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BY BLACK WOMEN
IN THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

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SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM BY BLACK WOMEN IN THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

By

Thelma Marie Townsend

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ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM
BY BLACK WOMEN
IN THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

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Thelma Marie Townsend

Nineteenth-century American life witnessed the black woman's quest for public voice in theological and secular debates. Through the autobiographical genre, many black women left records of their triumphant quests in these arenas. These women also left records of their transcendence of the socio-political forces of nineteenth-century society which often relegated them to an inferior and subordinate place. This dissertation analyzes black women's autobiographies as a means of participating in the ongoing scholarly efforts to recover black women's literary history and heritage.

Chapter One provides a historical foundation and an analysis of black women's struggles against racism, sexism and classism in nineteenth-century society. Chapter Two traces the development of the African-American autobiographical genre and serves as an introduction to the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

Chapters Three through Five provide specific readings of autobiographies by black women who wrote in the antebellum period of the nineteenth century. These are Maria W. Stewart's

Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart; Jarena Lee's The Life and Religious Experiences of Mrs. Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of her Call to Preach the Gospel; Zilpha Elaw's Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw, An American Female of Colour; Rebecca Cox Jackson's journals, compiled and arranged in Jean McMahon Humez's Gifts of Power; Harriet E. Wilson's Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black in a Two Story White House, North; and Harriet A. Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Each of these autobiographies is grounded in the black woman's quest for freedom and literacy, a theme central to African-American autobiographies.

Analyses of these six texts focus on the black woman's reimaging of the Divine for personal power. Furthermore, specific readings in these texts demonstrate the authors' significant contributions to the African-American autobiographical genre.

FOR MY PARENTS
JOHN AND ARCIE TOWNSEND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years literary historians, white and black feminist historians and feminist theologians have all been engaged in recovering the history and literature of American women. Among other things, these scholars are attempting to record the development of American women's political and religious consciousness.[1] Efforts in this recovery process center on nineteenth-century American culture and politics, as some feminist historians and feminist theologians believe that nineteenth-century America fostered the initial development of a fully organized feminist consciousness and feminist theological consciousness.

The nineteenth century was an important era in American women's political history. The early decades helped to develop not only the organized and successful quest by women for public voice in theological debates in mainstream American churches, but also the birth of an organized women's rights consciousness. These efforts continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century. African-American women were significantly involved in this quest for public voice in theological realms as well as for political voice in secular areas. Many black women left records of that triumphant

quest. Their records exist in the form of spiritual autobiographies of religious activism and provide first-hand evidence of black women's involvement in America's political and religious history. Such documents are especially vital if scholars are to succeed in their efforts to reconstruct the historical and literary past of American women.

This dissertation focuses on the antebellum autobiographies of religious activism written by African-American women between the 1830s and the 1860s. These works provide a means of understanding how a number of black women were able to forge significant and viable careers despite the almost overwhelmingly impossible odds of racism, sexism and classism in the nineteenth century. As early as 1835, black women liberation theologians began publishing their contributions to the black quest for liberation and freedom. These black women were also contributing to the quest for female equality in mainstream spiritual and secular realms.

In order to establish independent careers in itinerant ministries, as most of the women studied here did, it was particularly necessary for them to reject the ideologies of "true womanhood" as well as the traditional roles for women of nineteenth-century society. Black women who published autobiographies also had to define themselves positively against the negative stereotypes foisted upon the majority of black women by nineteenth-century culture and society. Some representative women who published spiritual autobiographies are studied here, including Maria W. Stewart, author of The Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart (1835); Jarena Lee, author

of The Life and Religious Experiences of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady (1836 and 1849); Rebecca Cox Jackson, author of Gifts of Power (posthumous publication by Jean McMahon Humez, 1981); and Zilpha Elaw, author of Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw, An American Female of Colour (1849). Black women also wrote secular autobiographies which contained sub-texts of liberation theologies and religious activism. Secular authors who are examined here include Harriet E. Wilson, author of Our Nig (1859) and Harriet A. Jacobs, author of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861). With the exception of Rebecca Cox Jackson, all of the women included here for study published autobiographies of spiritual and religious activism in the antebellum era of the nineteenth century. While a number of black women wrote autobiographies of religious activism in the postbellum era, this dissertation is limited to a discussion of particular texts written in the antebellum era. The works studied here set precedents and established a literary vehicle to enable black women in the postbellum era to construct a consciousness of religious self-determinism. However, as Sue E. Houchins notes:

> The goal of black autobiography had never been just an attempt at an 'objective reconstruction of an individual's past or a public demonstration of the qualities of selfhood or a private meditation on the meaning of a life of struggle.' It had also sought to be discursive by initiating a dialogue with those who doubted the very existence of black folks' souls -- not to mention the possibility of their redemption.[2]

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. states: "writing...was the millennial instrument of transformation through which the African would

become ... the human being."[3] In order to preach in the nineteenth century, black women had to define themselves positively and to transcend the all-pervasive social codes of "true womanhood" which relegated even privileged white women to subordinate places vis a vis white men but which excluded black women entirely due to race and class. Their need for a positive self-definition came at a time when millions of enslaved blacks were legally considered only three-fifths of a human being.

The socio-political climate of early- and mid-nineteenth-century America was a post-Revolutionary era of political ferment as many factions simultaneously vied for national attention to their particular concerns. Described by Ralph Waldo Emerson as the era of social reform, the cultural climate of nineteenth-century America began with a dissatisfaction with the organized clergy. In 1844 Emerson wrote:

> Whoever has had opportunity of acquaintance with society in New England during the last twenty-five years, with those leading sections that may constitute any just representation of the character or aim of the community will have been struck with the great activity of thought and experimenting. His attention must be commanded by the signs that the church, or religious party, is falling from the church nominal, and is appearing in temperance and non-temperance societies, in the movement of abolitionists and of socialists; and in very significant assemblies called Sabbath and Bible conventions; ... of seekers, of all the soul of the soldiery of dissent, of the priesthood, and of the church. In these movements, nothing was more remarkable than the discontent they begot in the movers.[4]

Black women were committed to the nineteenth-century "harvest of reform"[5], which was to have a lasting impact on the socio-political nature of the era. For black women, this struggle

included the struggle against sexism and racism. Stewart, Lee, Jackson, Elaw, Wilson and Jacobs, women who found public voice in theological and secular debates in nineteenth-century America, were participants in this struggle.

As had famous late-eighteenth-century African-American poet Phillis Wheatley, black women found public voice through what Sue E. Houchins calls a "reader-audience."[6] However, for nineteenth-century black women religious and political activists, avenues for their oratorical and literary talents opened in January, 1831, when William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879) published the first issue of the Liberator. With publication of the Liberator, the national antislavery crusade began. The publication of the Liberator and the national organization of the antislavery crusade helped make possible the black woman's quest for public voice in theological debates as well as in the political realm. Publication of the Liberator gave America's first black women's rights activist and abolitionist/theologian, Maria W. Stewart, an avenue for her particular oratorical and literary talents. Stewart published her first article in the October, 1831 issue of the Liberator and followed Garrison's advice as she began a public speaking career.

This dissertation is an attempt to participate in the ongoing efforts to recover a feminist theological history and heritage. The accomplishments of black women enhance that quest. The black woman's quest for equality in theological debates with men continued throughout the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth. Feminist theologians Amanda Berry

Smith and Virginia Broughton and feminist Anna Julia Cooper participated in women's efforts for equality in religious and secular spheres.

As feminist theologians and feminist scholars seek to discover the origin of an organized feminist consciousness, they frequently turn to the nineteenth-century female antislavery organizations as a heritage and resource. Many historians insist that white women's efforts in their particular abolitionist organizations helped them to develop the valuable skills necessary to sustain an organized women's rights effort which promoted the development of an organized feminist consciousness.

In most cases, the efforts by black women in the antebellum era are overlooked. As Rosalyn Terborg-Penn and Sharon Harley note, much of the history of the black woman consists of the struggle against sexism, an experience common to all women. The struggle has also consisted of the struggle against racism, experienced by black women and black men. However, as black women have fought for equality, barriers to their success have been erected by white women as well as by white men. Black women were the first American women to organize female antislavery organizations. In 1833 white women, excluded from male abolitionist societies, created their own. These were the Female Antislavery Society of Philadelphia and the Boston Female Antislavery Society. These societies were not open to all black women. Both of these organizations included only a few select black female members. Four black charter members of the Female Antislavery Society of

Philadelphia were Sarah Mapps Douglass, and the daughters of wealthy businessman James Forten, Sr.: Harriet, Margaretta, and Sarah.[7] It must be noted that the black women mentioned above were elite members of black society. Discrimination in these organizations was also based upon degree of color. Fair complected black women were more likely to be accepted. Many black women, already members of their own literary societies, self-help groups, mutual improvement organizations and antislavery organizations, channeled their energies into advancing the efforts of their own antislavery organizations or into joining those already established by men.[8] Rosalyn Terborg-Penn writes: "Discrimination against black women in abolitionist societies organized by white women appears ironic when one considers that white women complained of discrimination by white men."[9]

The current quest to recover women's history and heritage oftentimes does not include black women. Such an oversight results from myopic vision. Whether excluded from organized efforts or not, black women contributed much to the women's rights movement in nineteenth-century America. In capturing the essence of a century of struggle for women, Eleanor Flexner dismisses Maria Stewart as a public lecturer who neither opened the way to public speaking for women, nor had any significant impact on women's rights.[10] Flexner does admit, however, that Stewart preceded the Grimke sisters (Sarah Weld and Angelina Grimke Weld) on the lecture circuit, and in fact "heralded" similar arguments on women's rights to those the Grimke sisters would later present.[11] Flexner suggests that Stewart was more

specifically concerned with religious matters and black disenfranchisement than with women's rights.

As will be demonstrated in this dissertation, quite a few black women in the antebellum era campaigned for women's rights and black rights, primarily through their struggle for equality with the clergy. Yet their struggle was conducted in isolation due to the fact that they faced discrimination or had a separate agenda. They often found fulfillment in their individual quests and were quite successful.

Black intellectuals, such as Maria W. Stewart, and preaching women, such as Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Zilpha Elaw, demonstrated courage, fortitude and creative vision. They fought against black disenfranchisement, and they fought for women's rights. Using their own voices and their best talents, these pioneers were triumphant. As late as 1861, after a twenty-year struggle to write her autobiography at night, while spending her days at the beck and call of her employers, ex-slave Harriet A. Jacobs developed, in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, a liberation theology for the abolition of slavery in her own voice. Jacobs steadfastly refused to give her history to an amanuensis or to submit her story to Harriet Beecher Stowe for that "key" to Uncle Tom's Cabin. She recognized that the voice of the female slave must be heard in efforts to abolish slavery. Jacobs also understood the necessity of challenging traditional readings of Scripture which silenced women or promoted the enslavement of blacks. While Jacobs was a participant in the mid-nineteenth-century

abolitionist crusades, she still felt that the voice of a former female slave must be asserted in literature.

Efforts to recover women's recorded heritage for an American feminist theological consciousness should examine the achievements of the women included in this dissertation. Black female spiritual autobiographers individually campaigned for black rights and female rights. The primary focus of this study is an examination of the spiritual autobiographies which contain liberation theologies of black women in the antebellum era. Its aim is to ascertain the means by which black women forged successful religious and secular careers despite racial and sexual oppression in the nineteenth century. While it has been frequently noted by historians that the religion of black Christians helped foster their survival in both free and slave states in the antebellum and postbellum era, it is important to understand the specific religious faith employed by African-American women for their survival. It is hoped, therefore, that this study will participate in the ongoing discussions begun by William Andrews, Marilyn Richardson, and Nellie McKay to chart the birth of spiritual self-empowerment in black women's autobiographies in the antebellum era. A study of this nature requires exploration of the spiritual autobiographers' thoughts, words and feelings as incorporated in their narratives.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGIES

To appreciate fully the challenge black women made to all-male bastions of authority in religious spheres, an examination

of women's history must be included. Chapter One examines the development of a subordinate sphere for women in America and charts as well the development of American racism to demonstrate the overwhelming struggle black women faced in the quest for equality in the clergy.

Chapter Two examines the black autobiographical genre as an introduction to the texts examined in this work. Its aim is also to trace the development of spiritual autobiographies by black women.

Chapter Three examines the spiritual autobiographical writings of Maria W. Stewart. It is a demonstration of Stewart's importance in women's literature. This chapter provides as well a recovery of women's history in a feminist theological heritage. Chapter Three also focuses on Stewart's radical defiance of the ideologies of "true womanhood" and her transcendence of the barriers of race, gender and class through the lecture circuit and the autobiographical genre.

Citing the importance of preserving the arts and letters of black women, twentieth-century author and literary critic Alice Walker asks, "What did it mean for a black woman to be an artist in our grandmother's time? It is a question with an answer cruel enough to stop the blood."[12] Walker continues: "But when, you will ask, did my overworked mother have time to know or to care about feeding the creative spirit?"[13] Walker has a foremother in the nineteenth century who shared similar concerns. Maria W. Stewart bemoans the loss of black women's literary and scientific talents. Stewart writes:

> O, ye fairer sisters, whose hands are never soiled, whose nerves and muscles are never strained, go learn by experience! Had we the opportunity that you have had, to improve our moral and mental faculties, what would have hindered our intellects from being as bright, and our manners from being as dignified as yours? ... Owing to the disadvantages under which we labor, there are many flowers among us that are
>
> "_____born to bloom unseen, And waste their fragrance on the dessert air."[14]

Stewart's appropriate use of lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" indicates her sense that there were many extraordinary black women of exceptional artistic skills. For this reason, Stewart challenged black women to leave legacies for future generations: "O, ye daughters of Africa! What have ye done to immortalize your names beyond the grave? What examples have ye set before the rising generations? What foundations have ye laid for generations yet unborn?"[15] Stewart explores the history of women in biblical times, in ancient Greece and Rome and in the Middle Ages to provide her audience with exemplary foremothers of outstanding intellectual gifts and abilities. Stewart's reclamation of women's heritage introduces oppressed black women in her audiences to the world of possibilities.

Chapter Four is a comparative analysis of the spiritual autobiographies of three free black women in the antebellum era who follow Maria Stewart in creating autobiographies of religious activism. These are Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson and Zilpha Elaw. The autobiographical writings of these women present black female liberation theologies which advocate women's equality in the clergy. The works capture women's

religious heritage through the revival era under the impact of Methodism, which swept the nation in the nineteenth century.

Chapter Five examines the sentimental narrative of Harriet E. Wilson and the slave autobiography of Harriet A. Jacobs to observe first-hand the enslaved black women's awakening to their own individual theologies. Examination of these autobiographies will illustrate that "black women writers had a literature of their own previously hidden by patriarchal [and racist values]."[16] The works included in this dissertation demonstrate that, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues:

> Literary works configure in a tradition not because of some mystical collective unconsciousness determined by the biology of race or gender, but because writers read other writers and ground their representation of experience in models of language provided by other writers to whom they feel akin. It is through this mode of literary revision, amply evident in the texts themselves--in formal echoes, recast metaphors, even in parody--that a 'tradition' emerges and defines itself.[17]

The analysis that this dissertation undertakes is governed by William Andrews assertion that:

> The problem with too much of the criticism that has been written on black autobiography is that it pays too little attention to the social, historical, or ideological significance of the forms of black narrating that have evolved since the mid-eighteenth century. To put it simply, we have read too many black autobiographies as works not as texts.[18]

This dissertation examines the texts of spiritual autobiographers and secular autobiographers in their social, historical, and ideological contexts to better understand how black women developed a self-reliant and an empowered consciousness in nineteenth-century society.

NOTES

[1] William L. Andrews, ed., Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); Marilyn Richardson, ed., Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987); Nellie McKay, "Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Spiritual Autobiographies of Religious Faith and Self-Empowerment," Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives, ed. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989). Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper, 1984); Carol P. Christ, Womanspirit Rising (San Francisco: Harper, 1979); Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, "Women and Revivalism," Women and Religion in America: The Nineteenth Century, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper, 1981); Gerda Lerner, Black Women in White America: A Documentary History (New York: Vintage, 1973); Davida Foy Crabtree, "Women's Liberation and the Church," Women's Liberation and the Church, ed. Sarah Bently Doely, (New York: Association, 1970); and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "Emerging Issues in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper, 1984). Fiorenza recovers the feminist liberation theology of Anna Julia Cooper. See also Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her (New York: Crossroad, 1983). In this work Fiorenza traces the evolution of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's The Woman's Bible. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, The Woman's Bible, Parts I and II (New York: European, 1883; New York: Arno, 1972); Jacquelyn Grant, "A Black Response to Feminist Theology," Woman's Spirit Bonding, eds. Janet Kalven and Mary I. Buckley (New York: Pilgrim, 1985); Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, All We're Meant to Be (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986); Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Delores S. Williams,

"Womanist Theology: Black Women's Voices," Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper, 1989); and Nancy F. Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).

[2] Sue E. Houchins, introduction, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xxix.

[3] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed., "Race," Writing and Difference (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985) 11-12.

[4] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England Reformers," Selected Writings of Emerson, ed. Donald McQuade (New York: Modern Library, 1981) 433.

[5] Emerson 434.

[6] Houchins xxix.

[7] Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination Against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830-1920," The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port-Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1978) 18.

[8] Terborg-Penn 18.

[9] Terborg-Penn 18.

[10] Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (New York: Atheneum, 1973) 44-45.

[11] Flexner 44-45.

[12] Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose (San Diego: Harcourt, 1983) 233.

[13] Walker 233.

[14] Maria W. Stewart, Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (Boston: Friends of Freedom and Virtue, 1835; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 55.

[15] Stewart 6.

[16] Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 16.

[17] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Foreword: In Her Own Write," Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xviii.

[18] William L. Andrews, "Toward a Poetics of Afro-American Autobiography," Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s, eds., Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Patricia Redmond (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 80.

CHAPTER ONE
OVERVIEW:
RELIGION AND POSITIVE SELF-DEFINITION FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN

Many scholars in black literary and historical studies have frequently cited the importance of religion and literature as weapons in the survival of the black community.[1] Literary historian James H. Evans, Jr. notes that religion and literature "have been--and still are--two chief means of resisting oppression and affirming self worth."[2] Evans also notes that the central theme of these two very important facets of black expression is the quest for liberation, a primary feature of the African-American historical experience. Evans further insists on the importance of religion and literature in African-American existence because it is through religion and literature that African-Americans "preserved their collective identities" and redefined themselves for self-preservation in a predominantly hostile American culture. [3]

African-American autobiographies provide important first-hand accounts of that struggle for liberation in the black community. Historian John W. Blassingame's and literary theorist Albert E. Stone's validations of autobiographies as history and literature paved the way for the use of autobiographies as raw data for scholarly research in a variety

of fields.[4] These works are valuable tools in the discovery process of black women's participation in black American religious history and in the survival of the black community. Yet until the 1970s and early 1980s, the autobiographies of black women were even overlooked in African-American historical and literary studies. Nellie McKay suggests that while the black female's contribution to the survival of the black community has been well-documented, her contributions to the religious heritage of that community have often been overlooked.[5] It is only in recent years that scholars have begun to explore black women's spiritual autobiographies and secular autobiographies with a subtext of women's liberation theology as a way of fostering better understanding of how black women participated in that development while maintaining their own particular and separate religious ideologies.[6]

Such autobiographies illustrate further that not all black women passively accepted traditional readings of Biblical texts which promoted sexism, described by feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether as an "historical reality ... in human societies and which further resulted in the exclusion of women from social development in the valued sphere of cultural formation and leadership." [7] Their personal Biblical exegesis fostered the development of the first extant black liberation theologies in American literature. As authors of liberation theologies which included the liberation of all in equivalent personhood, without regard to race or gender, nineteenth-century black female liberation theologians in the spiritual autobiographical tradition radically re-imaged the Divine.[8] For

these females, the Divine was a Deity in favor of the complete liberation of the black female so that she might become spiritual leader, teacher or guide to white males and white females or black males and black females in all possible walks of life. In order to carry out their chosen career, some black female liberation theologians struggled for viable preaching engagements in what is commonly known as promiscuous assemblies.[9]

Documenting the struggle for the right to preach by black female liberation theologians, authors of spiritual autobiographies of religious activism reveal pioneering incidents of bravery and courage. The struggle for the right to preach was a struggle against the political, cultural and social forces in nineteenth-century America. Many nineteenth-century organized church bodies considered the female preacher's struggle for equal opportunity in the pulpit ministry to be at odds with traditional Biblical hermeneutics regarding women's subordinate place. However, the spiritual autobiographies of religious activism by black females indicate that some black females overcame the odds and indeed were able to preach publicly. The success of their quest has far-reaching consequences. Antebellum America was presented a public view, not seen or heard before, of the black female, a figure of political authority in the black community and a spiritual leader, teacher, and guide in predominantly white or racially mixed religious meetings.

In a larger socio-historical context then, black female liberation theologians developed ideologies concerning women's

roles which were not in keeping with nineteenth-century socio-cultural politics of the "cult of true womanhood", the "cult of domesticity", and the tradition of all-male authority in American churches which permeated society. With an examination of the autobiographical writings of black female liberation theologians, any previous notions by historians of a monolithic black female attitude or theology is shattered. Nineteenth-century black female theologians approached life from different economic situations and developed unique personal theologies. However, their theologies share the common grounding of a belief in women's innate equality with men and their right to preach publicly.

Black preaching women in the spiritual autobiographical tradition and black female autobiographers of secular narratives with spiritual subtexts developed personal theologies of female liberation which enabled them to resist nineteenth-century definitions of women's prescribed place and thus to experience degrees of liberation and freedom. Their religious ideologies were not always in agreement with the religious precepts of other black females or black males, nor were they always in agreement with those of white females and white males. The black women included in this dissertation found it necessary to explicitly or implicitly address American concepts of the "true woman" and redefine this term as a means of fostering survival and self-esteem for black women. Without redefinition of notions of "true womanhood," the authors' quest for freedom and liberation within the black community and in society at large might not even have been attempted.

The spiritual and secular narratives chosen for discussion in this dissertation reveal that the authors of these narratives resisted nineteenth-century definitions of "true womanhood" which not only excluded them from such an ideal because of race and class, but which also limited their potential for full humanity. Nineteenth-century black female liberation theologians (authors of spiritual autobiographies) struggled against these exclusions and the narrow definitions of women that limited them in the socio-political realm. Their struggle for the right to preach was a struggle against woman's subordination and against public perceptions of the "true woman". In order to understand fully the necessity of that struggle and the black woman's need to redefine "true woman" in order to survive and achieve selfhood, it will be helpful to begin with a brief examination of black women's history and heritage from colonial times on, along with a parallel examination of American white women's history and heritage. This first chapter begins with an examination of women's religious and secular roles in colonial America, as this era has had a large impact on the development of women's roles throughout American history.

AMERICAN PURITANISM AND ITS EFFECT ON AMERICAN LIVES

New England Puritanism fostered the development of traditional religious beliefs in mainstream American culture. Landing one year after the arrival of African slaves in 1619 colonial Virginia, the Puritan settlers in New England

developed religious views which were quite influential until the mid-nineteenth century. Perry Miller writes:

> Because their societies were tightly organized, and above all because they were a highly articulate people, the New Englanders established Puritanism --for better or worse-- as one of the continuous factors in American life and thought.[10]

Religious conformity was the key to survival within the early Puritan communities; deviation meant societal banishment.[11] As Benjamin W. Labaree notes, the Puritan goal was for a perfect community of Christians, which would serve as a model for other Christian communities to follow.[12] Benjamin W. Labaree notes further:

> Unity meant well-organized towns and congregations and families, but unity also required that individuals subordinate their own interests and values to those of the whole. Failure to do so would result in a weakening of church and society, perhaps even its total disintegration.[13]

In early Puritan New England, clergymen had great power and authority. They were the "first citizens" and leaders. The political and social life was centered in various settlements, formally organized into congregations. Magistrates settled some disputes, but the clergy had veritable power and authority.[14]

If the Puritan influence was great in terms of political and cultural values in American life and thought, this influence was also great in establishing roles for women. Women's subordination to males and to religious authority was firmly established with the arrival of the early Puritan settlers.

WHITE WOMEN'S ROLES AS THE ANTITHESIS OF BLACK WOMEN'S ROLES IN COLONIAL AMERICAN HISTORY

Gerda Lerner's study in women's roles from colonial to nineteenth-century America indicates the significant changes in roles played by American white women. White women in the early colonial era enjoyed a kind of freedom which the majority of black women throughout American history did not.[15] The majority of white women came to colonial America as free women, an opportunity which was never offered a black female.[16] The unusual privileges that white women enjoyed resulted from the need of unmarried Puritan males for more white women in the Puritan community.[17] Puritans considered themselves a special people chosen by God to set up a new world order in the American wilderness. Their destiny was to preserve and to cultivate America for themselves and their descendants. In the Puritan oligarchy, procreation was both a religious and civic duty. However, there was a shortage of white women in the early Puritan settlements. In the 1650's, advertisements were sent to England asking single women and widows to come to the newly established colonies to be the wives of single Puritan males. These messages included offers of acres of land as inducement to becoming a settler.[18] Even women who came as indentured servants were assured of economic security once their tenure ended. In Puritan society, marriage was a very important institution. Marriage was highly valued because it produced white offspring who were vital to the Puritan community and its heritage of racial superiority and religious precepts.

Marriage was also important because many Puritan males needed wives to perform specific tasks. Women made shoes, cloth, clothes, candles, furniture, dishes, and preserves. They grew and cultivated much of the family's food. Without the women's help in making household goods, early Puritan males would not have had the time to do the work they had defined for themselves. Despite their continual and essential contributions to Puritan households, wives were primarily considered men's chief, yet subordinate, assistants in the domestic sphere.[19] Nevertheless, white colonial women enjoyed self-fulfillment to a significant degree. Despite their primary roles as wives, a number of women held an interesting variety of jobs during the colonial era, including such occupations as silversmiths, butchers, upholsterers, and gunsmiths. Women also managed mills and plantations. In addition, they served as jail keepers, journalists, printers and sextons.[20]

It was a duty of both men and women to work during the Puritan era, and women were, more or less, expected to be self-supporting. Women practiced forms of medicine, especially midwifery. Men were excluded from this occupation since it was considered women's domain. However, the professionalization of American medicine in 1765 closed the practice to women.[21] Most of the valued skills in Puritan and colonial society underwent professionalization after 1765, closing the doors to women, who were not allowed in colleges and universities.[22]

As much as women exercised unusual privileges in the Puritan communities, they were not given the ability to

exercise a public voice in theological debates. The seventeenth-century New World settlers brought with them the English model that woman was "politically, socially and legally subordinate to man."[23] Traditional Biblical exegesis giving sanction to Paul's censorship of women's public voice and his denial of women's leadership in traditionally male-dominated spheres was eagerly embraced by the strict Puritan clergy. For the Puritan clergy, woman was inherently inferior to man, an ideology rooted in Christian tradition: "The first is, to submit herselfe to her husband; and to reverence him as her head in all things."[24] "In the Puritan hierarchy as men were subordinate to God, so were women subordinate to men."[25] This was based on 1 Corinthians 11:3 which reads, "... the head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man: and the head of Christ is God." John Robinson, pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, advised the settlers in Plymouth, Massachusetts, that: "... more especially the Lord requires in the man love and wisdom; and in the woman subjection. Eph.v. 22-25.... In the wife is specially required a reverend subjection in all lawful things to her husband. Eph. v. 22, 7c."[26] Women were thus restricted from theological debate and decision-making. These religious restrictions were also political restrictions in the Puritan oligarchy.[27]

The first female to openly challenge religious conformity and the silencing of women's voice in the early Puritan settlement was Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643), a major participant in the Antinomian controversy which took place between 1636 and 1638 in Boston, Massachusetts. Hutchinson's activities

indicate that American women had been fighting for participation in theological debates as well as the right to leadership roles in religious assemblies since the early colonial era. Hutchinson, a follower of Puritan elder John Cotton had heard him preach in Lincolnshire, England, before he left for America. Cotton had preached a "covenant of grace" which advocated that knowledge of Jesus was more essential than strict adherence to Biblical law. Hutchinson embraced Cotton's teaching and became an active believer in his doctrines. While Cotton's theology matured and conformed more to the theology in his Puritan community, Hutchinson, along with her husband Will and six children, continued in the belief Cotton had earlier advocated. In 1634 they arrived in Boston seeking to practice freely the religious practices and precepts they had developed in England.

In America, Hutchinson led religious meetings in her own home with males in attendance. Meetings of this sort were permissible for women because home-based religious meetings were not in conflict with current interpretations of Pauline theology. According to canonical scripture, women could hold private religious meetings in their homes.[28] Neither Hutchinson nor any other Puritan female could openly address a church religious assembly; however, they could address mixed audiences of males and females in at-home religious meetings. One of her more visible followers in these meetings was Henry Vane, a man who had formerly been a Royal Counselor in England. Vane arrived at the Boston Colony at the time that colonists sought to relieve John Winthrop of his governorship. Vane was elected

governor and became a follower of Hutchinson. Vane's visibility and political power helped to draw more converts to Hutchinson's religious philosophy than might have otherwise come.[29]

Another visible follower of Hutchinson was John Wheelwright, a teacher in the Boston church. Wheelwright asserted Hutchinson's theology publicly. As the Hutchinsonians increased in number, many Puritan elders felt that not only the purpose but the peace of the entire American Puritan settlement was threatened.

The Hutchinsonians were considered antinomian, people who developed 'doctrines against the law'. A major tenant of Hutchinson's theology was that "the moral law is not binding upon Christians, who are under the law of grace." [30] Anything that fell short of an experience of union with God was considered by the Hutchinsonians as a covenant of works. [31] The Puritans were not a tolerant group. Rowland H. Allen writes: "Religion and laws were closely intertwined in the Puritan community. The government felt itself bound to expatriate every disorderly person...."[32] Allen continues: "They knew nothing of toleration. They had not thought of *that*..."[33]

Winthrop and other members of the organized Puritan establishment believed in exacting methods of sanctification. They had an established concept of preparation. Upon admission to the Puritan church, believers seeking membership were expected to pass before a tribunal and to give correct answers to religious questions. These questions centered primarily

upon the steps by which the believer had come to his or her conversion. Depending upon the answers, believers were either admitted or not admitted to the Puritan church.

As a perceived threat to Puritan government, Hutchinson was tried for heresy.[34] At this time, Hutchinson participated in public theological debates, but only as a result of her trial. Hutchinson was found guilty of preaching a false doctrine and, as a consequence, was excommunicated and banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637.[35] After her banishment, Hutchinson initially moved to Aquidneck,[36] Rhode Island, and later to Pelham, New York. She was subsequently "killed by the Indians"[37] in 1643.

For all of her efforts, Huchinson was never granted the opportunity to conduct lay religious meetings publicly or to participate in public theological debates (except, of course, at her trial for heresy which she could never have hoped to win). Historian Thomas Hutchinson laments the fact that Mrs. Hutchinson is "known in posterity" because "confusion in the colony" was heard in England.[38] However, recovery of Anne Hutchinson's quest for equality in public theological debates is important for American women's history.

After a temporary "aberration," the Puritan colony once again became a thriving community of religious conformity in which women's views were not given public hearing. This was applicable as well to women's desire for church membership. The Puritan elders passed an ordinance in 1648 stipulating that: "Thereupon the party, if it be a man, speaketh himselfe; but if it be a woman, her confession made before the Elders in

private is most usually...read by the Pastor, who registers the same."[39] In this important era of preindustrial America, Puritan women were secondary citizens--whether orthodox or unorthodox. Although under the Puritan oligarchy women could achieve salvation equally with men, since God was no respecter of persons, this potential was not seen as applicable to the earthly realm where women were considered of inferior social and physical status.[40]

In Puritan economy, male and female roles were considered as "complementary parts of one whole."[41] Yet they were not equal. Complementary parts of one whole meant that male and female must become united to create life. With the creation of life, the Old Testament sanctions regarding women's ordained place as being dependent and subordinate to her husband were thought to be applicable to Puritan women.

Elder Cotton Mather wrestled with his belief that some women were the spiritual and intellectual equals of men. In 1692, the New England elder published his highly influential Ornaments For the Daughters of Zion.[42] Mather was quite progressive in his theology in that he affirmed that God inspired women to write Holy Scripture. Mather stated:

> ...that precious Bible... the curious Workmanship whereof, the Hand of a *Woman* has contributed? How ready should *Women* be to read the pages upon which they may see transcribed, the heavenly discoveries made by the God of Heaven to an Holy Woman.... We have not only the Song of Deborah, the Song of Hannah, the Song of Mary, and the Prophecy of Huldah in this matchless Book of God; but the Instructions of Bathshebah too, are entered in the blessed Registers. The thirty first Chapter of Proverbs contains a direction of Bathshebah to her darling Solomon.[43]

While Mather asserts that: "...divers women have been the Writers of his Declarative Word," he ultimately believed in woman's prescribed place as subordinate to men.

