

1994 Women's History Month

"In Every Generation Action Frees Our Dreams"

by

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for

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#### PREFACE

LCDR Christopher A. Grimm, USCG, served as a participant in the Topical Research Intern Program at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute in April/May 1993, and during that time conducted the necessary research and wrote this report. The Institute thanks LCDR Grimm for his contributions to the program.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The theme of the 1994 Women's History Month observance is "In Every Generation Action Frees Our Dreams." If we define a generation as being the average length of time between the birth of parents and the birth of their offspring (1:549), then nearly 20 generations have passed since the beginnings of English colonization of our country. In this time, action, heroic or tragic, has been recognized as characteristic of our history, and our actions have often been occasioned by our belief in "something bigger than ourselves"--what we've come to call "the American Dream":

The American Dream is another important component of American history. It has provided the substance for many Americans' individual dreams. The belief in each person's worth, in his ability to succeed according to the formula of hard work plus virtuous behavior plus self-reliance, has motivated many generations of Americans. Belief in work and its importance, belief in material success, and belief in equal opportunity for everyone have all provided the underpinnings for our society. (16:15)

But often the nature of dreams is to be illusory. In our history this has been the case for any number of groups for which the concept of "equal opportunity" has literally been a dream--  
a

the vision, desire, or aspiration--rather than a reality. And as  
the author of the above subtly points out, even that reality, that  
"ability to succeed," has been a masculine prerogative. Given  
our acquaintance with human ignorance, fear, and prejudice, the  
denial of equal opportunity to readily identified minorities is  
easy to comprehend (if not to excuse). However, when a group  
representing fully half (and quite possibly a majority) of our  
population--our mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters--is  
denied opportunity, it is indeed curious, especially when that  
disadvantaged majority is made up of people we profess to love.  
A look at history gives us an idea of how such a state of  
affairs could exist and what actions, activities, and circumstances  
combined to bring about change--in other words, to "free our  
dreams."

societies, Early American society, like subsequent American  
never considered women as being in any way the equals of  
men. A woman could not prepare for a career or a life of  
independence as a man could. Rather than provide for  
other life options, young women were taught that marriage was  
the only worthwhile kind of life. (16:36)

Even as a partner in matrimony, "woman's role was limited  
and clearly defined: she was wife, mother, and helper to her  
man." (16:36-37)

Such a woman had to learn . . . that her husband was her  
master and that she was subject to his will. After all,  
according to the colonial common law system, the children  
belonged to him, the property belonged to him, and so did  
the wife. This reflected the edict of Blackstone, the  
English jurist: a woman and a man became one when they  
married -- and the one was the husband. (16:37)

Of course, the fact that by virtue of her marriage she did  
not exist as a person in the eyes of the law wasn't all that a  
woman had to learn. It was during the colonial experience that  
the seeds for the education of women were planted.

#### WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Over the course of our country's history, "the problems  
women faced in acquiring education were threefold: they had to  
win the right to learn, the right to teach, and the right to  
think." (7:203) The right of a woman to learn in certain  
circumstances was not always begrudged. In order to perform  
her prescribed domestic functions, for example, at least some  
"basic training" was called for:

A girl learned early to assume responsibility for the younger children and to run a household. In colonial America the education of children was the responsibility

of

the family. Parents taught their children the most rudimentary skills as best they could. The wealthy

educated

their sons, and often their daughters, by private tutors. For the poor some writing, enough reading to decipher the Bible, and a few figures were all the education considered necessary. (8:11-12)

It appears that the primary literary resources for book-reading colonists were the sermons and diaries of Puritan leaders, "along with volumes of simple, unaffected prose and poetry that glorified God and the education of man to His purpose." (4:39) Along with the common law doctrine that essentially considered women as non-persons, the heavy

influence

of religion contributed to the limitation of a girl's education to the simplest skills: "The ignorance of women had been bound

in

with Christian dogma--Eve's sin consisted of reaching out for

the

tree of knowledge, so her punishment was to be forever deprived of it." (10:201)

In the face of antagonistic legal and religious circumstances, the road to educational opportunity for girls actually did open up, but the path was not without its

obstacles:

In Massachusetts. . . as early as 1647, each community was required to set up a public school. At first girls were admitted only during summer sessions, while boys were helping with farm work. Later they attended regular sessions, but their education ended after grammar school. Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts expressed the

prevailing

opinion when he advised girls to stick to a knowledge of household matters and refrain from "meddling in such

things

as are proper for the men whose minds are stronger."

Another authority thought that girls needed only

"sufficient

geography to find their way around the house" and "enough chemistry to keep the pot boiling." (8:12)

Given this "prevailing opinion," free public schools for

all

American children did not exist in the United States until well into the 1800s. There were Latin schools that prepared boys

for

college and academies (charging tuition fees) where education

was

available to boys and occasionally to girls. (20:70) Other avenues were occasionally used:

Some American fathers in days before a public school system was introduced into the United States took great pains to give their daughters a masculine education. . . .

Theodosia Burr (1783-1813), daughter of Aaron Burr, was studying Horace, Plutarch, French, mathematics, and science at the age of eleven, her father writing instructions to her tutors, determined that her education should equal that of men and prove that "women have souls." (20:74)

Even so, it was still considered unwise (as it often is even today) for a girl to openly demonstrate knowledge and intelligence. In 1775 Dr. Gregory, a Presbyterian minister, reminded his motherless daughters in a most popular "advice" book that woman's primary occupation was snaring a husband. He it further declared that "If you happen to have any learning keep a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look a with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts and a cultivated understanding." (16:69) It seemed of little use to be intelligent and to continue to "cultivate understanding":

In 1783 Lucinda Foote, aged twelve, was examined by a board at Yale College and found "fully qualified, except in her sex, to be received as a pupil of the freshman class of Yale University." The unfortunate Lucinda, thus denied her chance for higher education, thereafter vanished from history. But many other girls with intellectual promise buried their disappointment in the pages of a diary. "Oh, had I received the education I desired . . . I might have been a useful member of society," wrote Sarah Grimke [abolitionist and early women's rights advocate], born in 1792.

