The Antebellum Women’s Movement

PREVIEW COPY
INCLUDING THE COMPLETE FIRST LESSON

Prepared for:
America’s History in the Making
Oregon Public Broadcasting
The Antebellum Women’s Movement
1820 to 1860

A Unit of Study for Grades 8–11

Susan Leighow
Rita Sterner-Hine

Organization of American Historians
and
National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA
THE ANTEBELLUM WOMEN’S MOVEMENT, 1820 TO 1860

A UNIT OF STUDY FOR GRADES 8–11

Susan Leighow,
Rita Sterner-Hine,

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN HISTORIANS
AND THE
NATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORY IN THE SCHOOLS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication is the result of a collaborative effort between the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California Los Angeles and the Organization of American Historians to develop teaching units based on primary documents for United States History education at the pre-collegiate level.

David Vigilante, Associate Director of the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), has served as editor of the unit. Gary B. Nash, Director of NCHS, has offered suggestions and coordinated with the Organization of American Historians (OAH) for co-publication. At the OAH, Tamzen Meyer, Michael Regoli, and Amy Stark served as the production team.

AUTHORS


Rita Sterner-Hine holds a B.A and M.P.A. in public administration and a teaching certificate from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. She has been employed for five years as an eighth grade U.S. history teacher at Waynesboro Middle School, Waynesboro, Pennsylvania.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction

- Approach and Rationale. ........................................ 1
- Content and Organization .................................... 1

## Teacher Background Materials

- Unit Overview ..................................................... 3
- Correlation to the Standards for United States History .... 4
- Unit Objectives .................................................. 4
- Lesson Plans ..................................................... 5
- Introduction to Antebellum Women, 1820–1860 ............ 6

## Dramatic Moment .................................................. 8

## Lessons

- Lesson One: The “Separate Spheres” and “Cult of True Womanhood” Doctrines ........................................ 9
- Lesson Two: Women’s Work Outside Their Homes .......... 26
- Lesson Three: Antebellum Temperance and Abolitionist Movements ......................................................... 41
- Lesson Four: The Antebellum Women’s Movement ......... 53

## Select Bibliography .................................................. 67
INTRODUCTION

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

The National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS), working in collaboration with The Organization of American Historians (OAH), has developed the following collection of lessons titled *The Antebellum Women’s Movement, 1820 to 1860*. This adds to nearly 50 NCHS teaching units that are the fruit of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. They represent specific dramatic episodes in history and allow you and your students to delve into the deeper meanings of selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

By studying a crucial episode in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow’s history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from documents, artifacts, journals, diaries, newspapers and literature from the period under study. By using primary source documents in these lessons we hope to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: 1) Unit Objectives, 2) Correlation to the National Standards for History, 3) Teacher Background Materials, and 4) Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement
to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use at middle schools, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

The Teacher Background section should provide a good overview of the entire unit and the historical information and context necessary to link the specific Dramatic Moment to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as needed. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any hand-outs or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of inevitable facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.
I. UNIT OVERVIEW

This unit introduces students to the pre-Civil War women’s movement through primary source documents. The documents are grouped into four separate but interrelated categories. Those in Lesson One describe the economic and cultural systems of the United States between 1820 and 1860 which created both a “doctrine of separate spheres” and a “cult of true womanhood.” Lesson Two examines the lives of American women who worked outside the home. The documents of Lesson Three analyze women’s roles in antebellum reform movements such as abolition and temperance, experiences which later served as catalysts for the women’s rights movement. Finally, Lesson Four addresses the grievances, goals, and social impact of the female reformers who attended the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and wrote the “Declaration of Sentiments.” Since antebellum women of various races, classes, and regions had widely divergent experiences, various perspectives are presented throughout the unit.