Churches in the colonial era preached (following the New Testament) that women might be saved by performing their most important wifely duty--bearing children. White women in the colonial era, although frightened of dying in childbirth, embraced childbirth as a means of earning a place in heaven.[44] An economic system which demanded large families so that many hands could help on farms, societal belief in the multiplication command of Genesis 1:28, and the lack of adequate birth control, resulted in many women bearing a large number of children. Due to the astronomical rate of stillbirths and infant mortality, and the large numbers of pregnancies resulting in the death of the mother, women had extreme and ambivalent feelings about childbirth.[45]

Ministers, as a consequence, preached Pauline theology which insisted that Eve's curse was the cause of difficult or fatal pregnancies; yet these pregnancies were the possible gateway to blessed immortality. For Cotton Mather, salvation through childbirth was conditional. Only if women were virtuous could they expect to experience the gift of God's saving grace. Women embraced the theology that death through childbirth would allow them entrance into heaven if they were obedient to their husbands (respecting the natural authority of males) and lived holy lives. Mather states:

> Now as concerning the Wives Duty, What shall become her? Shall she abuse the gentleness and humanity of her

> Husband, and at her pleasure turn all things upside down? Now ... that is far repugnant against God's Commandment; for thus doth St. Peter preach to them, "To Wives, be ye in subjection to obey your own Husbands..... Holy Matrons did in former time...[put] their whole hope in God, and in obeying their Husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord.... they refused not from Marriage for the business thereof, for the gifts and perils thereof.[46]

For the naturally barren woman, Mather made provisions. Such a woman might have the:

> *Occassion* of her *eternal Happiness*, by the Spiritual Fulness whereto she is thereby excited and afflicted; it causes her to be more fruitful in all the good works of *Piety* and Charity; more *fruitful* in her Endeavours otherwise to *serve her Generation* after the Will of God.[47]

Consequently, the traditional sphere for men and women in early American society remained intact to a large extent, with women and men becoming equal only in death.[48]

While it has been argued that throughout the history of America, white women's lives have been similar to those of black female slaves,[49] historical evidence proves that this is an oversimplification. Nancy F. Cott writes: "The analogy between white women, and black slaves, vis-a-vis their white masters--their common treatment as property rather than human beings, their dependent status, etc.--has been noted by critical observers in America...." Cott continues: "This analogy sheds light on the status of women, though it somewhat obscures the larger ramifications of slave status and racism."[50]

White women in the colonial era were given many privileges not enjoyed by black women. Even indentured women had a more privileged role than black women: The white female indentured servant might have complained of her lot and that she toiled

"almost Day and Night, and very often in the Horses druggery,... and then tied up and whipp'd to that Degree that you'd not serve an Animal, scare any thing but Indian Corn and Salt to eat and that even begrudged...."[51] But the indentured servant could serve for an appointed time and gain her freedom at the end of her tenure while the black woman was a slave for life.

AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN COLONIAL AND PRE-COLONIAL AMERICAN HISTORY

The condition of privileged and lower-class white women in the colonial era was decidedly different from that of the black female. Although in the socio-political sphere the free white woman was accorded subordinate and inferior status to the male, she was still accorded a fully human status in the eyes of the church and society in the colonial era.

This was not so with black females. Forcibly brought in chains to colonial Virginia in 1619, black males and females were not accorded fully human status. From that time on along with black males, black women were involved in a struggle for survival, a struggle to use positive self-identification and communal solidarity in order to withstand racial discrimination and oppression in America. Their struggle for self-esteem and self-affirmation began in the colonial era with their initial arrival as slaves. A brief examination of colonial history might provide some explanation.

As early as the sixteenth century, Western Europeans had begun to define Africans as inhuman, beastly, immoral and incapable of civilization and Christianization. American

colonists had heard these criticisms of the supposed immorality of Africans before encountering the Africans themselves. Many rumors were spread through sixteenth-century Western European travel narratives, published in the mid-sixteenth century. Western Europeans had a healthy appetite for travel narratives and read them avidly hoping for any bit of information about people in different countries. These narratives and journals provided entertainment for those who could not travel to those far-off places. [52]

The kind of entertainment these narratives provided is explained by historian Winthrop D. Jordan. Jordan states that the earliest English descriptions of West Africa and West Africans were written by "adventurous" English travelers searching for profitable trading experiences around 1550. These travelers were affronted by what they considered "differences" in West African people, culture and society. The most striking "difference" for the mid-sixteenth century English traveler was that of appearance, notably the dark skin color of the West African. For the English traveler, the darkness in skin color constituted an anomaly and possible disfigurement. "Travelers rarely failed to comment upon it; indeed when describing Africans they frequently began with complexion and then moved on to dress (or, as they saw it, lack of it) and manners."[53]

For Europeans, blackness had many intense and negative connotations. Blackness as a concept was the direct opposite of whiteness. "White and black connotated purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil. Whiteness,

moreover, carried a special significance... it was, ... when complemented by red, the color of perfect human beauty, especially *female* beauty."[54] It is not surprising, then, that ethnocentric Englishmen with a concept of white supremacy considered West Africans ugly by reason of "color", "hair" and "disfigured lips and nose."[55]

The concept of blackness as an anomaly persisted even a century later. Jordan writes: "It was important, if incalculably so, that the English discovery of black Africa came at a time when the accepted English standard of ideal beauty was a fair complexion of rose and white. Negroes seemed the very picture of perverse negation." [56]

European ethnocentricity rendered West Africans savage. Jordan writes: "... savagery--the failure to be civilized - set Negroes apart from Englishmen in an ill-defined but crucial fashion. Africans were different from Englishmen in so many ways in their clothing, housing, farming, warfare, language, government, morals."[57]

A further distinction which set West Africans apart from the Englishmen was the lack of a Christian religion. Christianity, according to the sixteenth-century English mind, was the only religion of merit. The sixteenth-century English global "yardstick"[58] found any overtly "unchristian" country heathen, uncivilized, immoral, savage, and significantly inferior. This factor enhanced the English concept that West Africans were uncivilized.[59]

This notion, however, demonstrates the reductive nature of racial marginalization, illustrating that notions of "other"

lead to misunderstanding of a racial group and are a contributing factor in both scholarly and socio-political dismissal of a race's heritage.

> The most important aspect of the English reaction to African heathenism was that Englishmen evidently did not regard it as separable from the Negroes' other attributes. Heathenism was treated not so much as a specifically religious defect but as one manifestation of a general refusal to measure up to proper standards, as a failure to be English or even civilized.[60]

These differences were emphasized in order to "condemn deviations from the English norm."[61]

In fairness to colonial African-American female slaves, as well as to point out the fallacy of the "English yardstick," attention must be given to Henry Mitchell's research in African and African-American religions and cultures. Mitchell convincingly argues that any historical theory which suggests that all Africans became "Christian' only after 'enlightenment' in America is deficient. Mitchell's research indicates that Christianity penetrated Western Africa long before European Christianity existed.

> The Greek roots of Euro-American Christianity are, via Egypt, largely from Africa. The African commonality with Old Testament tradition is well-documented, along with the early land bridge between East Africa and Asia Minor. Thus shared prehistoric cultural roots, combined with the shared issues of all human experience, easily explain the similarities between the world view of late-blooming Northern Europe and early-blooming West Africa.[62]

Mitchell continues:

> The sustaining power and effectiveness of the Black American adaptation of West African reading of reality was at work prior to evangelization by whites, and its strength was so great that it has been constantly used and

> carefully preserved ever since the first gathering of slaves in the United States managed to communicate with each other. The process was... more folk cultural than consciously intellectual, and often more unconsciously than consciously religious. But it sustained Black survival.[63]

European Christians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had strict codes governing sexual behavior. When English travelers venturing to the African continent recounted what they considered "relaxed" sexual practices of the native Africans, European Christians were horrified. The Europeans' concept of racial superiority made them quick to consider inferior any nation with different racial characteristics, modes of behavior, mores and customs. This, combined with European concepts of sexual monogamy, made them consider native Africans savage and incapable of civilization.

"People in Africa unlike their European contemporaries practiced pragmatic approaches to human sexuality, such as arranging for the fulfillment of sexual needs 'in absentia' when spouses were deceased or otherwise away." [64] Polygamy practiced by African slaves further impressed upon white Christian minds the belief that Africans were immoral. Some tribes in Africa subscribed to the practice of "levirate"--a widow being "inherited" by her brother-in-law as a means of providing the children of the deceased with an inheritance. Levirate custom as continually practiced in African countries such as Tanzania and Kenya is stated as follows:

> When a husband dies his widow may either: (A) continue to live in her deceased husband's home in which case she may cohabit with either (1) one of her dead husband's brothers (2) one of her husband's male relatives or (3) any man who has been adopted into the deceased husband's clan..." [65]

This practice further solidified stereotypes about black women in the Western European racial conceptual framework. When black women came to America, the impression of blacks given in travel narratives became the standard by which all black women and men were judged. The "relaxed" sexual practices of the Africans which were different from the "strict" sexual codes of European Christians further enlarged negative concepts about African women. European ethnocentrism rendered the social behavior and religious practices of most members of the 'darker' races as immoral and inferior. Considering the European concept of beauty as the only true standard of beauty, Western Europeans saw no redeeming value in the physical features of Africans which contrasted in large part with those of Western Europeans. This European standard of beauty contributed to concepts of black women and men by white colonials as a marginal sub-standard version of humanity.

One might argue that the colonial American yardstick measuring moral behavior and civilized practice was at best flawed. Indeed colonial Americans, while frowning on the sexual behavior of others, themselves engaged in relaxed sexual behavior. Page Smith argues that although colonial Puritan Christians seemed to embrace the strictest codes concerning sexual practices, this was not always the case. Smith writes:

> Since lovers had often to delay their marriages, the Plymouth Colony instituted a religious practice known as pre-contract. Under its terms a couple might appear before two witnesses and declare their intention of marrying. Thus betrothed, they were allowed a remarkable degree of privacy and liberty. Pre-contract was in fact, a kind of semi-or trial marriage, and sexual intercourse "in time of contract" was clearly distinguished from

> fornication.... The frequency of premarital intercourse is astonishing to the modern mind, but the important fact is that by far the majority of such incidents took place under the pre-contract or between the couples whose intention it was to marry and who considered themselves betrothed." [66]

Again, it may be asserted that the English yardstick employed to measure difference or to point out "failure" to be English was at least "adjustable".

AFRICAN SLAVES AND RACIAL PREJUDICE

Historian John B. Boles notes that as early as 1619 racial prejudice against blacks was evident.[67] Historian Alden T. Vaughn also notes in his research concerning the years between 1619 and 1629 that black women and men brought to colonial Virginia had a rather debased status in the eyes of white settlers.[68] The arrival of African slaves was documented by white settler John Rolfe in 1620. Rolfe reported the arrival of a Dutch man of war and incidentally the arrival of African slaves.

> "About the last of August [1619] came in a dutch man of warre that sold vs twenty Negars [this was the first introduction of Negro slavery into Virginia]: and Iapazous King of Patawomeck came to Iames towne to desire two ships to come trade in his Riuer, for a mere plentifull yeere of Corne had not been in a long time, yet very contagious, and by the treachery of one Poule, in a manner turned heather wee were very iealous the Saluages would surprize vs.[69]

The "twenty Negars" received only brief mention as so much produce from harvest. No attempt was made to accord the slaves any further regard.

The census of 1624-1625 of colonial Virginia presents evidence that a profound prejudice against blacks was already

in existence. John Boles notes that the census contains the full names of living white persons, but full names of blacks are not recorded.[70] Blacks are simply listed as "one Negor", or a "Negors woman". In "Lists of the Livinge and the Dead" in Virginia blacks were listed in like manner:

negors
negors
negors
negors
negors
negors

a Negors woman.[71]

Very few names of the living and dead are incomplete for white settlers, but blacks are only partially named or not at all. If names were listed of blacks, the list appeared in the manner described below:

Anthony
William Negors Men
John
Anthony [72]

Such a list denoted the inferior place of blacks.

John Winthrop's revision of the neoclassical Great Chain of Being might help illustrate why concepts of racial superiority were predominant in the Puritan and Colonial society. Winthrop's famous sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," was delivered in 1630 in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean while he was onboard a ship destined for America. In this sermon, Winthrop presented the model of a successful and cooperative Christian community. Winthrop told his listeners that they would be the "city on the Hill", the Christian

community that the entire civilized world would come to emulate. Winthrop also told his listeners that partiality was demonstrated in God's creation of humanity. The Deity, Winthrop continued, made some humans inferior whose station in life was to serve others:

> God Almightie in his most holy and wise providence hath soe disposed of the Condicion of mankinde, as in all times some must be rich, some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subieccion.
>
> First, to hold conformity with the rest of his workes, being delighted to shewe forthe the glory of his wisdome in the variety and difference of the Creatures and the glory of his power, in ordering all these differences for the preservacion and good of the whole, and the glory of his greatness....
>
> Secondly, That he might haue the more occasion to manifest the works of his Spirit; first, vpon the wicked in moderateing and restraining them; soe that the riche and mighty should not eate vpp the poore, nor the poore, and dispised rise vpp against their superiours, and shake off their yoake; 2ly in the regenerate in exerciseing his graces in them, as in the greate ones, their loue mercy, gentlenes, temperance etc., in the poore and inferiour sorte, their faithe patience, obedience etc.[73]

Although seemingly powerless before a white majority, American black women demonstrated both the will to resist negative definitions imposed upon them by the white power structure and the desire to transcend oppression. For example, in 1655, Elizabeth Key, the illegitimate daughter of Thomas Key and an unmarried slave, brought suit for her freedom on the grounds that her father was a freeman. Her attorney was William Greensted. In 1636, at the age of five, Key had been enslaved to Humphrey Higginson, a tenure which lasted for nine years. In 1655, Key was passed into the possession of Colonel

John Mottrom, a Northumberland justice of the peace. When Mottrom died in 1655, Key brought suit for her freedom.

American common law in 1655 held that children inherited their father's condition. Key also brought suit on other grounds. Having been baptized a Christian, Key felt she could not be held in slavery for life.

Key initially lost her case, but her attorney filed an appeal before the General Assembly. The assembly, in turn, appointed a committee of burgesses to study the matter further. In the ensuing interval George Colelough, overseer of Mottrom's estate, gained permission from Governor Edward Digges to rehear the case before the General Court. Colelough, however, decided not to pursue the matter further. Key's attorney was granted an order for nonsuit against Colelough and Key subsequently achieved a victory.[74]

Throughout colonial history blacks embraced a version of Christianity geared to black survival. In the chattel system of slavery, black children were either placed on the market like cattle or included in existing plantation accounts as additional slaves. One of the important reasons African women became Christians during the early colonial era was to gain hope for themselves and their children. In 1660, in colonial Virginia, a newly Christianized slave could apply for freedom and be granted it under the new statute of redemption. Christianization normally led to freedom from slavery. For this reason, many slave holders opposed any doctrine meant to teach the slaves about their humanity and their ability to become rightful heirs to salvation. Yet black women along with black

men embraced Christianity. Becoming Christian, many slave women felt, would be one way of overcoming negative definitions. The public acceptance of American Christianity would enable them to elevate their "dehumanized" status slightly. However, freedom (upon public acceptance of Christianity) was experienced by only a few blacks. Initially, black church attendance was not allowed by many slave holders for fear that Christian slaves would be freed. By the late 1660s Massachusetts, Virginia and other English colonies had taken steps to make sure that slavery was a self-perpetuating institution. In 1667, Virginia legislated that baptism does not alter slave status. Other states followed suit, ensuring that baptism did not alter slave status.[75] Masters then realized they could Christianize slaves without fear of losing property.[76] This resulted in much time spent in slave religious instruction. Slaveholders did much to insure that property would not be lost because of the slave's acquisition of self-esteem, which the Christian doctrine, if appropriately taught or read, might possibly result in. Therefore, religious instruction for the slaves was a slanted version of the Christian doctrine, which emphasized loyal servitude. Literacy for slaves was against the law and a punishable offense, so slaves usually did not have access to the written language.

The common brotherhood and sisterhood of the human race was not emphasized in Biblical exegesis given the slave by others. Rather, emphasis was placed on the slaves' loyalty and blind obedience to an earthly master. Slaves were taught that God had made them servants to whites and that they would gain a

reward in heaven for loyal service. Slaves were admonished to be obedient to their masters in all areas of life or reap not only earthly punishment but punishment in the afterlife as well.

Other factors might account for the almost overwhelming acceptance of Christianity by slaves in the colonial era. With the gradual acceptance throughout the colonies of slavery as a legal institution, blacks looked to religion for hope and redefined their religion so that it would meet their needs.[77] Christianity was the religious belief chosen by the majority of slaves in the New World as a means of providing hope and group solidarity.[78] It also provided individual and collective self-esteem and self-worth. Slaves who could read shared uplifting and psychologically helpful Biblical passages with other slaves who could not read. Many black women in America were involved in this aggressiveness to pass on a redemptive version of Christianity for blacks. In the nineteenth century, Harriet A. Jacobs continued the tradition of imparting knowledge of "true Christianity"--a tradition defined by early African-American slaves as a Christian gospel which does not teach the inherent inferiority of Africans and their descendants. It was frequently necessary that black women and black men undertake responsibility for introduction to the Christian faith as some black and white preachers were agents of slave masters who delivered biased versions of scripture.[79]

Slave women and men also sought Christianity as a solace against negative definition and oppression. By the late 1600s, chattel slavery was deeply entrenched in colonial American

history and consciousness and had become a self-perpetuating institution. In 1688, the Germantown Friends felt compelled to publish the first religious testimony against slavery ever to be printed in America. Members of the Society of Friends declared: "... to bring men hither or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against." [80] In 1693, Quaker George Keith published "Pamphlet Against Slavery" arguing that "perpetual Bondage and Slavery" was "intollerable Punishment." Using Biblical exegesis, Keith argued that as it was wrong to buy "stollen Goods", it was also wrong to buy "stollen slaves; neither should such as have them keep them and their Prosperity in Perpetual Bondage and slavery, as is usually done, to the great scandal of the Christian profession." [81]

In addition to the Friends listed above, many other Friends attacked slavery. In 1754, John Woolman, tailor and shopkeeper, attacked slavery in his publication Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes.[82] In 1762, Anthony Benezet attacked the slave trade as being based on greed and avarice and denounced slavery as "an evil of so deep a Dye." [83]

Yet as eloquent as these voices were, they were "futile"[84] in abolishing slavery. Many black men and women found comfort in a political religious vision that offered not only a future and a hope, but also a belief in liberation from the dehumanizing and self-perpetuating institution of American slavery for themselves and their descendants. Throughout the early colonial era, African-Americans struggled to survive and find liberation from slavery.

BLACK WOMEN RESIST OPPRESSION

The history of black women in the colonial era supports the theory that quite a few black women resisted negative definitions, stereotypes, and oppression. In 1745, Elizabeth Hood and her husband filed a lawsuit against Adam Jourdan for slander, seeking payment for damages done to her reputation in the black community:

> ...Whereas the said Elizabeth is a good true faithful and honest...Subject of our Lord, the King... herself... of good name fame creditt and reputation as well amongst her neighbours.. with whom [she] always hath bee free from all manner of Incontinence adultery or the Suspicion thereof.... Nevertheless the said Adam not being ignorant of the promises but well knowing the same and envying the happy state and condition of her the said Elizabeth but Contriving and Intending... her good name,fame, Creditt and Reputation to hurt, and to bring her into the hate and Evil opinion of all her Neighbours...Subjects of our said Lord the King falsly Scandously & publickly did say and with a loud voice publish malitiously to the said William Hood of the said Elizabeth his wife these false, Scandalous & Defamatory
> English Words Viz, Take your damned Negro whore.. home with you,..upon which the said Adam then and there in the hearing of the Subjects aforesaid Said & replied "you... Sent your damned Negro whore of a Wife,... to abuse my folks - go you son of a whore, ... with her...to Maryland and bring the negro bastard home with [you],....[85]

Although not all black women had access to the tools of vindication and justice available to Elizabeth Hood, another black women filed a petition against injustice done to her in slavery. In 1782, an outraged slave woman named Belinda made known her anger about her permanent slave status. Court documents indicate that Belinda came to America as a child and was made a slave in the United States for the rest of her life. Belinda's petition presents a first-hand account of the seizure

and capture of a slave girl. For fifty years Belinda toiled as a slave:

> She [came to] know that her doom was slavery from which death alone was to emancipate [her]. The laws rendered her incapable of receiving property: and though she was a free moral agent, accountable for own actions, yet never she had a moment of her own disposal! Fifty years her faithful hands have been compelled to ignoble servitude for the benefit of an Issac Royall....[86]

While Belinda's petition indicates the tremendous outrage she felt resulting from her slave-status, Belinda remained a slave. As chattel slaves, black women were victims of exploitation in other areas. They worked alongside black males clearing fields, chopping trees or planting crops. Initially black men outnumbered black women in colonial Virginia and in many other Southern and Northern colonies. This was due in large part to the fact that black females were considered a less desirable purchase.[87] This attitude began to change with the breeding practices of slaveholders. Breeding was a less expensive method of expanding the slave population. This form of sexual exploitation convinced whites that black women were immoral and impure. Breeding practices informed by attitudes that the black woman was immoral thus helped to support those attitudes. While breeding was a form of sexual exploitation, it also caused many enslaved black women to suffer another form of loss--the loss of the right to their bodies and the right to their children. Rape and breeding practices were conducted with impunity as white males, for the most part, were rarely held accountable for impregnating black females in early colonial America. In the case of sexual exploitation of a white indentured servant,

however, the perpetrator was forced to pay for the resulting loss of service or was reprimanded publicly.

THE FOUNDING OF THE FIRST ORGANIZED BLACK CHURCH

The black church fostered black survival within slavery. The faith of the black American community originated in this institution, yet the original black church was an invisible institution-- informal and secret meetings held usually at night on a far section of the plantation for prayer and deliverance from slavery. These meetings remained secret so that the survival of blacks in slavery could be realized. In these secret meetings, blacks adopted a Christian doctrine that would meet their special needs in slavery. This Christianity was a synthesis of their masters' versions of Christianity and the West African beliefs of their native lands. In this invisible institution, Blacks affirmed themselves and provided inner resistance against the onslaught of brutal oppression of the slave master.

In the invisible institution of the black church, blacks learned to re-image God as a Deity of black liberation. Blacks re-imaged themselves as not worthless, but as God's chosen people. By linking themselves to the 400-year enslavement of the Biblical Jews, blacks saw similarities between their own condition and that described in the Exodus. God was a Deity of black liberation. The situation was similar. Working for a harsh taskmaster with scant nourishment, under brutal conditions and under a harsh sun, they experienced conditions which were parallel to those of Jews. The teachings of the

black church suggested that God would deliver and punish the oppressor for the wrongs done to God's chosen people.

For this reason, black theologian and religious historian Olin P. Moyd defines the black Christian tradition as an oral tradition, kerygmatic in nature, used to spread the 'good news': the gospel of hope for enslaved Africans. Moyd argues that the black religious tradition was necessarily kerygmatic because blacks were not permitted literacy; it was also a resistance to some white interpretations of Christianity which taught blacks that they were inferior and created by God particularly and specifically to serve slave masters.[88]

The slave master taught the slaves an abusive version of Christ as a suffering savior who was meek and mild, willing also to give his life for his enemies. This conception of Jesus was held out to the slaves as a model of obedience. Slaves once again adapted this image to meet their needs and embraced Jesus as a Saviour who would provide them hope, redemption and an escape from the midst of oppression. Their Christology helped them survive an evil institution that would have extinguished many racial groups. [89]

Yet Christianity was also attractive to the Africans because of the "life after death" tenet. In their original belief systems, West African slaves thought that after death they would join African ancestors in their homeland, and, not surprisingly, they found this concept appealing.[90] The Christian religion had other belief patterns that were familiar to original African beliefs, for instance, the idea of one God, an all-powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent creator of the

universe. Likewise, Yoruba religion contained concepts usually associated with Christianity. Intercession, repentance, pardon, faith, and adoption were concepts familiar to Americans of African descent.[91]

1640 marked the beginning of an era in which some religious whites in the colonial era were organized in an effort to Christianize all blacks. American Indians and African slaves were seen as fertile soil for the harvesting of souls to Christianity. Roman Catholic churches in Western colonies were the first religious organizations to teach Christianity to blacks. In the American Western colonies, black males were given recognition by the Catholic clergy.[92]

Some African slaves in America found inner freedom in the Catholic Church and were taught the doctrine of equality of all men. In pre-industrial western America colonies, blacks were recognized by the Catholic clergy as having the potential to become members of the clergy. Xavier de Lung Victoria, son of a freedman, became a priest after his conversion to Catholicism.[93] Even so, the opposition against preaching to all people regardless of color was rampant throughout the colonies. The opposition meant that Maryland was the only state where blacks could be taught by Roman Catholics. However, relaxation of these strictures meant that "evangelicalism" of blacks soon took root in all the colonies.[94]

The efforts of the Catholic church paved the way for the introduction of African slaves to Christianity. However, once the door was open, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian religious sects seized the opportunity to introduce slaves to

their beliefs. The campaign to Christianize all blacks became the norm in many colonial Protestant churches by the 1740s.[95]

Another important era in which some whites sought to Christianize blacks was the Great Awakening (1739 to 1743), which centered on two religious sects jockeying for power. They were the Baptist and Methodist religious denominations, both of which had great appeal for the underprivileged and working classes.[96] American Methodism thrived in the Great Awakening. Black people found this religion very appealing: "...through its unconventional revivals, its challenge to social norms and its appeal to the lower and middle classes, it encouraged alienated blacks to believe that society was on the verge of a major transformation that would hasten their liberation."[97] While the Presbyterian religious sect also participated in the effort to Christianize blacks, their efforts were not as successful as those of the Methodist and Baptist sects.

During the Great Awakening (1739-1743), churches attracted black women in large numbers. The movement initiated "Christianity for all,"[98] regardless of race, color, or social status, in many denominations. The Methodist church, however, had the largest increase in black membership, due to its ideology that any unsaved soul was fertile soil for instruction in Methodist theology. The Great Awakening, which swept over all the colonies with great rapidity, was largely responsible for the conversion of many black women in the colonial era to American Christianity.[99]

Even during the Great Awakening, most slaveholders were still hesitant about the unsupervised teaching of Christianity to their slaves despite the 1667 legislation that baptism would not alter slave status. There was concern that slaves taught about the common brotherhood and sisterhood of all humanity would begin to sue for their rights and privileges as a part of humanity and further recognize that slavery was against 'true' Christian theology. Even so, many members of the Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian religious sects were convincing in their argument that slaves needed religious instruction. For this reason, large numbers of Southern blacks in the 1740s received Christian instruction.

Methodist and Baptist religious sects rose to prominence in the black population.[100] This is testified to in modern times by the fact that most blacks are either Methodists or Baptists.[101] While white members of most Methodist congregations did not feel that slaves should be freed, the General Conference (the governing body of the Methodist churches) was antislavery.

Blacks were drawn to the Methodist and Baptist churches during the first great Awakening in large part due to the antislavery messages preached in these churches. However, these churches did not offer full membership to black members. In the Methodist churches in the North, blacks and whites generally worshipped together, albeit in separate sections. Although black membership increased in the Methodist churches, blacks were not given the same rights and privileges as white members. They left the church in anger and displeasure over

the inequitable treatment they received. Although blacks could attend the church, they were frequently relegated to separate sections of the church. As a result, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1787, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church was formed ten years later. This movement gradually led to the formation of other black churches.

The establishment and founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is important in black women's religious history because the first black female minister in mainstream black Methodism was Jarena Lee, who achieved religious conversion under its founder Reverend Richard Allen. In 1787 in Philadelphia, Richard Allen, with the help of Absalom Jones, William White, and Darins Jinnings, founded the first organized black church in America, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Heretofore, members of the black community in the North, who also attended white churches, felt the need to hold secret meetings because of discrimination.[102] They, like enslaved blacks, also felt a need to re-image the Divine because of the racial discrimination, segregation, and disenfranchisement they suffered in the North. In these secret meetings, blacks rebelled against notions by a white majority that they lacked souls or fully human status.

Open rebellion came to pass in an historical moment when Allen and other blacks, former members of the St. George Methodist Church in 1787, walked out of a religious service in protest against the segregation of blacks from whites in the church. Black communicants had formerly been permitted to sit with whites in the church assembly. However, with the passage

of Jim Crow laws, blacks were restricted to a gallery of the church apart from the white members. Allen, Jones, White and Jinnings refused to abide by Jim Crow laws because they considered them inhumane to black members of the church. Since blacks and whites had previously worshipped together in Philadelphia, these members found Jim Crow laws hypocritical and not in keeping with Christian traditions.[103]

The founding members of the earliest black church were former slaves, illiterate yet possessing a strong sense of self-worth and dignity. In fact, Richard Allen had preached before white congregations in the church. The founding institution--born in political resistance against inhumane treatment of free blacks in the North--began a tradition that continued to be realized in the black church. Even before the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, the black church was not specifically just a place for worship. It was also a place which developed leadership in religious and secular areas as well as marketable skills for blacks through educational or vocational training.[104]

The black church, historically created as a political institution, has thus always been a means for blacks as a group to resist oppression. Historically a haven against oppression and hostility, it was a social place for blacks to meet and to confirm their humanity. It is not surprising that a church born in a political spirit of rebellion and quest for freedom shortly after the American Revolution would sponsor the political religious quest for public voice by Jarena Lee and a number of black Methodist women who followed Lee in the quest

for public voice and who also left records as to that acquisition. As Jean McMahon Humez notes, the institution of black Methodism sponsored the quest for public voice by black women.[105]

Almost since its inception in America, white Methodism as a religious sect has been recognized for its vehement opposition to slavery, though not all church members have upheld this view. Northern Methodism was appealing to blacks because it offered slaves equality with the clergy. As noted earlier, Reverend Richard Allen was one of the few black men who were preachers in the Methodist church. Freedmen eagerly responded to the ideologies of equality in heaven.[106] However, the large number of African-American members caused problems for the Methodist churches in both the North and South, more specifically so in the Southern Methodist churches. When the Methodist church established revivals in the South, white Southern members could not countenance sharing church worship with black members. In addition, Southern blacks did not trust Southern Methodists. The overwhelming conception was that Southern Methodists were desirous of sending free blacks back into slavery.[107] Ex-slave Frederick Douglass and nineteenth-century spiritual autobiographer Amanda Berry Smith recounted the hypocritical practices of Methodist teachers who held slaves as a means of gaining wealth.[108]

CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN SURVIVAL

Christianity must never be ridiculed as an opiate in the black religious experience. Christianity promoted racial survival that should not have been possible during four hundred years of oppression against African-Americans. By focusing on future hope of deliverance from the evils of racism, poverty, injustice, and even the later nineteenth-century Jim Crow laws during Reconstruction, African-Americans were able to distance themselves from the horrors of daily existence peculiar to oppressed Americans. Survival under such hostile circumstances would have been otherwise impossible. Although acceptance of Christianity no longer provided escape from slavery for all blacks, it did provide escape for some. For most blacks, however, religion provided hope in the future by giving them the means to escape mentally from oppressive circumstances. By focusing on the future hope of freedom, blacks were able to withstand remarkably the oppressive forces in their lives.

Despite acceptance of Christianity, the slaves continued to embrace their old rituals and customs brought over from their homelands, to the horror of leaders in the religious sects. Slaves continued to enjoy "dancing, feasting and various forms of merriment"[109] not sanctioned as proper behavior by church laws. Dancing, in particular, was seen as sinful.[110]

Because of this fact, the Reverend Francis Le Jau, a missionary to Goose Creek Parish Anglican Church in South Carolina between 1706 and 1717, felt that slaves did not completely understand the moral precepts of Christianity. Le Jau felt the slaves continued to indulge in what he considered

immoral behavior and other sins which were not befitting a "Christian." In a letter dated September 15, 1708, Le Jau writes:

> The evil I complain of is the constant and promiscuous cohabiting of slaves of different Sexes and Nations together; when a Man or Woman's fancy does alter about his Party they grow up one another & take others which they also change when they please this is a General Sin...[111]

Reverend Le Jau continues this argument in another letter which is dated October 10, 1709: "One of the most scandalous and common crimes of our slaves is their perpetual changing wives and husbands which occasions great disorders." There may be reasons that the slaves failed to accept Le Jau's version of Christianity. Le Jau gained permission to preach to the slaves on the condition that he would not teach the slaves any version of Christianity that would jeopardize the master/slave relationship. In his baptismal sermons Le Jau sought to: "remove all pretense from the Adult Slaves I shall baptise of their being free upon that account."[112]

However, Le Jau's beliefs about the sinful nature of slaves were echoed by many slave holders in Northern states. In some instances, guilt stricken slave holders forced African slaves to receive religious instruction so that whites would not be held responsible for their sins.

In New York in October 1705, Elias Neau kept a tally of slave masters and mistresses along with their male and female slaves who attended catechism classes. As slaves, blacks had to have permission to attend these classes. Neau's report indicates that black women outnumbered black males in

attendance. Subdivisions of the tally suggest that black male slaves were not sent to catechism classes with the frequency that black females were. One instance in Neau's tally indicates twenty-seven African-American females to fifteen African-American males.[113]

Immediately after the American colonies' fight for freedom, racism and slavery were deeply entrenched in the American way of life. In his 1784 "Notes on Virginia," American statesman Thomas Jefferson wrote: "I advance it.. as a suspicion only that the blacks whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances are inferior to whites in the endowments both of body and mind." [114] The struggle to overcome racism and acquire freedom, as well as the struggle of black women to redefine themselves positively, continued into the nineteenth century.

THE SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN IN AMERICAN HISTORY

In the nineteenth century, a few black women left extant autobiographies chronicling their struggle for the right to preach. These autobiographies depicted the black woman's struggle to find voice, to acquire literacy, and to transcend the multiple jeopardies of race, class and gender. These autobiographies were also centered in the struggles of these women to redefine themselves against the negative definitions forced upon black women by the dominant culture. These works present the success of some black women in overcoming barriers to their desires to be ministers. In order to understand why this struggle to preach was necessary, we must turn now to an

examination of the societal perception of women's roles in the church as well as in the larger society.