[Such] cries of disappointment were occasionally translated into calls for action in the reform of women's education. Abigail Adams reminded her husband, President John Adams, of the urgent need for educational reform: "If you complain of education in sons, what shall I say in regard to daughters, who ever experience the want of it? . . . If we mean to have heroes, statesman and philosophers we should have learned women." (8:39)

As it happened, the end of the 18th century saw a renewed emphasis on and movement for the education of girls, tied as it was "to the needs of the new republic: women would make sure that patriot sons were reared properly. . . . As publicly supported education expanded in the first decades of the 19th century, girls were almost invariably included along with boys. Even raw, new towns in the frontier West and South insisted on education for children of both sexes. (10:202)

And so it was that universal education for girls, at least at the grammar school level, was adopted. But what could justify their further education at the high school level? The answer was to neatly follow:

Because of the increasing number of public schools, another profession open to women in this period was teaching. . . .

As the new nation committed itself to universal public education, thousands of new teachers were needed. Men could not be counted on to fill this need because of the numerous, often more profitable opportunities open to them. Young, single, unmarried women, however, were ideal for teaching as well as available in large numbers. (9:154)

The idea of women working outside the home as teachers actually found favor with the public, as many people believed that women were naturally suited to the job given "the greater intensity of the parental instinct in the female sex, their natural love of children, and the superior gentleness and forebearance of their dispositions." (9:154) As it turned out, "the closer a female activity was associated with the moral and domestic responsibilities of women . . . the more likely the activity was to be condoned and fairly readily accepted by other women and society in general." (4:306)

However, high schools which accommodated the education of girls were extremely scarce at this time. "The real breakthrough . . . came when . . . women took matters into their own hands." (10:202) In response, pioneer educator Emma Willard authored "A Plan for Improving Female Education," and in September 1821 the Troy Female Seminary opened with a charter from the New York State Legislature. Students were offered a wide range of subjects -- science, history, mathematics, French, Italian, Spanish, German, philosophy -- and many became teachers.

(20:71) In addition to the usual "classical" subjects, Willard "continued to introduce innovations into her course of study, the most daring being the subject of physiology, at a time when any mention of the human body by ladies was considered the height of indelicacy." (6:26)

Mothers visiting a class at the Seminary in the early thirties were so shocked at the sight of a pupil drawing a heart, arteries and veins on a blackboard . . . that they left the room in shame and dismay. To preserve the modesty of the girls, and spare them too frequent agitation, heavy paper was pasted over the pages in their textbooks which depicted the human body. (6:27)

A model for later institutions, the Troy Female Seminary trained over 200 female teachers before any "normal schools" (i.e., for teacher education) were established, and its graduates helped staff the nation's public schools. (7:216) Coincidentally, Emma Willard was the first to establish teacher-training schools for men! (17:284)

Not all reformers who contributed to the education of young women during the post-Revolutionary period agreed with Willard's approach or goals. Some, like Catherine Beecher (sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin) "believed passionately in women's traditional role, and demanded education in 'domestic science' to fit girls for married life." (10:202)

Miss Beecher had no interest in the women's rights movement . . . Rather she upgraded woman's role as housewife and mother, stressing such new ideas as the need for adequate exercise, more comfortable clothing, proper hygiene, physical education, and the training of girls for the profession of teaching, should they by chance need to support themselves. (20:72)

Regardless of the curriculum they were initially trained under, women found themselves in the forefront, as "sentiment, evangelism, and economic reality joined to feminise the profession of teacher." Consequently, this was "to hasten the emergence of formal training schools for such teachers. . . . The first state-sponsored normal school came with the foundation in Massachusetts in 1839 of three schools, one exclusively for women students over 16 for a course lasting three years." (12:128-129)

Despite the successes women had gained in promoting their education in support of the teaching profession, there were tragic missteps:

in The most persecuted schoolteacher in the early 1800s was Prudence Crandall (1803-90). She dared to make an experiment that didn't work. In 1833 she opened a school her home for black girls from educated families in the village of Canterbury, Connecticut. She wanted to train these girls to become teachers, hoping that they, themselves, would open schools for black girls in their hometowns, and that the idea would continue to grow. She was boycotted by resentful villagers, her water supply polluted, her black pupils barred from the local church. She herself was arrested. Upon her acquittal, a local mob attacked her house one dark night in September, 1834, breaking windows, battering down walls, destroying the furnishings. To protect her pupils from further physical harm she closed the school. (20:74)

At any rate, "by 1870, more than half the two hundred thousand primary- and secondary-school teachers in America were women." (2:46) That did not mean that women as teachers were free from control and regulation:

in As teachers, even as late as 1922, women were restricted their activities outside the classroom. The following contract, for seventy-five dollars a month outlines the do's and don'ts for a female teacher in Pennsylvania:

Miss \_\_\_\_\_ agrees:

1. Not to get married.
2. Not to have company with men.
3. To be at home between the hours of 8:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. unless in attendance at a school function.
4. Not to loiter downtown in ice cream stores.
5. Not to leave town at any time without the permission of the Chairman of the Trustees.
6. Not to smoke cigarettes.
7. Not to drink beer, wine or whiskey.
8. Not to ride in a carriage or automobile with any man except her brother or father.
9. Not to dress in bright colors.
10. Not to dye her hair.
11. To wear at least two petticoats.
12. Not to wear dresses more than two inches above the ankles.
13. To keep the schoolroom clean.
14. Not to wear face powder, mascara, or

to paint the lips. (17:275-276)

In the end, women had won themselves a new profession and, in the bargain, acknowledgement of the importance of secondary education for young women. Regrettably, "this acceptance of girls' education, however, stopped short at the collegiate or university level. . . . Higher education was a part of man's sphere because the purpose of it was to train ministers, professional men, and political leaders. (4:308-310). In the pre-Civil War era, although a few "colleges" (Oberlin in 1837; Antioch in 1853) opened their doors to women, often the

training

received by women students was inferior to that for male students. Oberlin, for example, "channeled most female

students

into its 'Ladies Department,' whose curriculum in addition to literary and morals courses included sewing and washing for the male students." (9:197)

Again, individual women went to work to correct this deficiency:

and

Dissatisfied with her own inadequate preparation for teaching, Mary Lyon developed a plan for setting up a women's college. After trying to stay in the background

let men do the promotion work, she soon found that she was the best advocate for her cause. It took her two years to raise the necessary money, much of which she finally collected at small meetings, parlor gatherings, and sewing circles. In November, 1837, Mount Holyoke [in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts] received its first students. . .

Prior to the opening of Mount Holyoke, women had been admitted only to Oberlin College. Mount Holyoke set the example for the formation of separate educational institutions for women. (8:44-45)

well

Around this same time, the issue of higher education as

convention

as others found voice during a landmark women's rights in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The convention produced a famous "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" (modeled

after

Jefferson's Declaration of Independence) in which the following statements appear:

but

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives

a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough

education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church . . . but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

a  
kept  
With regard to being "denied the facilities for obtaining thorough education," pressure from women's rights advocates up with significant results for supporters of higher education for women:

where  
By 1879 nearly half the colleges in the United States were co-educational. Oberlin pioneered in 1833, followed by Antioch (1852), the University of Iowa (1856), and Swarthmore (1852). There were many more in the West,

women seemed better able to find equal opportunities. . .

were  
The University of Mississippi admitted women in 1882, the first southern state institution to do so. . . . The new land-grant colleges (funded by the Morrill Act of 1862)

Radcliffe  
co-educational and provided students of both sexes with unprecedented educational opportunity. . . . The initial male university to tackle the problem of women's education was the nation's first college: Harvard. In 1874

was organized as an annex to Harvard. (2:128-129)

Not surprisingly, as with the provision of elementary and secondary schooling for women in the previous centuries, there was dissent:

that  
If by the opening of the 20th century it could be said higher education for women was accepted, that achievement had not, however, been uncontested. . . . In 1873, Dr. Edward H. Clarke of the Harvard Medical School published

Sex  
in Education, in which he contended that women possessed

the  
mental ability to do college work but that their feminine physique was harmed severely when they were trained along the same lines as men. He regaled his readers with horrendous cases of brilliant young women who either died

or  
were incapacitated physically as a result of their intellectual successes at college. (4:311-312)

appeared  
To put it bluntly, "Clarke firmly believed that women's reproductive systems would be destroyed through mental overexertion." (2:131) Moreover, as college education to keep women from marrying or from having as many children as

a  
and  
influential  
is

non-college women, "women's education was criticized for having  
subversive influence upon the traditional conception of women  
the family" (4:314). Frederick Nietzsche, the most  
of the nineteenth-century German philosophers [declared] "Man  
for woman a means; the end is always the child. But what is  
woman for a man? . . . A dangerous toy. . . . Man shall be  
educated for war and woman for the recreation of the warrior;  
everything else is folly." (21:14)

The opinions of Harvard professors and German philosophers  
notwithstanding, arguments against higher education for women  
became moot as women enrolled in colleges and universities in  
increasing numbers. There were significant repercussions:

With the extension to female students of higher education  
(and the women reformers had proved that if men would not  
let them into their universities, they would found their  
own) the right to enter the professions could no longer be  
withheld. (10:203)

to  
arenas

Besides noting that women had been closed out of colleges,  
the Seneca Falls Declaration had decried the exclusion of women  
from the fields of religion, medicine, and the law (as teachers  
or practitioners) at the professional level--that is, the level  
at which a man enjoyed wealth and distinction "most honorable  
himself." What was the role and status of women in these  
through American history?

#### WOMEN AND RELIGION

This

It has been recorded that as early as the 1650s women  
outnumbered men in the churches of New England (4:298-299).  
was in spite of the rather demanding nature of the institution  
during the early period:

religion  
jewelry,  
religious

Religion, which was the hope and the inspiration for many  
colonists, was restrictive, especially the Puritan  
which forbid [sic] dancing, adornment of clothing,  
and women speaking out. The Quakers were the only  
group which allowed women to speak in church. (17:263)

women

As might be expected, the prescription of silence for  
in spiritual matters at times got outspoken individuals in  
trouble:

Highly respected among the colonists for her knowledge of

midwifery and herbal healing, Anne Hutchinson . . . began gathering women in her home to comment on John Cotton's sermons. Going further than her spiritual mentor, she

soon

expounded a permissive doctrine of salvation by a gift of grace. . . . This heretical doctrine, which downgraded the role of the learned ministry and denied the absolute authority of the elect, became a highly controversial issue. . . . Anne Hutchinson was formally banished by the colony . . . and excommunicated. (7:465)

And so women were well-advised to keep their thoughts to themselves when it came to religious expression. But the

passage

of time saw a gradual shifting of values. Settlement, population, commerce, and industry grew rapidly as the nation

was

colonized, with marked effect on the religious posture of its citizens:

Economic success separated women's and men's religious as well as economic activities during the eighteenth century. With each generation Euro-American men had become less religious and more attentive to economic opportunity. . .