Comprehending the lives of American women is fundamental for understanding the entire antebellum period. At a time in which females were encouraged to be pure, pious, domestic, and submissive, women’s roles reached outside the home and family. Young New England farm women provided the bulk of the labor for the expanding textile industry. African-American slaves, female as well as male, produced the cotton spun and woven in mills, both in the North and abroad. Middle-class, northern matrons championed diverse causes such as abstinence from liquor and the abolition of slavery. As female roles changed, women’s rights advocates became aware of the gender inequities present in their society, chafed under these limits, and established a movement which is still with us today.

Lessons One and Two can be taught as students begin studying the Second Great Awakening and the Industrial Revolution. These documents will help students better understand how changing religious beliefs and new ways of producing and marketing goods affected the roles and status of black and white, middle-class, working-class, and slave women. Lesson Three may be introduced later, as students learn about the problems associated with industrialization, growing sectional tensions, and various antebellum reform movements. Teachers can conclude the unit with Lesson Four. Students can then analyze how the aforementioned forces encouraged antebellum women into launching a women’s rights movement.
II. CORRELATION TO THE NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

Antebellum Women’s Movement, 1820 to 1860 provides teaching materials to support National Standards for History, Basic Edition (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). The unit specifically addresses Standards 2A and 4C of Era 4, Expansion and Reform (1801-1861). Lessons in this unit have students investigate how slavery and the northern factory system affected the lives of women; examine the activities of women in the reform movements for education, abolition, temperance, and women’s suffrage; and analyze the goals expressed in the Seneca Falls “Declaration of Sentiments.”

The unit likewise integrates a number of Historical Thinking Standards such as analyzing cause-and-effect relationships, identifying the central questions in historical narratives, and supporting interpretations with historical evidence.

III. UNIT OBJECTIVES

1. To describe how the Industrial Revolution led to changes in women’s roles both within and outside the home.

2. To explain how economic and cultural change created a “separate spheres” ideology and “cult of true womanhood.”

3. To evaluate how the “cult of true womanhood” affected women’s influence in both their homes and the larger society.

4. To analyze women’s roles in antebellum reform movements such as temperance and abolition.

5. To compare and contrast the differing experiences of women of various racial, social, and regional groups.

6. To analyze and evaluate the impact of the antebellum women’s rights movement on American society, past and present.
IV. LESSON PLANS

1. The “Separate Spheres” and “Cult of True Womanhood” Doctrines

2. Women’s Work Outside Their Homes

3. Antebellum Temperance and Abolitionist Movements

4. The Antebellum Women’s Movement
In the early nineteenth century the United States underwent massive economic and social change. Although the overall birthrate declined from about seven children per family in 1800 to five at mid-century, immigration helped to dramatically increase population, causing it to nearly double every twenty years. Five million immigrants, primarily from Ireland and Germany, became new consumers and workers for the growing nation. At the same time, Americans moved westward. They built canals, steamboats, and railroads to open up new areas of the continent, link various regions, and allow farmers and manufacturers to specialize and produce for a growing market. These changes encouraged industrialization—the use of machinery, wage labor, and the factory system. Other transformations occurred as well. A Second Great Awakening emphasized individual responsibility, personal salvation, and societal reform. As more states adopted white, manhood suffrage, politics became increasingly democratized.

These extensive changes had important consequences for American women. White, middle-class, native-born families abandoned home-based production units. Instead, men went out to work in factories, warehouses, stores, and offices. The home and family became the middle-class woman’s domain. The Industrial Revolution, however, affected females of other classes and races differently. Working-class and farm women sought employment in the growing factories. The demand for cotton by New England and British textile manufacturers also had implications for the slave women who labored with their families in the plantation fields of the South. Slave families from the economically stagnant Upper South became extremely vulnerable to separation as masters sold them to planters in the cotton-producing areas of the Lower South. The profitability of cotton and the need for slave labor to produce it made emancipation increasingly less likely.

