the general population, and in the high schools, they exceeded it. As women moved through college, they sought postgraduate and professional opportunities, only to find that graduate schools and the professions were not as welcoming as undergraduate institutions. In law and **medical education**,* women were generally excluded from formal educational opportunities. Interestingly, both of these professions began with apprenticeship as the primary training mode; when law and medical schools cornered the market on professional training after the turn of the twentieth century, women were effectively excluded. Many women, for example, had trained at all-female medical colleges. These separate institutions lost out, however, in the profession's move to upgrade qualifications and training. Thus, the percentage of women physicians dropped between 1910 (6 percent) and 1930 (4 percent); in law, women were still only 2 percent of all lawyers by 1930. Other professional areas—sometimes derogated as **semiprofessions***—drew women and became, effectively, female areas. In **librarianship**,* nursing, and **social work**,* women represented two-thirds or more of all practitioners by the 1930s, although men frequently held the most visible managerial and leadership roles.

Teaching, too, rapidly experienced **feminization**.* By 1880, 80 percent of schoolteachers were women, and large percentages of college and normal school graduates pursued teaching as a career. In keeping with Progressive Era tendencies to build systems and bureaucracies, the schools established hierarchies of authority that usually found men as superintendents and principals, and women

as classroom teachers. To strengthen the voice of women teachers under this arrangement, unions began to flourish after 1900. Some, notably the **Chicago Teachers' Federation*** (CTF), were led by strong women for several decades. **Margaret Haley*** and Catherine Goggin not only headed the CTF; they also supported the candidacy of **Ella Flagg Young*** as the nation's first female superintendent of a major urban school system (Chicago, 1909–1915) and as first female president of the nation's largest educators' organization, the National Education Association (1910). Besides **teacher unions***, which were primarily an urban effort, women also exercised authority in more rural areas as **county superintendents*** who supervised schools, certified teachers, and apportioned state funds. Nationwide, women constituted one-quarter of county superintendents during the Progressive Era but held more than half of these posts in some western states.

Besides these formal opportunities for women to pursue and lead education, the Progressive Era was marked by an amazing array of informal educational efforts, many crafted and sustained by women. The **suffrage*** movement, which won women's right to vote in 1920, spawned several national organizations with women as leaders and advocates. The **settlement house movement***, made most prominent by **Jane Addams's*** Chicago-based **Hull-House***, brought educated women to underserved city populations with educational, health, and legal advocacy. **Kindergartens*** began as child-centered efforts by a group of middle-class women reformers who saw early education of children both as a way to enhance the lives of youth and their families and as a vocational opportunity for women. A notion of government's efficacy in improving people's lives highlighted the Progressive Era; besides economic agencies like the Federal Trade Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission, family-oriented agencies including the **Women's Bureau*** and the Children's Bureau emerged with women as both clients and leaders. The huge sweep of the **women's club movement*** at the turn of the century exemplified women's involvement in civic, educational, and literary affairs. White and black middle-class women took responsibility for improving local civic life, as well as their own educations. Many of these efforts in **social housekeeping*** allowed women an informal authority in civic affairs that was ultimately formalized when movements like kindergartens, public health, and protective labor legislation became institutionalized contributions to public life.

Working-class women were not merely recipients of services during the Progressive Era. Through grassroots efforts by working women and men, many **labor colleges*** flourished during the century's early decades. Organizations like Brookwood Labor College in New York and Commonwealth College in Arkansas were cofounded by women who sought to raise consciousness and train leaders in the workers' movement. The **Women's Trade Union League*** supported a Training School for Women Organizers in Chicago. Even some traditional colleges joined the workers' education movement; the **Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers*** shared its elite setting with women

factory workers for two decades. Through these efforts, the Progressive Era stands as one of the nation's strongest in building institutions that would sustain educational services throughout the twentieth century.

MODERN ERA (1940s–1990s)

The Great Depression of the 1930s helped end the institutional growth of the Progressive Era, although recovery from that disturbance and from World War II in the 1940s and 1950s fueled another round of change for women and for education. Many of the professional and educational advances women had made during the war years evaporated in the 1950s, when women's percentage as college students (30 percent in 1950) and professionals diminished. Nonetheless, the **G. I. Bill*** of Rights—which served women in the same proportion as their membership in the wartime military (3 percent)—began to change the country's notion of the clientele that could benefit from collegiate study, and colleges themselves began a period of enormous growth and change.

The modern era affected women's education through changes in three arenas: cultural, legal, and educational. Culturally, the civil rights and feminist movements hit their strides in the 1950s and 1960s, expanding women's sense of entitlement to equal services, opportunities, and treatment. In many ways, the civil rights movement, which preceded the 1960s rejuvenation of feminism, was a training ground for women leaders, teaching them techniques, arguments, and approaches to fostering equity. The feminist movement, often regarded as a white middle-class women's effort, expanded women's options formally and informally. The **Commission on the Status of Women**,* for example, highlighted concerns for women nationwide and created a blueprint for attacking inequities.

Legal changes followed the increase in cultural awareness of women's issues. **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act*** (1964), **Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972**,* and the **Women's Educational Equity Act*** (1974) created legal support for changes that women pushed in education and employment. Protections around **sexual harassment*** and affirmative action proved more controversial, setting precedents that remain disputed after two decades.