.

Laments about the decline in church membership began among Puritans in the mid-seventeenth century; in fact the

decline

took place primarily among men. . . . Loss of male piety also meant loss of power for the male clergy. . . . Many colonials, men and women alike, found the clash of values troublesome. They resolved it for a time by placing the burdens of religious responsibility on women under the leadership of male ministers, making the passive female a symbol of Christian virtues. (5:40-41)

Passive and virtuous as women may have been viewed, the lessening of power and participation by men allowed for a "sea change" in American religion: "Women flowed, almost as readily

as

water, into those occupations and areas of American society

where

they encountered the least masculine opposition. Religion, new and old, was one of these." (15:180) As it went, by the beginning of the 19th century, some Protestant sects, notably Quakers and Baptists, provided some opportunities to women to

be

leaders and preachers. (4:302)

One of the earliest of these female leaders was "Mother"

Ann

Lee, "a young woman . . . who in 1758 joined a group of ex-Quakers, who met together united by millenarian beliefs [i.e., the belief that a time would come in the not-distant future

when

Christ and the saints would reign on earth in a "new

millennium"]. By 1770 she proclaimed herself the new female messiah, and asserted her own leadership within the sect [now known as "Shakers"]. . . . By the end of the eighteenth century there were eleven Shaker communities." (12:101) Another woman in the vanguard was Barbara Heck, who established Methodism in America in 1760. Heck did not preach herself, but was responsible for organizing the first Methodist meetings and for the erection of the first Methodist church in America.

(15:177)

From the beginning, religion continued to provide the engine for the catapulting of women into prominence:

The fact is that women had fewer options than men to demonstrate autonomy. Choice of church, marital partner, and perhaps family limitation were the only decisions left to women. Evangelical revivals [such as the Second Great Awakening, a term for the evangelical revival that swept across the republic during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, echoing the first large-scale movement of this sort, the Great Awakening of the 1740s] afforded women an opportunity to exercise control, to state a preference, to identify. . . . During these years, it

became

apparent to both the shepherds and to the flock that religion was increasingly women's domain. By the middle

of

the [19th] century a silent partnership had been struck,

in

practical and ideological terms, between women enthusiasts and male ministers, resulting in what has been described

as

the "feminization of American religion." (2:42-43)

Continuing the trend from early colonial times, "women were

in the majority in the radically orthodox new denominations and sects that flourished in the American hinterland throughout the nineteenth century." (15:175) There was even seen an attempt

to

break into the ministerial ranks within the more established churches: in 1853, Antoinette Brown, a Congregationalist (who later became a Unitarian and who married a brother of the first woman doctor, Elizabeth Blackwell), was the first woman to be ordained in a mainline Protestant church after earning her divinity degree from Oberlin College.

But this foray was not to last, and for the next century, most Protestant women had to content themselves with unofficial roles. (11:56) Kept out of the ministry, yet as pious as ever, women increasingly "used religious and moral commitment to

create

new public spaces and female solidarity in the name of

Christian

duty." (5:74)

In the South [for example], prayer meetings of women often developed into social and benevolent organizations. . . .

As

reform organizations, these religious groups and societies were usually quite innocuous. But as alternatives to the home for married women, they were seminal. Women gained experience in organizing themselves and carrying out goals set by themselves. (4:301)

Female missionary societies and Sunday schools formed to reach out beyond the home and immediate community: "The mission field was, in fact, the first area of American life where women achieved a more or less equal professional status with men. . . .

By 1910 there were ten thousand women, divided almost equally between married and unmarried in seventeen mission fields." (15:181,195) Coincidentally, the aim of the missionaries

became

not only to "spread the Gospel," but to foster the education

and

health of the populations they served. The mission movement showed its influence in many ways: it is interesting to note

that

"while the Salvation Army [founded in 1895 by Catherine Booth

and

her husband William] has a religious basis, it has maintained that helping people is more important to their organization

than

preaching." (17:291)

Of course, the spiritual side was by no means neglected

for

the sake of good works. At the end of the 19th century several religious movements were initiated by women in the "search for truth or for an understanding of life's deeper meaning":

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) . . . claimed that the turning point in her life came when, in 1866, after a bad fall on the ice and a serious injury to her back, she arose from

her

bed healed after reading a Scripture verse. With this healing came the awareness of her mission to carry to all the world her message of mental healing, Christian Science. . . . The Christian Science Monitor began publication in 1908.