In this rapidly changing society, Americans sought an area of stability. The separation of work and home, along with the psychological need to preserve an ideal family, led to a belief that men and women lived in separate but complementary spheres. Aggressive, rational, enterprising men were best suited for the rough-and-tumble, sometimes sordid, public worlds of business and politics. Women, who were by nature gentle, emotional, and sensitive, belonged in the private world of the home. There, they provided a haven for husbands and children from the rigors of modern capitalism. Those who espoused these views wrote and published a wealth of prescriptive literature urging “true women” to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. Although the “separate spheres doctrine” and the “cult of true wom-
anhood” held little validity for working-class, immigrant, and African-American women, this cultural ideal pervaded antebellum society.

“The cult of true womanhood” both empowered and limited women. Educational opportunities expanded as reformers like Catharine Beecher argued that American wives and mothers needed more schooling in order to properly rear sons and influence husbands. This same reasoning opened up teaching as a suitable occupation for females who were morally superior to men, as well as innately fitted to deal with children. Women’s piety, morality, and concern for their families also provided the impetus for their involvement in antebellum reform movements. At the same time, males in medicine, law, and the ministry barred women on the grounds they were “too delicate.” States’ legal system did not always protect wives’ rights to their property, wages, or children. Even within the temperance and abolition movements, men tried to constrain women’s activities. In her 1852 letter to Amelia Bloomer, Susan B. Anthony complained about male colleagues who did not believe “...that women may speak and act in public as well as in the home circle ...”

By the 1840s a nascent women’s rights movement emerged. By then, American females had perceived the inconsistencies between their alleged superiority and their very real powerlessness. Education gave them the ability to articulate their problems and propose alternatives. Their reform activities provided them with the ideologies and skills necessary to establish this cause. The documents and lessons in this unit provide the resources necessary to understanding this antebellum women’s movement that would set women on a course leading in zigzag fashion to modern feminism of the late twentieth century.

---


2 School boards hired more women as teachers; however, their pay was one-third to one-quarter that of a male teacher.

Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, concerned about the denial of basic rights to women, organized a convention to meet at Seneca Falls, New York in July 1848. The meeting attracted about 200 women and 40 men and adopted resolutions recognizing that women deserved nothing short of full rights and privileges of citizens. The Seneca Falls Convention prompted a series of nation-wide meetings focusing on women’s rights. Throughout the United States the press reported on these conventions. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* ridiculed the women’s movement in the following editorial:

Our Philadelphia ladies not only possess beauty, but they are celebrated for discretion, modesty, and unfeigned diffidence, as well as wit, vivacity, and good nature. Whoever heard of a Philadelphia lady setting up for a reformer, or standing out for woman’s rights, or assisting to man the election ground, raise a regiment, command a legion, or address a jury? Our ladies glow with a higher ambition. They soar to rule the heats of their worshipers, and secure obedience by the sceptre of affection. The tenure of their power is a law of nation, not a law of man, and hence they fear no insurrection, and never experience the shock of a revolution in their dominions. But all women are not as reasonable as ours of Philadelphia. The Boston ladies contend for the rights of women. The New York girls aspire to mount the rostrum, to do all the voting, and, we suppose, all the fighting too. . . . Our Philadelphia girls object to fighting and holding office. They prefer the baby-jumper . . . and the ball-room. . . . Women have enough influence over human affairs without being politicians. Is not everything managed by female influence? Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and sweet-hearts manage everything. Men have nothing to do but to listen and obey to the “of course, my dear, you will, and of course, my dear, you won’t.” Their rule is absolute; their power unbounded. Under such a system men have no claim to rights, especially “equal rights.” A woman is nobody. A wife is everything. A pretty girl is equal to ten thousand men, and a mother is, next to God, all powerful. . . . The ladies of Philadelphia, therefore, under the influence of the most serious ‘sober second thoughts,’ are resolved to maintain their rights as Wives, Belles, Virgins, and Mothers, and not as Women.4

Women had long been directly involved in antebellum reform movements. As women exerted leadership positions they often faced ridicule by the press. The documents within this unit tell the story of women from all walks of life who devoted themselves to the struggle for equal rights. The letters, oral histories, speeches and other sources reveal the causes, agenda, and impact of the antebellum women’s movement.