Educationally, new formats and opportunities expanded to serve women's new demands. **Reentry programs*** for women returning to school and college after raising families pushed institutions to create expanded counseling and financial aid services; likewise, new delivery systems enhanced continuing education efforts. Community colleges exploded in numbers after the 1960s; women and minority students often used these institutions as their initial entry to higher education and constituted more than half of those student populations. In traditional colleges and universities, **women's studies*** and **women's centers*** gave institutional form to increased interest in women's issues. These innovations were not without critics, however, who regarded these research focuses as less serious and less scholarly than more long-standing fields.

Nearing the turn of the twenty-first century, American women's education has undoubtedly made enormous progress. Rudimentary female literacy is nearly universal, girls graduate from high school at slightly higher rates than boys, women constitute more than half of all college students, law and medical schools graduate at least one-third women, and women have moved into the mainstream in many fields. Yet such statistics that demonstrate unquestionable positive growth should not disguise pockets of continuing concern, difference, and dispute. Although, for example, basic literacy is solid, "functional illiteracy," which measures skills adults need to reach their full potential, remains at more than 20 percent of the adult American population, many of whom are women living in poverty. The nature of poverty itself is being questioned, with issues about who deserves government aid and under what circumstances forcing re-examination of decisions that had experienced increasing support for several decades. Single women who are mothers of young children, a vulnerable group in terms of education and other needs, will be especially affected by these changes. Title IX and affirmative action have increased financial support for women's programs, but a new version of the "**backlash**"* that challenged women's educational success in the first decades of this century is asking whether these formal supports have gone too far. As a new century turns, many issues related to women's education are up for reargument, although women's advocates will be able to respond from a base of unprecedented formal and informal support.

abolitionism. Abolitionism is the fervent pre–Civil War reform movement that opposed both **slavery*** and gradual abolition and called for immediate emancipation of slaves. Rooted in the evangelical enthusiasm of the **Second Great Awakening**,* the abolitionist crusade used moral suasion to seek repentance not only of slaveholding southerners but also of complacent northerners. Abolitionists were predominantly white, native-born, Evangelical Protestant members of the upwardly mobile middle class, although free blacks had fought slavery and racism even earlier. The movement was particularly strong in cities and towns swept by the free market economy because northerners concerned with the social turmoil and moral disorder that plagued their own communities made the sin of slavery the target of moral regeneration.

Among reformers, women were most apt to carry the antislavery message. As mothers, they seemed entitled to fight the “peculiar institution” that destroyed families. Moreover, while the ideology of **separate spheres*** excluded the majority of women from the booming cash economy, it nonetheless granted them moral superiority. Women also entered the public sphere when praying aloud and repenting with men during revivals.

William Lloyd Garrison led the way in recognizing the importance of women to the abolitionist cause. His radical newspaper, *The Liberator* (1831–1866), included a “Ladies’ Department,” seeking the sympathy of women readers. The abolitionist press was both educational medium and recruiting tool for new activists. Beginning with the founding of the all-male New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832, followed in 1833 by the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS), and the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), such groups quickly proliferated. By 1838 the AASS claimed a membership of 250,000 and over 1,300 local societies. The work of women as successful fund-raisers, primarily through annual antislavery fairs, provided financial support. Lydia Maria Child, author of *An*

Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans (1833), organized the first antislavery fair in 1834 in Boston. Fairs featured needlework of female sewing circles as well as antislavery gift books such as *The Liberty Bell* (1839–1858), edited by Maria Weston Chapman, bringing thousands of dollars.

Nonetheless, women's contributions went far beyond financial support of male leadership. Female activity ranged from petitioning Congress or joining a society to writing antislavery tracts and speaking on lecture circuits. Although abolitionist women worked within separate female organizations and often circulated sex-separated petitions, not all women agreed on the propriety of such public activity. The result was concentration of female activism in the Garrisonian wing of the movement. In contrast, moderate abolitionists, including conservative women, and most ministers found it unladylike for female speakers to address promiscuous assemblies of men and women and believed that women's influence should be confined to the home.

However, a small number of women, particularly **Quakers**,* took to the podium. The 1837 lecture tour of southerners Angelina and Sarah Grimké in New England and New York served to galvanize movement support [see **Charlotte Forten Grimké***]. Wherever they spoke, more petitions were signed, and new female societies were organized. Petitioning, lecturing, and organizing were closely interrelated.

The spread of abolitionism was further tied to antebellum women's interest in education. **Teaching*** was the most common occupation of working women who joined the movement. The prime movers of the Boston society, Chapman and Child, were teachers. Members also included African American teachers: Susan Paul taught in the Smith School, and Julia Williams, herself a pupil of **Prudence Crandall**,* became a teacher in Martha and Lucy Ball's school for black girls. Similarly, Philadelphia members included Sarah Mapps Douglass, a well-known free black and teacher, whose school for black women received funding from PFASS in return for its use as a meeting place. The dual goal of abolitionism and self-improvement was pursued by black female literary societies such as Boston's Afric-American Female Intelligence Society and Philadelphia's Female Minervian Association. Black abolitionists trusted that education produced **race uplift*** and would diminish white prejudice.

One teacher and militant abolitionist was Abby Kelley of Massachusetts. Unfunded by any society and facing intimations of immorality, young Kelley traveled alone to speak in rural New England where she met lukewarm abolitionists and violent anti-abolitionist mobs. Her Quaker background helped her master the art of quotations and unrehearsed public lectures, which she delivered in schoolhouses when barred from speaking in churches. Her eloquence energized the movement as far as Ohio, where her visits to **Oberlin College*** impressed students, including **Lucy Stone**.* Detractors, however, coined the term "Abby Kelleyism" to describe women who transgressed gender boundaries.

By 1840 the "woman question" regarding female participation, public speaking, and voting rights led to irreconcilable divisions between Garrisonians and