Ellen G. H. White (1827-1915), co-founder with her

husband,

James S. White, of the Seventh-day Adventists, traveled throughout the country during her lifetime guiding, supervising, preaching, and explaining the goals of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. These goals included the belief in the second coming of Christ, observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) and strong emphasis on education. She was opposed to tea, coffee, flesh food,

and

(20:131) stressed the importance of exercise and fresh air.

outside Spiritualism, mesmerism (hypnotism), phrenology (the study of the skull to determine mental capacity), and what has been called "mind cure" were other areas of spiritual interest of the contemporary mainstream religious communities. "Mind cure" especially "became a major force in American religious experience":

as Essentially, mind cure . . . held that ills of the flesh well as endemic nervousness, despair and anxiety were in the mind. . . . Mind cure . . . was a touching effort to escape from the disintegrative effect of American life, from the efficiency, the organization, the competitiveness and the sexual tensions that were so destructive to the nervous systems of men and women alike.

of But it was women who responded most readily to the tenets mind cure. As Donald Meyer puts it: "the most obvious evangel of mind cure was the ubiquity of women. Not only was its most famous exponent a woman [Mary Baker Eddy]; scores of its lesser exponents were women, as founders, writers, preachers, teachers, healers. Mind cure gave jobs to women by hundreds and thousands." (15:179-180)

few In 1950 Elizabeth Dexter observed that "women in America have always contributed their full share to church work, but at any times have preached or held office in the organized churches. . . . In general, the stronger the ecclesiastical tradition and more compact the organization, the less place for women. Loosely organized fellowships sometimes accepted them, and new sects and revivalistic movements often allowed women the same opportunities as men" (6:357). Again, the involvement of women in out-of-the-ordinary religious, moral, and spiritual ventures reflected the circumstances they found themselves in. religious Until very recently, women have remained excluded from ministry in the "mainstream" denominations, but there has been action and change:

the Until Protestant barriers began to fall in the 1950s, most women leaders were in Pentecostal or Holiness churches or groups where local congregations ordain clergy. . . . In U. S., African Methodist churches had previously allowed women clergy, and in the 1950s white Methodists and Presbyterians followed suit. The first woman rabbi in the

seminary

U. S. was ordained in 1972. Today U.S. Protestant

enrollments are nearly one-third female. . . . In the mid 1970s the Episcopal Church--the U. S. Anglican branch--elevated its first women priests. (11:56)

Ministering to the spirit certainly occupied thousands of women up to the present and of course continues to do so. But what about tending to the body?

#### WOMEN AND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION

The religious ministry was only one of the arenas from which, as the Seneca Falls Declaration claimed, women had been unjustly excluded; the second was that of medicine. What could have prompted such a statement?

to

In colonial America there were no medical schools, no medical journals, few hospitals, and few laws pertaining

governors,

the practice of the healing arts. Clergymen and

medicine.

barbers, quacks, apprentices, and women practiced

"physics,"

Most practitioners acquired their credentials by reading Paracelsus and Galen and serving an apprenticeship with an established practitioner. Among the semi-trained

a

surgeons, and healers the occasional "doctress" was fully accepted and frequently well rewarded. County records of all the colonies contain references to the work of the female physicians. There was even a female Army surgeon,

Plantation

Mrs. Allyn, who served during King Philip's war.

granted

records mention by name several slave women who were

special privileges because of their useful service as midwives and "doctresses." (3:185)

in

In addition to acting as midwives, women had been allowed unlimited freedom in practicing "physick" [the administration of medicines] and even "chirurgery" [an archaic term for surgery]. . . . Judith Corey advertised

follows

the New England Palladium as late as 1808 that "she

the Midwife and Doctress business; that she cures Burns, Salt Rheum, Canker, Scald-head, Fever Sores, Rheumatism, & the Piles." (15:55)

women

So it seemed that there were "equal opportunities" for

in what could be called the field of medicine early in the country's history. It was in the field of midwifery especially that women held a virtual monopoly in colonial America. In fact, in 1646 a man was actually prosecuted in Maine for

practicing as a midwife. (3:187) This was because, "for most women before the 19th century, childbearing was a female-only experience. . . . The attending medical figure was also a woman--a midwife, who usually had experience in, and some folk knowledge about, delivering babies. None had any special training." (4:56) Changes to this seemingly natural

arrangement

were forthcoming, however:

practice  
in  
few

Around the time of the Revolution . . . a change in and outlook began. As American male doctors learned more European medical schools and at home about obstetrics, a few of them in cities began to specialize in the field. . . . The word "obstetrician" was later deliberately coined to remove the female connotations of "midwife" from medical attendance at childbirths. (4:56)

This turn of events was not universally well-received:

attacked  
newspaper  
"sufficient

When doctors began to crowd out midwives, they were as awkward and brutal practitioners. An indignant editor wrote that the familiarities taken by men in attending pregnant women and those in labor were to taint the Purity and sully the Chastity of any Woman breathing." (15:55)

The concern for modesty did come into play, certainly, and pains were taken to address the matter:

and  
to  
out

No male physician could examine his patient as fully or as freely as a midwife. Proper female delicacy forbade it most physicians, throughout the 19th century, in order to avoid any charges of impropriety bent over backwards not appear too familiar. As a result, lights were dim during the examination, and the examination and delivery were by touch only; if instruments were used they had to be manipulated under covers! One male writer even pointed proudly, in justification of modesty, that one of the greatest male obstetricians had been blind! (4:58)

As the issue of modesty was successfully addressed, the usurpation of the delivery-assistance business by male doctors was allowed:

When male physicians began to enter the delivery room on a regular basis in the early years of the 19th century, the meaning of childbirth inevitably changed for women. It

male  
usually  
removed

gradually ceased to be a female ritual largely because doctors brought that to an end. For one thing, they reduced the number of women present at the birth, or them entirely. For another, male doctors, out of their growing sense of professionalism, did not like the conviviality and conversation that often accompanied labor and birth when women were present. At the same time, the male sex of the physician ensured that the procedure would be formal, cool, and impersonal. (4:58)

midwives  
period.  
Maine

By the early 19th century male physicians had virtually monopolized the practice of midwifery on the Eastern seaboard. True to the generally delayed economic development in the Western frontier regions, female continued to work on the frontier until a much later period. It is interesting to note that the concepts of "propriety" shifted with the prevalent practice. In 17th century Maine the attempt of a man to act as a midwife was considered outrageous and illegal; in mid-19th century America the suggestion that women should train as midwives and physicians was considered equally outrageous and improper. (3:187-188)