From the colonial era until the nineteenth-century, mainstream Protestant women remained consistently silent in Protestant mainstream church meetings which had males in attendance. In these meetings, women were not permitted to speak with authority. Strictures against women having voice originated in Scripture and were used to suppress and subordinate women. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (KJV) was often used in support of these strictures:

> Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man but to be in silence. For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

In American religious history, despite the fact that women comprised the majority in membership in religious services, they could not set policy or sit on the church-governing bodies. Even so, many church board decisions affected their lives and the lives of their children.

However, in the nineteenth century, many women were able to "define their faith in their own terms and declare theological independence from male systematic categories."[115] This declaration of theological independence led women to challenge all-male bastions of religious authority which silenced women and restricted their activities to subordinate and domestic roles in the church. Women sought, instead, equality in *ekklesia;* (defined by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza

as "the public assembly of free citizens who gather in order to determine their own will and their children's... political and spiritual well-being")[116], equality in pulpit ministry, and equal participation in church governing boards.

While these early efforts to implement changes in church roles for women were not always successful, they were indeed significant for three important reasons. These efforts had some influence on the social, cultural, and political climate in nineteenth-century America.[117] Secondly, these efforts gave birth to an organized American feminist consciousness,[118] the roots of which lay in sectarian and mainstream nineteenth-century American churches.[119] Third, they were significant in that twentieth-century religious feminists have continued the fight for ecclesiastical equality begun in the earlier period. Current leading feminist theologians credit the birth of the twentieth-century feminist critique of male-centered theologies to the organized women's theological critique in the mid-and late nineteenth century.

From the colonial era to the mid-nineteenth century, traditional societal and cultural roles had relegated women to primarily subordinate status in mainstream American churches. Women were expected to defer to the authority of males and to willingly carry out tasks appointed by male leaders. Women were not allowed to achieve leadership roles in lay meetings or to conduct class meetings with males in attendance, as this was in violation of males' natural leadership in all cultural and social areas. Preconceived ideas concerning women's traditional sphere permeated all aspects of American society.

The church was both informed by and significantly contributed to cultural norms and thus upheld traditional notions with regard to women's ordained sphere.

For middle-and upper-class women, societal guidelines prescribed a place for women. Societal expectations relegating women to specific social roles grew out of the Puritan order[120] and continued through the American Victorian era. These roles usually revolved around the home and its domestic duties. Certain characteristics were used to designate ideal womanhood: the ideal woman was beautiful, pure, delicate, fragile, and submissive to her husband; she gladly and unselfishly placed the needs of her husband and family before her own. Nancy F. Cott suggests that the ideal woman's greatest assets were "decorative and supportive ones."[121] The ideal woman preserved a "cultivated gentility and a respectable piety, making her company and her home a place of refreshment and harmony."[122] The most important duties of the ideal woman were diligently making the home comfortable for her family and regularly attending church. Through church attendance, the ideal woman might continue the influence of her particular church in the home. For American society, such outward manifestations of virtue provided further evidence as to whether or not a woman achieved societal and cultural ideals.

The church upheld Victorian views about woman's assigned place. For this reason, the fact that women made up the majority in American churches comes as no surprise to social historian Ann Douglas or feminist theologians and historians Rosemary Radford Ruether, Rosemary Skinner Keller and Martha

Tomhave Blauvelt. Douglas writes: "Throughout the ante-bellum and Civil War period, liberal ministers were preoccupied with establishing and fixing the correct feminine role; equally important, they defined it in terms which strongly suggested clerical aspirations and anxieties."[123]

Barbara Welter in Dimity Convictions captures the social and domestic consciousness of nineteenth-century America: "Religion or piety was the core of woman's virtue, the source of her strength. Young men looking for a mate were cautioned to search first for piety, for if that were there, all else would follow. Religion belonged to woman by divine right, a gift of God and nature."[124]

According to Welter, the feminization of American religion occurred between 1800 and 1860. This was due in large part to the decline in the power of the church and to the decline of the clergy as leaders in American society and culture. Secular politics was a more effective arena for influencing American society, and this captured the time and attention of American males. Welter writes:

> American churches had regarded it as their solemn duty to lead in building a godly culture, and the 'city on the hill' which symbolized American aspiration had clusters of church steeples as its tallest structure. In the nineteenth century the skyscraper would replace the steeple as a symbol of the American dream, and the ministers of God fought against this displacement. Politics captured the zeal and the time once reserved to religion, and the pulpits thundered against those men who mistakenly served power itself and not the Source of Power. The women's magazines and books of advice also warned against politics as a destroyer of the home. [125]

Women were excluded from politics as it would "sully" them. For similar reasons the church was excluded.[126]

Thus, femininity and religion become increasingly connected in American society. Interestingly enough, many women, in the mid-nineteenth century, agreed with societal views about women's roles and wrote treatises in support and defense of notions of "true womanhood."

THE CULT OF "TRUE WOMANHOOD"

By the nineteenth century, piety was considered the "true nature" of a woman. Any deviation from a pious character indicated deviance in woman's nature. Martha Tomhave Blauvelt states that irreligiosity in a woman did not bear contemplation. Therefore, most women craving social acceptance attended church frequently. Since religion was a vital part of womanly duties in the nineteenth-century's cult of domesticity, women continued the trend begun in the colonial period.

> ...Female church members had vastly outnumbered males during most of the colonial period. Even during revivals, which were particularly effective in recruiting male converts, men had not always equaled the number of women going. During the First Great Awakening (1739-1743), for example, the proportion of women admitted to Connecticut churches averaged about 56 percent. The proportion of women going during non revival years was much higher. America's late eighteenth century declaration that women were naturally religious, was in one sense a factual observation.[127]

The nineteenth century (circa 1830) heralded the emphasis by leading social authorities on class distinctions among women. Gerda Lerner writes:

> The image of "the lady" was elevated to the accepted ideal of femininity toward which all women would strive.

> In this formation of values lower class women were simply ignored. The actual lady was, of course, nothing new on the American scene; she had been present ever since colonial days. What was new in the 1830s was the cult of the lady, her elevation to a status symbol. The advancing prosperity of the early nineteenth century made it possible for middle class women to aspire to the status formerly reserved for upper class women. The "cult of true womanhood" of the 1830s became a vehicle for such aspirations. Mass circulation newspapers and magazines made it possible to teach every woman how to elevate the status of her family by setting "proper" standards of behavior, dress and literary tastes.... Innumerable giftbooks and tracts of the period all preach the same gospel of "true womanhood", -piety, purity, domesticity. Those unable to reach the goal of becoming ladies were to be satisfied with the lesser goal--acceptance of their "proper place" in the home.[128]

Barbara Welter described the nineteenth century as "the cult of true womanhood" which was essentially a cult to which only white women could belong. "It was a fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility which the nineteenth-century American woman had - to uphold the pillars of the temple with her *frail white* hand"[129] (italics mine). Her chief occupation in life was to display as ostentatiously as possible her husband's wealth. Idleness (considered a sin in Puritan society) became a status symbol for the upper classes.

The cult of domesticity during the mid-nineteenth century permeated society, yet definitions of "true womanhood" were exclusionary to black women. Given the economic and socio-political climate of nineteenth-century American society, black women could never have entered the cult of "true womanhood" or have achieved its ideal. Inequities in employment practices forced black women to work as domestics outside their homes in order to eke out a mere subsistence. Racism meant the vast

majority of black males could only attain jobs with very low wages; thus, many married black women were still forced to work.

The destiny for many white women was again very different from black women. Numerous articles concerning "women's sphere" proliferated in nineteenth century society. Newspapers and magazines taught women the proper way a lady should behave and dress and the proper literary tastes she should acquire. Black and lower class women were ignored because they were not thought to be fit for the appellation of lady or true woman.

Gerda Lerner writes that "conspicuous consumption" became the ideal woman's chief occupation. Much time, care, and attention was spent in acquiring those particular goods that would indicate social status and membership in the leisure class. Another indication of social status was ample leisure time. Lerner adds: "It is no accident that the slogan, 'woman's place is in the home' took on a certain aggressiveness and shrillness precisely at the time when increasing numbers of poorer women left their homes to become factory workers."[130]

As noted earlier in this chapter, white women in the colonial era were given freedom to enjoy traditional male occupations as incentives in attracting white women of marriageable age to the colonies. Such freedom for women ended around 1765 with the professionalization of most occupations. Lerner notes, however, that in the nineteenth century, after industrialization, positive changes in employment opportunities for white women materialized. In the decades between the 1800s and the 1840s, middle-class white women entered the work force.

Factory work for middle-class women was a means for postponing the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood until a later period in their lives. The term "mill girl" acquired a relatively high status as middle-class white women enjoyed freedom in the work place.

The work environment was not the same for white women of lower or poorer class status. These women, along with wives and daughters of newly arrived European immigrants, performed tasks not unlike those they performed at home such as sewing on buttons or mending hems, yet their destiny in the work place was better than that of black women. Since many white women refused to work beside black women in the factories, most jobs obtained by black women were those purely of a domestic or very menial nature that white women of all classes refused to do. Free black women desiring economic opportunities in the work-place encountered the same prejudice that free black males who sought apprenticeships or equitable working conditions in nineteenth-century America had long endured.

Most women craved upper class status. Those women who could not aspire to those ranks could accept the "lesser goal" of their "'proper place' in the home."[131] Again, such an ideal was an impossible aim for most black women. Inequitable treatment in hiring practices for black men meant that the majority of free blacks would toil at very low paying jobs. Quite a few black women would be forced to toil as domestics in order to help feed their families and to help them to survive. Many free and all enslaved black women in nineteenth-century

society could not, if they had a desire to do so, have secured a "proper place" in the home.

The socio-political concepts of "true womanhood" had a tremendous impact on nineteenth-century society. Evidence of this is demonstrated in the fact that, even as late as 1903, debates were still flourishing about societal concepts of the ideal woman. In American society, women were considered the most influential members of society, at least in the domestic arena. American public opinion placed a great deal of emphasis on a woman's character. It was largely held by societal experts that the women of a particular race embodied the moral fiber of that race. Upper and middle class white women were expected to be pious and pure. By example or soft words of admonishment, they were to hold their husband's natural proclivity to sin at bay through virtuous influence. Women in these social classes were also expected to pass on to the youth of the family moral and social values. However, if a white woman was sullied or a fallen woman, her race did not fall in social stature with her. On the contrary, as noted by Guy-Sheftall, if the morality of even one black woman was called into question, it reflected on the black race as a whole.[132]

BLACK WOMEN SEEK TO SELF-DEFINE POSITIVELY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

Because of the profound influence which the all-pervasive "cult of true womanhood" had on the socio-cultural politics in American society, and also due to the fact that the definers of "true woman" excluded black women, black women who wrote spiritual autobiographies in the antebellum period found it necessary to subvert the cult in order to create a positive self in literature and to create viable preaching careers. Maria Stewart directly accuses the definers of being racist. Stewart blamed the cult of domesticity in particular, and racism in general, on the fact that an abnormally large percentage of black women were:

> compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles.... How long shall a mean set of men flatter us with their smiles and enrich themselves with our hard earnings; their wives' fingers sparkling with rings, and they themselves laughing at our folly?[133]

Stewart sought new roles for woman in the religious sphere by fighting for women's equality in clerical and in secular spheres. Stewart centered her fight on a women's liberation theology. She offered different interpretations of traditional readings of scripture in order to present God's will concerning women's quest for equality. Stewart toured the lecture circuit to convince men and women of God's will for human beings. However, Stewart's tour on the lecture circuit was brief because members of the black community were not ready to accept a woman in a leadership role. While the black community embraced concepts of "mutual improvement," "race uplift", and endorsed the education of women, the community also embraced

traditional roles for women. Stewart's struggle for equality with the clergy and leadership in the black community made her a "hissing reproach" to the people she tried to reach.

History indicates why the struggle for the right to preach was necessary for aspiring women in the nineteenth-century socio-political sphere. Most men valued religion as a social and spiritual outlet in their wives' lives since it was not a threat to the smooth running of the home. Society leaders cautioned women in newspapers and magazines to temper their religious activities so that their deeds would not take their attention away from their primary duties as wives and mothers. However, some Southern males were opposed to feminine piety because they saw it as a threat to their authority. Some of them were outraged at the influence ministers had on their wives and daughters. Some ministers were threatened by Southern males who accused them of improprieties with female members of their congregations. In 1857, powerful evangelist Peter Cartwright recalled such an incident: "This enraged...husband and father of these... females... not only threatened to whip me, but to kill me. He said I must be a very bad man, for all the women in the country were falling in love with me; and that I moved on their passions and took them into the church with bad intentions."[134]

The rise in female attendance in American churches during the early and mid-nineteenth century is due mainly to religious revivals which brought people to the church in very large numbers. In the New England Great Awakening (1739-1743), women "flocked to churches, repopulating them."[135] However, it was in

the revival meetings of the second Great Awakening (1820-1845 under Methodist influence), that women found public voice in the church.

WOMEN'S QUEST FOR PUBLIC VOICE IN THEOLOGICAL DEBATES IS REALIZED

With the arrival of religious revivals under Methodist influence, women's roles in the churches changed considerably. The usual routine at these revival meetings was that those who were saved would share their religious experiences with others and possibly influence the unsaved to give their lives to God.[136] Women's participation at revival meetings helped save souls and convinced women of their importance as spiritual leaders.[137]

Consequently, strictures against women speaking in church were relaxed as some members of the clergy permitted women to speak before promiscuous assemblies at revivals. Women were allowed to pray publicly for the souls of those seeking to come to Christ. The relaxation of strictures against women having voice in the churches stemmed, in large part, from the Methodist belief that the individual alone was responsible for his or her acceptance of God. Souls were received by God equally. This theology taught that there was no mediator between the human and the Divine. The only route to salvation was a personal knowledge of God within. In this regard men and women were equals.

Charles Grandison Finney also helped make it possible for women to have significant voice in the church. He is normally

credited with instituting the practice of women speaking in religious meetings. Ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church in 1824, Finney began to preach and to conduct revivals. At one of his revivals during the years of 1825-26, Theodore Weld was converted. Shortly after his conversion, Weld spoke of his new experience in a public meeting and encouraged females present to both speak and pray if they so desired. In a letter to Sarah and Angeline Grimke dated August 26, 1837, Weld spoke of his efforts to encourage women to pray and to speak in religious meetings:

> ...I was converted to Christ in the city of Utica during a powerful revival of religion under brother Finney and the first time I ever spoke in a religious meeting--I urged females both to pray and speak if they felt deeply enough to do it and not to be restrained from it by the fact that they were *females*. I made these remarks at a meeting when not less than two hundred persons were present of both sexes, and five ministers of the gospel at least. The result was that seven females, a number of them the most influential Christians in the city, confessed their sin in being restrained by their sex and prayed publicly.[138]

Finney both accepted and encouraged the practice of women speaking publicly which subsequently led to a great split in the church. East Coast revivalists considered such a practice sinful. Meetings were held to decide the appropriate course of action in the matter. Among the ministers present arguing against the propriety of these acts were Boston preacher, Lyman Beecher, and Finney's good friend, Nathaniel Beman. Ministers used Scripture to argue against such actions. However, because no concensus of opinion could be reached, the matter was allowed to drop after several days' discussion.[139] Finney continued the practice on his revival tours. After a period of

time, and with some controversy, the practice of women's speaking and praying in Methodist religious sects was accepted.

Of the six women included in this study, three, Jerena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Zilpha Elaw, were members of, or had a close association with, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, the first known independent black religious organization in America. In addition, each of these women explicitly or implicitly attributed her ministerial impulse and subsequent development of public voice to the outgrowth of the "Holiness" religious revivals under Methodism that swept America from 1820 to 1845.

TRAINING GROUNDS FOR THE PUBLIC VOICE OF BLACK WOMEN IN PUBLIC RELIGIOUS MEETINGS

A look at black women's church history is necessary and might provide some understanding of the religious and political climate in which AME spiritual autobiographers composed their texts. However, any attempt at understanding the black woman's history and heritage in the AME church proves difficult. Until recently, studies of black American religious history rendered the black woman's history invisible. The importance of black religious heritage in studying any aspect of African-American history and literature is noted by William E.B. DuBois who argues: "The study of Negro religion is a vital part of the history of the Negro in America."[140] However, as DuBois traces the positive and negative influences of African-American religion on black American life, in The Souls of Black Folk, he excludes any treatment of women's religious history. For

DuBois, apparently, the black American religious experience is synonymously the black male experience.

Historian Henry A. Mitchell also traces the African-American religious heritage. Mitchell argues that the retention of African beliefs and culture in the religion of African-Americans helped ensure African-American survival during black American oppression. Mitchell writes: "No group or race suffering the oppression and brutal treatment heaped on black Americans could have remained sane."[141] Olin P. Moyd traces the theme of "redemption" as a tool of empowerment in the black American religious experience. In his study, black females are again excluded. In like manner, historian Benjamin Mays attempts an historical study of the superstructure of the black American church, its religious philosophy and redefinition. In a work spanning 154 years (1760-1914), Mays pays only brief attention to the black woman's religious experience and redefinition of God in literature and history.[142]

For this reason, the spiritual autobiographies of black women theologians are a valuable resource in reconstructing black women's religious history and heritage. In addition, more recent literary and historical studies attempt to address the multi-faceted experiences of black women's involvement in African-American religious history. Recent historical and literary scholarship document the fact that many black females helped ensure black survival in oppression throughout the black historical presence in the United States.[143] Whereas scholarship on black women's historical contributions in religion had previously received little attention, many black

feminist scholars in historical disciplines are attempting to fill the lacunae in black women's church history.

The lives of black Methodist 'preaching women", Lee, Jackson, and Elaw illustrate how black women formulated varied methods and strategies to redefine black women's church roles. With a liberation theology, a female-centered Biblical exegesis, and the development of a Biblical language, they transcended sexism, racism, and the politics of class. Their individual and collective efforts indicate that the black female religious experience is not monolithic. Moreover, while these three women share some similarities in life experiences and personal theologies, their autobiographies provide individual readings of Biblical texts.

The importance of black female religious heritage is illustrated by Jualyne Dodson: "Black women, are, in a very profound sense, the "something within" that shaped the "culture of resistance", the patterns of consciousness and self-expression, and the social organizational framework of the local and national expressions of community." Dodson continues:

> In a racist society, their battle against the color line was heroic; in a sexist society their achievement against so many odds was threatening and deviant... Armed with an Afro-American imagination that included a justice-oriented reading of the King James Bible, black women also became the something within that banishes pain.[144]

During the 1820s and 1830s, many AME women became believers in "'sanctification'; a second experience of divine grace in the soul following conversion."[145] According to the Holiness trend in Methodist thought and practice, the

individual experienced "'justification' at conversion--the conviction that her sins were forgiven and she was made just through Christ's love."[146] In these parallel moments when Holiness fervor swept early nineteenth-century America, black women sought the special dispensation which would enable them to redefine Holiness and Christian theologies in a manner particular to the black female experience. Holiness had a special appeal to many free black women in the pre-civil war Methodist churches because it enabled many of them to withstand the psychological effects of white racism.[147]

The concerted effort among black Methodist females in the development of public voice began in the 1820s. Jean McMahon Humez writes: "Predominantly or entirely female 'praying bands' were an early and continuing phenomenon of black Methodism in America and were the original unit of the Holiness movements."[148] AME spiritual autobiographers included in this study indicate that:

> testifying to a spiritual experience in these small groups meeting weekly at the homes of their members encouraged substantial numbers of devout black Methodist women to think of preaching to larger audiences. In these relatively intimate, highly participatory, democratic religious gatherings, in the familiar private world of women friends, spiritual talents and speaking skills were developed and protected.[149]

Nineteenth-century black female spiritual autobiographers in the AME tradition fulfilled another important role: that of redefining black women's church roles. Traditionally those females seeking theological equality could become exhorters or lead prayer meetings. Dissatisfied with their limited roles in the church, free black women preachers established new roles

for themselves. As trailblazers and pioneers they became itinerant ministers traveling to distant cities and different countries, laboring to preach the gospel to blacks and whites.

Jarena Lee, perhaps the first female preacher in the history of black Methodism, began a public preaching career by bypassing nineteenth-century restrictions on women's ordination. Lee began an itinerant ministry by preaching in various homes. In one year alone, Lee traveled 2,325 miles and delivered 178 sermons.[150]

Zilpha Elaw found relative success as a home minister. Elaw later expanded this role through traveling preaching engagements. "Urged... to take the pulpit,"[151] Elaw transcended sexist definitions of nineteenth-century woman's roles. Amanda Berry Smith found fulfillment as a nineteenth-century preacher by seizing the authority to found churches, schools, and religious organizations in Africa and India.

Rebecca Cox Jackson, a free black Methodist woman, is a radical point of departure for AME spiritual autobiographers. Jackson left Methodism in order to develop an independent personal theology which she later realized was similar in scope and nature to the religious and social views of the Shakers.[152] The Methodist tradition, with its patriarchal center, proved too much for Jackson: "I was buried too deep in the tradition of my forefathers, I thought I would never be dug up." Jackson left Methodism to seek community in the Shaker religious sect which emphasized the dual nature of the Godhead and women's equality in all areas of life.

Julia A. Foote transcended nineteenth-century racism as well as definitions of 'true womanhood' and developed a liberation theology. Foote was able to visit both black and white communities. Foote writes: "Having no children, I had a good deal of leisure after my husband's departure, so I visited many of the poor..., reading and talking to them of Jesus, the Saviour."[153]

Despite the relative success of black female itinerant preachers in the AME tradition, by the mid and late nineteenth century, black women had not achieved licensing or ordination. AME religious organizations denied women the right to public voice in theological debates. At the General Conference of 1852, Right Reverend William Paul Quinn delivered the bishop's address on May 3rd and glossed over the subject of licensing women to preach:

> One more subject to which I would invite your attention, and then I shall have done. The subject, will doubtless, [sic] come before you in some form or other during your session, as it occupied some of your attention during the last General Conference. It is the licensing of women in the church. I have given the subject some thought, but not enough probably to warrant one to give an opinion in the case. All that I ask is that something distinct may be done that will be satisfactory to all, and the quest is to be put to rest.[154]

However, the outcome of the impending discussion was not in favor of women obtaining a preacher's license. AME church historian Daniel A. Payne writes:

> On Friday evening May 7th, the question of licensing women to preach, alluded to in the Bishop's address, was discussed with a great deal of judgment and spirit. Rev. Thomas Lawrence moved that licenses should be granted. The motion was put and lost by a majority.[155]

This decision was upheld throughout most of the nineteenth century. As late as 1872, there were no ordained women in AME Methodism. However, black women continued to struggle for the right to preach. Black women such as Melinda M. Cotton, Mary L. Harris, Marcy C. Palmer, Harriet A. Baker, Lena Dolin-Mason, Charlotte S. Riley, Lillian Thurman, Margaret Wilson, Emma V. Johnson and Mary L. Harris, among many others, were active AME evangelists. "As the century drew to a close, they traveled and preached as though the church's 1818 prohibition against women's ordination was meaningless."[156]

Many women, both black and white, who were active in the mid and late nineteenth-century rights movement had been members of the Holiness Movement. Women who were followers of Charles Finney and who were later to become famous nineteenth-century suffragists were Lucy Stone, Antoinette Brown, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Caroline Severance and Paulina Kellog Wright Davis were also members as was famous preacher Frances Wright. Kellogg Wright Davis wanted to be a missionary.[157] In 1853, Antoinette Brown became the first fully ordained woman in the Congregational church, a recognized American denomination.[158]

In the mid to late nineteenth century, the subject of Holiness (or perfection) began to be addressed in every aspect of American ecclesiastical life. Timothy Merritt in The Guide to Christian Perfection asked female members of the Methodist Church who had achieved perfect holiness to write about it as a means of leading others to Christ. Thus began the trend in

which women began to recount their experiences in attaining true perfection.[159]

The nineteenth century witnessed the struggle of numerous women for the right to preach. While a few denominations allowed women the opportunity to preach and lead worship in lay meetings, conservative churches did not. According to Barbara Brown Zikmund, churches which had a relaxed polity and Christian groups which upheld the "power of the Holy Spirit" advocated female leadership.[160] Various Christian denominations allowed women to preach. The Unitarians, Quakers, Universalists, and Congregationalists had a history of "preaching women." The Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Episcopalian religious groups relaxed strictures against women preachers. Most conservative mainstream American churches advocated and upheld traditional church leadership patterns. Pauline texts indicating that women were neither to teach nor to usurp authority over men (1 Timothy 3:12 KJV) were frequently cited in arguments against women's having leadership roles in the church.[161]

The issue of women's right to preach was argued throughout the mid and late nineteenth century. This was usually a controversial issue as many American males felt that allowing women leadership roles in the church would not only be blasphemous but would also inspire women to seek equality in governmental and public sectors of American life.

By 1888 there were approximately five hundred women who had experience as pulpit evangelists and about 350 Quaker females who were religious leaders. Many denominations had

ordained women by 1888, including the Methodist, Baptist, Free Baptist, Universalist, Congregational, and Unitarian churches.[162]

Evangelist Margaret ("Maggie") Newton Van Cott became, in 1869, the first female to be granted a local preacher's license in the Methodist Episcopal Church. It appears this license was only temporary. When many women sought ordination in 1880 within the denomination, the license was revoked.[163]

Religious revivals in both the first and second Great Awakenings were important in bringing women to the realization that they could play greater roles in the church. Both revival movements encouraged women to expand their roles in the churches. Women took it upon themselves to found schools and to form self-help groups. They organized groups to aid the poor, aged and widowed; they also organized and founded church schools for children. Doing so enabled them to realize their potential as both decision makers and organizers. This resulted in their having a significant voice in decision-making in the church. Ann Douglas writes: "The liberal clergy faced a difficult situation. Middle-class churchgoing and reading women had genuine control, no matter how limited, over their ministers, and some of them, moreover, were at least partly aware of their power."[164] Recognition of their skills in teaching others motivated women with special gifts to join churches which permitted women to develop skills in public speaking. Women in national and local sectarian religious groups such as the Shakers and Methodists gained political rights before women in mainstream American churches. Barbara

Brown Zikmund argues that when deprived of the freedom to worship the way they liked, women sought religious organizations which allowed them opportunities to develop their talents.

The autobiographies of Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Zilpha Elaw, as well as the secular autobiographies of Harriet E. Wilson and Harriet A. Jacobs present important first-hand accounts of black woman's survival strategies and their religious social activism.[165] A full discussion of the means by which black women found the courage, strength and will to become religious revolutionaries will be conducted in subsequent chapters. The literature of these nineteenth-century American women must be examined through the larger context of their history. The subtext of their narratives offers proof of their resistance to nineteenth-century definitions of "true womanhood" which marginalized black women. This study will demonstrate that black women made important contributions to women's quest for equality in religious and secular spheres in the nineteenth century. Chapter two examines black women's place in the autobiographical genre.

NOTES

[1] For a few sources among many on the importance of religion in the survival of the black community, see: William E.B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk, Three Negro Classics, ed. John Hope Franklin (New York: Avon, 1983); Albert Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford UP, 1978); Benjamin Elijah Mays and Joseph William, The Negro's Church (New York: Negro Universities P, 1933); Olin P. Moyd, Redemption in Black Theology (Valley Forge: Jackson, 1979); Henry A. Mitchell, Black Belief: Folk Beliefs of Blacks in America and West Africa (New York: Harper, 1975); Richard C. Wade, "Beyond the Master's Eye," The Black Church in America, eds. Hart M. Nelsen, Raytha L. Yokely and Anne K. Nelsen (New York: Basic, 1971); John Brown Childs, The Political Black Minister: A Study in Afro-American Politics and Religion (Boston: Hall, 1980); Charles V. Hamilton, Black Preacher in America (New York: William and Morrow, 1972); Melvin Dixon, "Singing Swords: The Literary Legacy of Slavery," The Slave's Narrative, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford UP, 1985); Carl F. Ellis, Jr., Beyond Liberation: The Gospel in the Black American Experience (Downers Grew, IL: Intervarsity, 1983).

For a few documents among many which discuss the legacy of the slave narrative, see John F. Bayliss, ed. Black Slave Narratives (London: MacMillan, 1970); Robert Burns Stepto. From Behind the Veil (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979); William L. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986); Sidonie Smith, Where I'm Bound: Patterns of Slavery and Freedom in Black American Autobiography (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1974); Houston A. Baker, The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980); Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Patricia Redmond, Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989); John Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford UP, 1979); Peter J. Paris, Social Teaching of the Black Church (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Figures in Black (New York: Oxford UP, 1987); Benjamin Mays, The Negro's God: As Reflected in His Literature (New York:

Atheneum, 1969); Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., The Slave's Narrative (New York: Oxford UP, 1985).

For an examination of some valuable works which combine studies of the religious and literary legacy of black feminist studies see Nellie McKay, "Nineteenth Century Black Women's Spiritual Autobiographies: Religious Faith and Self-Empowerment," Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives, ed. Personal Narratives Group, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989); William L. Andrews, ed, Sisters of the Spirit (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); Marilyn Richardson, Black Women and Religion (Boston: Hall, 1980); Marilyn Richardson, ed. Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987); Sue E. Houchins, introduction, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1988)

[2] James H. Evans, Jr, Spiritual Empowerment in African-American Literature: Frederick Douglass, Rebecca Jackson, Booker T. Washington, Richard Wright and Toni Morrison (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1987) 1.

[3] Evans 1.

[4] See John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York: Oxford UP, 1979); see also, Albert E. Stone, Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1982).

[5] McKay 139.

[6] For a few scholars see William L. Andrews, Sisters in the Spirit: Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); Nellie McKay, "Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Spiritual Autobiographies: Religious Faith and Self-Empowerment," Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives, ed. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989); and Marilyn Richardson, Black Women and Religion (Boston: Hall, 1980).

[7] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper, 1984) 9-10.

[8] Liberation for Christian women is defined by Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty. They write that liberation is not necessarily a movement or an organization, "but rather a state of mind in which a woman comes to view herself as Jesus Christ sees her--as a person created in God's image whom he wants to make free to be whole, to grow, to learn to utilize fully the talents and gifts God has given her as a unique individual." See Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, All We're Meant to Be (Nashville: Word, 1975) 11. Scanzoni and Hardesty further add that: "It is a realization that men and women alike may be freed from sex role stereotypes and traditions which hinder the development into true humanness that God intended when he created male and female in his own

image to delight in fellowship with him and with one another" (Scanzoni and Hardesty 12).

[9] "Promiscuous assemblies" is a term frequently used by nineteenth century historians as a mixed audience of males and females.

[10] Perry Miller, ed. The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry (New York: Columbia UP, 1956) ix.

This influence can be demonstrated by an examination of the American literary heritage. Until the nineteenth century much of the literature read was written by the Puritans and their descendants. The leading American institutions of higher learning were founded by the Puritans who emphasized learning, literature, and church government in their curriculums. Richard Schlatter writes: "Nineteenth-century American literature was mostly New England literature written by Puritans and their descendants; American colleges were mostly New England colleges founded by Puritans and their descendants. See Richard Schlatter, "The Puritan Strain," Puritanism and the American Experience, ed. Michael McGiffert (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969) 4-5.

[11] Carl Holliday writes that church attendance was enforced and even when not mandatory, was essential for those who did not wish to be politically and socially ostracized. See Carl Holliday, Woman's Life in Colonial Days (New York: Ungar, 1922) 19.

[12] Benjamin W. Labaree, Colonial Massachusetts: A History (New York: Kto, 1979) 47.

[13] Labaree 47. Labaree further adds: "To maintain social order the community relied on three institutions: the church, the state, and the family" (73).

[14] Herbert Wallace Schneider, The Puritan Mind (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1958) 17.

[15] The following discussion focuses on white women known as gentle-women or those of lower classes, rather than white female indentured servants who regardless of working conditions would have been able to gain not only freedom after service but entry into mainstream American society if they so desired.

[16] Eugenie Andruss Leonard writes that the first permanent settlement in Jamestown, Virginia, in the fall of 1608 included a gentle-woman by the name of Mrs. Thomas Forrest who journeyed to America with her maid Anne Burras. Other English women who settled in America "were of the dissenter churches such as the Puritans, Anabaptists and Quakers." Women of the Catholic faith or women from alms houses, jails or orphanages also came to America. They "brought with them skills to produce the commodities needed by the colonists." Women from various countries came as well. Women from France, Holland, Sweden and Finland helped to settle America. Privileged white women from various places such as Holland and France also

settled in South Carolinas or other southern states. However, this dissertation focuses on those women involved in settlements which fostered the stream of consciousness that had the most lasting impact on American culture and thought. See Eugenie Andruss Leonard, The Dear-Bought Heritage (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1963) 24-27, 47-61.

[17] See Leonard 24-27.

[18] See Eugenie Andruss Leonard's discussion of "maid lotts" which were to be granted to single women as a measure to attract women to the colonies. Leonard develops the argument that a significant number of landowners in the early colonial era were women (53-56). See also Gerda Lerner's discussion of American Puritan women's landowners status in, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson, 1800-1840," A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women, eds. Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth A. Pleck (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979)

[19] Lerner 232-233.

[20] Lerner 183. See also Nancy F. Cott, Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women, (New York: Dutton, 1972) 6-7. Cott further adds: "Women's accomplishments in domestic crafts commanded the esteem that was due to all necessary functions. Those nonagricultural, non domestic occupations (such as trades, shopkeeping, innkeeping), which were part of town life, were also frequently carried on by members of a family working together."