LESSON I: THE “SEPARATE SPHERES” AND “CULT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD” DOCTRINES

A. OBJECTIVES

1. To explain the characteristics of the “true woman” of the antebellum period.

2. To explain how the “cult of true womanhood” enabled antebellum women to acquire more education and take on new roles such as teachers and religious leaders.

3. To contrast the ideal family of the antebellum period with the family life of African-American slaves and evaluate whether the ideal applied to slave families.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES (These activities will take 2–3 days.)

1. Look up the meaning of the word “constitution.” Discuss the purposes for establishing a constitution as well as what may be included in the document. Also review what students already know about slave families.

2. Distribute copies of Documents A through E. Have students read these and answer the accompanying questions as part of a jigsaw activity. After the “experts” report back to their original groups, discuss the documents with the students. Have them describe the way African American women saw themselves. Then, ask students to contrast those perceptions with African American males’ beliefs about women. Also, ask students to contrast women’s ideals with the realities of slave life.

3. Have students make a list of women’s home responsibilities during the antebellum period. Next, ask them to brainstorm what they believe the responsibilities of a teacher might be. Compare and contrast the lists.

4. Put the following phrase on the chalkboard and have students rewrite the phrase in their own words.

   “Woman, whatever are her relations in life, is necessarily the guardian of the nursery, the companion of childhood, and the constant model of imitation.”
LESSON I

5. Distribute the study questions for Document F, “The Education of Female Teachers.” Have students read the excerpt and answer the questions, either individually or with a partner. Discuss their answers, emphasizing how the “cult of true womanhood” enabled antebellum women to acquire more education and become teachers.

6. Using an overhead, show the front plate of Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s The American Woman’s Home and the authors’ statement regarding the purpose of the book (Document G). After discussing the book’s purpose, have the class examine Document H, “A Christian House.” According to the authors, what is the “cult of true womanhood?”

7. Conclude the lesson by having students consult magazine and television advertisements, and then make a list of at least five adjectives describing an ideal woman of the 1990s. In an essay or speech, have students compare this 1990s woman to the ideal woman of the antebellum period.

Study Questions for Document A

1. How often does the society meet?

2. What are the members expected to do until everyone arrives?

3. How is religion incorporated into the Society’s meetings? What is meant by fasting?

4. What are the promises the members are expected to observe?

5. What are the Society’s yearly dues?

6. What services do the members provide for each other? What is meant by destitute?

7. How were members disciplined for misconduct?

8. What process was necessary to join the Society?

9. Why was this society established?

10. What did you learn about antebellum women’s roles from studying this document?
Study Questions for Document B

1. According to the authors, what is woman’s role?

2. What happens when women stray from “their place?”

3. When should a woman give advice?

4. How should a woman respond to a husband who supports her?

5. Explain the meaning of the last sentence. Do you agree with it? Why or why not?

Study Questions for Document C

1. What is the purpose of Matilda’s letter?

2. According to Matilda, what do women’s minds deserve? How can they improve their status?

3. How should mothers help their daughters?

4. Why should women read books?

5. What does Matilda hope her letter will initiate?

6. What did you learn about antebellum women’s roles from studying this document?

Study Questions for Document D

1. What was going to happen to Harriet Tubman’s youngest brother?

2. How did the master try to trick their mother?

3. How did the mother protect her son? How did she respond to the men who came looking for him? Was she successful?

4. Do you think this mother’s response was typical of slave women? Explain.
5. How do you think African-American, slave mothers’ lives differed from those of white mothers?