women  
a  
the  
a

As the practice of midwifery waned as a profession for in general, the goal of becoming a doctor became attractive to a few. Admission to medical school stood as only the first of many hurdles to overcome for a woman with the desire to become a physician:

male  
shortly

When Harvard Medical School admitted women in 1850, the students compelled a reversal on the grounds that women would cause them to lose status, especially since blacks (another low-prestige group) had been admitted only before. (4:381)

was

For one Elizabeth Blackwell, however, success ultimately achieved. Her extraordinary quest is worthy of note:

friend

The immediate stimulus occurred on a visit to a woman dying from a painful gynecological disorder. This friend pointed out that her own worst sufferings would have been spared if she had had a woman doctor to administer the

consider  
initial  
medical treatment, and she suggested that Elizabeth  
the profession of medicine for herself. Elizabeth's  
reaction is surprising in a future physician:

and  
ailments  
I hated everything connected with the body and could  
not bear the sight of a medical book. This was so  
true, that I had been always foolishly ashamed of any  
form of illness. . . . As a schoolgirl I had tried to  
harden the body by sleeping on the floor at night,  
even passing a couple of days without food, with the  
foolish notion of thus subduing one's physical  
nature. . . . The very thought of dwelling on the  
physical structure of the body and its various  
filled me with disgust. (13:327-328)

number  
of schools was finally admitted to Geneva College in New York:  
Blackwell nevertheless dedicated herself to her goal and  
after a tortuous process of application and rejection by a

(later  
bear  
could  
they  
they  
The circumstances of her admission to Geneva College  
absorbed into the University of Syracuse) were hardly such  
as to cover that institution with glory: the faculty  
unanimously opposed her admission, but did not want to  
the onus of saying so; they put the decision up to the  
students (with the proviso that a single negative vote  
blackball the applicant) in the happy belief that there  
could be only one outcome. The students turned the tables  
on their teachers, also for any but idealistic reasons:  
voted unanimously to admit the woman applicant because  
saw in her presence endless opportunities for diverting  
themselves [i.e., through practical jokes]. (6:118)

out  
had  
Showing considerable fortitude, Blackwell excelled in her  
studies and graduated on January 23, 1849, at the head of her  
class. Curiously, "we catch a glimpse of the contradictions  
of which such women were made, in her decision, although she  
battled to be allowed to witness the dissection of the  
reproductive organs, against walking in the Commencement  
procession because it would be unladylike!" (6:118) Sadly,  
Blackwell never enjoyed the fruits of her academic distinction.  
As building a private practice proved extremely difficult, she  
eventually established her own hospital, the New York Infirmary  
for Women and Children. (9:155) Later, "the hostility of  
orthodox medical schools in the United States to the idea of

educating women led to the formation of women's medical colleges:  
Boston Female Medical College and the Female Medical College of Philadelphia in 1850." (12:259)

the war":  
Shortly thereafter, the nation entered the Civil War, and "even though women had broken into the medical profession as doctors before 1861, women doctors made little headway during

one  
Despite the desperate need for physicians, when war broke out no women were commissioned as doctors by either the Union or the Confederate medical departments. . . . The

Johnson.  
woman doctor to receive recognition from the Union government, Mary Walker, applied for a post when the war broke out in 1861. The Union refused to grant her a commission until 1864. Her application approved, she was sent to the front at Chattanooga, Tennessee. Shortly thereafter she became a prisoner of war and was quite a curiosity to her captors. After being exchanged for a Confederate physician, Walker went on to supervise the Female Military Prison in Louisville. She was honorably discharged and awarded a medal by President Andrew

extraordinary,  
(2:83)  
Her talent and willingness to serve were not but the recognition she received proved exceptional.

In the South, women doctors were even rarer because women doctors were seen as a threat to the image of southern ladyhood and the Confederate medical establishment. (2:83)

was  
Even though there was some apparent progress after the war (for example, of 198 medical students in the Boston University School of Medicine in 1886, 79 were women), "there were nonetheless only a handful of institutions that accepted women and three of these were medical schools for women. The fact

that as late as the mid-1880's the United States lagged behind Czarist Russia and Italy in admitting women to medical school." (15:278) This indictment of the medical system was prompted by the erection of several roadblocks that affected women's abilities to enter most professions:

advanced  
and  
One noteworthy barrier came in the form of "professionalization"; i.e., a college education or training were required before one could attempt to be licensed to practice certain professions. Since women were routinely denied admission to most colleges and medical law schools, professionalization completely cut off their access to certain occupations. Additionally, state licensing of "prestige" professions, most notably law and

employment medicine, was another means of inhibiting women's opportunities. (9:153)

and As the professional status of all physicians advanced, the status differential between male and female practitioners was more obviously disadvantageous and underscored women's marginality. Their vital exclusion from the most prestigious and lucrative branches of the profession and their concentration in specializations relating to women children made such disadvantaging more obvious by the end of the 19th century. . . . Women were the casualties of medical professionalization. (3:186-187)

prisons Women doctors were forced to create their own institutions and, eventually, their own positions. Female physicians demanded to be put on staff at newly created women's and asylums. In 1890 a bill passed the New York State legislature providing for a woman doctor at each such facility. Other states followed suit. . . . Before the establishment of women's hospitals, women were effectively banned from the serious practice of medicine in America. (2:145)

in As usual, women had to find a niche in which the contribution of their services was viewed as being logical because of the "feminine" nature of the work: "The only fields which professionalization did not result in the elimination of women from the upgraded profession were nursing and [as we have seen] teaching. Both were characterized by a severe shortage of labor." (3:188) Again, the Civil War provided the impetus for increased participation, and "over three thousand women became army nurses during the Civil War, the majority in the North." (2:83) Even before the war, nursing had been regarded peculiarly as a woman's occupation, although some of the hospitals and the Army during wars employed male nurses. "These bore the stigma of low skill, low status, and low pay" (3:188), with the inevitable result for those who "signed up":