[21] Lerner 187.

[22] As Lerner notes, by 1830 there were fewer women who owned stores or other businesses (188).

[23] Esther Katz and Anita Rapone, eds., Woman's Experience in America: An Historical Anthology (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1980) 11.

[24] Rosemary Skinner Keller quotes extensively from William Perkins. See Rosemary Skinner Keller, "New England Women: Ideology and Experience in First-Generation Puritanism (1630-1650)," Women and Religion in America, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 2, (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 156.

[25] Katz and Rapone 17.

[26] Keller again quotes extensively from John Robinson. See Keller, "New England Women," 161.

[27] Robinson, 162. See also Moses Coit Tyler, A History of American Literature 1607-1765 (1878; Ithaca, NY: n.p., 1966). Tyler writes:

> Above, all it was toward religion, as the one supreme thing in life and in the universe, that all this intellectuality of theirs and all this earnestness, were directed.

> Never were men more logical or self-consistent, in theory and in practice. Religion, they said was the chief thing; they meant it; they acted upon it. They did not attempt to combine the sacred and the secular; they simply abolished the secular and left only the sacred. The state became the church; the king, a priest; politics, a department of theology; citizenship, the privilege of those only who had received baptism and the Lord's Supper (Tyler, 88).

[28] See Titus 2.

[29] For further discussion see David D. Hall, The Antinomian Controversy 1636-1638: A Documentary History (Durham: Duke UP, 1990) and Norman Pettit, The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life (New Yaven: Yale UP, 1966).

[30] Hall 3.

[31] Pettit 141.

[32] Rowland H. Allen, New England Tragedies in Prose (Boston: Nichols, 1869) 19.

[33] Allen 19.

[34] See Thomas Hutchinson, The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts-Bay, ed. Lawrence Shaw Mayo, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1936) Hutchinson writes of Anne Hutchinson: "Countenanced and encouraged by Mr. Vane and Mr. Cotton, she advanced doctrines and opinions which involved the colony in disputes and contentions; and being improved, to civil as well as religious purposes, had like to have produced ruin both to church and state." Hutchinson adds that because of Mrs. Hutchinson, "the colony was soon divided into two parties" (50).

[35] Utilizing the historical notes of John Winthrop, Puritan scholar Perry Miller writes that as soon as Mrs. Hutchinson and Wheelwright had been banished, an account of the precedings was "'sent into England to be published there.'" Miller further notes that in order to uphold its model of religious conformity, the Massachusetts settlement had to "exterminate Antinomianism, and to do so quickly and effectively." See Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650 (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1965) 159.

[36] Later known as Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

[37] Hutchinson 62-63.

[38] Hutchinson 64

[39] Herbert Wallace Schneider, The Puritan Mind (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1958) 21.

[40] In the American Quaker religious communities women's roles in Quaker religious spheres were not so rigidly defined. Women in these communities could hold religious meetings or lead them publicly. This dissertation, however, focuses on

that religious strain which had the greatest impact on mainstream American society and culture.

[41] Cott, Roots of Bitterness 6.

[42] Cotton Mather, Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion (1692) ed. Pattie Cowell (Delmar, NY: Scholars, 1978). This text was very influential and underwent three editions--1692, 1694, 1741.

[43] Mather, Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion 4-5.

[44] Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735," Women in American Religion, ed. Janet Wilson James (U of Pennsylvania P, 1980) 78.

[45] Ulrich 78.

[46] Keller quotes extensively from a pamphlet from the Church of England. See Keller, "New England Women," 151-152.

[47] Mather, Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion 100.

[48] Ulrich 73.

[49] See Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988).

[50] Cott, Root of Bitterness 14-15.

[51] Cott quotes extensively from a letter written by Elizabeth Sprigs to John Sprigs in 1736. See Cott, Root of Bitterness 89.

[52] Lilian Ashcraft Webb, "Black Women and Religion in the Colonial Period," Women and Religion in America, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 233.

[53] Winthrop D. Jordan, The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in America (New York: Oxford UP, 1974) 4.

[54] Jordan 6.

[55] Jordan 6.

[56] Jordan 7.

[57] Jordan 13.

[58] Jordan 13.

[59] Jordan 16.

[60] Jordan 12.

[61] Jordan 13.

[62] Mitchell 21.

[63] Mitchell 22.

[64] Webb 234.

[65] Webb quotes extensively from an African levirate statement. See Webb, 245.

[66] Page Smith, Daughters of the Promised Land: Women in American History (Boston: Little Brown) 245.

[67] John B. Boles, Black Southerners: 1619-1819 (Lexington: UP at Kentucky, 1985) 12.

[68] Alden T. Vaughn, "Blacks in Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 29 (1972): 470.

[69] John Rolfe, "Letter to Captain John Smith," Travels and Works of Captain John Smith, ed. Edward Aber (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1910) 541-542.

[70] Boles 12.

[71] "Lists of the Livinge and the Dead in Virginia," Colonial Records of Virginia (1874; Baltimore: Geneological, 1964) 40.

[72] Colonial Records of Virginia 40.

[73] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," Winthrop Papers, 1623-1630, ed. Stewart Mitchell, vol.2 (New York: Russell, 1931) 282-283.

[74] Warren M. Billings, "The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," Articles on American Slavery: Colonial Southern Slavery, ed. Paul Finkelman, vol.3 (New York: Garland, 1989) 1-3.

[75] Webb 236.

[76] Webb 3-4.

[77] Henry Mitchell writes that the slave's openness to the Christian faith "stemmed from his desire to follow his strong religious bent in a manner both consistent with his heritage and adequately related to the religious processes and practices of his new home." Mitchell further adds that the slaves rather than the masters initially translated their African beliefs into "inescapably Christian terms." The slaves read the Christian Bible and "selected the ideas useful to them in the new slave experience." As Mitchell suggests, by the time the slave masters decided that Christianity might be useful in fostering submissive attitudes among the slaves, the slaves had developed an "underground version of the true faith; and ...were well along in their own "invisible institution", or underground church." See Henry A. Mitchell, Black Belief: Folk Beliefs of Blacks in American and West Africa (New York: Harper, 1975) 10.

[78] See Mitchell 9-11

[79] See Charles V. Hamilton, The Black Preacher in America (New York: William and Morrow, 1972).

[80] "Germantown Friends Protest Against Slavery, 1688," Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America (1688-1788), ed. Robert Bruns (New York: Chelsea, 1977) 3. Although the Society of Friends as an organization was against slavery, many Quakers were proslavery. This discussion focuses on those who upheld the general principles of the Quaker organization concerning slavery.

[81] George Keith, "Pamphlet Against Slavery, 1693," Bruns 6-7.

[82] John Woolman, "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes," The Antislavery Argument, eds. William A. Pease and Jane H. Pease (Indianapolis: Bobbs, 1965) 295-296.

[83] Anthony Benezet, "Pamphlet on Negroes in Africa, 1762," Bruns 80.

[84] Bruns 81.

[85] Webb quotes extensively from a document that contains this court case. See Webb 251.

[86] Belinda, "The Cruelty of Men Whose Faces Were Like the Moon," Bruns 4.

[87] Joan Bezner Gundersen, "The Double Bonds of Race and Sex: Black and White Women in a Colonial Virginia Parish," Black Women in American History From Colonial Times Through the Nineteenth Century, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990) 59.

[88] Olin P. Moyd, Redemption in Black Theology (Valley Forge, PA.: Jackson, 1979) 9.

[89] Blassingame

[90] Henry H. Mitchell writes: "The folk religion of the masses of blackamericans is clearly an adaptation of the African--traditional--religious base brought over by the various West Africans who were pressed into slavery. Black Religion today is quite properly understood to be profoundly Christian, but it is also still deeply influenced by its African roots." See Mitchell 9.

[91] Blassingame 72-73.

[92] J.Beverly F. Shaw, The Negro in the History of Methodism. (Nashville: Parthenon, 1954),

[93] Shaw 21.

[94] Shaw 21.

[95] Shaw 21.

[96] Carol V. R. George, Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black churches 1760-1840 (New York: Oxford UP, 1973) 14.

[97] George 14.

[98] Catharine C. Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1916) 40.

[99] For further reading see Cleveland. See also William G. McLaughlin, Revivals, Awakenings and Reform (Chicago: U of Chicago P), 1978.

[100] These two religious sects had the greatest appeal among African-American communities in America.

[101] See John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes (New York: Knopf, 1948) 224-225. See also Gunnar Mrydal, Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, An

American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York: Harper, 1944) 863-864. Gunnar Mrydal writes: "The great majority of Negroes belong to the Baptist and Methodist churches or to small sects which have branched out from them...." (864).

[102] Blacks were segregated to specific church pews, apart from the white members of the congregations. They were also denied all of the advantages of being full-fledged members of the church. See Harry V. Richardson, Dark Salvation (Garden City: Anchor, 1976) 65.

[103] Richardson 65-82.

[104] Richardson 84-92. See also Daniel Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Arno, 1969).

[105] Jean MaMahon Humez, ed., Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson: Black Visionary Shaker Eldress (Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 1981) 1-7.

[106] Ralph E. Morrow, Northern Methodism and Reconstruction (East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1956) 35-46.

[107] See Morrow. See also Richardson, 56-58.

[108] See Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, ed. Houston A. Baker, Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1982) and Amanda Berry Smith, An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist, ed. Jualynne Dodson (New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

[109] Raboteau 66.

[110] Raboteau 66.

[111] Webb quotes extensively from Le Jau's missionary letters. See Webb 250.

[112] Milton C. Sernett quotes extensively from Francis Le Jau's letters written during Le Jau's tenure as a preacher in South Carolina. Le Jau had the slaves make the following declaration: "You declare in the presence of God and before this Congregation that you do not ask for the holy baptism out of any design to ffree [sic] yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your Master while you live, but meerly for the good of your Soul and to partake of the Graces and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ." See Milton C. Sernett, Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness (Durham: Duke UP, 1985) 25.

[113] Webb quotes extensively from Elias Neau's tally conducted in New York, October 1705. See Webb 248.

[114] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on Virginia," The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Robert L. Lipscomb, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1903) 201.

[115] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Feminist Thrust of Sectarian Christianity," Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in Jewish and Christian Traditions, eds. Rosemary Radford

Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster) 215.

[116] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston: Beacon, 1984) xiv.

[117] Nancy Hardesty, Lucille Sider Dayton and Donald W. Dayton, "Women in the Holiness Movements: Feminism in the Evangelical Tradition," Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditons, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster) 225.

[118] Blauvelt, "Women and Revivalism," eds. Ruether and Skinner, vol. 1; Barbara Welter, Dimity Convictions (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976), 21-41; Cott, Root of Bitterness 24; Zikmund, "The Feminist Thrust of Sectarian Christianity" 216.

[119] Zikmund, "The Feminist Thrust of Sectarian Christianity" 216.

[120] Nancy F. Cott acknowledges that Puritan society granted positive positions in the work force to women; she indicates while it was assumed "that women's souls were capable of being chosen by God, and their earthly roles were necessary to a community of saints, [these assumptions] did not diminish the assumption that they were secondary." See Cott, Root of Bitterness 6

[121] Cott, Root of Bitterness 10.

[122] Cott, Root of Bitterness 10.

[123] Douglas 45

[124] Welter 22-23

[125] Welter 84-85

[126] Welter 85.

[127] Blauvelt 2.

[128] Lerner 190.

[129] Welter 93.

[130] Lerner 190.

[131] Lerner 190.

[132] Guy-Sheftall 41.

[133] Maria W. Stewart, Productions Of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 16.

[134] Blauvelt quotes extensively from the Rev. Peter Cartwright. See Blauvelt 23.

[135] Cott, Bonds of Womanhood 132.

[136] Hardesty et al. 226-254.

[137] Hardesty et al. 229-230.

[138] Theodore Weld, "Weld to Sarah and Angelina Grimke, New York, August 16, 1837," Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld and Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke (1824-1844), eds. Gilbert

H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (New York: Appleton-Century, 1934) 229-230.

[139] Weld 229-230.

[140] William E. B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk, Three Negro Classics, ed. John Hope Franklin. (New York: Avon, 1965) 340.

[141] Mitchell 220.

[142] Benjamin Mays, The Negroes' God: As Reflected in His Literature (New York: Atheneum, 1969)

[143] Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: Norton, 1985)

[144] Jualyne E. Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "'Something Within'" Social Change and Collective Endurance in the Sacred World of Black Christian Women, Women and Religion in America, eds. Ruether and Keller, vol. 3 81.

[145] Jean McMahon Humez, ed., Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson: Black Visionary Shaker Eldress (1882; Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 1987) 5.

[146] Humez 5

[147] Humez 5.

[148] Humez 6.

[149] Humez 6

[150] Bert James Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin, Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1976) 135.

[151] Zilpha Elaw, Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw, An American Female of Colour, Sisters of the Spirit, ed. William L. Andrews, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) 108.

[152] Humez 26.

[153] Julia A. Foote, A Brand Plucked From the Fire, Sisters of the Spirit, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 162.

[154] Daniel A. Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, (New York: Arno, 1969) 273.

[155] Payne 273.

[156] Jualynne Dodson, "Introduction" An Autobiography, xxxvi.

[157] Hardesty et al. 235.

[158] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Struggle for the Right to Preach," Women and Religion in America, eds. Ruether and Keller, vol. 1, 214.

[159] Zikmund, "Struggle" 214.

[160] Zikmund, "Struggle" 214.

[161] Zikmund, "Struggle" 214,

[162] Zikmund, "Struggle" 208.

[163] Blauvelt 10.

[164] Douglas 103-104.

[165] See Richardson, Black Women and Religion xv.

CHAPTER TWO
AUTOBIOGRAPHY: THE GENRE

In publishing their spiritual autobiographies and autobiographical writings, African-American women in the antebellum era claimed the authority to define themselves and simultaneously seized their rights as Americans.[1] In so doing, Maria W. Stewart,[2] Jarena Lee,[3] Zilpha Elaw,[4] Harriet E. Wilson,[5] and Harriet A. Jacobs[6] radically transcended nineteenth-century cultural and political definitions of woman's prescribed place. By participating in the intellectual, exegetical examination of canonical Biblical texts, black female spiritual autobiographers defined themselves as theologians and carved a place for themselves as the progenitors of a Christian theology of black liberation based in female experience. While Shaker Eldress Mother Rebecca Cox Jackson, founder of the first black Shaker religious sect and cult, did not publish her posthumous journal in this time period, her careful attention to dates and places, in addition to her asides to the reader in her text, suggest that Jackson, too, may have intended to publish her journal. Importantly, Jackson's radical religious faith and exegesis of Scripture in the direction of a black female liberation theology, along with her participation in the black woman's

effort to surpass nineteenth-century cultural roles, make her crucial to any discussion of black women's social activism through religious autobiography.[7]

Like the earliest African-American spiritual autobiographers of the late-eighteenth century, James Gronniosaw, John Marrant and George White,[8] the women studied in this dissertation were convinced that the autobiographical genre was an appropriate and logical literary mode in which to portray their spiritual awakening, subsequent religious conversion and consequent freedom from sin. It was a useful tool in guiding others to a similar experience of spiritual perfection.[9] The black spiritual autobiographer, whether female or male, chronicled the journey from enslavement to freedom:

> back to the acquisition of some sort of saving knowledge and to an awareness within. The recognition of one's true identity, unfettered by either the slavery of sin or the sin of slavery, set in motion a process by which early black Christians, and later, black slaves, attained spiritual as well as secular freedom.
>
> On reaching their goals both the spiritual and the slave autobiographer felt obliged to proclaim their respective gospels.[10]

Autobiography was a useful tool for persuasion, guidance, and the charting of spiritual growth for the female revivalist testifiers of the Second Great Awakening (1820-1845). In the same manner, autobiography was useful for the women evangelists of the Holiness Movement (1835-1930s).[11] For the female spiritual autobiographers mentioned earlier[12], the task was complicated by the need to revise public views concerning ecclesiastical doctrine based on a particular Scriptural

hermeneutics about women's right to clerical status. The spiritual autobiographers studied here offered radical readings of Biblical passages which supported their right to preach. Doing so involved not only a competent knowledge of the Bible and Biblical history but a reexamination of androcentric Biblical language which marginalized women's pivotal roles in the formation of the Christian religion. Traditional readings of Scripture have rendered women's activity and power in canonical Biblical history invisible. Female evangelists necessarily attempted to recover this history in support of their right to preach.

The task for the black female spiritual autobiographer was further complicated. Her humanity as well as her right to preach had to be proven. By demonstrating a personal, intimate, reciprocal relationship with God, black women could refute nineteenth-century views of blacks as non-human, soulless beings incapable of experiencing God's saving grace. Courageously taking on the public role of preacher, spiritual leader, and counselor in the development of strategies for both secular and spiritual survival, the black women discussed in this study challenged women's subordination to males in religious and political vocations. Spiritual autobiography, which incorporates the journey motif, is the symbolic manifestation of the aforementioned individual's manumission from the slavery of sin and from the oppression of clerical silencing. Through the literary testimony of their autobiographical works, these black women acquired public voice and simultaneously constructed positive self-identities. Social

and legal restrictions denied black women the right to literacy in some states. Hence the recreation of a self in literature became a political act which challenged the oppression of black women. African-American spiritual autobiography is a valuable resource in exploring black women's transcendence and survival of hostile socio-political forces in nineteenth-century society. It is useful as well for black women's positive redefinition apart from the nineteenth-century definitions of "true womanhood" which sought to repress and limit their potential for personal growth.

African-American spiritual autobiography (useful to males and females in the creation of a selfhood) is the progenitor for many of the secular slave narratives adapted by African American males and females in the antebellum and postbellum era. The spiritual narratives by black female liberation theologians, and their indictment of the socio-political and religious framework of American society (which limited blacks and women), provided a vehicle for other African-American women to make similar indictments. Harriet E. Wilson (ca. 1808-1870) and Harriet A. Jacobs (1813-1897) wrote antebellum secular narratives revealing the awakening of the inner courage of black women through a reappropriation of the Divine as a Deity favoring the black woman's liberation from oppression. Between 1835 and 1861, these women, conscious of their unique and special individuality in a collective human experience, used a variety of literary modes to redefine and construct a self. In her autobiographical writings, Maria W. Stewart makes use of the American jeremiad to launch an indictment of the

inequitable circumstances blacks faced in America. America's "first black woman political writer"[13] and first "feminist/theologian abolitionist,"[14] Stewart indicts the "corruption" of the American clergy which she insists has withheld the "truth" from black men and women that might foster their liberation. Stewart feels that she has been appointed by God to present the "truth"---the gospel of salvation and liberation from the spiritual, mental, and physical oppression of African-Americans. Yet Stewart's message is radical for a nineteenth-century audience. Influenced by William Lloyd Garrison, publisher of the Liberator, Stewart's message is one of "immediate emancipation" for blacks. A disciple of David Walker, author of the inflammatory pamphlet, David Walker's Appeal (1829), Stewart adopts Walker's style and language in order to incite her "promiscuous" audience of readers and listeners to life-altering action.

Jarena Lee makes use of the Puritan Conversion narrative to chart her religious experience. Like Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Lee records her spiritual awakening, conversion, and commitment to a life of following God's will. Rebecca Cox Jackson makes use of the Puritan journal as she takes up the pen to examine and to historicize her life. Her journals are a means of charting her personal growth and journey toward union with the Divine. Jackson's attempt at historicism results from her belief that she also has been chosen by God as a vessel to provide divine truth. Jackson writes: "I am a pen in His hand."[15]

Zilpha Elaw historicizes her life through the use of memoirs. A proud American female of color, Elaw makes use of the form utilized by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and Thomas Jefferson (1703-1758) to record her accomplishments in itinerant ministry. Elaw writes: "... these humble memoirs will doubtless continue to be read long after I shall have ceased from my earthly labours and existence."[16]

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the spiritual autobiographies listed above make a possible vehicle for other African-American females to develop personal theologies of liberation in a black woman's mode. Just prior to the outbreak of the American Civil War, Harriet E. Wilson and Harriet A. Jacobs penned autobiographies containing such theologies using the perspective of slavery. Although the texts are primarily secular, they contain a religious undercurrent. Harriet E. Wilson adopts the format of the sentimental novel to compose autobiographical fiction. Although she is not a slave in fact, Wilson's life and the life of her protagonist Frado parallel the chattel enslavement of many black women in the antebellum era. Wilson's text attacks not only hypocritical Christianity but also issues pertaining to racism and classism. In addition, Wilson indicts the nineteenth-century cult of "true womanhood."

The autobiography of Harriet A. Jacobs is one of the few extant slave autobiographies written by a black female. The text is also an American jeremiad and a pulpit from which a "fallen" woman preaches a gospel of good news for women. With the Biblical precedent established by the "Woman of Samaria",

Jacobs is comfortable in her role of "fallen" woman revising traditional readings of the Bible.[17]

Black female spiritual and secular autobiographers' theologies of black liberation are defined by their individual and personal experience in a country which oppresses and silences the majority of blacks and women. Yet the narratives illustrate triumph. These autobiographers defined themselves personally, significantly, individually, collectively. In the decades spanning the 1830s and 1860s, black women, conscious of their unique and special individuality in a collective human experience, used a variety of literary modes to redefine and construct a self. While the authors listed above have different foci, they share in common several beliefs. Each author supports the black woman's right to create a self in literature and her right to equality and freedom from oppression. Finally, whether explicitly or implicitly stated, each author supports a woman's right to engage in public theological debates.[18]

The tradition of American black women writing spiritual and secular autobiographies simultaneously begins with Maria Stewart's 1835 publication of her autobiographical writings and meditations. The Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart constitute political commentary as well as feminist Biblical exegesis, a personal theology of black liberation and women's equality, and an argument for abolishing slavery. Stewart's understanding of the political and cultural climate of early nineteenth-century America prompts her to write her own spiritual autobiography with the intent of arousing African-

American males and females to courageous exertion for "knowledge and improvement." Still, Stewart's rhetorical aim is similar to the rhetorical aim of all African-American autobiography: to form a bridge of communication between a white and black world in order to revise the prevailing and often negative attitudes about African-Americans for a dominant white American public.

Stewart, concerned that black women were not leaving enough evidence of their artistic and creative genius, urged black women to bequeath legacies of their personal achievements to inspire future generations of black males and females yet unborn. Stewart writes: "O, ye daughters of Africa! What have ye done to immortalize your names beyond the grave? What examples have ye set before the rising generations? What foundations have ye laid for generations yet unborn?"[19] Stewart's challenge to black women to immortalize themselves, a challenge Stewart herself undertakes, makes her the first American-born black female to write an autobiography incorporating both political and spiritual content. Her religious autobiography of social activism based on a political theology of black liberation anticipates the development of black, feminist, spiritual and secular autobiographies throughout the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth century. The tradition begun by Stewart was carried on by a number of itinerant women preachers, who left their own legacies by writing religious autobiographies of activism, based on a political theology of black liberation: Jarena Lee, The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, A Coloured

Lady Giving an Account of her Call to Preach the Gospel (1836)[20], Rebecca Cox Jackson, Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson: Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress (published posthumously in 1981, but composed between 1830-1864),[21] Zilpha Elaw, Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw, An American Female of Colour (1846).[22] Other itinerant preachers must be included. For instance: Julia A. Foote, A Brand Plucked from the Fire (1879),[23] Amanda Berry Smith, An Autobiography, The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist (1893).[24] Virginia Broughton, Twenty Years' Experience of a Missionary (1907),[25] continue the tradition begun by Stewart.

To this tradition also belong two other women who write narratives that are primarily secular, but contain a religious undercurrent: Harriet E. Wilson's Our Nig; or Sketches in the Life of a Free Black (1859) and Harriet A. Jacobs', Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861). Our Nig utilizes the format of the sentimental narrative in order to discuss racism in the North. Wilson achieves personal freedom when she unlearns a passive version of Christianity, taught by her oppressors. Jacobs' Incidents is a secular slave autobiography which incorporates both religious and philosophical arguments against slavery. Frances Smith Foster says that the publication of Jacobs' text indicates significant changes in the evolution of slave narratives published between 1840 and 1861. While

> demonstrations of philosophical and religious contradictions continued to be important, ... there was an increased emphasis on the violence and brutality of the institution. The presentation of slavery from the perspective of the slave became even more important.[26]

In many instances nineteenth-century black females publish their own autobiographies in a conscious effort to preserve black women's achievements in a country which promotes their oppression. Each black female adopts a mode to best meet her own form of expression. Her autobiography becomes a tool for revising the history of African-American women and for celebrating the potential for new being. In the mid-nineteenth century Jarena Lee celebrates her spiritual position as "the first female preacher of the First African Methodist Church."[27]

Studies in black women's spiritual and personal histories indicate that the philosophical and religious currents apparent throughout the classic, black, female slave narratives like Our Nig and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl are heightened in works by spiritual autobiographers. For quite a few black women in the early nineteenth century, religion is a tool of survival, enabling them to transcend the socio-political forces in nineteenth-century society. The balance of this dissertation will examine the antebellum spiritual and secular autobiographies written by Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Harriet E. Wilson and Harriet A. Jacobs, in an effort to understand better the valuable contributions black women make to literature and history. Each of these autobiographies "illustrates the emergence of new forms, modes and styles from

the particular confrontations of nineteenth-century black women in the United States."[28]

The reading of primary texts included in this dissertation is motivated by theories similar to Albert E. Stone's that:

> we must not only look more closely at particular texts than some critics in pursuit of an overarching thesis have done, but also compare synchronically works which deal with similar themes, social situations, or strategies of self-construction. In the process we may be able to throw light on cultural contexts which both unite and separate one life-story and another. [29]

The spiritual and slave autobiographies of black women included in this study have in common a belief in "true" readings of Biblical texts which support the humanity of all. Marilyn Richardson writes: "Religious faith gave these women strength, courage, comfort, and above all, vision--a vision that was at once creative, intellectual and pragmatic." [30] The narratives illustrate the variety of experiences and life styles of black women in the nineteenth century and their specific and particular ways of addressing these experiences. All of these women construct, in various ways, and develop their own particular theologies.

> Building on their knowledge of Biblical and historical feminist precedent, or on their analyses of their immediate circumstances if no other information was available to them, these women constructed a philosophy of religion, social justice, and feminism which gave shape and purpose to their lives. And they left records. They wrote, they published, they kept journals, they composed songs. [31]

Until quite recently, texts by nineteenth-century black women had been overlooked in favor of texts composed by males. For this reason, the important roles that black women have

played in African-American life and culture, and the successful strategies they have fostered for the survival of the African-American community have only recently been given in-depth discussion in literary and historical works.

During the antebellum period, when black females first began publishing spiritual autobiographies, the abolitionist crusade was operating in full force. January 1, 1831 marks the official inauguration of the national antislavery crusade with the publication of the Liberator by its editor William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison called for articles and essays protesting slavery with the goal of putting an end to slavery. Garrison also visited the black female literary societies around Boston and invited papers for publication in the Liberator. Maria W. Stewart answered the call and published an essay in the October, 1831 issue, launching herself into literary history as America's first black woman political writer. Stewart visited Garrison at his office seeking advice on how best to serve her people. Garrison recognized that Stewart possessed unique talents and suggested that she use her literary and oratorical skills to lead her people in the fight against slavery.

Stewart's brief career as a political/spiritual lecturer made up, in large part, the core focus of her spiritual autobiography. In publishing her spiritual autobiography which subverted the cult of "true womanhood," and which also indicted hypocritical Christianity and the exploitation of black women and men, Stewart provided the literary vehicle for other African-American females to address such concerns.

Yet literacy was inaccessible for the majority of black women. Lowenberg and Bogin explain circumstances which may have prevented a large number of black women from publishing:

> Literacy itself was exceptional. While this was particularly true in the antebellum South, opportunities for education in the North as well were minimal. If the black male's words,...were recorded only spasmodically, those of the black female were still less frequently set down on paper and the more that black communities reared churches, schools, and institutions of family life on white American models, the more it was the men, not the women, who gave expression to their history, their strivings, and their innermost feelings.[32]

Although a few black women wrote personal narratives in the antebellum era, black males acquired success in the literary arena with greater frequency. Charles Nichols points out that the narratives of Olaudah Equiano, Moses Roper, Josiah Henson, and Frederick Douglass underwent many editions.[33]

Efforts to recover black female literary history are extremely important. Even during the recent sixties, as scholars recovered the slave narratives as resource and heritage, texts written by female authors were sometimes ignored, dismissed, misread, or only given brief mention by a scholar. On a more positive note, Charles Nichols' Many Thousand Gone (1963)[34] provided a brief but valuable examination of Harriet A. Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. On the other hand, in 1973, social historian John W. Blassingame dismissed Jacobs' text as incredible. Blassingame asserted:

> In the first place, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) is too orderly; too many of the characters meet providentially after years of separation. Then too, the story is too melodramatic: miscegenation and cruelty,

> outraged virtue, unrequited love and planter licentiousness appear on every page. The virtuous Harriet sympathizes with her wretched mistress who has to look on all of the mulattoes fathered by her husband...[Harriet]...bears two children for another white man and then runs away and hides in a garret in her grandmother's cabin for seven years until she is able to escape to New York. In the meantime, her white lover has acknowledged his paternity of her children, purchased their freedom and been elected to Congress.[35]

Blassingame ends his attack on Jacobs' autobiography with a classic example of the misreading of a woman's text: "In the end all live happily ever after."[36] On the contrary, Harriet A. Jacobs' text does not conclude with a typical happy ending, but rather, it ends, as Jean Fagan Yellin argues, in mixed triumph.[37]

Many texts written by women suffered perhaps a worse fate with no mention at all. Even as late as the 1960s many texts written by black females in the antebellum era had not been rediscovered due to the privileging of male texts and narratives written by ex-fugitive male slaves. The exclusion of black women's literature from literary canons has also contributed to a skewed version of American women's experience. Francis Smith Foster writes:

> The study of personal narratives has been limited to studies [of black males]. Focusing upon the restrictions that women encountered in the nineteenth century, scholars frequently argue that the auction block and the pedestal are similar in form and function. The personal narratives of many nineteenth-century white women contribute to this tendency....[38]

Recent research in black women's history by scholars such as Deborah Gray White, Angela Davis, and Jacqueline Jones indicates that theories which construct similarities between

the auction block and the pedestal are the results of an incomplete knowledge of black and white women's history. However, reclamation efforts by black feminist scholars in the early 1980s made possible the validation of black women's history, literature and experience and corrected this skewed version of history and literature. In fact, ideologies of similarities between the auction block and pedestal buried "the larger ramifications of slave status and racism."[39] Efforts in reclaiming the history of the antebellum and postbellum freed and enslaved females helped prove how misleading such hastily drawn similarities could be. These efforts also unearthed spiritual autobiographies and slave autobiographies by black women. These reclaimed personal narratives provide a valuable contribution to women's religious history, specifically African-American women's religious history, as well as American history. Albert E. Stone writes:

> For history and the human sciences, as well as for literature and philosophy, the recorded perceptions of specifically located individuals of the meanings they themselves attach to past experiences may prove indispensable. Not what an event actually was (which may often prove impossible or extremely difficult to establish) but what it has since come to mean to a participant or observer looking back in light of accumulated experience and altered perspective -- that is the special province and promise of autobiography as social document. [40]

Readings in black women's spiritual and slave autobiographies provide prose portraits and add contour and color to the experiences of women in the nineteenth century. "These works present a spectrum of classes and geographies sufficient to challenge popular notions of a monolithic slave

experience and to remind us that all maidens were not blond, nor, in fact, did all Afro-Americans live in the South." [41]

Black women's spiritual and slave autobiographies significantly enhance understanding of African-American and American history. Black women write from a variety of social ranks and geographic locations over succeeding generations. Their autobiographical writings indicate that not all black females were slaves or economically depressed. Yet all spiritual autobiographies of black women grounded in a context of great personal determination, depict mainly the quest for spiritual perfection, freedom, and literacy. Although primarily spiritual in focus, these works, like the antebellum and postbellum slave narratives which follow them in evolution of the genre, provide commentaries on American history, life, and the major political issues of their given eras which most affected blacks and women. The self-portraits of these autobiographies make more and more visible the invisible American woman.

Autobiography, a story in which the self has central focus, is written when the author surmises that his or her life is not only worth remembering but is of such special significance and value that it ought to be shared. It is written normally for people separated by distance and often by time from personal experience and knowledge of the author's circumstances. Spiritual autobiography is more than a self-portrait; it is "a book written as a testimony and inspiration to other Christians to comfort one another and to save souls."[42] As profound believers in Christianity, cognizant of

its value in transforming their lives, African-American spiritual autobiographers write also to persuade non-Christians that the Christian religion will be of especial psychological and physical value in transforming everyday lives. The sense that they are chosen by God for a special and unique mission that is both ground-breaking and revolutionary prompts the female spiritual autobiographers to relate their life stories.

In a manner similar to the medieval mystics of Europe, such as Margery Kempe, author of the first autobiography in English, the religious vocation of black women included in this study required physical travel. As Sue E. Houchins notes, journeys and travels made by black women to various states and foreign countries provided perhaps the most reliable physical manifestation of freedom in the lives of antebellum black women.

The fact that they were chosen and commissioned by the transcendent Logos of Being, God, also affirmed a sense of uniqueness for these women. This attitude of specialness illustrated why Zilpha Elaw saw herself rising above her fellow human beings, to lead, to stand apart, to be unique.