6. After studying this document, how would you describe the role of ante-bellum slave mothers?

Study Questions for Document E

1. Where is the slave going? Why is he going?

2. How does he feel about leaving? What language in the song tells you this?

3. Who is he going to miss?

4. Do you think the separation will be permanent? Explain your answer.

5. What does this song tell you about the lives of slave families in the ante-bellum period?

Study Questions for Document F

1. According to the author, Catharine Beecher, why is female education changing? What has promoted this change?

2. How do teachers influence their students?

3. What are the similarities between teaching in a school and running a home? According to Beecher, how are home and school related?

4. What is the most difficult duty of both parents and teachers?

5. What principles must be adopted by the women of the nation? Why?
CONSTITUTION
of the
Colored Female Religious and Moral
Society of Salem

Article I—At the weekly meeting of the Society, when the appointed hour
arrives, and a number are convened, the exercises shall begin by reading in
some profitable book, till all have come in who are expected.

Art. II—A prayer shall then be made by one of the members, and after that,
a chapter in the Bible shall be read, and religious conversation be attended
to, as time will allow.

Art. III—Four quarterly days in the year, in January, April, July and Octo-
ber, beginning on the first day of every January, to be observed as day of
solemn fasting and prayer.

Art. IV—We promise not to ridicule or divulge the supposed or apparent
infirmities of any fellow member; but to keep secret all things relating to the
Society, the discovery of which might tend to do hurt to the Society or any
individual.

Art. V—We resolve to be charitably watchful over each other; to advise,
caution and admonish where we may judge there is occasion, and that it
may be useful; and we promise not to resent, but kindly and thankfully
receive such friendly advice or reproof from any one of our members.

Art. VI—Any female can become a member of this Society by conforming to
the Constitution, and paying in fifty two cents per year.

Art. VII—This Society is formed for the benefit of the sick and destitute of
those members belonging to the Society.

Art. VIII—If any member commit any scandalous sin, or walk unruly, and
after proper reproof continue manifestly impenitent, she shall be excluded
from us, until she give evidence of her repentance.

Art. IX—When any person shall manifest to any one of us a desire to join the
Society, it shall be mentioned in one of our meetings that all may have op-
portunity, who desire it, to satisfy themselves respecting the character and
conversation of the person offering to join; and if at the meeting on the next week, there be no objection to her being admitted, she may apply to the head of the Society, who will read our Articles to her, and if she is willing and does sign them, she shall be considered as a member of the Society, regularly admitted.

Art. X—As to any other matters which we shall hereafter find conducive to the benefit and good regulation of our Society, we engage to leave to the discretion and decision of a major part of us, to whose determination we promise quietly to agree and submit.

President—Mrs. Clarissa C. Lawrence
Vice-President—Mrs. Eleanor Jones
Treasurer—Miss Betsey Blanchard
Secretary—Mrs. Sally Colemen
Visiting Committee—Mrs. Mercy Morris, Mrs. Nancy Randolph

Early black newspapers published articles on what was called the “woman’s sphere.” The following is advice in a leading African American newspaper, Freedom’s Journal.

Women are not formed for great cares themselves, but to soften ours. Their tenderness is the proper reward for the dangers we undergo for their preservation. They are confined within the narrow limits of domestic assiduity, and when they stray beyond them, they move out of their proper sphere and consequently without grace.

Employ yourself in household affairs. Wait till your husband confides to you, and do not give your advice till he asks it. Always appear flattered by the little he does for you. Never wound his vanity; not even in the most trifling instance. A wife may have more sense than her husband but she should never seem to know it.

Source: Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 220.
Matilda’s Letter
August, 1827

The following letter to the editors of Freedom’s Journal, a leading African American newspaper, challenges articles published in the newspaper instructing women not to “move out of their proper sphere.”