Discrimination and male prejudice dogged their steps; most of them received no pay for their services and many were left in want and ill-health. It took until 1892 before a bill was passed in Congress granting Civil War nurses pensions of \$12 a month. (7:181)

Nursing gradually became an organized profession after the Civil War, as in 1873 the first training schools for nurses opened at Bellevue Hospital in New York City, Massachusetts

General Hospital in Boston, and Connecticut Hospital in New Haven. Even so, "in many ways the relationship between physician and nurse replicated the domestic sexual division of labor, placing authority in the hands of the male doctor and subordinating the nurturing roles of women." (5:141-142) Moreover, nursing generally was still regarded "as simply an extension of the unpaid services performed by the housewife--a characteristic attitude that haunts the profession to this day. (3:188)

As in the religious arena, women found the mission field to hold promise and opportunity for the exercise of their medical talents and realization of ambitions: "Increasingly, with all denominations, the emphasis . . . moved on to medical missionary work and again women were prominent as doctors, as the founders of nursing schools, and as administrators." (15:190)

There was another, more secular avenue through which to become involved:

Women were to show a particular interest as a movement for improvement in personal health, based on greater knowledge of physiology and on self-help, grew. Homeopathy, the 'botanical medicine' of Samuel and John Thomson . . . and the teaching of Silvester Graham [of Graham cracker fame] on diet reform, all had considerable appeal for women. (12:258)

Harriot K. Hunt, who had previously been denied admission to the Harvard Medical School, "practiced without a license for years, although she confined herself largely to what today would be called physiotherapy." (6:117) It was she who helped to set up the Ladies Physiological Society in Charlestown, Boston, and explained:

If women could be induced to meet together for the purpose of obtaining a knowledge of physical laws, it would enable them to dispense in great measure with physicians, put them on their own responsibilities, and be a blessing to themselves and their children. (12:258)

#### WOMEN AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION

In medicine, women slowly made advances in their participation and professional status. On the other hand, "the admission of women into law practice was considerably more delayed than into medicine, perhaps because medicine, like teaching, seemed to have some connection with woman's traditional

role in the home, while the law had none." (4:381) Then too,  
a  
type of professionalization occurred in the field of law,  
similar  
to that that took place in medicine and which eliminated women  
from practice:

Before 1750, when law suits were commonly brought to the  
courts by the plaintiffs themselves or by deputies without  
specialized legal training, women as well as men could and  
did act as "attorneys-in-fact." When the law became a  
paid  
profession and trained lawyers took over litigation, women  
disappeared from the court scene for over a century.  
(3:188)

As a result, the legal profession effectively barred women  
from practice until after the Civil War, when "a hardy group of  
women began to challenge these barriers." (2:138) Such  
enterprise had its supporters: Dr. Dio Lewis (who inspired the  
creation of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union) in 1871  
wrote  
in Our Girls that his "hopes of the future" rested on the  
girls,  
and that "women must be trained to take suitable jobs. . . .  
They would also make good lawyers and 'inevitably cleanse and  
elevate' that debased profession." (15:254,276)

On the other side were the attitudes of lawyers  
themselves,  
typified by the comments of "the liberal and reform-minded  
George Templeton Strong who wrote in his diary in 1869:  
'Application from three infatuated young women to [Columbia]  
Law  
School. No woman shall degrade herself by practising law, in  
New  
York especially, if I can save her.'" (15:282) Again, it was  
individual women who kept up the struggle:

The most spirited campaigns against this prejudice were  
conducted in the nation's capital following the Civil War.  
Belva Lockwood applied to Columbian College (later George  
Washington University) for admission to its law school in  
the autumn of 1869. The institution turned down her  
application with the following rationale:

Madam:

The Faculty of Columbian College have considered your  
request to be admitted to the Law Department of this  
institution [and], after due consideration, have  
considered that such admission would not be  
expedient,  
as it would be likely to distract the attention of  
the  
men.

School  
The forty-year-old Lockwood was little flattered by this dismissal. She attended the National University Law  
instead, and graduated in 1873. (2:139-140)

admitted  
Another woman found her way to success through a different approach. Arabella Mansfield (of Iowa) was the first woman in America licensed to practice law, "attaining this honor with a petition to the Iowa bar in 1869. Surprisingly, Mansfield met with little opposition." (2:138)

She had been trained by her lawyer husband and was  
to the bar by a liberal-minded judge who ignored the law which confined legal practice to "white male citizens."  
(4:381-382)

Sanitary  
It was ironic that, in that same year, Myra Bradwell, "probably the best-known and most competent legal mind among women in the country--she was the editor of a prestigious legal journal--was denied admission to the bar in Illinois." (4:382) Bradwell was an abolitionist who had served on the U. S.  
Commission during the war, and who was involved "in  
considerable  
state controversy with her crusade to reform the law in her home  
of Illinois." (2:138)

that  
When, in 1870, Myra Bradwell appealed the Illinois law  
appeal barred her from practicing law, the court denied her  
and gave this as its reason:

spheres  
The civil law, as well as nature herself, has always recognized a wide difference in the respective  
and destinies of man and woman. Man is, or should  
be,  
proper women's protector and defender. The natural and  
timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life. (16:103)

equal  
Under pressure from Bradwell supporters, however, in 1872 the Illinois legislature passed a bill providing women with  
the access to the bar, and that year Bradwell was made an honorary member of the state bar. (2:138-139) Belva Lockwood became  
could first woman to be admitted (under a law passed in 1879) to practice before the Supreme Court, "at a time when America  
lay claim to fewer than sixty practicing women attorneys, with only thirty-one law school graduates in this distinguished

group." (2:40) However, the achievements of Mansfield, Bradwell, and Lockwood, while noteworthy, were essentially singular.