> Whether I was in the body, or whether I was out of the body, on that auspicious day, I cannot say; but this I do know...I became so overpowered with the presence of God that I sank down upon the ground, and laid there for a considerable time; and while I was thus prostrate on the earth, my spirit seemed to ascend up into the clear circle of the sun's disc; and, surrounded and engulfed in the glorious effulgence of his rays, I distinctly heard a voice speak unto me, which said, "Now thou are sanctified; and I will show thee what thou must do....I [was] far above those spreading trees, beneath whose shady and verdant bowers I was then reclined.[43]

Amanda Berry Smith, one of the most famous preachers of the nineteenth century, experienced a similar sense of uniqueness which, for her, affirms her as one chosen and set apart for a great vocation:

> Then, it seemed, I went to a great Camp meeting and there seemed to be thousands of people, and I was to preach and the platform I had to stand on was up high above the people. It seemed it was erected between two trees, but near the tops. How I got on it I don't know, but I was on this platform with a large Bible opened and I was preaching from these words: And if I be lifted up will draw all men unto me." O, how I preached, and the people were slain right and left.[44]

African-American spiritual autobiography has never been merely a reconstruction of past events in the personal "chain of feelings and experience," or merely a depiction of the "painful and advantageous experiences transformed into the substance of the personality," or even the "interplay between the past and the present."[45] Rather, it has most often had the rhetorical aim of changing the prevailing views of the African-American held by a hostile and dominant white American public. In speaking of her parents' conversion and subsequent joining of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Julia A. Foote writes of their earlier experiences: "They were not treated as Christian believers, but as poor lepers. They were obliged to occupy certain seats in one corner of the gallery and dared not come down to partake of the Holy Communion until the last white communicant had left the table."[46] Foote adds:

> This was one of the fruits of slavery. Although professing to love the same God, members of the same church, and expecting to find the same heaven at last, they could not partake of the Lord's Supper until the lowest of the whites had been served. Were they led by

> the Holy Spirit? Who shall say? The Spirit of Truth can never be mistaken, nor can he inspire anything unholy. How many at the present day profess great spirituality, and even holiness, and yet are deluded by a spirit of error, which leads them to say to the poor and the colored ones among them, [sic] "Stand back a little--I am holier than thou."[47]

For the African-American spiritual autobiographer, "seizing God's word for his or her self-determination was an especially bold form of self-authorization."[48] As Nellie McKay notes: "Escaped slaves who condemned the 'peculiar' institution by indicting its atrocities in writing and spiritual narrators who claimed equal access to the love and forgiveness of a black-appropriated Christian God could not be nonpersons in the eyes of a white world."[49]

Early American spiritual autobiographies were written for a white audience to prove the humanity of blacks (later, as the genre evolved, it included a black audience as well). The narratives argued in a world which doubted the humanhood of the African-American that blacks were equal recipients of God's saving grace as well as equal heirs to divine salvation. For this reason, while the spiritual autobiographer was primarily concerned with acquiring spiritual perfection, implicit in the African-American spiritual autobiography were discussions of the major, timely political issues. Zilpha Elaw writes:

> I started off for the southern territories of the United States, where slavery is established and enforced by law. When I arrived in the slave states, Satan much worried and distressed my soul with the fear of being arrested and sold for a slave, which their laws would have warranted, on account of my complexion and features...I inquired within myself, "from whence cometh all this fear?" My faith then rallied and my confidence in the Lord returned,

> and I said, "get thee behind me Satan, for my Jesus hath made me free."[50]

Through the attainment of literacy individual African-Americans attained personhood and simultaneously demonstrated the ability to acquire written language. In Figures in Black, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes: "The command of a written language was a decisive political act." [51] Tracing the development of an African-American literary tradition and heritage, Gates argues that, since 1773, the acquisition of literacy for African-Americans was the "international antislavery movement's most salient argument for the African's innate equality."[52] Gates explores this concept further in The Signifying Monkey.

> After Descartes, reason was privileged or valorized, over all other human characteristics. Writing, especially after the printing press became so widespread, was taken to be the visible sign of reason. Blacks were reasonable and hence "men" if--and only if--they demonstrated mastery of the arts and sciences. The eighteenth century's formula for writing...the urge toward the systematization of all human knowledge by which we characterize the Enlightenment, in other words led directly to the relegation of black people to a lower rung on the Great Chain of Being, an eighteenth century metaphor that arranged all of creation on the vertical scale from animals and plants...through men to the angels and God himself. By 1760, the chain had become individualized; the human scale rose from the lowest "Hottentot" (black South African) to "glorious Milton and Newton."[53]

Through writing and publishing literature which required a creative imagination, blacks could elevate themselves on the chain of Being.[54] "... Literacy, the very literacy of the printed book stood as the ultimate parameter by which to measure the humanity of authors struggling to define an African self in Western letters."[55]

Autobiography is the proper form for depiction of the evolution of the self. In language, the author "creates a self and recreates a self-in-experience."[56] Beginning with childhood and youth, selected facts and experiences in the author's past are reconstructed to produce a coherent story. "The best autobiographies seem to suggest a certain power of the personality over circumstance...."[57] Autobiography as a genre may include writings such as journals, memoirs, letters, personal novels, autobiographical poems, or diaries.[58] In other words, all of the above classifications might be considered in large part autobiography. In the memoir, the events in the primary character's life are given central focus, while the character remains in the background. However, autobiography proper occurs when the author and narrator, or principal character and protagonist are one. Autobiography is "mainly a narrative" and "mainly retrospective." The subject is the individual life, denoting the beginning of personality.[59]

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Critical theorist Albert E. Stone has explored the value autobiography might have for historians, psychologists, sociologists, linguists and authors. Literary historians Jean Fagan Yellin, William Andrews, and Frances Smith Foster have explored the genre in an effort to understand the social, political, and cultural contexts in which African-American literature was created. Literary critic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has utilized African-American autobiography to uncover the theoretical origins of African-American literary tradition as well as to understand African-American literature. Historians

John Blassingame, Albert J. Raboteau, Jacqueline Jones, and Deborah Gray White found autobiography important in the collection of facts and data useful in rendering a correction and revision of the history of the African American presence in the United States.

Autobiography is both discourse and history. Stone writes that autobiography is a complex genre which can be classified in a variety of ways. In compiling a list of possible uses for the genre, Stone says that because of its links to rather diverse areas of "public life and private consciousness" autobiography lends itself to a psychological examination. Yet, any narrowed psychological perspective would prove inadequate for the genre. As a life history, autobiography might be regarded as perhaps a skewed "version of history." The goal of autobiography is to persuade; therefore, the author manipulates language in order to inspire sympathetic readings. Autobiography might also be considered a "case history" and "spiritual confession" as the narrator relates his or her past and present actions along with the impulses which inspired them. Finally, Stone writes, "autobiography is the linguistic bridge between one self or soul and others."[60] Autobiography recreates a replica of the culture and the society which sponsored the personality development of the narrator. In this manner, the author draws upon the collective human experience and community is established.[61]

The development of African-American spiritual autobiography by Gronniosaw, Marrant and White[62] in the mid-eighteenth century made possible the development of the slave

narrative and also made most effective the arguments supporting the civil rights of fugitive slave autobiographers in the mid-nineteenth century.[63] The genre became an important vehicle in which the slave autobiographer could protest the "peculiar" institution of chattel slavery.[64] Early American slave autobiography is primarily an abolitionist genre and may be classified as protest literature. The genre was written primarily to prove the humanhood of enslaved blacks and to argue against the evils of slavery. The content of slave autobiography was primarily secular, yet the genre employed Biblical exegesis, along with philosophical arguments challenging the Scriptural and philosophical arguments of slavery apologists.

Early American slave autobiographers, like the early American spiritual autobiographers shared the common "rhetorical aim" of revising the prevailing views of the African-American by a hostile and predominantly white American public. Their autobiographies were never written without consciousness of those who remained enslaved or those suffering from the evils of racism and discrimination in free states. In the slave autobiographers' attempt to revise white American assumptions about black Americans as non-human, untrustworthy and immoral characters, African-American autobiographers had to become "eye-witness historians" whose integrity could not be challenged as they spoke on behalf of members of their race.[65]

While Harriet A. Jacobs' Incidents has been one of the more famous female narratives to be recently rediscovered, Jacobs' rhetorical model may be found in the works of Maria W.

Stewart, Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw. Henry Louis Gates cites Mary Prince as the immediate literary foremother who made possible Jacobs' ability to discuss the slave female's sexual violation "along with the enforced severance of a mother's natural relation to her children and lover of her choice."[66] Yet, the ground breaking spiritual autobiographies of Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw provide Jacobs with the vehicle to make an explosive indictment of hypocritical Christianity. Jacobs' text argues that institutional Christianity is corrupt and used in support of black disenfranchisement as well as what is commonly known as the "peculiar institution"--chattel American slavery, a charge Maria Stewart had made twenty-six years earlier. The spiritual narratives of Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw give Jacobs the vehicle to indict Christianity as a religion that does not favor black liberation. The silence of many American churches' on the question of slavery is a great evil to Jacobs. These narratives also provide Jacobs with the vehicle for establishing her theology of black liberation. By taking on the role of spiritual guide for an audience of Northern white women, Jacobs' challenges the silencing of females by the clergy.

While Jacobs identifies herself as an outraged slave mother, the autobiographies of other black females included in this study indicate less concern for the traditional roles of motherhood. Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Amanda Berry Smith, Virginia W. Broughton leave their children with others while they fulfill ministerial duties. Amanda Berry Smith arranges

boarding for her daughter in order to pursue her ministerial duties. After the death and burial of her daughter, Selena, Virginia Broughton immediately continues her missionary duties. Her detractors find such action inappropriate. Yet Broughton writes: "So mightily did God use her on that occasion that her bitterest opposers said: 'Let that woman alone, God is truly with her.' She has ever since been enabled to trust God for the care of her home and her children; nothing has been allowed to hinder her from doing her Master's bidding when sufficient light has been given her to direct her course."[67]

Though works by black female spiritual and slave autobiographers are grounded in an historical and political context, they are subject to the compositional impulses familiar to any other works of literary production. All slave narratives are fictions of factual representation simply because facts are usually distorted in a deliberately plotted presentation no matter how careful the narrator is to deliver truthful discourse.[68] Autobiography is "literary convention and cultural activity, imagination and history."[69]

Nineteenth-century African-American autobiography is a distinctive genre that is separate in some degree from white autobiography, mainly as a result of the political context of arguments against racism and slavery. The signal distinguishing characteristic between African-American autobiography and white autobiography is the inclusion of a reading of African-American experience as a component of the collective American experience. There are various modes for the genre: letters, journals, dairies, oral histories, meditations, spiritual,

conversion or confessional narratives, as well as slave narratives. Each of these forms addresses certain critical issues, which must be examined according to each one's own particular literary form. Examination of the cultural contexts in which the autobiographies are written is important, as well, in the study of the genre.[70]

William Andrews also examines autobiography as discourse and history. Andrews argues that autobiography is not simply a function of its rhetorical situation. When political or social events present problems which cannot be altered or solved through the use of persuasive discourse to change someone's thoughts or actions, then a "rhetorical situation comes into being."[71] African-American autobiography is specifically confrontational. Faced with the urgency of finding a solution to the evils of slavery and the refusal of a dominant white America to see African-Americans as fully human, or believable, black spiritual autobiographers and the slave autobiographers who followed them in the evolution of the genre "naturally realized that theirs was a rhetorical situation."[72] To present "simply" an "objective reconstruction of the individual past or a public demonstration of the qualities of selfhood or a private manifestation of a life of struggle", would not be sufficient for the purposes of the spiritual autobiographer or the slave autobiographer. "The writing of autobiography became an attempt to open an intercourse with the white world."[73]

According to Robert Stepto, the genre of African-American autobiography is shaped by the "'pregeneric myth' for Afro-Americans", the quest for freedom and literacy. These "authors

and texts collectively seek their own literary forms--their own admixture of genre--bound to a shared pregeneric myth."[74]

However, Henry Louis Gates offers a different perspective. Gates insists that "literary works" develop into a tradition "not because of some mystical collective unconscious determined by the biology of race or gender." Rather, "writers read other writers and ground their representation of experience in models of language provided by other writers to whom they feel akin." Gates further asserts that "it is through this mode of literary revision, amply evident in the *texts*--in formal echoes, recast metaphors, even in parody--that a 'tradition' emerges and defines itself."[75] Gates also writes in The Signifying Monkey: "Afro-American literary history is characterized by...*tertiary* formal revision, by which I mean its authors seem to revise at least two antecedent texts, often taken from different generations or periods within the tradition.... Black writers read and critique other Black texts as an act of rhetorical self-definition. Our literary tradition exists because of these precisely chartable formal literary relationships, of signifying."[76]

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes that black women's autobiography is primarily and necessarily self-referential, necessarily so because the genre demands a political reading of which the self is the center.[77] Black female autobiography not only discusses the black woman's experience in America but also uses that individual discussion to explore the collective experience of African-Americans and white Americans.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes:

> Autobiographies of black women, each of which is necessarily personal and unique, constitute a running commentary on the collective experience of black women in the United States. These writings are inescapably grounded in the experience of slavery and the literary tradition of slave narratives. Their common denominator, which establishes their integrity as a sub-genre, derives not from the general categories of race or sex, but from the historical experience of being black and female in a specific society at a specific moment and over succeeding generations. Black women's autobiographies...include some autobiographical fiction as well as formal autobiographies both streams of which have rich sources in a rich oral Afro-American culture. Black women's autobiography resists reduction to either political or critical pieties and resists even more firmly reduction to mindless empiricism. In short, it commands an attention to theory and method that respects its distinctiveness as a discourse.[78]

Because the political, socio-economic and personal nature of black women is different from that of white women, the political and self-referential nature of black female autobiography requires different readings than do autobiographies of black males or white females. Black women, like others who write autobiography, construct "prose portraits of themselves as histories of their lives." Still, Fox-Genovese insists, any completely informed reading includes a political reading. However, "to read well, to read fully is inescapably to read politically, but to foreground the politics, as if it could somehow be distinguished from the reading itself, is to render the reading suspect."[79]

The underlying principle in African-American autobiography is that authors revise earlier works they have read to suit their rhetorical needs and historical circumstances.[80] The following chapters will examine the spiritual autobiographies

of African-American females in order to understand the revisions black women have made in American literature and the running commentaries they have presented about African-American life.

NOTES

[1] Sue E. Houchins, introduction, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

[2] Maria W. Stewart, Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (Boston: Friends of Freedom and Virtue, 1835; New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

[3] Jarena Lee, The Life and Religious Experiences of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady Giving an Account of her Call to preach the Gospel, Sisters of the Spirit, ed. William L. Andrews (1836; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986).

[4] Zilpha Elaw, Memoirs of the Life Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Elaw, An American Female of Colour, Sisters of the Spirit, ed. William L. Andrews (1846; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986).

[5] Harriet E. Wilson, Our Nig, or Sketches From the Life of a Free Black, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1859; New York: Vintage, 1983).

[6] Harriet A. Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (1861; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987).

[7] Jean McMahon Humez, Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress (Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 1981).

[8] Gronniosaw published in 1770, Marrant published in 1785 and George White published in 1810. See William L. Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 1.

[9] Houchins xxix.

[10] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 1.

[11] Houchins, xxix. See also Pheobe Palmer, Promise of the Father (Boston: Degen, 1859).

[12] See also the following post-bellum spiritual autobiographies: Julia A. Foote, A Brand Plucked From the Fire, Sisters of the Spirit, ed. William L. Andrews (1879; Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986); Amanda Smith, An Autobiography, The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist, ed. Jualynne Dodson (Chicago: Meyer, 1893; New York: Oxford UP, 1988); and Baptist missionary Virginia W. Broughton, Twenty Years'

Experience of a Missionary, Spiritual Narratives, ed.Sue E. Houchins (Chicago: Pony P, 1907; New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

[13] See Marilyn Richardson's edition of Stewart's Productions. See also Marilyn Richardson, ed., Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987).

[14] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 22.

[15] Humez 107.

[16] Elaw 160.

[17] See Ben Witherington, III, Women in the Ministry of Jesus (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) for a discussion of the first female evangelist. See also John 4: 1-42.

[18] An insertion needs to be made here. While other nineteenth-century black females wrote their slave narratives or dictated them to an amaneusis, these are not included for in-depth discussion in this study. These narratives include: Mary Prince, The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave (1831); Nancy Prince, A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince (1853); Aunt Sally, Aunt Sally, or the Cross the Way of Freedom. Narrative of the Slave Life and Purchase of Mother of Rev. Issac Williams of Detroit Michigan (1858); Jane Brown, Narrative of the Life of Jane Brown and Her Two Children, (1860); Rev. H. Mattison, A.M., Louisa Piquet, The Octaroon: A Tale of Southern Life (1861); Elizabeth, Memoirs of Old Elizabeth; A Coloured Woman (1863); Dr. L.S. Thompson, The Story of Mattie J. Jackson (1866); Kate Drummgold, A Slave Girl's Story (1878); Lucy A. Delaney, From the Darkness Cometh the Light; or Struggles for Freedom, (c.1891); Bethaney Veney, The Narrative of Bethaney Veney; A Slave Woman (1899); Susie King Taylor, Reminiscences of My Life in Camp (1902); Annie L. Burton, Memories of Childhood's Slavery Days (1909). This study, however, is limited to a discussion of women who used biblical exegesis to critique male androcentric biases against women's empowerment.

Elizabeth Keckley, Behind the Scenes: or ; Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House (1868), will have brief mention in this dissertation. The following texts will also have a brief inclusion: Julia A. Foote, A Brand Plucked From the Fire (1879); Amanda Smith, An Autobiography, The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist (1893); and Virginia Broughton, Twenty Years' Experience of a Missionary (1907).

[19] Stewart 6.

[20] See Lee.

[21] See Gifts.

[22] See Elaw.

[23] See Foote.

[24] See Smith.

[25] See Broughton.

[26] Francis Smith Foster, Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives (Westport, CN: Greenwood P, 1979) 59.

[27] Jarena Lee, Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (1849; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 97.

[28] Foster, Witnessing Slavery 59.

[29] Stone 19.

[30] Marilyn Richardson, Black Women and Religion (Boston: Hall, 1980) xv.

[31] Richardson xv.

[32] Bert James Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin, eds., Black Women in Nineteenth-Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1976) 5.

[33] Charles Nichols, Many Thousand Gone: The Ex-Slaves Account of their Bondage and Freedom (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1963) xiv.

[34] See Nichols 17-23.

[35] John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford UP, 1979) 373.

[36] Blassingame 373.

[37] Fagan Yellin xxiv.

[38] Francis Smith Foster, "Adding Color and Contour to Early American Self-Portraitures: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," Black Women in American History: From Colonial Times Through the Nineteenth Century, ed. Darlene Clark Hine vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990) 396.

[39] Nancy F. Cott, Roots of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women (New York: Dutton, 1972) 14-15.

[40] Albert E. Stone, Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts: Versions of American Identity from Henry Adams to Nate Shaw (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1982) 7.

[41] Foster, "Adding Color and Contour" 396.

[42] Clarissa W. Atkinson, Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983) 24.

[43] Elaw 66-67.

[44] Smith 42-43.

[45] Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1960) 11.

[46] Foote 167.

[47] Foote 167.

[48] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 1.

[49] Nellie McKay, "Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Spiritual Autobiographies: Religious Faith, and Self-

Empowerment," Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives, ed. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 140.

[50] Elaw 90-91.

[51] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Figures in Black: Words, Signs and the "Racial Self" (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 4.

[52] Gates, Figures in Black 5.

[53] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 130-131.

[54] Gates, Signifying Monkey 131.

[55] Gates, Signifying Monkey 131.

[56] McKay 140.

[57] Pascal 11.

[58] Phillippe Lejeune, On Autobiography (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989) 4.

[59] Lejeune 4.

[60] Stone 5

[61] Stone 5.

[62] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 1.

[63] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 2.

[64] William L. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story (Urbana: U of Chicago P, 1986) 17.

[65] Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 17.

[66] Henry Louis Gates, Six Classic Narratives. (New York: New American Library, 1989) xv.

[67] Broughton,

[68] Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 17.

[69] McKay 140.

[70] Sandra Pouchet Pacquet, "Response: "Toward A Poetics of Afro-American Autobiography," Afro-American Literary Study in the 1990s, eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Patricia Redmond (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 91.

[71] Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 17.

[72] Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 17.

[73] Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 17.

[74] Robert B. Stepto, From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979) ix.

[75] Henry Louis Gates, "Foreword: In her Own Write," Spiritual Narratives ed. Sue E. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) xviii.

[76] Henry Louis Gates, "The Signifying Monkey," Black Literature and Theory (New York: Methuen, 1984) 290.

[77] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "To Write My Self: The Autobiographies of Afro-American Women," Black Women's

History: Theory and Practice, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990) 155.

[78] Fox-Genovese 155.

[79] Fox-Genovese 157.

[80] Fox-Genovese 155.

CHAPTER THREE
MARIA W. STEWART'S TRANSCENDENCE OF CLERICAL SILENCING OF WOMEN AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CULT OF "TRUE WOMANHOOD"

The recent unearthing of autobiographies by nineteenth-century black women--especially spiritual and secular autobiographies with a religious context--provides us with first-hand accounts of some of the strategies of survival utilized by black women in the nineteenth century. Autobiographical writings in these two streams--those that indicate black women's religious activism--reveal that free black women in the North who faced the hostility of racism, and female autobiographers who experienced Southern slavery, were neither passive in their religious faith nor acquiescent in their particular circumstances and situations. Rather, many black women demonstrated the courage and will to chart their own destinies and transcend the socio-political codes of nineteenth-century society which oppressed a large number of African-Americans. The autobiographies written by such women reveal not only black women's self-determinism but also a Biblical, critical theology of liberation in a black woman's mode that helped them find inner wholeness in nineteenth-century society.

These autobiographies reveal that black women were proto-black liberation theologians as well as proto-feminist liberation theologians. Current black liberation theologians have asserted that theology must start from the view of the oppressed black male.[1] Thus, current black feminist liberation theologians are challenging not only the exclusion of black women's experience from black liberation theologies but the subordination of black women's needs to those of black men. Black feminist liberation theologians insist that black liberation theologies which support the suppression and oppression of black women in the church are as guilty of the "sin of oppression" as any oppressor in the power structure. Black spiritual autobiographers who penned narratives of religious activism made similar challenges in the antebellum era of the nineteenth century. As proto-feminist liberation theologians, black women sought to include themselves in women's quest for equality with the clergy and the quest for transcendence of chauvinist oppression. Female spiritual autobiographers in the antebellum era who sought equality with the clergy encountered racism from white women and white men as well as sexism from black men as they struggled for the right to preach.

As progenitors of a liberation theology in a black woman's mode, they sought the liberation of all human beings, not just the liberation of white females and black males. Black women liberation theologians also sought to liberate white males and black males from the "sin" of sexism. To black female spiritual autobiographers, sexism in clerical spheres silenced

women who heard the "call", preventing them from fulfilling the Divine will. Clerical silencing, therefore, they felt, not only interfered with the highest orders of God but also prevented many human beings from being enlightened about God's will for their lives.

Sexism is defined by feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether as "an expression of broken mutuality between the genders, the subjugation of women to men."[2] Ruether further adds:

> Sexism results in the exclusion of women from social development in the valued spheres of cultural formation and leadership. Religion plays a key role here both in being shaped by and in sacralizing the social patterns of sexism. Religion makes sexism appear the normative nature of human relations, the order of creation, and the relation of God to humanity and history.[3]

For black women theologians, the religious arena was the appropriate place to begin a political transcendence of cultural oppression and religious silencing. The quest to liberate white and black males from the sin of sexism in order to preach the gospel was an almost overwhelming challenge. As Ruether notes:

> The intertwining of sexism with religion means not only that women and women's experience have been excluded from the shaping of the public culture of religion as both theology and cult. It also means that the religious codes, cult and symbolic patterns, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition have been shaped by an ideological bias *against* women.[4]

The challenge black women made to the clerical silencing of women was a most appropriate place to begin the quest for women's rights.

Stewart's autobiography, entitled Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart,[5] effectively blurs the lines between the secular and the sacred and makes a significant contribution to understanding the role religion played in black women's religious and political activism, as well as the contributions black women made to the social reform era of nineteenth-century America. Through creative vision and a Biblical, critical-historical hermeneutics of suspicion,[6] black women found the courage to fight for women's equality within clerical and secular spheres. Their positive redefinition apart from the nineteenth-century definitions of "true womanhood," which repressed and limited their potential for personal growth, is also recorded in these valuable documents. Black women's roles are often overlooked in discussions relating to women's contributions to significant changes in American society. Through examination of specific autobiographies, this dissertation seeks to fill the lacunae concerning black women's political and religious efforts in the antebellum era.

The autobiographical writings of Maria W. Stewart are concerned primarily with religious and political matters. Facts about Stewart's personal life are relegated to minor importance as Stewart focuses on those religious and political concerns that affected blacks and women. In the introduction to her autobiography, Stewart informs her primarily black audience of her reasons for publishing her autobiography. Stewart writes:

> Feeling a deep solemnity of soul, in view of our wretched and degraded situation, and sensible of the gross

> ignorance that prevails among us, I have thought proper thus publicly to express my sentiments before you. (Stewart 3)

Stewart's desire is to "arouse" her readers to "exertion and to enforce upon [their] minds the great necessity of turning [their] attention to knowledge and improvement" (Stewart 3). Stewart proclaims that, from the moment she experienced religious conversion in 1831, she felt a "desire" to "devote her life to a pious and virtuous existence." Possessing a "spirit" of independence, Stewart felt ready to "willingly sacrifice" her life for the "cause of God and [her] brethren" (Stewart 4).

Stewart focuses her autobiography primarily on the sermons, prayers, religious meditations, lectures, addresses, songs and poems she wrote and delivered over her three-year career as a political activist. The content of these outwardly directed pieces meant to inspire nineteenth-century blacks to life-altering action presents a prose portrait of Stewart.

By gleaning the biographical facts from her text and the biographical sketches available in a few historical works, Stewart's life history can be obtained. Stewart (1803-1879) was born in Hartford, Connecticut and was orphaned at the age of five. Shortly thereafter she was indentured to service in a clergyman's family. In 1826 the former Maria Miller married James W. Stewart, a veteran of the war of 1812. Upon her marriage, she became an active member of the black middle class of Boston. James W. Stewart, described as a "light-bright mulatto,"[7] was quite a few years older than his wife. He was prosperously employed as an outfitter for whaling and fishing

vessels. Upon his insistence, Maria Stewart added W to her name as "part of her own signature."[8] When her husband died on December 17, 1829, he left Stewart with a "substantial inheritance.[9]" However, Stewart was defrauded of her inheritance by unscrupulous lawyers.[10]

In 1831 Stewart experienced religious conversion and embarked on a career as a religious and political activist. After a brief career on the lecture circuit, a period spanning three years, Stewart dedicated her life to teaching as a means of earning a living. [11]

Stewart's text charts the development of a black woman's liberation theology which could lead to her self-realization in the Divine; the autobiography simultaneously discusses those major religious and political issues of early nineteenth-century America which most affected blacks and women. The text provides later black women theologians with the literary framework in which to defy socio-political structures in nineteenth-century America. Through autobiography, they indict and overcome those socio-political structures relegating blacks and women to a prescribed and limited place.

The post-revolutionary era of nineteenth-century America was highly charged with impulses which created significant changes in American life and thought. These impulses included the quest by free blacks in the North for equality and civil rights, the birth of the national organization of the abolitionist crusade, the efforts of female preachers to assure women's right to participate publicly in religious and theological debates, and their quest for equality in the

clergy. Maria W. Stewart's autobiographical writings address each of these social reform efforts. The quests by nineteenth-century females for public voice in the religious arena, as well as women's efforts in abolitionist organizations, paved the way for the development of women's suffragist organizations which sought equal opportunities for women in all areas of life.

There are at least two factors that might account for Stewart's venture into political activism. Stewart had long been interested in being "useful" in furthering the cause of her people. As an advocate of "mutual improvement" and "race uplift," Stewart felt that the acquisition of education might help blacks carve useful and rewarding careers for themselves and aid their fellow human beings. Interested in elevating both herself and her race in the area of education and intellectual pursuits, Stewart was a member of a black female literary society in Boston. At one of these meetings, Stewart saw a notice asking black women to contribute literary pieces on current topics to the newly published weekly magazine, the Liberator.[12] Stewart composed religious meditations and an essay for publication entitled "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, the Sure Foundation on which we Must Build," and visited the publishing headquarters of Garrison and Knapp in hopes of getting her religious meditations published. Garrison published Stewart's essay in the October 1831 issue of the Liberator and later published Stewart's meditations in the form of tracts.[13] Stewart also sought Garrison's guidance in carving out a suitable and "useful" career that might advance

the liberation efforts of black people. Garrison felt that Stewart's intellect and talents as a writer might serve her well as an orator in the abolitionist movement. His advice enabled Stewart to carve out a career path that propelled her from obscurity to the blazing light of public eye.

Stewart prepared herself for this public tour by appropriating the language of the Book of Books to support her actions. Placing herself on an equal footing with male preachers and theologians, Stewart insisted that she had been sanctioned by God to engage in Biblical hermeneutics and to preach and lead members of the black community to an understanding of God's will for human beings. Males, the traditional holders, interpreters and defenders of the *Word*, found this stance offensive and a threat to their leadership positions in the black community. Public hostility did not deter Stewart. Stewart's message to the black community demonstrated that fact:

> I am sensible of exposing myself to calumny and reproach; but shall I, for fear of feeble man who shall die, hold my peace? shall I for fear of scoffs and frowns, refrain my tongue? Ah, no! I speak as one that must give an account at the awful bar of God; I speak as a dying mortal, to dying mortals. (Stewart 6)

Stewart further offended black males by attacking their lack of initiative and ambition to correct the economic and racial problems blacks faced in America. Stewart writes: "All the nations of the earth are crying out for Liberty and Equality. Away, away with tyranny and oppression! And shall Afric's sons be silent any longer?" (Stewart 4)

In "Feminist Theology and Spirituality", Rosemary Radford Ruether defines theology as "reflection of human experience in light of our relation to God. By 'God' I mean the transcendent matrix of Being that underlies and supports both our own existence and our continual potential for new being." Ruether adds further that this "relation to God provides humanity...over against the historical deformation of that potential by systems "which give rise to..."social structures of social alienation and oppression: sexism, racism, classism..."[14] J. Deotis Roberts states, "theology has to do with divine revelation.... Theology involves our reflection upon the divine-human personal encounter."[15] Supporting these definitions is James H. Cone, who states that "theology is human speech formed by historical and theological traditions and written for particular times and places."[16] Paul Acthemeier participates in this discussion by arguing that theology grows out of any community's attempt to understand God.[17] Theology is particularly revelatory since it must continue to inform both history and new traditions as human beings struggle to understand the world and God. If theology does not continue to meet the needs of the individuals, it is, at best, unnecessary in any given era or epoch.

If theology is informed by the experiences of the theologian, then the racial and sexist climate of nineteenth-century America, which Maria Stewart identifies as extremely problematic, must figure prominently in her theological perspective. Although radical in her efforts to become a leader to the black community, Stewart goes a step further and

attempts to empower black women. Stewart writes: "O, ye daughters of Africa, Awake! Awake! Arise! No longer sleep nor slumber but distinguish yourselves. Show... the world [your] noble and exalted faculties" (Stewart 6). Her theology is particularly confrontational, addressing issues which result from experiences of what we would call the multiple jeopardy of sexism, racism, and classism. James Cone argues that theology must go beyond theory and meet the needs of the oppressed if it is to be effective.[18] Stewart formulates a liberation theology which attempts to improve the lives of African-American women and men. Stewart writes:

> Truly my heart's desire and prayer is, that Ethiopia might stretch forth her hands to God. But we have a great work to do. Never, no, never will the chains of ignorance burst, till we become united as one, and cultivate among ourselves, the pure principles of piety, morality and virtue. I am sensible of my ignorance; but such knowledge as God has given to me, I impart to you. (Stewart 5-6)

While Stewart's autobiographical religious meditations are written to blacks as well as members of the First African Baptist Church and Society, she remains in a broader black woman's religious tradition that includes Methodist ministers Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Julia A. Foote, Amanda Berry Smith as well as Shaker Eldress Rebecca Cox Jackson and late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century black Baptist liberation theologian Virginia A. Broughton. Stewart's perspective, as well as the perspective of the other women listed above, is informed by the quest for black liberation, the quest for literacy, and the struggle for women's equality and the right to preach. Each of these women uses a Biblical critical exegesis which supports

the right of women's full personhood in all areas of humanity. An examination of the critical Biblical exegesis utilized by these women will be conducted in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. However, because this work is limited to an examination of the Biblical critical exegesis of antebellum autobiographers, the theologies of Julia A. Foote and Amanda Berry Smith will be examined by this author in a different work. While Harriet A. Jacobs and Harriet E. Wilson do not define themselves as ministers or theologians, their autobiographies include a liberation theology. Their theological precepts must be examined because their voices add to the richness of the black woman's religious tradition in the antebellum era, as well as women's religious tradition in American history. Their writing moves the oral tradition of black religion into the realm of literacy, thereby providing legacies for black women or men who write theology.