Messrs. Editors

Will you allow a female to offer a few remarks upon a subject that you must allow to be all-important? I don’t know that in any of your papers, you have said sufficient upon the education of females. I hope you are not to be classed with those, who think that our mathematical knowledge should be limited to “fathoming the dish-kettle,” and that we have acquired enough of history, if we know that our grandfather’s father lived and died. ‘Tis true the time has been, when to darn a stocking, and cook a pudding well, was considered the end and aim of a woman’s being. But those were days when ignorance blinded our eyes. The diffusion of knowledge has destroyed those degrading opinions, and men of the present age, allow, that we have minds that are capable and deserving of culture. There are difficulties, and great difficulties in the way of our advancement; but that should only stir us to greater efforts. We possess not the advantages with those of our sex, whose skins are not colored like our own; but we can improve what little we have, and make our one talent produce two-fold. The influence that we have over the male sex demands, that our minds should be instructed and improved with the principles of education and religion, in order that this influence should be properly directed. Ignorant ourselves, how can we be expected to form the minds of our youth, and conduct them in the paths of knowledge? How can we “teach the young idea to shoot” if we have [no knowledge] ourselves? I would address myself to all mothers, and say to them, that while it is necessary to possess a knowledge of cookery, and the various mysteries of pudding-making, something more is requisite. It is their bounden duty to
store their daughters’ minds with useful learning. They should be made to devote their leisure time to reading books, whence they would derive valuable information, which could never be taken from them. I will no longer trespass on your time and patience. I merely throw out these hints, in order that some more able pen will take up the subject.

Matilda

Source: Sterling, We Are Your Sisters, 98–99.
Harriet Tubman Explains how Her Brother was Saved from a Georgia Slave Trader, 1863

A Georgia man came and bought my brother; and after he had bought him, the master calls to him to come to the house & catch the gentleman’s horse, but instead of his coming to catch the horse, my mother who was out in the field, and knew what the master was doing, comes in. She says, “What do you want of the boy?” He wouldn’t tell her, but says to her, “Go and bring a pitcher of water”; and after she brought the pitcher of water he makes another excuse, & hollers to the boy to come & put the horse into the carriage. But the mother comes again. Then he says, “What did you come for? I hollered for the boy.” And she up & swore, and said he wanted the boy for that (ripping out an oath) Georgia man. He called three times, but the boy did not come; and the third time, he came to look for the boy, but the mother had him hid. The master still kept the money and told the Georgia man, “Before you get ready to make up your flock, I will try to catch the boy someway.” Late at night [master] came to the door, and asked the mother to let him come in, but she was suspicious and she says, “What do you want?” Says he, “Mr. Scott wants to come in to light a segar.” She ripped out an oath, and said; “You are after my son; but the first man that comes into my house, I will split his head open.” That frightened them, and they would not come in. So she kept the boy hid until the Georgia man went away.

Source: Sterling, We Are Your Sisters, 58–59
Slave Work Song

Farewell, fellow servants! Oho!
I’m gwine way to leabe you, Oho!
I’m gwine leabe de ole country, Oho!

I’m sold off to Georgy! Oho!

My dear wife un one chile, Oho!
My poor heart is breaking, Oho!
No more shall I see you, Oho!
    Oh! no more foreber! Oho!

Modern English Version

Farewell, fellow servants! Oho!
I’m going away to leave you, Oho!
I’m going to leave the old country, Oho!
I’m sold off to Georgia! Oho!

My dear wife and one child, Oho!
My poor hear is breaking, Oho!
No more shall I see you, Oho!
    Oh! no more forever! Oho!

Source: Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters*, 41

Sojourner Truth, *Ain’t I a Woman?*
Library of Congress
An Essay on the Education of Female Teachers
Catharine Beecher, 1835

Catharine Beecher, a popular author, spent her income from her books on women’s education projects including the training of nurses and teachers. In 1835 the American Lyceum invited Beecher to deliver an address on the education of women teachers. In the speech Beecher outlined several projects that later became part of the American Women’s Education Association, an organization she founded in 1852.

Woman, whatever are her relations in life, is necessarily the guardian of the nursery, the companion of childhood, and the constant model of imitation. . . . Woman also is the presiding genius who must regulate all those thousand minutiae of domestic business, that demand habits of industry, order, neatness, punctuality, and constant care. . . .