admission  
era)  
criminal  
law. (2:139)

Law schools refused to admit women students in significant numbers until the 1890s. Most women who did seek were married to lawyers. Most women who were finally admitted to the bar never practiced (before the modern era) because of the discrimination they encountered within society and in the courts. Those women who did manage successful law careers practiced civil rather than

Their  
school  
academe  
who sought equal status within the profession, were often driven to establish their own institutions. (2:141)

In 1898, when six well-qualified women applicants were denied admission to Columbian, [Ellen Spencer] Mussey and another female attorney opened their own law school. institution admitted both men and women, gained in numbers and prestige, and eventually merged to become the law of American University. Women in law, like women in

#### CONCLUSION

Actions taken by American women over our history to gain opportunities for education and entry into some of the most prestigious professions should be put into perspective.

had  
a  
slowed.

The few women willing to tackle the social and legal barriers to their practice of law or medicine generally to work unceasingly by themselves to overcome these obstacles. Their efforts had little "spillover" effect on the rights of other women. Once these few individuals secured entry to a school or admission to the practice of a profession, their efforts generally ceased or at least

higher  
very  
(9:156)

Thus, the progress of women in the professions and in education during the nineteenth century was restricted by the absence of a unified women's movement to push hard for advancement. In fact, across the professions, the gains made were typical of what happens when a few privileged individuals undertake to acquire a public good--only a limited supply was made available by their efforts.

In other words, by the beginning of the 20th century, for

the vast majority of women many felt there had effectively been little progress. In 1895 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in a foreword to *The Woman's Bible*, offered an observation that seems to confirm that it was "business as usual" for women.

man.  
of  
The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to  
Creeds, codes, Scriptures, and statutes, are all based on this idea. The fashions, forms, ceremonies, and customs  
of  
society, church ordinance and discipline all grow out of this idea. (13:401)

inroads  
only  
There have been times since Stanton penned the above when this arrangement has been suspended and women have been allowed "out from under," but they have usually been situational and short-lived. During wartime especially, when there have been obvious shortages in the male labor pool, women have made  
into the workforce and have made unqualified contributions,  
to be relegated to their former status when crises have ended. This was notably the case after World War II.

home.  
The war ended and the men came back. The engines of industry revved up and a woman's place was back in the  
Business wanted her there and advertising helped put her there. By the mid-'50s, television, now in most American homes, became the preferred medium for the message, and images of women as homemakers-wives-mothers literally flooded the airwaves. It was the era of the "white glove" test. The enemy wasn't Hitler anymore, it was dust. (14:97)

enter  
For women who desired to bolster their educations and  
professional life, the old conflict between the "natural" domestic role they had been assigned and the chances they had finally earned continued to influence women's lives.

of  
suddenly  
What  
The changes of the fifties had left women in a new and unsettled position, experiencing new dimensions of work, education, and community action but trapped in a language  
domesticity that suppressed the broader implications of these new realities. The mass media in 1960 . . .  
discovered the "trapped housewife." Twice as many women attended college as a decade before, leading *Newsweek* to worry about "Young Wives with Brains: Babies, Yes--But  
Else?" (5:265)

The implicit question of the value of education for women who ultimately won't "use it" still is being asked world-wide:

In most countries economic expansion has increased the number of women workers. Moreover, girls increasingly receive an extensive education, often state-financed. If afterwards they do not work, society's investment in their instruction brings no return--and the wisdom of having them educated in the first place may be doubted. (18:85)

Many people argue that such a question would not apply if the investment was to be in the education of males. In fact, in the last hundred years the pursuit of equal opportunity for women in America has continued to be subject to questions regarding their "proper" sphere and "true" nature. The inclination to set women apart from men, even if well-intentioned, has led to arguments that women are "inferior," "superior," "opposite," or "different" from men. While there are proponents for these common positions, there are other arguments for minimizing the "dualistic" point of view:

It is time to ask again the old unfashionable questions: Who benefits from the official theories and private stories we tell about presumed sex differences? Who pays? What are the consequences? Who gets the jobs and promotions? Who ends up doing the housework? . . . This way of thinking gets us out of the "who's better" approach that . . . goes merely in circles. . . . Such questions are unanswerable, because "better" or "worse" depends on what a person values, chooses, and wants out of life, and what rewards or disadvantages follow from those choices.

Instead, we might examine some results of the belief that women's life paths do not fit them for an academic or corporate [or military] career the way men's development does. One consequence is that women were once excluded from universities and still are excluded from advancement at the highest corporate levels; another is that men who focus wholly on career are excluded from the pleasures and crises of daily family life. We might ask how it came to be that only one professional path is acceptable, and who decides which one is correct. We might observe that the very question of whether women's life paths are worse or better than men's deflects us from the fact that men are setting the standard of normalcy. (19:289)

most  
the  
Actions by present and future generations--by women and men--in changing our values, our standards, our systems will likely continue to "free the dreams" of individual women . . . and perhaps even change our perception and interpretation of American Dream itself.

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