Stewart's theology comes directly out of the cultural and social situation of black Americans. Stewart argues that blacks are bound in drudgery and servitude by the chains of ignorance which stem from a lack of spiritual knowledge, and especially by the loss of a personal relationship with God. Stewart's theology is a point of departure from other traditional eschatological theologies which teach blacks to be passive and to wait on God for a reward in the afterlife.[19]

Stewart stresses that a strong individual focus on mental improvement and the organization of women's self-help groups will lead blacks to markedly improved lives. The steps toward improvement in the material existence of African-Americans lie

within each individual, who must first devote energies to self-improvement if any collective improvement is to take place. Addressing an audience of women, Stewart states, "It is of no use for us to sit with hands folded" (Stewart 13) If black men and women take the initiative toward self-improvement, descendants of Africans will once again be known as a race which made great contributions to the arts and sciences.

On September 21, 1832, in Boston Massachusetts, Maria W. Stewart became the first American *born* female of any race to begin a public lecture tour which combined religious and political topics.[20] With this revolutionary step, Stewart violated early nineteenth-century socio-political codes of propriety for "women's realm," and transcended the nineteenth-century Northern American "cult of domesticity" and "true womanhood." At her first public lecture in Franklin Hall, Stewart took the podium before a "promiscuous assembly," then commonly referred to as a mixed audience of males and females, and presented a political argument for the abolition of enslaved blacks in the South and the empowerment of blacks in the North.

Courageous and fearless, Stewart made no apologies for gender as she presented herself as a religious and political leader to a nation of blacks. Stewart told her audience of males and females:

> Methinks I heard a spiritual interrogation-- "Who shall go forward and take off the reproach that is cast upon the people of color? Shall it be a woman?" And my heart made this reply-- "If it is thy will, be it even so, Lord Jesus!" (Stewart 51)

In this lecture at Franklin Hall, Stewart introduced the political and religious themes she would develop later in her 1835 autobiography. This first lecture had an immediate focus, in that it centered on some of the major political arguments current in the late 1820s and 1830s which affected black males and females. Stewart addressed the colonization efforts to send American blacks to Liberia. Like her mentor, William Lloyd Garrison, Stewart suspected that the colonization effort begun by white proponents was hypocritical; she considered its true design to rid America of the black presence. Asserting that blacks were lazy and idle, and were a drain on the resources of American cities, colonizationists hoped to strengthen their political campaigns. Garrison felt that the colonizationists were not truly concerned with finding viable solutions for black economic and racial problems, and attacked their political campaigns in numerous speeches and essays.[21] In her first public lecture, Stewart also felt the need to attack their propaganda efforts. Stewart stated:

> I observed a piece in the Liberator a few months since, stating that the colonizationists had published a work respecting us asserting that we were lazy and idle. I confute them on that point. Take us generally as a people, we are neither lazy nor idle; and considering how little we have to excite or stimulate us, I am almost astonished that there are so many industrious and ambitious ones to be found.... (Stewart 53)

Yet Stewart acknowledged "with extreme sorrow that there are some who never were and never will be serviceable to society" (Stewart 53). Still, Stewart considered this argument by colonizationists extremely flawed. If their endeavor to indict and to exile an entire race on this issue was sound, then why

did they not direct the same attack at members of their own race? Addressing whites, Stewart asked: "And have you not a similar class among yourselves?" (Stewart 51)

Stewart also addressed the question of American slavery, and racism and discrimination against blacks in the North (that reduced blacks to a similar form of limitation to the slavery that the majority of Southern blacks endured). Speaking to an audience of free blacks, Stewart stated:

> I have heard much respecting the horrors of slavery; but may Heaven forbid that the generality of my color throughout these United States should experience any more of its horrors than to be a servant of servants,hewers of wood and drawers of water! (Stewart 51)

Stewart asserted as well that she considered the "condition" of blacks to be "little better than that" of Southern slaves (Stewart 51-52). In addition, Stewart felt it was imperative that blacks define themselves as American citizens, with the rights and privileges that white Americans enjoyed. Stewart told the men in her audience to pray the "Legislature" to grant them "all the rights and privileges of free citizens that [their] daughters may rise to that degree of respectability which true merit deserves, and [their] sons above the servile situations which most of them fill" (Stewart 56). However, Stewart insisted petitions to the legislature were not enough. Blacks must possess a spirit of "virtuous emulation" of the pilgrims and make a powerful effort to raise themselves" (Stewart 56).

When Maria W. Stewart mounted the lecture podium at Franklin Hall, she spoke during the time when the race riots

and brutality campaigns were in full swing against blacks as they struggled to find equitable employment in Boston and other Northern cities. Although the North had abolished slavery in 1817, blacks still felt disenfranchised. Black disenfranchisement became one of the major themes in Stewart's autobiography. Ready to die for the "cause of God and [her] brethren" (Stewart 4), Stewart continued to use the lecture podium to inspire blacks into political activism.

The year that Stewart gave her first lecture in 1832, at a time when the national abolitionist movement was at its height. A year earlier, on January 1, 1831, in Boston, Massachusetts the national abolitionist crusade was born when William Lloyd Garrison published the Liberator, a weekly newsletter reserved for articles which would advocate an end to American slavery.[22] Antislavery efforts of the 1830s were dependent on the publication of pamphlets, newspapers and tracts. Many free blacks helped support this enterprise. Blacks in Boston led by James Forten supported it by becoming charter subscribers. With the publication of "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality: The Sure Foundation On Which We must Build" (October 8, 1831), Stewart became one of its first female contributors.[23] Through the efforts of black agents, the Liberator was distributed in New York, Cincinnati, New Haven, Connecticut and Boston. Three-fourths of the subscribers were black and kept the newspaper in operation.

In order to ensure a proper understanding of Stewart's text, there is a need to retrace the socio-cultural climate that prompted her public political and religious stance.

However, proper understanding of the reform efforts in nineteenth-century society may help ensure that Stewart's active involvement in the nineteenth-century ferment of political and social reforms will be realized.

The post-revolutionary era of early nineteenth-century America immediately preceding and during the time that Stewart began her political career was an era of great political activism in the free black community in large cities of freedom such as Philadelphia and Boston. From the early years in the 1800s to 1829, black leaders such as the wealthy Philadelphian James Forten, as well as wealthy ship owner, Paul Cuffee, in addition to black leaders Reverend Richard Allen and Reverend Absalom Jones (co-founders of the first organized black church in America, the African Methodist Episcopal), realized that despite America's quest and subsequent victory for freedom in the Revolutionary War, America was not truly a free country.

At the time of the American Revolution, colonists were divided on the question of whether blacks should be allowed to fight in the war. Opponents felt that if blacks were allowed to fight, they would, understandably, feel entitled to American citizenship. Abigail Adams had pointed out in a personal letter to her husband that the American fight for independence was in conflict with American slavery. On September 22, 1774, Adams wrote to her husband John Adams: "I wish most sincerely there was not a slave in the province. It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me--fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."[24] However, not many statesmen

seemed to share that opinion. Although they felt black soldiers in the American battle for independence would create problems in America later on, they placed such issues on the back burner. The need for every able-bodied male convinced them to let blacks fight in the Revolutionary War.

Although black men fought in the Revolutionary war, the majority of black men and women did not enjoy true freedom in America. A large number of black men and women were still chained in slavery and restricted by race from close social contact with whites. Despite the fact that laboring blacks paid taxes, blacks were denied services many whites enjoyed. Many were restricted to the margins of society. Wealthy black Philadelphian business owners Paul Cuffee and James Forten faced discrimination. Despite the fact that their businesses brought income into the cities, they were not truly free to enjoy meals in white-owned restaurants and were limited in the places where they could obtain housing. Blacks were restricted from opera houses, resort areas, and many places of business. Although James Forten had fought in the American Revolution and was a volunteer in the American navy, he was not allowed to have the privileges extended to the majority of Americans. Discrimination and racial prejudice were constant factors against blacks in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

In December, 1816, in Washington, D.C., the American Colonization Society (to remove American blacks to Liberia) was organized. Members included Francis Scott Key, Richard Rush, and John Randolph. Pamphlets supporting colonization were distributed. Legislative petitions from colonization

apologists argued that blacks were degraded, ignorant human beings, spiritually and emotionally deficient. Some proponents used "scientific" arguments to support these claims. Proponents also argued that racial prejudice against blacks was rampant in all areas of the country. They further argued that blacks could never hope to achieve equitable employment opportunities or to assimilate into white society with all of the socio-political privileges whites enjoyed. Even those whites who were sympathetic to the racial crises facing blacks in America felt that the African-American desire for upward mobility in nineteenth-century America was impossible, because its citizens would never incorporate blacks into the social fabric of society. Colonizationists also felt efforts to foster education among blacks were decidedly harmful in that education would tend to make blacks think they could elevate themselves. As this would never happen in America, it was cruel to raise hopes only to dash them. Therefore, it was best to keep blacks uneducated because they would never be able to attain the goals that education would inspire in them.[25] For this reason advocates of colonization argued that American blacks might be better served by being removed to Liberia.

Arguments by colonization apologists were persuasive. The society began to increase in members, including Henry Clay, James Madison, Andrew Jackson, William H. Seward, Stephen Douglass, in addition to John Marshall, Daniel Webster and William Appleton. Educational and religious leaders across the country decided that colonization was the best solution to the problem of the black presence in America.

Some blacks, finding prejudice overwhelming and unbearable, felt the colonization efforts spearheaded by white leaders to be the appropriate means toward a peaceful existence in the present. In early to mid-nineteenth-century New York, blacks could not own real estate, houses or land, "under penalty of forfeiture."[26] In New Jersey, free blacks were also forbidden by law to own land. In Pennsylvania, blacks could not turn down jobs which paid insufficient income or refuse to accept employment under intolerable conditions because it was against the law for any able black person to refuse to work. If blacks felt that jobs offered to them were insulting, they could not refuse to take them. For this reason, many blacks felt it was hopeless to assume that blacks would not be discriminated against in America. Therefore, Cuffee, Forten, and Richard Allen, among many other black leaders, initially joined the effort for colonization. However, these leaders later revised their initial positions and not only abandoned the platform but later persuaded abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison to denounce colonization efforts.

Similar situations to those facing blacks in Philadelphia were mirrored all across the United States. As feminist historian Marilyn Richardson points out, in Boston, the area of Stewart's residence, members of the small black middle class were conscious that they faced discrimination and an overwhelming lack of opportunity for good employment based solely on the color of their skin.[27] This awareness caused middle-class black Bostonians to realize that, regardless of

their economic prosperity, all blacks faced discrimination, and restriction against personal advancement.[28] Richardson writes:

> In a community where economic opportunity for most blacks was restricted by attitude and custom if not strictly by law, many of the better-off black Bostonians were not content to enjoy their relative security and prosperity without regard to the situation of the vast majority of their fellow blacks, both North and South. Such men and women were aware of the extent of the domestic and international political unrest which characterized the decades of the 1820s.[29]

For this reason, many well-to-do black Bostonians were conscious of the plight of the less well to do members of black society. Litwack writes:

> In an era of expanding opportunities and social mobility, Northern Negroes faced economic discrimination and exploitation. For the greater portion of black labor force racial prejudice meant much more than restrictions at the polls, in the theaters or on public conveyances, it manifested itself in the daily struggle for existence, in the problems of subsistence living, employment in the lowest paid, unskilled jobs, hostile native and immigrant white workers, exclusionist trade unions, and deplorable housing in the "Negro section" of town. This was the Negro's "place" in a white dominated society.[30]

The racial hostility that blacks faced in the North was tremendous. Many blacks went to other states in search of better economic opportunities. However, Virginia and Missouri wanted to place a limit on the number of free blacks settling in their states. Adopting the argument of colonizationists that free blacks would drain their states' economy, Virginia and Missouri increased efforts to keep free blacks out. In addition, free blacks in Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire and Vermont were given notice that they should not attempt to settle in those two states.

In 1820 one of the first Fugitive Slave Laws was passed. Upon its passing, a number of blacks who had lived for years as industrious individuals were at the whims of greedy slave traders. Whether free American born or legally freed from slavery, captured blacks were pronounced "escaped slaves" by traders and sold into slavery. These two factors prompted some members of Congress to debate black rights at a congressional gathering on March 2, 1821.[31]

In the 1820s, at a time when many blacks were migrating North in search of economic opportunities, free blacks were hated by many white laborers who felt threatened by their ability to work. Politicians, white laborers, and European immigrants fanned prejudice against blacks as their search for labor increased. It was suggested that blacks eagerly competing for jobs would decrease the wage scale, forcing working-class whites and European immigrants to accept a non-livable wage. The belief that white employers would pay blacks less heightened hostility between the races. Subsequently, the 1820s and 1830s were a time of many race riots.

Denied entrance into apprenticeships in an effort to prevent them from learning "useful" skills, blacks migrating North had skills that might be beneficial for farming but which did not serve them well in cities. Unable to participate in apprenticeships in order to learn the necessary skills to procure work in the North, many blacks became unemployable and reduced to the lowest menial labor.

There was not a large number of black artisans and craftsmen in the 1820s and 1830s who could teach blacks the

skills closed to them in apprentice shops. Overwhelmed by doors closed to equitable employment, some blacks did not try to find work. For social historian William E. B. BuBois, this group created problems for the entire race. DuBois argues that while the majority of blacks continued striving to find equitable employment, the small groups of blacks who abandoned the effort created problems for the entire black race.

In his analysis of nineteenth-century American history, DuBois suggests that this element of black society helped to fan racial prejudice against those blacks who sought to succeed. DuBois was not alone in his consciousness that all blacks were judged by a small number in black society. Leaders in the black community recognized that if one member in the black community committed an illegal act, all members of the black community, in total, were deemed capable of such an act. In protest of this fact, a member of the African Society in Boston wrote:

> But as we are not to judge men, then surely we ought not to condemn all for one's transaction. How unwise should we esteem the merchant that would destroy a large sum of gold because a piece of dross was found amongst it. This, I say, would be acting foolishly, judging partially, and condemning wrongfully. It is true, many of our complexion conduct themselves with great impropriety; notwithstanding, as they must answer for their conduct, it does not militate those having freedom who do conduct themselves properly.[32]

Even so, racial prejudice against Northern blacks continued to increase. While well-to-do blacks in Philadelphia had tried to establish themselves as apart from the criminal elements in black Philadelphian society, many whites still viewed blacks *en masse* seeing them all equally and stereotypically as lazy and

prone to theft and murder. If blacks were hired at shops and factories around Boston and Philadelphia, rumors, prejudices and negative slogans and boycotts were spread by immigrants and other whites who saw black labor as a threat to white labor. Some white laborers refused to work alongside blacks. Any blacks hired in enviable positions in Philadelphia and Boston were immediately discharged because of racial hostility. Freed blacks who had once been skilled craftsmen in slavery were unable to get employment because of prejudice.

In the post revolutionary era, many blacks found it difficult to become prosperous and successful. Denied access to the voting booths, resort areas, schools, churches and juries,[33] many blacks were overwhelmed by the racial problems.

The political unrest in black communities resulting from this form of oppression manifested itself in various ways and indicated that not all blacks protested slavery and black disenfranchisement in the same way. In 1828, just three years prior to the official beginning of abolition, David Walker published a political pamphlet entitled Walker's Appeal.[34] The Appeal was considered an incendiary document and a violent attack on slaveholders, many of whom took considerable offence to it. Consequently, they offered a reward for Walker's life. Walker died in 1830 at the age of thirty-four, the cause of his death unknown. Subsequent investigations were conducted to establish the cause. These investigations, however, proved inconclusive as no official cause could be given for his death. As Maria W. Stewart would do seven years later, Walker addressed and challenged members of his race to arm themselves

and fight for their own liberation. Walker combined his challenge with Biblical exegesis, jeremiads and historical precedents to support his arguments. In his "Preamble," Walker wrote that his most accurate observations had: "warranted the full and unshakened conviction that we (colored people of these United States), are the most degraded, wretched and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began."[35] He wrote, Walker told his audience, to alleviate ignorance among members of his race.

Black protest against disenfranchisement took a different form in the slave holding South. In 1832, Nat Turner led a revolt against the white slaveholders in Southhampton County in Southeast Virginia. About fifty-seven whites were killed. Whites suppressed the uprising by a militia and many blacks were killed without a trial. Turner's revolt triggered the debates on slavery in the House of Delegates in 1831 and 1832.[36]

In 1832, the year of Stewart's first lecture, the New England Antislavery Society was founded by William Lloyd Garrison and twelve other white men. One fourth of the members were black.[37] That same year, the volume of religious meditations by Maria W. Stewart, entitled Meditations From the Pen of Maria W. Stewart, was published by Garrison and Knapp.

Maria W. Stewart was very active in the abolitionist crusade. Many feminist and social historians as well as feminist theologians have consistently pointed out the impact the abolitionist movement and women's fight for equality in

public theological debates have had on the lives of American women. Eleanor Flexner writes:

> It was in the abolition movement that women first learned to organize, to hold public meetings, to conduct petition campaigns. As abolitionists they first won the right to speak in public and began to evolve a philosophy of their place in society and of their basic rights.[38]

Women could not participate in the male abolitionist organizations in the early nineteenth century and therefore formed their own organizations. Some of the principle members were females who had recognized women's equality with males in the Divine. These early members included Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Antoinette Brown, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, among many others. The women's suffrage organizations had two primary agendas: women's equality and black equality. Some of the more famous black female members included nineteenth-century female activist, essayist, poet and novelist Frances E. W. Harper. Sojourner Truth was also a member of the organization, but had to fight for acceptance. Her fight for acceptance is recorded in her public addresses.

Not all black women were welcomed in women's suffrage organizations. While a few achieved acceptance, many white women were afraid that close contact with black women might be harmful to their reputations. Society at large considered black women immoral, impure, and careless about motherhood, the home and family. The rampant sexual exploitation of the enslaved black female helped to foster negative stereotypes about black women. Manning Marable writes: "Many masters did not wait for the slaves themselves to reproduce in sufficient

numbers, and took matters into their own hands."[39] While black women were forced to create wealth for their owners through hard work, their owners also increased wealth by increasing field hands, the cheapest means being reproduction. Forced sexual contact between white men and black women occurred often in the nineteenth century. "Black women were...constantly subjected to the physical sexual exploitation of white males."[40] Knowledge of these widespread practices in southern slave states contributed to the public ostracism of many black females. The public division between many white women and black women was intensified when the fight for black equality was abandoned after black males achieved the right to vote and white females did not.

This might account for the fact that many black women spiritual autobiographers participated in nineteenth-century reform efforts in isolation. Although frequently overlooked, involved in the political agitations for positive changes in the lives of blacks and women were nineteenth-century black women spiritual autobiographers and black women secular autobiographers who also incorporated a subtext of women's religious hermeneutics for women's liberation in their works. The preservation and recovery of autobiographies by black women theologians illustrate that black women participated in the social reform movement that swept America in the nineteenth century. Their autobiographies, which challenge traditional readings of canonized Judeo-Christian texts, indicate that the acquisition of literacy spurred their cause of freedom to radically interpret the Word and to dispense the Word. Their

non-traditional readings of the Bible made possible their understanding that the prevailing cultural and social attitudes which limited blacks and women to marginal political place must be revised. Feeling they had been chosen by God for a special mission, black female spiritual autobiographers traveled across America to preach the gospel. Their particular gospels included a radical rereading of Biblical texts which supported their fight for women's equality within the clergy. As black females, their presence and participation as leaders in racially mixed religious revivals were designed to fulfill their particular understanding of Divine duty while simultaneously fighting the racial exclusion of blacks from socio-religious American spheres. Choosing to write autobiography as a means to recreate and assert a self was an act of rebellion against the mores of nineteenth-century society and culture. Black acquisition of literacy was against the law in slave states, while equal educational opportunities for blacks was frowned upon in many areas in Northern states. Writing autobiography for black females was, therefore, not only an act of rebellion, but also an attempt to make permanent the reforms they felt were necessary for a viable black American humanity.

Recovery of Maria W. Stewart's autobiographical writings fosters complete understanding of American women's political history. Social historian Eleanor Flexner delves into women's involvement in abolition campaigns but dismisses Maria W. Stewart as merely a religious writer. Yet Stewart's work encompasses religious matters, abolition and women's rights for

equality. As literary historian William Andrews succinctly points out, Stewart is the "first black [proto-] feminist-abolitionist in America." [41]

As stated earlier in this chapter, Stewart's autobiography incorporates several agendas at once: the disenfranchisement of blacks in the North, the abolition of slavery, women's rights, the quest for women's equality with the clergy and the quest to lead blacks to a greater religious enlightenment through their personal independence. Yet, Stewart's focus is primarily religious. For Stewart, the socio-political ills facing Americans could not be resolved without a proper understanding of God's will for human beings. Any dismissal of Stewart as merely a religious writer who makes no contributions to the social reforms in nineteenth-century society is shortsighted. Emerson wrote that the great activity of "thought and experimenting" and "soul of the soldiery of dissent" in nineteenth-century America resulted from dissatisfaction with the church.[42] Maria W. Stewart was involved in the spirit of "antinomianism" in the nineteenth-century "harvest of reform." As the first American born female to tour the lecture circuit (mounting the lecture podium five years before the Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina Grimke Weld), Stewart must have provided an example for other women to follow. Stewart's activities also make her foremother of black women who acquired public voice. Women such as Sojourner Truth, Anna J. Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terell and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, like Stewart, fought not only for black civil rights but for women's rights as well.

By writing, Stewart places herself in the American literary tradition begun by the American Puritan clergy in the 1620s, that of writing and recording sermons for posterity so that succeeding generations might make use of these historical legacies and use them as lessons in God's dealings with human beings. In writing their sermons and autobiographical meditations, the Puritan clergy were interested in demonstrating God's dealing with Americans, specifically the American Puritans. Making use of Biblical history for models in God's dealing with his chosen people, the Israelites, the American Puritan clergy identified themselves as a new nation chosen by God to fulfill a new covenant of God. A theocracy was necessary in helping the Puritans transcend the forces that would thwart their desire to experience self-determination and prosperity, outward manifestations of God's blessings to his newly chosen nation.

In a special manner, Stewart makes use of the precedent that the Puritans have set. John Winthrop states in "A Model of Christian Charity" (1650): "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us..."[43] Stewart inverts this sermon by arguing that the eyes of all nations are upon the black nation. Blacks in America are held up to ridicule and finger pointing because they have demonstrated themselves neither to be virtuous nor self-reliant. Stewart argues that prejudice, ignorance, and poverty oppress blacks. To become prosperous, blacks must cast off sluggishness and determine their own rights to freedom and prosperity. "We this day are considered as one of the most

degraded races upon the face of the earth." Stewart adds: "Shall we be a by-word among the nations any longer? Shall they laugh us to scorn forever" (Stewart 16-17). In a sermon in 1634, Puritan elder John Cotton tells his congregation that Christians should: "be busy like ants, morning and evening, early and late and labor diligently with their hands and with their wits." [44] Apparently, Cotton's strategies for prosperity are ageless. Stewart admonishes her audience that: "the Christian has no time to be idle" (Stewart 62), and further argues that blacks must "unite and build" (Stewart 16-17). Wisdom must be employed if blacks are to become prosperous.[45]

Using both secular and Biblical history to form the core of her hermeneutical explorations into God's will for human beings, Stewart courageously participates in "naming," defined by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow as the process of "claiming" and "naming [women's] experiences and exploring the ways in which incorporating women's experience might transform traditional religion or lead to the creation of new traditions."[46] Stewart's theological concepts then intersect "with the particularities of religion, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation."[47] In the process of naming, Stewart outlines positive mechanisms which can help to destroy established structures of power which cause African-American men and women to suffer from alienation, poverty, and oppression. Naming, for Stewart, takes the form of redefinition. In redefining God as a Deity in favor of the liberation of human beings from racial and sexual oppression, Stewart attempts to motivate her audience to transform and to

transcend the racial, sexual and ecclesiastical barriers that prevent them from enjoying full potential in America.

Stewart was encouraged that there were many able and talented members of the black race "whose names might be recorded on the bright annals of fame. But, '*I can't*,' is a great barrier in the way" (Stewart 12). Stewart, the first black woman to publicly empower black females, writes: "O, ye daughter of Africa, awake! arise! no longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties" (Stewart 12).

A self-appointed leader endeavoring to transform the economic, political and cultural situation of black females and males, Stewart faces the reality of the status of blacks in America. Hoping to arouse her audience, Stewart insists: "I really think we are in as wretched and miserable a state as was the house of Israel in the days of Jeremiah" (Stewart 8). On a personal level, Stewart challenges her audience to do two things. They must first redefine themselves as human beings. They must "prove to the world that [they] are neither ourang-outanges, nor a species of mere animals [as Thomas Jefferson suggested thirty-five years earlier], but that [they] possess the same powers of intellect as those of the *proud-boasting* American" (italics mine) (Stewart 21). Secondly, black men and women must redefine themselves as Americans who are entitled to all the rights and privileges the majority of Americans enjoy. Blacks must become self-reliant and fight for their rights.

Attempting to goad her audience of black males and females into autonomous actions, Stewart asks: "Why sit ye here and

die?" "If we sit here, we shall die" (Stewart 51). Arguing that the black community must unite and forge new and collective identities which will lead to the construction of schools. Stewart challenges blacks to become self-reliant, to claim their rights and privileges as human beings, to empower themselves by developing those skills which will grant them self-sufficiency. Stewart writes:

> it [will] be vain for the advocates of freedom to spend their breath in our behalf, unless with united hearts and souls you make some mighty efforts to raise your sons and daughters from the horrible state of servitude and degradation in which they are placed. (Stewart 55)

In a united effort, blacks might erect the educational institutions which will foster the survival of the black race. These institutions will impart the knowledge and skills which will sponsor a self-reliant humanity, which will in turn lead to the prosperity and elevation of the majority of blacks from the bondage of toil and servitude. Stewart's political agenda seeks solutions to the plight of African-Americans from three specific classes: those who are enslaved in Southern states; those who endure a form of wage or social slavery in the free states of the North, "who continually drudge from Monday morning until Sunday noon;" and black women who suffer societal exclusion because of negative definitions enforced upon them by the dominant culture in nineteenth-century America.

Stewart's road was a hard one. As an advocate of education as a means to black success, Stewart asked her listeners to face almost insurmountable odds. Many churches, politicians, and religious communities around the country were

against the black desire for upward mobility. In 1833 in Connecticut, Prudence Crandall, the former director of an all-white girl's school, opened one for young black females. Whites in the community attempted to burn the school, and insulted and harassed the students openly as they ventured to and from school. Manure was placed in the school's well.[48] The white citizens were afraid that the school would draw an influx of free blacks to the community and ruin the economy with "poor and ragged" black adults and youths seeking public handouts from the state, since it was assumed, because they would have neither the means nor the desire to provide for themselves.[49]

The recognition that women were excluded from social development in the "valued sphere of cultural formation and leadership" motivated Stewart to begin a new tradition by establishing herself publicly as a black woman theologian who wass capable of leading men and women. In order to be effective, her theology must not be detached from the political situation of black Americans. Consequently, the experiences of women and of black Americans informed her theology. Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty assert that:

> Theology [is] the stepping-stone between revelation and application. The theologian... tries to understand the nature of God and the whole of God's revelation in Scripture in order to make generalizations about the nature and destiny of human beings and God's will for life. Based on the Bible, theology is also open to other ways of understanding God's world. If all truth is God's truth, then insights from philosophy, history, the physical and social sciences help us understand the biblical message better.[50]

Stewart writes, "Knowledge is power" (Stewart 64). Using implied Biblical dogma "my people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge", Stewart argues that black men and women suffer because they lack a knowledge of their own and of world history. Subsequently women's history, black history, and American history are empowering forces which allow her to challenge authority and to see possibilities for new life.[51] Stewart argues that a lack of knowledge of their history makes people prone to repeat mistakes of the past, mistakes that could be avoided with both an historical and theo- historical and Biblical critical historical foundation.[52]

Believing that a knowledge of history will help to make positive changes in people's lives, Stewart employs a Biblical exegesis that considers all truth God's truth. In "An Address, Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston," Stewart argues, blacks suffer because they have been deficient in three areas: Biblical knowledge for religious power, intellectual knowledge, and practical knowledge; all of which will help them to achieve prosperity. Earlier in her text, Stewart orders her readers to "incline" their ears to wisdom and to apply their "hearts to understanding." For Stewart, "instruction" is "life." Stewart makes use of Biblical knowledge in God's dealings with the Ethiopians, and also her knowledge of history, to provide examples to help blacks make positive changes in their lives:

> But God has said, that Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto him. True, but God uses means to bring about his purposes; and unless the rising generation manifest a different temper and disposition towards each

> other from what we have manifested, the generation following will never be an enlightened people. We this day are considered as one of the most degraded races upon the face of the earth. It is useless for us any longer to sit with our hands folded, reproaching the whites; for that will never elevate us. (Stewart 60)

Stewart incorporates historical facts into her lecture: "All the nations of the earth have distinguished themselves, and have shown forth a noble and gallant spirit. Look at the suffering Greeks! Their proud souls revolted at the idea of serving a tyrannical nation, who were no better than themselves, and perhaps not so good. They made a mighty effort and arose..." Stewart continues to cite other nations in her historical analysis: "the French in the late revolution;" the Hatyians [sic], with their "firmness of character, and independence of spirit have been greatly admired and applauded;" the Poles "rose against three hundred thousand mighty men of Russia;" and the wild Indians who refuse to be insulted, "are held in higher repute" than blacks (Stewart 61).

Blacks, then, are destitute and destroyed. They suffer from an extreme inferiority complex because they do not have access to the true gospel and to historical truths which would provide them with models for a reliant self-identity. However, women must be included in the efforts for black success. Otherwise African-Americans will remain disempowered. Stewart asks black women to take the initiative to become self-reliant because they must if the black race is to achieve success. Stewart writes: "O woman, woman! upon you I call; for upon your exertions almost entirely depends whether the rising generation shall be anything more than we have been or not. O woman,

woman! your example is powerful." Stewart adds, however, that black women must "demonstrate Christian love and unity, having charity one for another, without which all our goodness is as sounding brass, and as a tinkling cymbal" (Stewart 63).

A step toward women's self-actualization is the establishment of a women's tradition in patriarchal Biblical history and in the arts and sciences. Stewart reclaims women's heritage and legacy in these areas. In searching women's history, Stewart reverses the tool of androcentric selectivity used historically to relegate women's roles in Biblical history to that of merely subordinate or supportive ones. Stewart presents the true gospel of Christ by demonstrating that women played important roles in the founding of the Christian church reconstructing women's history as "biblical-historical theology and feminist theology." [53]

In her attempt to redefine God as being a God who is in favor of women having self-determination, Stewart is aware that women's Biblical heritage must be examined. Stewart asks: "What if I am a woman; is not the God of ancient times the God of these modern days? did he not raise of Deborah, to be a mother and a judge of Israel?" (Stewart 75) All of women's Biblical history is important: "Did not queen Esther save the lives of the Jews? And Mary Magdalene first declare the resurrection of Christ from the dead? Come, said the women of Samaria, and see a man that hath told me all things that I ever did, is not this the Christ?" (Stewart 75)

Reclaiming women's Biblical history as pivotal to the founding of the Christian gospel and to women's liberation

Hagar

makes Stewart a forerunner of current feminist theologians Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Carol P. Christ, Judith Plaskow, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. Fiorenza argues, "Women's systematic exclusion from scholarship and intellectual influence is an important aspect of our powerlessness."[54] Fiorenza also writes, "Both Christian feminist theology and biblical interpretation are in the process of rediscovering that the Christian gospel cannot be proclaimed if women disciples and what they have done are not remembered."[55] Patriarchal interpretations of scripture oppress women. Stewart fights this oppression by establishing women themselves as important and active participants in Biblical history and as co-founders of Christianity with the disciples. Thus, the Bible becomes for Stewart a heritage and legacy.

As this dissertation suggests, nineteenth-century America defined women's roles as taking care of the home and family and performing supportive, subordinate roles in the church. Men's roles included affairs conducted under the aegis of political and cultural leadership. While contemporary feminist theologians Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty argue that this arrangement is not found in scripture,[56] one only needs to read the second chapters of the Apostle Paul's letters to Titus and Timothy to discover Paul's interpretation of God's will restricting women to domestic spheres.[57] Women who aspired to leadership or teaching roles were restricted to leading or teaching other women. To lead or to teach men was to "usurp authority over" men (1 Timothy 2:12). Stewart relegates St. Paul to a fellow Biblical exegete and embraces

Jesus as the Christian founder who does not relegate women to rigidly defined spheres. Stewart writes: "St Paul declared that it was a shame for a woman to speak in public, yet our great High Priest and advocate did not condemn the woman [of Samaria] for a more notorious offence than this" (Stewart 78).

Stewart's theology is confrontational in that she rejects directly by her writing St. Paul's silencing of women--especially so by refusing to restrict herself to topics and audiences considered appropriate for women. Instead, Stewart issues challenges to the ecclesiastical bastions of authority by daring to speak with authority to both men and women about important religious and political issues. Stewart argues: "Did St. Paul but know of our wrongs and deprivations, I presume he would make no objections to our pleading in public for our rights" (Stewart 75).

It is not just in Biblical history that women determined the course of their own lives. Stewart recovers women's history in the arts and sciences:

> In the 15th century, the general spirit of this period is worthy of observation. We might then have seen women preaching and mixing themselves in controversies. Women occupying the chairs of Philosophy and Justice; women writing in Greek and studying Hebrew; Nuns were Poetesses, and women of quality Divines; and young girls who had studied Eloquence, would with the sweetest countenances, and the most plaintive voices, pathetically exhort the Pope and the Christian Princes, to declare war against the Turks. Women in those days devoted their leisure hours to contemplation and study. The religious spirit which has animated women in all showed itself at this time. It has made them by turn, martyrs, apostles, warriors and concluded in making them divines and scholars. (Stewart 77)

Stewart also recovers women's history from the 13th century, tracing the history of one who earned the Degree of Doctor of Laws and who later earned a chair and taught "scholars from all nations." Stewart may be somewhat unrealistic in believing that it is not impossible for a nineteenth-century woman of "sable" race to have such accomplishments.