Is a weak, undisciplined, unregulated mind, fitted to encounter the responsibility, weariness, and watching of the nursery; to bear the incessant care and perplexity of governing young children; to accommodate with kindness and patience to the peculiarities and frailties of a husband; to control the indolence, waywardness, and net neglect of servants; and to regulate all the variety of domestic cares? The superficial accomplishments of former periods were of little avail to fit a woman for such arduous duties; and for this reason it is, that as society has advanced in all other improvements, the course of female education has been gradually changing, and some portion of that mental discipline, once exclusively reserved for the other sex, is beginning to exert its invigorating influence upon the female character. . . .

And yet, whatever may be the opinion of teachers and parents, children do, to a very great extent, form their character under influences bearing upon them at school. They are proverbially creatures of imitation, and accessible to powerful influences. Six hours every day are spent with teachers, whom they usually love and respect, and whose sentiments and opinions, in one way or another, they constantly dis-
cover. They are at the same time associated with companions of all varieties of temper, character, and habit. Is it possible that this can exist without involving constant and powerful influences, either good or bad? The simple fact that a teacher succeeds in making a child habitually accurate and thorough in all the lessons of school, may induce mental habits that will have a controlling influence through life. If the government of schools be so administered as to induce habits of cheerful and implicit obedience, if punctuality, neatness, and order in all school employments are preserved for a course of years, it must have some influence in forming useful habits. On the contrary, if a child is tolerated in disobedience and neglect, if school duties are performed in a careless, irregular, and deficient manner, pernicious habits may be formed that will operate disastrously through life. It is true that mismanagement and indulgence at home may counteract all the good influences of school; and the faithful discharge of parental duty may counteract, to some extent, the bad influences of school: but this does not lessen the force of these considerations.

... [I]t is the most important and most difficult duty of parents and teachers, to form the moral character, the principles and habits of children, no one will dissent. All allow it to be a labor demanding great watchfulness, great wisdom, and constant perseverance and care.

... For a nation to be virtuous and religious, the females of that nation must be deeply imbued with these principles: for just as the wives and mothers sink or rise in the scale of virtue, intelligence, and piety, the husbands and the sons will rise or fall.

The American Woman’s Home

Title page illustration, 1869 publication
The authors of this volume, while they sympathize with every honest effort to relieve the disabilities and sufferings of their sex, are confident that the chief cause of these evils is the fact that the honor and duties of the family state are not duly appreciated, that women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and that, as the consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded menial and disgraceful.

To be the nurse of young children, a cook, or a housemaid, is regarded as the lowest and last resort of poverty, and one which no woman of culture and position can assume without loss of caste and respectability.

It is the aim of this volume to elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state, and thus to render each department of woman’s true profession as much desired and respected as are the most honored professions of men. . . .

A Christian House

The American Woman’s Home
*Front plate illustration, 1869 edition*
II.

A Christian House

In the Divine Word it is written, “The wise women buildeth her house.” To be “wise,” is “to choose the best means for accomplishing the best end.” It has been shown that the best end for a woman to seek is the training of God’s children for their eternal home, by guiding them to intelligence, virtue, and true happiness. When, therefore, the wise woman seeks a home in which to exercise this ministry, she will aim to secure a house so planned that it will provide in the best manner for health, industry, and economy, those cardinal requisites of domestic enjoyment and success. . . .

To purchase the complete unit, see the National Center for History in the Schools catalog: http://nchs.ucla.edu/catalog.html

Questions?
National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA
Marian McKenna Olivas, Coordinator
Gary B. Nash, Director
6265 Bunche Hall
Los Angeles, CA  90095-1473
(310) 825-4702
FAX: (310) 267-2103
http://nchs.ucla.edu

To purchase and download a complete ebook (pdf) version of this unit, go to Social Studies Services: http://www.socialstudies.com
(Use the “ebooks” link on the left side & search for the title)