Because black men are not adequately fighting for their liberty and freedom, Stewart reproaches the males in attendance at her lecture at the African Masonic Hall in Boston on February 27, 1833. Stewart admonishes her audience of males that "African rights and liberty" are subjects that should arouse them to self-reliant manhood. Attempting to goad her listeners into life-altering action, Stewart argues: "When I cast my eyes on the long list of illustrious names that are enrolled on the bright annals of fame ...I turn my eyes within, and ask my thoughts, 'Where are the names of *our* illustrious ones?'" Black disenfranchisement has angered Stewart. She states: "These things have fired my soul with a holy indignation and compelled me thus to come forward...Have the sons of Africa no souls? O ye sons of Africa, when will your voices be heard in our legislative halls, in defiance of your enemies, contending for equal rights and liberty?" (Stewart 65-66)

Theories about black inferiority stemmed from myths that blacks have not made any significant contributions to the arts and sciences.[58] In an attempt to correct this myth, Stewart felt politically compelled to take up her pen adding her own voice to literary history. In an attempt to shatter this myth,

Stewart writes: "History informs us that we sprung from one of the most learned nations of the whole earth; from the seat, if not the parent of science." Stewart asserts: "poor despised Africa was once the resort of sages and legislators of other nations, was esteemed the school for learning, and the most illustrious men in Greece flocked thither for instruction." Adapting the American jeremiad, Stewart argues that the "gross sins and abominations" of blacks "provoked the Almighty to frown thus heavily...and give our glory to others" (Stewart 65).

Stewart adapted the role of a nineteenth-century American Deborah. In Biblical history, Deborah was a woman prophet, a spokesperson for God who advised the entire nation of Israel. Deborah was not only a prophet, but a judge. The men of Israel came to the Biblical Deborah for advice in daily and political matters. Deborah's skills in judging were famous. Deborah combined the political and secular sphere to carry out her particular cause. Stewart combined the socio-political as well as the religious sphere to carry out the duties she has carved for herself. Empowered by God, Stewart's face was clothed with "steel" and her forehead was lined "with brass" for her entrance into "Christian warfare" for her people.

In her meditations, Stewart outlines three ways for blacks to be empowered, a theme developed by all black women theologians included in this study: Religion is "the sure foundation on which we must build." To be empowered, blacks must go back to the source of power, which is God. In examining Biblical history to understand God's dealings with people

historically, blacks will rediscover God in a positive manner. Finally, blacks must become self-reliant in order to experience successful living in America.

Throughout her autobiographical writings and religious meditations, Stewart develops one of her themes: "Religion is pure;...it is beautiful; it is all that is worth living for; it is worth dying for" (Stewart 9). For Stewart, the "religion of Jesus alone"...will constitute ...happiness" (Stewart 9). Stewart asks her readers to take hold of Biblical instruction.

Early in her text, Stewart indicts the way Christianity is practiced in nineteenth-century America: "O could I but see the church built up in the most holy faith; could I but see men spiritually minded, walking in the fear of God, not given to filthy lucre, not holding religion in one hand and the world in the other..." (Stewart 9)· Stewart continues this indictment throughout her text.

Arguing that the ministers of the gospel have not done their jobs and have not faithfully discharged their duties, Stewart asserts that African-Americans "would have been a very different people from what [they] now are; but [ministers] have kept the truth as it were and hid it from [their] eyes and have cried 'Peace, Peace' when there is no peace" (Stewart 60). Rosemary Radford Ruether notes in Sexism and God Talk that:

> Exegetical criticism of received theological and scriptural traditions can bring forth new interpretations that speak to new experiences. A more radical break takes place when the institutional structures that transmit traditions are perceived to have become corrupt. They are perceived not as teaching truth but as teaching falsehood dictated by their own self-interest and will to power... Usually interpretative patterns are taken from scripture

> and early community documents to set the original traditions against its latter corruption.[59]

In writing a spiritual-secular autobiography with a political context which offered practical solutions to the political and economic problems facing black males and females, Stewart created a literary mode in which black women could challenge traditional and hypocritical readings of Christianity. Her fiery indictment of traditional readings of canonized Judeo-Christian texts and her fight against nineteenth-century cultural and political roles for women made possible the use of autobiography to offer radical readings of Scripture. Stewart's autobiography also made possible the opportunity for black women to develop and to preserve a proto-feminist liberation theology and a black liberation theology in literature.

After a brief tour of the lecture circuit (lasting only three years), Stewart retired in 1834. At the time that she lectured, black communities across America were engaged in activities concerning "race uplift" and "mutual improvement" enterprises. Particular attention was given to self-help organizations geared to aiding poor members of the black community in the elevation of all.

Proponents of race uplift placed emphasis on education and refinement for men and woman so that blacks could more easily assimilate into mainstream society. While the race uplift movement valued education for women, not all proponents valued equal education for women. In addition to this limitation, the majority of advocates of race uplift adopted the social codes

of conduct for black women that were similar to those of "true womanhood." Blacks hoping for acceptance in America's social fabric stressed especially that black women conduct themselves with decorum and propriety to avoid criticism of the race from society at large. Many members of the black elite in nineteenth-century America felt that the fall from grace of even one black woman reflected badly on the entire race in the eyes of racist America. Stewart's radical exegesis of scripture and her violation of "women's realm" made her an object of "prejudice" and "reproach" among the people she most hoped to reach. Stewart asked her audience: "What if I am a woman?" but realized simultaneously that she had made herself "contemptible in the eyes of many" (Stewart 81).

When she is forbidden to speak in some pulpits, Stewart circumvents this silencing by seeking voice in a permanent form. By providing herself with literary voice, Stewart alters the tradition in American literature so that it includes black women. Her book of autobiographical meditations becomes her permanent pulpit, her platform from which to teach individual men and women while leading an entire black nation to Biblical truth, secular knowledge, and ultimate freedom and prosperity.

Stewart argues that proper reading of texts is imperative; literacy is the duty of all African-Americans. Improper readings of Biblical texts had destroyed blacks and had caused blacks to be considered as primarily "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (Stewart 51). Blacks, therefore, have a responsibility in attaining knowledge because knowledge saves lives. As a Biblical exegete, Stewart sought the salvation of

all. As a liberation theologian, Stewart realized that passive readings of Christian doctrine could result in personal alienation and foster socio-economic and socio-political ills. Stewart asks her audience to throw away the shackles of past disenfranchisement and to embrace a religion that is "pure and ever new" (Stewart 9).

NOTES

[1] See works by the major proponent of black liberation theology, James H. Cone. See for example, James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986); Cone, Speaking the Truth (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1986); See also works by black liberation theologians in James J. Gardiner and J. Deotis Roberts, eds., Quest for a Black Theology (Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1971).

[2] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality," Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco Harper, 1984) 9.

[3] Ruether,"Feminist Theology and Spirituality" 9-10.

[4] Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality" 10.

[5] All citations from Stewart's text will be taken from: Maria W. Stewart, Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (Boston: Friends of Freedom and Virtue, 1835; New York: Oxford UP, 1988). Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart includes Stewart's autobiographical writings, as well as her compositions of religious meditations, recorded prayers, addresses, songs and public lectures.

[6] This approach is identified by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza as the systematic study of Biblical texts by feminists to establish the positive and powerful history of women in Biblical texts. Fiorenza writes: "Feminist interpretation begins with a hermeneutics of suspicion that applies to both contemporary androcentric interpretations of the Bible and the biblical texts themselves." Fiorenza continues: "Certain texts of the Bible can be used in argument against women's struggle for liberation not only because they are patriarchally misinterpreted but because they are patriarchal texts." Many biblical texts, intrinsically patriarchal, legitimize women's subordination in the church and society. See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation (Boston: Beacon, 1984) xii.

[7] See Marilyn Richardson, ed., Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987) 3.

[8] Richardson 4.

[9] Richardson 7.

[10] Richardson 7.

[11] Facts about Stewart's life may be found in Marilyn Richardson, Maria W. Stewart. See also Gerda Lerner, ed., Black Women in White America: A Documentary History (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

[12] Richardson 10.

[13] Richardson 11.

[14] Ruether, "Feminist Theology and Spirituality."

[15] J. Deotis Roberts, A Black Political Theology (Philadelphia: Westminister P, 1974) 19.

[16] James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation xiii.

[17] Paul J. Achtemeier, The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals (Philadelphia: Westminister, 1980) 89.

[18] Cone xxi-xvii.

[19] William E. B. Dubois, The Souls of Black Folk, Three Negro Classics, ed. John Hope Franklin, (New York: Avon, 1965) 343-345.

[20] Lerner, Black Women in White America,

[21] In the April 23, 1831, issue of The Liberator Garrison wrote:

> I am prepared to show that those who have entered into this conspiracy against human rights are unanimous in abusing their victims; unanimous in their mode of attack; unanimous in proclaiming the absurdity that our free blacks are natives of Africa; unanimous in proclaiming the libel that they cannot be elevated and improved in this country; unanimous in opposing their instruction; unanimous in exciting the prejudices of people against them; unanimous in apologizing for the crime of slavery; unanimous in conceding the right of planters to hold slaves in a limited bondage; unanimous in their hollow pretenses for colonizing, namely, to evangelize Africa; unanimous in their "true motive" for the measure -- a terror lest the blacks should rise to avenge their accumulated wrongs. It is a conspiracy to send the free people of color to Africa under a benevolent pretence but really that the slaves be held more securely in bondage.

Furthermore Garrison felt that membership in the colonization society included ministers and Southern slaveholders and politicians. Garrison felt that such a mixture indicated the hypocrisy of the colonization scheme. He wondered how ministers and slaveholders could agree on any issue pertaining to slavery. See William Lloyd Garrison, Thoughts on African Colonization (New York: Arno, 1968) 10.

[22] John Daniels, In Freedom's Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negroes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911) 39.

[23] Richardson 11

[24] L.H. Butterfield, ed., Adams Family Correspondence (December 1761-May 1776), vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard UP, 1963) 162.

[25] Leon F. Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) 20-24.

[26] Edgar J. McManus, Black Bondage in the North (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1973) 68.

[27] Richardson 4

[28] Richardson 4.

[29] Richardson 4

[30] Litwack 153.

[31] Litwack 153.

[32] A Member of the African Society in Boston 25.

[33] Litwack 20-21.

[34] David Walker, Walker's Appeal, Walker's Appeal in Four Articles: An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America, ed. Henry Highland Garnet (1829; New York: Arno, 1969).

[35] Walker 11.

[36] Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860 (New York: Harper, 1960).

[37] William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861 (New York: Atheneum, 1974) 31.

[38] Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1959) 41.

[39] Manning Marable, "Groundings with My Sisters: Patriarchy and the Sexual Exploitation of Black Women," Black Women's History: Theory and Practice, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, vol. 2. (New York: Carlson, 1990) 409.

[40] Marable 409.

[41] William L. Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 22.

[42] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England Reformers: Lecture Read Before the Society in Amory Hall, on Sunday March 3, 1844," Selected Writings of Emerson, ed. Donald McQuade, (New York: Modern Library, 1981) 433.

[43] Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco, The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985) 91.

[44] Heimert and Delbanco 31.

[45] Like early American Puritan preachers, Stewart's theological writing utilized the events of her age to present the gospel and restore "harmony between communities and Jehovah." See examination of Cotton Mather's sermons in George Harrison Orians, ed., introduction, Cotton Mather: Days of

Humiliation: Times of Affliction and Disaster: Nine Sermons for Restoring Favor with an Angry God (1696-1727) (Gainesville, FL: Scholar's Facsimiles & Reprints, 1979) vii. On July 30, 1724, Thomas Foxcroft delivered a sermon entitled "God's Face Set Against an Incorrigible People." With a text taken from the book of Jeremiah, Foxcroft admonished his people to "procure the Cause of their Miseries, viz, Their own Wickedness." See Thomas Foxcroft, God's Face Set Against an Incorrigible People (Boston: Printed for B. Green for John Eliot, 1724) 3. He further admonished his congregation to cheerfully submit themselves to God for their own liberation from sin. In so doing, they would become a prosperous people (Foxcroft, 3). Such a Puritan heritage is demonstrated in Maria W. Stewart's religious writings. Stewart felt that God's face was set against African-Americans due to their wickedness. Stewart hoped to liberate her people from the "slavery of sin" and thus alleviate the disenfranchisement of her race. Blacks would be restored to an everlasting covenant if "Ethiopia would stretch forth her hands to God." Thus, blacks would become God's chosen people and thereby experience freedom from oppression, prosperity, and wholeness.

Stewart's development of this theme in her autobiography is concurrent with her development of a woman's liberation theology which radically defies the sermonic and literary heritage of the Puritan elders and also the prescriptive codes of her age. As did Puritan elders of the early congregations in the colonial era, Stewart establishes a new world order for herself, for women, and for her people.

[46] Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ, eds., Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality (San Francisco: Harper, 1989) 3

[47] Plaskow and Christ 9.

[48] Flexner 38-39.

[49] See Daniels 26-29. See also Litwack 113-115.

[50] Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, eds., All We're Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism For Today (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986) 25.

[51] Paula Giddings makes the same argument. See Paula Giddings, When and Where I Enter.(New York: Bantam, 1984).

[52] Olin P. Moyd states that black theology is predominantly theo-historical as blacks use biblical history to determine God's will for human beings. See Olin P. Moyd, Redemption in Black Theology (Valley Forge, PA: Jackson, 1979). Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza makes use of a feminist biblical critical historical approach in her theological writings. Fiorenza seeks to rediscover women's biblical history in an effort to unearth women's pivotal roles in the foundation of the early Christian church and the spreading of the gospel of Christianity. Using a feminist biblical approach, Fiorenza has determined that women's achievements in Biblical

history have been rendered invisible due to androcentric language of the Bible and in traditional exegesis of Scripture. See Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

[53] Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone xvii.

[54] Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone xvii.

[55] Fiorenza, Bread Not Stone xvii.

[56] Scanzoni and Hardesty 29.

[57] 1 Timothy 2: 11-15 reads: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith, charity and holiness with sobriety" (KJV).

Titus W; 3-6 reads: "The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, ... teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed"(KJV).

[58] Gates states that: "Writing... [was the} millennial instrument of transformation through which the African would become... the human being." Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., "Race," Writing, and Difference (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 11-12.

[59] Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God Talk (Boston: Beacon P, 1963) 16-17.

CHAPTER FOUR
SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM BY FREE BLACK WOMEN IN THE NORTH: "ON MY MASTER'S ERRAND"

A great number of works by nineteenth century traveling ministers and missionaries have been recovered in black women's scholarship. This chapter limits itself to an examination of works by free black women in the antebellum era who wrote spiritual autobiographies of religious activism. Mirrored in these texts are survival mechanisms historically utilized by the black race to transcend oppression--the adaptation of religion and literature from a black perspective to create meaningful lives in nineteenth-century America.

William E. B. DuBois argues that in order to understand the history of African-Americans one must examine their religious history.[1] Such an examination of the religious history of African-American women will enable us to ascertain first-hand the mechanisms that fostered a self-reliant and powerful black womanhood in nineteenth-century society. Darlene Clark Hine writes:

> At some fundamental level all black churches espoused a theology of liberation, self-determinism, and black autonomy. Northern black churches were especially active in and supportive of the abolition movement. The promises embodied in Christian scripture permeated all aspects of Afro-American culture and possessed special

> meaning for black women's psychic survival and transcendence. The black church became the training arena that enabled free black women prior to the Civil War to acquire leadership and organizing skills and an increased commitment to winning freedom for the slaves and more control over their own lives. Black slave women's religious faith nourished hope for release from their earthly oppression and degradation. The body could be tortured and abused while the soul remained pure and untouched.... In short, the black church ultimately served as an institutional base giving moral sanction to black women's quest for freedom and the advancement of the race.[2]

Analysis of black women's church history indicates that black women were not content to remain in the traditionally subordinate roles for women advocated by most black clergy members.[3] Some black women sought to transcend these roles for their own particular inner wholeness and independence. It is important to reclaim the means by which they did so. Autobiographies by black women are appropriate places to begin.

For a comparative analysis of works by free black women in the North that illustrate the black woman's religious activism, the author of this dissertation has chosen three works that continue the legacy begun by Maria W. Stewart in the religious arena: The Life and Religious Experiences of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady; Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress; and Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour.

Each of the women studied here develops a unique personal theology of liberation for all. Their theologies are grounded in a belief in black women's right to clerical status, and each woman chooses the best autobiographical mode to create a

lasting self-portrait of black women's triumph in literature. While the works in this chapter concentrate primarily on religious matters, the central theme common to all texts in this dissertation is the "'pregeneric myth': the quest for freedom and literacy."[4]

The spiritual autobiographies by black women in the nineteenth century included various versions of the genre. Black women wrote personal journals, confessional and travel narratives, and sketches. Hailing from various geographical regions and social ranks, black spiritual autobiographers constructed various prose portraits in literature. Conscious of the fact that she is a trailblazer and pathfinder in black women's quest for equality in pulpit ministry, each woman provides a triumphant rendering of her life. While the black women discussed in this chapter did not achieve ordination into the ministry, their quests for equality are no less triumphant. They are among the first black women to find success in preaching engagements in many areas of the United States and in foreign countries as well.

Autobiographies by black women who developed liberation theologies of equality for all demonstrate that many black women were neither passive in their religious faith, nor acquiescent in their particular circumstances. Yet, until recently, the works by female spiritual autobiographers have been dismissed as works that merely gave rise to texts of race uplift or whitewash literature. Spiritual autobiographers who developed liberation theologies challenged clerical restrictions against the full participation of women in pulpit

ministry. In making efforts to transform and transcend patriarchal systems, black women became warriors in the fight for women's equality. Despite the fact that no black woman achieved ordination in traditional religious spheres during the early and middle nineteenth century, black women spiritual autobiographers achieved much in religious and political arenas. For this reason, the author of this dissertation finds Marjorie Pryse's statement below somewhat problematic. Pryse writes:

> Afro-American female literary societies might serve as self-improvement associations; black women preachers might advance the cause of Christianizing the race; and if the missionary impulse remained paramount, a novel written by a black woman might also be put to the higher service of racial uplift.[5]

Black women preachers such as Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Rebecca Cox Jackson were not merely interested in Christianizing the black race. Their preaching engagements were often conducted before predominantly white audiences. In their various engagements they transcended the socio-political codes of their eras. As William L. Andrews notes: "Successful evangelistic forays among 'lawyers, doctors, and magistrates,' climaxing in a vigorous dispute with a slaveholding Deist over the issue of whether black people have souls, show [Jarena Lee] at home in the male sphere of her society, indeed, triumphant over those presumed by gender and race to be her superiors."[6] The works discussed in this chapter provide richness in black women's history and literature and indicate that, despite racial or sexual oppression or inequities in employment opportunities, black women set goals for attaining careers and

reached them. These works also demonstrate that black women developed their own religious ideologies and, on some occasions, disagreed with mainstream religious philosophies and practice. Yet, the contributions they made to black women's history are tremendous because their works set precedents.

While black women spiritual autobiographers may not have been as concerned with issues of American slavery as slave autobiographers were, they were still activists in nineteenth-century women's rights because they fought for women's right to preach. Their works challenge public opinion about women's quest for equality in ecclesiastical spheres.

The aim of this chapter is to understand how black women achieved religious autonomy not just in the black community but in society at large. The aim is also to understand how black women transcended the all-pervasive socio-political codes of true womanhood in order to define themselves positively in regions around the country. These works present black women in a previously unheard of stance as authority figures providing Biblical exegesis before mixed audiences of males and females from the black community as well as the predominantly white community. In the early nineteenth century, black women religious enthusiasts found the courage to confront racism and sexism from whites, and sexism within the black communities as they struggled for public voice across America.

Literary historian Frances Smith Foster argues that black women spiritual and secular autobiographers in the nineteenth century struggled for more liberal interpretations and definitions of "True Womanhood" while they struggled

simultaneously to define themselves according to the four cardinal virtues of the cult. As mentioned earlier, ideologies of the cult of true womanhood were all pervasive in nineteenth-century society. Because this chapter is centered in Welter's definition of the ideologies of the cult, it is necessary to reexamine the boundaries she presents. Welter writes:

> The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, and her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife -- woman. Without them, whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power.[7]

In "Adding Color and Contour to Early American Self-Portraitures: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," Foster writes: "Although the social and economic realities of black life did not allow strict adherence to the cult of True Womanhood, Black women at least publicly aspired to this standard."[8] Foster continues:

> Personal histories by women such as [Jarena] Lee, [Nancy] Prince, and [Harriet E.] Wilson, present protagonists who transcend the images of the victimized slave woman and the home-bound True Woman. However, their characterizations are more complex and subtle than a simple reversal of stereotypes might imply. They offer alternatives to the image of the ultra feminine lady and suggest a more liberal interpretation of femininity and woman's "proper sphere." Their characterizations do not go against the cardinal virtues of womanhood: instead they argue for freer interpretations by demonstrating that even when their activities appear "unseemly" they did not abandon piety, purity, submission and domesticity.[9]

Foster offers an excellent contribution to discussions of black women's spiritual autobiographies. However, her reading is short-sighted. Spiritual autobiographies by black women are

rich, complex and diverse. No one reading closes discussions on them.

This chapter attempts to demonstrate that black women spiritual autobiographers who developed liberation theologies in a black woman's mode were at variance with the codes of "true womanhood." The cult of true womanhood was intentionally exclusionary toward black women. Black spiritual autobiographers were, of course, aware of this fact. Yet the cult was all-pervasive in nineteenth-century society. Literary historian Hazel Carby suggests that the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood "influenced and, to a large extent, determined the shape of the public voice of black women writers...."[10] But Carby also adds that perhaps literary historians should seek to "understand how an ideology that excluded black women from the category women affected the ways in which they wrote and addressed an audience."[11] The black women discussed in this chapter not only defied but also subverted the social codes of "true womanhood" as they sought equality in clerical spheres.

Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Zilpha Elaw focus primarily on seeking equality among the clergy by renouncing undue attention to worldly matters and, instead, embracing spiritual concerns. Their works are precedent setting and provide a vehicle for postbellum black women to challenge the all-pervasive codes of "true womanhood" as they also struggle for the right to preach. The self-definition begun by black women in the antebellum era continues into the postbellum era and early twentieth century as black women struggle to redefine

concepts of true womanhood. Black women such as Julia A. Foote, Amanda Berry Smith, and Virginia A. Broughton, continue discussions begun by Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Zilpha Elaw as they challenged notions of woman's proper spheres in traditional religious settings.

The fact that black women present themselves as pious and virtuous has to do with what they feel are androgynous qualifications for anyone seeking clerical status. In analyzing Jarena Lee's text, William L. Andrews notes that in a "radical challenge to traditional systems of naming," Lee is intent on turning the "alienating implications" of her name to her own "rhetorical advantage." Andrews further adds: "Lee extends [the] tradition of rehabilitating alien names into the area of gender, as well as social and racial, signs. Her autobiography claims beneath the other denoting identity of her title-- A *Coloured Lady* --a spiritual essence that abolishes the privileging power of male over female and qualifies her for the androgynous identity she adopts at the end of her narrative." Andrews continues: "This identity she signifies by appropriating to herself from Romans 8:14 the empowering concept of the "sons of God" which can be applied to any who are "led by the *Spirit* of God."[12]

The quest for virtue is not simply an attempt to meet ideologies concerning "true womanhood." Rather, the women in this chapter initially held Calvinistic conceptions of sin and innate depravity. Such conceptions are transformed only during the cathartic moments of spiritual conversion which consequently released in them outgoing love for all human

beings. After conversion Rebecca Cox Jackson writes:

> I then felt a desire for all the world to come and love God for Christ's sake... and my soul ran out after sinners and a-specially [sic] after those who had done me wrong and I had never forgiven them and never intended to unless they came to me and asked my pardon for the wrong they had done to me. But I prayed and I felt I would go to them and kneel down and pray for them and take them in my arms. (Gifts 72)

The quest for entrance into the cult of "true womanhood" would have been viewed by spiritual autobiographers as a conflict between worldly matters and the attainment of spiritual perfection. As late as 1898, spiritual autobiographer Amanda Berry Smith critiques those members of the black and white communities who placed too much attention on the "fop" and "show" of the world. For black women spiritual autobiographers, transient matters impede spiritual progress.

The emphasis of piety and virtue in these texts also permit the authors to meet a nineteenth-century reader audience. As Darlene Clark Hine suggests, women who traveled and preached before mixed audiences would have been viewed as promiscuous in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

It is better to argue that the religious philosophies of Lee, Jackson, and Elaw are at variance with the codes of "true womanhood." The three women listed above should not be considered aspirants of the cult. Initially Lee, Jackson, and Elaw attempted to define themselves according to the social codes but later realized that such aspirations were limiting to their self-definition and personal fulfillment in career vocations. Rather, their texts illustrate the courage of black women in creating new and more fulfilling roles for themselves.

THE SPIRITUAL NARRATIVES OF LEE, JACKSON, AND ELAW

The spiritual autobiographies by free black women in the antebellum era will illustrate that many black women were neither passive in their religious faith, nor acquiescent to the "natural authority of males," nor were they content in their particular and individual circumstances. Rather, black women proclaimed that the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled, and that "sons and daughters" were inspired to prophesy.[13] For them the nineteenth century ushered in the era when males and females should achieve equality in the pulpit. Black women liberation theologians went a step further in their radical philosophies and in their particular religious theories and practices. They considered themselves leaders of men and women, black and white, in all walks and areas of life regarding proper understanding of Christianity and exegesis of Biblical texts. Examination of these works will indicate that black women spiritual autobiographers who penned liberation theologies in a black woman's mode were necessarily religious activists. Their works are important from an historical and literary perspective in that they provide much needed commentary on the political and social currents in nineteenth-century America from a feminine perspective.

The author of this dissertation argues that it is through subverting the ideologies of "true womanhood" that black women find viable preaching careers, reach "listener-reader" audiences and show other black women ways to positively define a self in nineteenth-century society. They illustrate further

that black women did not always embrace definitions of the majority culture but were both courageous and creative enough to define a positive identity. In spite of black women's exclusion from the cult of "true womanhood," this did not prevent them from forging a positive self in nineteenth-century society.

Each spiritual autobiographer adapts what she considers to be the best narrative mode to create a lasting self-portrait in literature and to confront nineteenth-century culture and politics. Jarena Lee's text charts her triumphant journey from her consciousness of sin and depravity to subsequent religious conversion and dedication of her life to God's will and work. Rebecca Cox Jackson makes use of the Puritan journal for a personal assessment of her spiritual growth. Jackson uses her journal to develop a theology and practice similar in form to that of the Shaker religious sect and cult. Examination of Jackson's text demonstrates that Jackson apparently felt that she was developing a new theology that would not only benefit the entire human race but that she was chosen to present this new theology to all mankind. In her journal Jackson writes: "I am only a pen in His hand" (Gifts 107). Jackson's studied attention to dates and places as well as her frequent asides to the reader indicate that Jackson may have wanted to publish her journal as an historical and spiritual guide for others. Zilpha Elaw adopts the autobiographical form of memoir to "self-construct" and to self-define. Defining herself as an "American female of color" Elaw successfully merges her "double self [American and black] into a better and truer self" in

which "neither is lost."[14] Elaw writes from a triple consciousness which at the end of her text is successfully merged: gender, race, and American heritage come together to create a positive identity.

In striving to develop more positive definitions for black women in fighting for equality among the clergy, black women sought alternative means for positive self-definition despite clerical silencing and their exclusion from the cult of "true womanhood." This step took courage. Social historian Barbara Welter writes: "... a true woman was a true woman, wherever she was found. If anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization, of the Republic!"[15] The nineteenth-century "cult of true womanhood" insisted upon woman's prescribed place, ordained by God and society, as being in service to her husband and family. Women were to place the needs of the family before their own. In addition, the cult insisted on the submissiveness of the wife to the "natural authority" of males in the church, in society and the home. Middle class women who could not aspire to the social model of the "true woman" because of its emphasis on leisure, sought other avenues for personal fulfillment and legitimate social outlet in what may be regarded as the "cult of domesticity." By forming benevolence organizations and temperance societies, middle class women found the means to become useful outside of the home without challenging the cult of "true womanhood." For the black woman, entrance into the cult of "true womanhood" was impossible.

In the early nineteenth century sermons and editorials were constantly circumscribed woman's place. Newspapers and magazines frequently featured articles on this subject. Ministers argued that virtuous women attended the church. Hence, as feminist historians Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, Gerda Lerner, and Nancy F. Cott insist, nineteenth-century females considered religion important and flocked to churches in large numbers.

During the early nineteenth century, holiness revival bands under John Wesley Methodism swept the nation. These religious revivals emphasized the individual's ability to determine God's true will for personal fulfillment. Leading proponents of these revivals argued that women as well as men had equal access to God and to proper understanding of God's will for human beings. God might reveal to women as well as to men the proper means to divine salvation, the correct interpretation of the Divine word. In addition, God might also reveal his plans for nineteenth-century America to women. Recognition of the possibility that women as well as men might be recipients of divine revelation prompted revival preacher Charles Finney--after Theodore Weld initiated the practice--to permit women to speak and to pray publicly in lay religious meetings.

The practice of speaking in formal lay religious meetings and religious revivals led black women to develop their own religious praying bands. In these meetings black female evangelists developed the courage to lead religious assemblies. As Jean McMahon Humez notes:

> In these relatively intimate, highly participatory democratic religious gatherings, in the familiar private world of women friends, spiritual talents and speaking skills were tested. Given the suspicion or hostility that a woman's public religious leadership evoked outside these circles, from the independent black church, leaders and some congregations, it seems likely that the female praying bands were of utmost importance in preparing a woman for a career as a speaker and minister....[16]

This portion of the dissertation includes an examination of some of the first black women's autobiographies to be published after Maria Stewart's. These contain the fundamental themes of the black woman's journey toward self-reliance, self-determinism and ultimate power through the acquisition of a public voice and the construction of a permanent self-portrait in literature.

The autobiographies of Lee, Jackson, and Elaw demonstrate the authors' heavy reliance on dreams, visions and inner promptings of the spirit in their quest for inner wholeness and self-reliance. These texts seek to indicate a significant, intimate, reciprocal relationship with the Divine as proof that blacks were not only the recipients of God's saving grace but to demonstrate as well an intimate reciprocal relationship with God. This was meant to serve as proof to white audiences that blacks possessed souls. In addition, their frequent documentations of spiritual guidance was meant to persuade members of the black and white clergy of women's right to preach.

During her first preaching tour which lasted six months, Lee demonstrates tremendous success. At one of the initial sessions, Lee writes: "God made manifest his power among the

people. Some wept, while others shouted for joy. One whole seat of females, by the power of God as the rushing of a wind, were all bowed to the floor at once, and screamed out" (Lee 45). In attendance at this meeting were both males and females. Through God "... a sick man and woman ... [were] convicted [of sin]" (Lee 45).

Lee links race, gender, and class with the power of God. Lee asserts: "Here by the instrumentality of a poor coloured woman, the Lord poured forth his spirit among the people. Though as I was told, there were lawyers, doctors, and magistrates present, to hear me speak, yet there was mourning and crying among sinners, for the Lord scattered fire among them of his own kindling" (Lee 45-46). Lee continues: "The Lord gave his handmaiden power to speak for his great name for he arrested the hearts of the people and caused a shaking amongst the multitude for God was in the midst" (Lee 46).

Dreams are frequently documented in Rebecca Cox Jackson's text as a gift of power and as one of the many manifestations of her intimate reciprocal relationship with God. Yet dreams become a burden to her family. In her narrative Jackson writes that she will "mention only a few" of her dreams in [her journals] "in order to show how it pleased God in His wisdom to lead a poor unlearned ignorant woman without the aid of mortal" (Gifts 100).

At a religious revival Zilpha Elaw has an out-of-body experience and becomes "overpowered with the presence of God." She reports to have heard a voice say to her: "Now thou art sanctified and I will show thee what thou must do" (Elaw 66).

What follows is an examination of the spiritual narratives of Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Zilpha Elaw. These authors share in common an early affiliation with African Methodism--specifically in the AME tradition. The works also have common grounding in the development of liberation theologies in a black woman's mode. Led by inner promptings of the spirit, visions, dreams, and reasonably reliable precognitive episodes, each woman is guided to what she believes to be her proper religious sphere.

THE SPIRITUAL NARRATIVE OF JARENA LEE

Jarena Lee presents the first "detailed" autobiography written by an African-American female.[17] Lee's autobiography, as well as the other spiritual autobiographies discussed in this chapter, address the "central question of the fate of the individual soul."[18] As William L. Andrews notes: "Whether written by blacks or whites, American spiritual autobiography chronicles the soul's journey not only from damnation to salvation but also to a realization of one's true place and destiny in the divine scheme of things."[19]

Lee was born on February 11, 1783, in Cape May, New Jersey, the child of free parents. Like many young black females in the nineteenth century, Lee was placed in domestic service as a means of earning her keep. Because nineteenth-century American life left few opportunities for black males and females to earn a decent livelihood, their children were often placed into service at an early age for self-support. While in domestic service, Lee became aware that she was a

"wretched sinner;" but those concerns became subordinate to her daily existence. However, in 1804, Lee was again convinced of her sinful nature. Lee's autobiography progresses through the three degrees of salvation that Lee experiences: conviction of sin, justification and sanctification.

The structure of Lee's autobiography consists of three main parts: the introduction to her life history; her "call" to preach the gospel; her marriage and the subsequent renewal of her "call." Lee's text ends with details of her triumphant career in itinerant ministry. Lee's initial attempts to achieve salvation are dramatic as Lee intersperses her account with her numerous bouts of depression regarding her depravity and her resulting suicide attempts. Lee finally achieved religious conversion under the Reverend Richard Allen, bishop and co-founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Lee writes:

> During the labors of this man that afternoon, I had come to the conclusion, that this is the people to which my heart unites, and it so happened that as soon as the service closed he invited such as felt a desire to flee the wrath to come to unite on trial with them -- I embraced the opportunity. Three weeks from that day, my soul was gloriously converted to God under preaching at the very outset of the sermon. (Lee 29)

Conversion sponsored catharsis, not only in a release of negative emotions regarding one's person, but also a release of "malice" and ill will toward others. Forgiveness of others for their perceived shortcomings and inappropriate behavior released in Lee the courage to exhort publicly. Lee writes: "At this discovery, I said *Lord,* I forgive every creature" (Lee 29). Lee further adds:

> That moment, though hundreds were present, I did leap to my feet, and declare that God, for Christ's sake, had pardoned the sins of my soul.... For a few moments I had power to exhort sinners, and to tell the wonders and of the goodness of him who had clothed me with *his* salvation. During this, the minister was silent, until my soul felt its duty had been performed, when he declared another witness of the power of Christ to forgive my sins on earth, was manifest in my conversion. (Lee 29)

After conversion, Lee again felt dissatisfaction with her religious life and embarked on a quest for the "entire sanctification of [her] soul to God" (Lee 33). About five years after sanctification, Lee felt the call to preach the gospel. Concerned about the proper course she should take, Lee sought the counsel of Rev. Richard Allen. Allen acknowledged that Methodist discipline permitted women to exhort and lead prayer meetings. However, Allen added: "As to women preaching, ...[Methodist] Discipline ... did not call for women preachers" (Lee 36). Although Lee initially felt relief at her ability to escape the call "because it removed the fear of the cross," Lee was later troubled about not fulfilling divine duty. Subsequently, Lee rejects Allen's advice and formulates her own theology for women's duty to preach. Challenging ideological biases against women, Lee presents her strongest argument in favor of women's right to preach. Lee argues that unnecessary carefulness about "bylaws of church government and discipline" may result in "disrepute" even to the "word of life." Continuing her argument, Lee asserts (as twentieth century feminist theologians will later do) that one half of humanity has been silenced by ideological bias against women. Lee wonders:

> And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach? Seeing the Saviour died for the woman as well as the man? (Lee 36)

Lee feels that arguments against women's right to preach are unjustified.

> If a man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of half a one? (Lee 36)

Lee continues:

> Did not Mary *first* preach the risen Saviour, and is not the doctrine of the resurrection, the very climax of Christianity -- hangs not all our hope on this, argued by St. Paul. Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? For she preached the resurrection of the crucified son of God. (Lee 36)

In 1811, Lee married Mr. Joseph Lee, pastor of a black Methodist society in Snow Hill, Pennsylvania. For a time, Lee chose the traditional role of pastor's wife to a small society. But Lee found it difficult to become comfortable in her new surroundings. The desire to preach "burned vehemently" in her soul. While ill, Lee exhorted "sinners" who came to visit her. After recovering from her illness, Lee realized she would be "permitted to preach."

After her husband's death, Lee realized that her call to preach should be delayed no longer. Her overwhelming desire was realized in a moment of high drama when Lee took over the sermon of visiting minister Rev. Richard Williams who was having some difficulties "expounding" the second chapter of Jonah. Before members of the congregation, Lee took over his sermon and fully expounded the Jonah text. Using the method common to revival preachers and lay religious leaders in the

early nineteenth century, Lee used her personal experience in her first public sermon. Lee insisted that, like Jonah, she had delayed her call to preach to the fallen "sons and daughters of Adam" (Lee 44). After preaching, Lee was concerned: "I now sat down, scarcely knowing what I had done, being frightened. I imagined that for this indecorum, as... it might be called, I should be expelled from the church" (Lee 44). In Lee's defense, Richard Allen told the congregation that Lee had sought his advice about her call to preach and he had "put [her] off", but he now believed that Lee had experienced the call as much as any preacher present. With the support of Allen, Lee went on to establish a home ministry until she had the courage to begin a traveling public ministry.

In violation of the cult of domesticity and true womanhood, Lee "broke up housekeeping" in order to preach. Leaving her sick son and her daughter, Lee embarked on her first preaching tour during which time she was not troubled about her son.[20] After speaking successfully before lawyers, doctors and magistrates, Lee returned home from a lengthy public tour and found that no harm had come to her sick child. With this realization, Lee abandoned women's traditional sphere and went out to preach. Material freedom was realized in Lee's ability to preach before white and black audiences and to speak freely with a "loose tongue." Under Lee's preaching, both whites and blacks were converted.

THE SPIRITUAL NARRATIVE OF REBECCA COX JACKSON

Rebecca Cox Jackson was born in 1795 and was affiliated with, though not a member of, a black Methodist Church in Philadelphia. In 1844, in the middle of her life, Jackson became a member of the Watervliet Shakers at a time when the Shaker religious sect enjoyed its greatest prosperity and largest number of members.[21] Jackson's autobiographical account presents historical insight into Shaker religion and communal life at this time.

Rebecca Cox Jackson is the first known black member of the Shakers. Her narrative records her severance of primary relationships with family and friends to become a member of the predominantly white Shaker community. Before embarking on a permanent life plan with the Shakers, Jackson came to develop a liberation theology and religious belief and philosophy that she later discovered was similar in thought and practice to the Shakers. Because of her very radical religious belief, and her advocacy of celibacy as the chief means to perfect holiness, Jackson was a figure of some controversy. Jackson's narrative charts a most unusual quest by a black woman for freedom and literacy.

Unlike most of the spiritual autobiographers included in this study, Jackson did not have a voice in the publication of her own journal. The posthumous publication of her text prevented her from making changes that she might have desired. Humez found Jackson's journal entries scattered in museums across the United States and compiled them into a chronological whole. With Humez's brilliant editorial skills and her

historical and literary analysis of Jackson's text, we have the first in-depth treatment of Jackson's journal.

These fragmented accounts of Jackson's life were arranged chronologically by Humez: "Awakening and Early Gifts" (1830-1832), "Breaking Away From Family and Churches" (1833-1836), "Finding God's True People on Earth" (!840-1843), Shaker Doctrine and First Residence at Watervliet"(1844-1851). These works were followed by: "Interim in Philadelphia: Experiments in Seance Spiritualism"(1851-1857), "Second Residence at Watervliet: Establishment of the Philadelphia Shaker Community" (1857-1864).

As does the autobiography of Jarena Lee, Rebecca Cox Jackson's personal journal charts her inner growth to spiritual perfection. As in the case of Lee's autobiography, Jackson's text is an inner-directed chronicle which indicates Jackson's heavy reliance on her inner voice, dreams and visions. Disobedience to inner promptings of the spirit leads her to failure in carrying out a particular mission which might provide a valuable learning experience. As Carl H. Evans notes, the quest for literacy in Jackson's text embodies two kinds of reading: spiritual reading, known as discernment in the will of God, and material reading of Biblical texts.

Although Jackson kept a detailed and careful chronological account of her life, her focus is largely religious. The narrative focuses primarily on Jackson's spiritual growth and acquisition of personal "gifts of power."[22] Daily issues are not mentioned unless they serve to highlight or clarify spiritual or religious moments. However, from Jackson's text

the reader learns that Jackson was married to Samuel Jackson. She and her husband resided with her brother Joseph Cox, a widower with four children. Due to Jackson's relative prosperity, unlike most black women in this study, Jackson was not employed as a domestic to help provide for her livelihood.

Before becoming a member of the Shakers, Jackson made every effort to make home life comfortable for the members of her extended family while seeing to the needs of her immediate family. Jackson's desire for financial independence prompted her to take in sewing as a means of having her own money. Jackson did have some valuable assets. In one of her near-death experiences recorded in her autobiographical writings, Jackson advises Samuel on matters concerning her possessions.

The narrative opens in mid-year, July 1830, in the middle of a thunderstorm, when Jackson is in the middle of her life. The opening scenes capture the moments of her spiritual rebirth. A sense of drama becomes immediately apparent when we realize that Jackson is involved in a quest for freedom from the slavery of fear. Jackson writes:

> In the year of 1830, July, I was wakened by thunder and lightning at the break of day and the bed which had been my resting place in the time of thunder for five years was now [taken] away. About five years ago, I was affected by thunder and always after in time of thunder and lightning I would have to go to bed because it made me so sick. Now my place of rest is [taken] away, and I rose up and walked the floor back and forth wringing my hands and crying under great fear. (Gifts 71)

Jackson asserts that she experiences a deep conviction of sin of such great weight that all the sins of her childhood "rushed into [her] mind like an over swelling tide," causing her to

expect every clap of thunder to launch [her] soul at the bar of God..." (Gifts 71). Through intense prayer, a personal act that would later become one of her "weapons of war" in confronting clerical silencing, Jackson achieves transcendence and transformation. She overcomes her fear of thunder and is transformed into a person who experiences the deep joy of "love for God and all mankind" (Gifts 71).

The fact that Jackson's text begins in mid-life is, of course, critical to the reading of Jackson's narrative. In these opening moments, Jackson is reborn, no longer considering herself a depraved sinner but a person transformed and renewed by an act of God. Jackson deliberately does not begin her narrative in the manner familiar to the autobiographical genre with the statement: "I was born." This strategy indicates that events in her life prior to religious conversion in July 1830 are of little importance to Jackson herself. As the narrative unfolds we learn that events that took place in Jackson's life prior to 1830 are used by Jackson only to chart the earliest acquisition of a particular gift or to support Jackson's belief in her gift of prophecy.

Although Jackson has had religious experiences prior to this moment, they, too, are deemed unimportant. When Jackson relates to her brother, Joseph Cox, that she has found the Lord, his response is telling. "Has thee? I am glad thee has found the Lord again."

Like all of the narratives chosen for discussion, Jackson's text centers on the quest for freedom and literacy. In order to realize these gifts and forge a self-reliant

womanhood. Jackson must first gain freedom from male domination within her own family.

Jackson's text demonstrates a nineteenth-century black woman's most radical defiance of the ideologies concerning the cult of true womanhood and notions as to women's prescribed place. Jackson's liberation theology centers in the quest for a celibate and self-reliant lifestyle. Shortly after achieving sanctification, experienced in a female-dominated praying band, Jackson comes to believe that sexual union for pleasure--whether in marriage or illicit union--is sin. For Jackson, upon this one act rests Adam's fall and the consequential fall of all human beings. Lust as sin is a primary tenet of Shaker religious faith and theology.[23] Further, Shaker theology suggests that the desire for sexual union stems from the desire to possess another human being and distracts human beings from concentrating on understanding God.[24] This understanding of the true nature of "sin" motivates Jackson to find liberation from all aspects of male dominance.

Jackson's radical stance on the issue of celibacy, which was her outward demonstration of control of her entire person, sets her apart from the other black women included in this study and sets her apart from the political and cultural ideologies in nineteenth-century society. Social and religious mores in nineteenth-century society insisted that women submit to their husbands' will in all areas of the marital relationship.

Aware that her philosophy of celibacy was radical and that it might be taken by many to be a false doctrine, Jackson

attempts to demonstrate that celibacy is a part of the Divine plan. Her "new thoughts" about sin cause her to praise God and to behave very differently; this aroused her husband's concern. Aware that great effort must be undertaken to put her new life into practice, Jackson relies on the power of God to demonstrate that she has an unusual relationship with the Divine. Supernatural forces come to her aid. Jackson writes: "So in my march appraising God, I went from the cellar door to the stove and when I would get to the stove I would lay my hands on the stove, and then turn to the cellar with my eyes shut all the while" (Gifts 77). Jackson continues: "These two things caused my husband to believe that it was more than nature. He expected every time I laid my hands on the stove, and when I went to the cellar door, to see me fall down the cellar" (Gifts 77). This unusual demonstration inspired fear in Samuel. Later when his fear turned to anger, he sought Jackson's life. However, Jackson acquired precognitive gifts and Samuel's frequent attempts to murder her were altogether unsuccessful.

Through the primarily female and highly "democratic" praying bands Jackson develops her radical theology regarding celibacy and develops, as well, the public voice in which to present her gospel. Her radical theology, supported by a new exegesis of scripture causes members of the clergy to suggest that she is "chopping up churches."

For Jackson, liberation from marital union and the acquisition of public voice are the means whereby women may transcend the cultural, political, and secular forces that

cause them to be confined to the domestic realm. The desire for freedom from male domination manifests itself in Jackson's quest for literacy which comes to Jackson through the "remarkable providence of God's love" (Gifts 107). Before acquiring this gift, Jackson was unable to read or write and had to dictate her letters to her brother. Joseph Cox seized control of Jackson's voice:

> So I went to get my brother to write my letters and to read them. So he was awriting a letter in answer to one he had just read. I told him what to put in. Then I asked him to read. He did. I said, 'Thee has put in more than I told thee.' This he done several times. I then said, 'I don't want thee to word my letter, I only want thee to write it. Then he said, 'Sister, thee is the hardest one I ever wrote for! (Gifts 107)

Jackson is distressed by her brother's attitude. However, through inner promptings of the spirit, Jackson learns that she will eventually have the gift of reading. Jackson specifically makes clear in her text that she does not acquire literacy by human aid, rather she is taught by God:

> I...picked up my Bible, ran upstairs, opened it, and kneeled down with it pressed to my breast, prayed earnestly to Almighty God if it was consisting to His holy will, to learn me to read His holy word. And when I looked on the word, I began to read. And when I found I was reading, I was frightened -- then I could not read one word. I closed my eyes again in prayer and then opened my eyes, began to read. So I done, until I read the chapter. (Gifts 108)

The acquisition of literacy was useful to Jackson's home ministry. In these meetings, Jackson gained some followers. Black members of the Methodist clergy accused Jackson of inappropriately transcending women's sphere: "The Bishop [African Methodist Episcopal bishop, Morris Brown] came to

Brother Peterson and said he heard that he had that Rebecca Jackson at his house, aholding [sic] class meetings and aleading [sic] the men" (Gifts 105). However, Morris Brown relented after hearing her preach. He told attending members of the black clergy: "Nothing [was amiss]. If ever the Holy Ghost was in any place, it was in that meeting....let her alone now" (Gifts 106).

In 1833, three years after spiritual conversion, Jackson began a traveling ministry to white congregations in Marcus Hook, New Jersey. On the first step of her journey, Jackson confronts sexism again. Men who heard that "a woman was going to speak... came to prevent it" (Gifts 127). However, the principal officer of the village experiences conversion through Jackson's sermon and advises that no one present prevent her from doing God's will. While her meetings in Marcus Hook are successful, Jackson returns home to find her husband and brother opposed to her ministry. However, Jackson is not deterred and continues her ministry.

In order to live as she desires, Jackson finds it necessary to break away from family and friends. Jackson writes: "While I was under great sorrow and suffering about living a holy life, everything seemed to stand in opposition to that life...This made my life burdensome to me and to my husband, and to my friends" (Gifts 137).

When Jackson realizes that Shaker philosophy and practice is similar to her own theology, in that it "contained much of [her] experience" (Gifts 143). Jackson feels that she must join the predominantly white Shaker sect because they are

"God's true people on earth." Before joining the sect, Jackson underwent a period of intense persecution (because of her doctrine) by members of the black and white clergy. Jackson remains with the predominantly white Shaker sect until 1858 when she gains permission from Shaker Eldress Paulina Bates to leave the Shakers and work among her own people.

The Divine is a transcendent reality for Jackson who uses spiritual power to transcend the cult of domesticity and women's realm. Through redefinition of the Divine as a Deity in favor of the liberation of women and blacks, Jackson finds literacy and subsequently economic well-being. To the end of her text, Jackson has control over her body, her destiny, and her career.

THE MEMOIRS OF ZILPHA ELAW

The Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour (1846) represents one of the most positive narrative accounts of women's quest for equality included in this collection. Set in the era of the religious revivals that swept America under Methodist impact, Elaw's text charts her struggle to transcend the cult of "true womanhood" in order to find liberation. Through Elaw's text, the myth is shattered that black women engaged in preaching tours primarily to Christianize the black race. Although Elaw never achieved ministerial ordination, she conducted her preaching tours primarily among white congregations both in England and America; she was almost always well-received. As a

spokesperson for the Divine, she was an influential figure of authority.

As a female preacher activist Zilpha Elaw considered herself an equal to male preachers in Occidental countries. She dedicated her memoirs to her brethren in England while longing to return to America, "the land of [her] nativity" (Elaw 51). This dedication reflects the finished prose portrait of her journey toward liberation as well as her full potential in the black woman's autobiographical genre. Transcending women's traditional spheres, Elaw presents herself as a teacher and religious leader to members of the clergy. In doing so, she radically violates St. Paul's admonitory advice about women's realm [25] and ideologies concerning the cult of "true womanhood." Her dedication to the "Saints and faithful brethren in Christ who have honoured my ministry with their attendance in London... England" is centered primarily on religious matters (Elaw 51). Elaw asks her audience to renounce undue attention to things of the world such as the love of money, possessions, societal advancement and achievements. Holy men, Elaw insists, should resist the "artificial surface-polish of society and abhor the pride of respectability; for that which is highly esteemed amongst men is an abomination in the eyes of God" (Elaw 52).

The autobiography is also Elaw's attempt at immortality beyond the grave. She presents her life history as a sermon to chart the Lord's dealings with an African-American female chosen as spokesperson for God. Elaw begins her autobiography with a dedication to her brethren in England which indicates

pride in her race and her acquisition of spiritual authority through redefinition of the Divine. Elaw writes:

> I feel I cannot present you with a more appropriate keepsake, or a more lively memento of my Christian esteem, and affectionate desires for your progressive prosperity and perfection in the Christian calling, than the following contour portrait of my regenerated constitution -- exhibiting as did the bride of Solomon, comeliness with blackness [Song of Sol. 1:5]; and as did the Apostle Paul, riches with poverty, and power in weakness [2 Cor. 12:9. (Elaw 51)

Making no apologies for gender, Elaw feels she can guide her brethren to proper understanding of Divine will. She exhorts them to "walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith you are called," and proceeds to teach them how to conduct themselves. Elaw writes:

> ...dear brethren,....Cease, therefore from earthly accumulations; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Renounce the love of money; for it is the root of all evil. [1 Tim. 6:10] Love not the world. (Elaw 52)

To inform the world that she has established an equal partnership with her brethren on an informal level, Elaw writes: "We ... met together in the house of God, mingled our ascending petitions at the throne of grace unbosomed our spiritual conflicts and trials to one another and listened with devotional interest to the messages of gospel mercy..." Suggesting that if she is indeed worthy of their "cherished recollections," her brethren should "receive with cordial and generous courtesy, this small token of esteem and love" (Elaw 51).

Like the women presented earlier in this dissertation, Elaw's desire for a pious and virtuous existence is androgynous. Elaw claims that her contour portrait does not

represent the features of her "outward person, drawn and coloured by the skill of the pencilling artist," but represents instead, "the lineaments of my inward man, as inscribed by the Holy Ghost, and, according to my poor ability, copied off for your edification" (Elaw 51).

Elaw's text presents a first-hand account of a black woman's struggle for full equality with the clergy. The persona Elaw adopts early on in her text is of a woman who struggles to define herself within the all-pervasive social codes of "true womanhood" but later realizes that such definitions are too limiting for expression of her full potential. After experiencing sanctification at a revival meeting, Elaw begins a home ministry.

Elaw's text opens with background information about her life. At the age of nine when her mother dies, she is placed by her father into domestic service for Pierson and Rebecca Mitchell. At the age of 18, her father dies. The introductory material of Elaw's text sets the tone for the rest of her discussion. Here Elaw focuses on her early religious instruction or, more specifically, the lack of it and the impact it had on her life. Elaw's text moves swiftly toward her religious conversion and the achievements she realizes through self-definition in the Divine.

Once Elaw has achieved spiritual conversion, she defines herself as a child of God and begins a quest toward liberation of her full potential. While at a revival meeting, Elaw experiences sanctification, during this time, she has an out-of-body experience and is "overpowered with the presence of

God" (Elaw 51). Sanctification is confirmed when a heavenly voice tells Elaw that she is sanctified and that she will be shown what to do. When she returns to her body, Elaw finds the courage to pray publicly at the revival meetings. Through the subsequent receipt of inner guidance by the Spirit, Elaw begins a home ministry. As a home minister, Elaw struggles to adhere to traditional Scriptural exegesis concerning women's roles in the ministry. Elaw confines herself to "visiting families" and to "speaking personally to members thereof, of the salvation and eternal interests of their souls" (Elaw 67). Elaw also visits the sick and attends to the personal needs of her followers.

The home ministry for Elaw was primarily a trial period. Elaw is called to preach in a manner similar to that of Paul the Apostle. In recounting her call to a full-fledged itinerant ministry, Elaw establishes a matrilineal line in determining God's will. While visiting her gravely ill sister in Burlington, Elaw is informed by her sister that she must preach the gospel. However, in order to receive further instructions as to her call, she must go to a Quaker woman named Fisher who would tell her further what she must do. Initially, Elaw does not believe that these are divine orders. Shortly after the visit with her sister, Elaw receives a visit from a Quaker female who questions her about her divine call. Still, Elaw does not carry out her ministerial duties.

In the interim, Elaw becomes gravely ill and considers this a punishment from God. When she is well enough, she attends a religious revival with thousands in attendance. At

this revival, Elaw comes to understand God's will concerning her life when she is moved to do an impromptu exhortation. Elaw writes:

> I immediately went outside and stood at the door of the tent; and in an instant I began as it were involuntarily, or from an internal prompting, with a loud voice to exhort the people who yet were remaining near the preacher's stand; and in the presence of a more numerous assemblage of ministers than I had ever seen before; as if God had called forth witness on earth, ministers and members, to witness on this day to my commission, and the qualifications, He bestowed on me to preach his holy Gospel. (Elaw 82)

Elaw writes that her first preaching session had a tremendous effect on the ministers present: "Our dear ministers stood gazing and listening with wonder and astonishment; and the tears flowed abundantly down their cheeks while they witnessed the wonderful works of God" (Elaw 82).

In order to preach, Elaw has to refute Pauline theology that women remain silent in churches. Elaw writes:

> It is true, that in the ordinary course of Church arrangement and order, the Apostle Paul laid it down as a rule, that females should not speak in the church, nor be suffered to teach, but the Scriptures make it evident that this rule was not intended to limit the extraordinary directions of the Holy Ghost, in reference to female evangelists, or oracular sisters; nor to be rigidly observed in peculiar circumstances. (Elaw 124)

Elaw's text depicts her inner struggle to define herself outside of woman's prescribed sphere to complete her ministerial duties. Early in her text, she suggests that the "wife is destined to be the help-meet of her husband" but later she comes to realize that such a subordinate role limits those women who have strong career aspirations. Elaw advises women in her audience against being "unequally yoked." Marriage to a

non-believer can place limitations on a woman's reaching her full potential.

After her husband's death, Elaw places her daughter in service and begins a self-reliant and tremendously successful career in itinerant ministry, preaching in free Northern states, slave holding states in the South, as well as before leading members of upper class society and in England. Courageous and self-reliant, Elaw ventures into the slaveholding South during the era of the Fugitive Slave Law to preach the Gospel: "On one occasion..., I had been preaching to a coloured congregation; and had exhorted them impressively to acquit themselves as men approved of God... I had no sooner sat down, than Satan suggested to me with such force, that the slaveholders would speedily capture me, as filled me with fear and terror" (Elaw 91). However, Lee confronted her terror and undaunted, preached the gospel nightly until taking her leave.

In large part, Elaw successfully confronts racism and sexism. Preaching before predominantly white congregations with doctors, lawyers, scholars, and theologians in attendance, presents Elaw with a triumphant challenge. In her preaching engagements in America, Elaw was invited by prominent citizens, including the wives of Mayor Hunter and General Van Esse, to spend time at their residences in order to preach the gospel. Mrs. Lee, wife of General Robert E. Lee, invited her to a chapel on her property to preach the gospel. While a guest at residences of upper class and significant Americans, Elaw was tested concerning her intellectual knowledge of scriptures and always prevailed before audiences with men in attendance. For

this reason Elaw's memoirs contain a flavor of pride in her achievements as she records her triumphant accomplishments in itinerant ministry. Elaw leaves her autobiography as a legacy to be read "long after [she has] ceased from [her] earthly labours and existence" (Elaw 160).

Welter maintains that "religion or piety was the core of a woman's virtue, the source of her strength." Yet, clerical authority in mainstream American churches viewed religion as a means of confining women to a dependent life. Religious training would help women develop those characteristics and qualities that would make women dependent and submissive. Through religion, woman would know that her "proper sphere" was her home. Welter writes: "Unlike participation in other societies or movements, church work would not make her less domestic or submissive, less a True Woman."[26] Above all else, ideologies concerning the cult of true womanhood specified that woman's energies were best placed in domestic duties and the religious work which promoted them. Intellectual pursuits which "clashed" with those duties were to be avoided at all costs.

The women included in this discussion found it necessary to break away from family and friends in order to preach the gospel. They did not adhere to the standards for women in nineteenth-century society or to the ideologies of the cult of "true womanhood." Performing Biblical exegesis as authority figures before mixed audiences of males and females made them violators of woman's place in traditional readings of Scripture and in society at large.

NOTES

[1] William E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk. Three Negro Classics, ed. John Hope Franklin, (New York: Avon, 1965).

[2] Darlene Clark Hine, "Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women's History in Slavery and Freedom," The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1986) 228.

[3] See Jean McMahon Humez, ed., Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Cox Jackson: Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress, (Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 1981) and Jualyne Dodson and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Something Within: Social Change and Collective Endurance in the Sacred World of Black Christian Women," Women and Religion in America, eds. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper, 1986).

[4] Robert Burns Stepto, From Behind the Veil (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979) vii.

[5] Marjorie Pryse, introduction, Conjuring, eds. Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985) 8.

[6] William L. Andrews, To Tell a Free Story. (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1986). 70-71.

[7] Barbara Welter, Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century, (Athens: Ohio UP, 1976) 21.

[8] Frances Smith Foster, "Adding Color and Contour to Early American Self-Portraitures: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," Black Women in American History: From Colonial Times Through the Nineteenth Century, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990) 404.

[9] Foster 405.

[10] Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 40.

[11] Carby 40.

[12] Andrews, To Tell a Free Story 69-70.

[13] See Joel 2: 28-32 and Acts 2: 2-28.

[14] DuBois discusses the double consciousness of African-Americans. See DuBois, Souls of Black Folk 215.

[15] Welter 21.

[16] Humez 6.

[17] William L. Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 9.

[18] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 10.

[19] Andrews, Sisters of the Spirit 10-11.

[20] Lee writes: "I had a call to preach at a place about thirty miles distant, among the Methodists, with whom I remained one week, and during the whole time, not a thought of my little son came to my mind; it was hid from me, lest I should have been diverted from the work I had to, to look after my son" (Lee 45).

[21] The Shaker religious sect and cult is one of the few religious faiths currently alive in America whose founder and leader was female. The Shaker sect, or the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing was founded in America in 1776 in Niskeyuna (Watervliet) near Albany, New York to open the Gospel of Christ's Second Appearing the New World. The Shaker religious faith was founded by Mother Ann Lee (1736-1784), a former member of the Manchester England Shaking Quakers. As a young woman, Lee joined the organization hoping to attain liberation from sin, thereby attaining spiritual perfection. Because of her religious beliefs, throughout much of her life, Lee had suffered persecution and hostility from the local Manchester residents as well as from the local civic and religious authorities. The intensity of this hostility led to Lee's imprisonment.

During her imprisonment in 1770, Lee underwent two significant religious experiences that would later become the foundation of the Shaker religious faith. In the first religious encounter, Lee had a visionary experience which led her to believe that sexual union was a grievous sin and was, in fact, the signal act which prompted God to expell Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and subsequently to human loss of paradise. From that moment on, Lee preached that celibacy was the only way to achieve salvation. With the preaching of this new doctrine, Lee again encountered persecution, perhaps even more severe than before. As the persecution raged, Lee informed her followers that God had revealed to her that she would found a religion in America. In 1779, the Shakers officially became followers of Mother Ann Lee.

Shaker theory and practice taught the dual or androgynous nature of God. Members of the sect believed that females and males were equal representatives of the Divine and created equal by God. However, due to a lack of enlightenment, as well

as misinterpretation of Scripture, females were rendered subordinate to males. Believing that Christ was present in the embodiment of Mother Ann Lee, the sect separated from the world to carry out their religious beliefs.

The longevity of the Shaker religious cult and sect was due to Lee's ability to attract intellectual followers who could maintain her organizational and theological vision for her movement. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Women in Utopian Movements," Women and Religion in America, eds, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper, 1986). For the above discussion, see also Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, eds., Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message (Columbus, Ohio: n.p., 1904); Shakers, Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Mother Ann Lee, (New York: AMS, 1988); Frederick William Evans, Autobiography of a Shaker (Glasgow: United, 1888); Richard E. Williams, Called and Chosen (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1981).

[22] See Humez's analysis of this concept in Gifts of Power 7-36.

[23] See John McKelvie Whitworth, God's Blueprints: A Sociological Study of Three Utopian Sects (London: Routledge, 1975). Whitworth writes:

> Interesting evidence of the psychology of the Shaker theologians can be found in the instances of the 'practical evils' deriving immediately from sexuality, which they cited to illustrate the corruption and misery of life in the world. These evils included excessive child-bearing (the 'curse of women') and the power of 'unseasonable lust' to master and degrade otherwise controlled and rational man (19).

[24] Whitworth 19.

[25] See 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

[26] Welter 22.

CHAPTER FIVE
PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVISM IN SECULAR AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALES

The pattern established in Maria W. Stewart's spiritual and secular autobiographical writings of 1835 is displayed in the later secular autobiographical writings of African-American women. In 1859, Harriet E. Wilson "seized authority" to print a text indicting hypocritical Christianity and America's socio-political structure. Two years later, Harriet A. Jacobs "seized authority" to publish an autobiography indicting similar issues. While the texts focus primarily on secular matters and challenge sexism and racism in America, they develop liberation theologies which are crucial to their authors' religious activism. Examined here are Harriet E. Wilson's Our Nig; or Sketches From the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story White House North; Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There (1859),[1] and Harriet A. Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself (1861).[2] Analysis of these texts should illustrate that black women were able to develop a Christian theology of liberation despite their exposure to a slanted version of that religion which supported their oppression. Further, analysis from "their own

mouths"[3] will illustrate how they were able to transform the Christian doctrine into a political tool for their individual liberation.

With the 1859 printing of Our Nig, Wilson became the first African-American female to publish a novel in English. In 1983, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. recovered and authenticated Wilson's text as both an African-American novel and as a "fictional third-person autobiography."[4] According to Gates, Wilson's text, also an adaptation of the nineteenth-century sentimental narrative, bears quite striking similarities to her own life history. For the purpose of this discussion, Wilson's text will be examined as the secular autobiographical writings of a black female. Through the autobiographical format Wilson develops a critique of almost every social institution in existence in mid-nineteenth-century America. Wilson indicts: the pervasive silence of the organized clergy in many mainstream Christian sects on the evils of racism; the slanted version of Christianity taught to blacks by whites; and what she perceives to be the hypocrisy of many abolitionists. Finally, Wilson's narrative is an indictment of the cult of domesticity and "true womanhood." It is through subverting the ideologies of true womanhood and the development of a liberation theology in a black woman's mode that Wilson achieves freedom and self-reliance.

Wilson's text confronts racism straight on. As the title suggests, Wilson exposes the enormity of Northern racism, "showing that slavery's shadows fall even there." Historian Leon Litwack discusses the ever-present manifestation of

Northern racism and points out that efforts to portray the North as a benevolent region were deceiving:

> The Mason-Dixon Line is a convenient but an often misleading geographical division. It has been used not only to distinguish the old South from the North and the Confederacy from the Union but to dramatize essential differences in the treatment of, and attitudes toward, the Negro--to control Southern racial inhumanity with Northern benevolence and liberality.[5]

However, Litwack warns that historians must be "wary of such an oversimplified comparison, for it does not accord with the realities of either the nineteenth century or the twentieth."[6] Litwack states further that while the intrinsic cruelty of Southern slavery does not have to be proven any longer, Southern slavery does not mitigate Northern racism:

> Although slavery eventually confined itself to the region below the Mason-Dixon Line, discrimination against the Negro and a firmly held belief in the superiority of white race were not restricted to one section but were shared by an overwhelming majority of white Americans in both the North and the South.[7]

In giving prominent place to racism in her text, Wilson presents another first-hand account of a Northern black woman's attempt to transcend oppression.

Wilson presents her life history through her protagonist, Alfrado, who is the product of an interracial marriage between Mag and Jim (a white female and black male), the ultimate taboo in antebellum society. Mag, a "fallen" woman, marries Jim to survive financially. During the marriage, Mag becomes the mother of two children, Alfrado and her brother. When Frado's[8] father dies, Mag cohabits with another black male, Seth, who rejects Frado and her brother. Desperate financial circumstances prompt Seth to adopt a scheme to rid himself of

Mag's children. Mag goes along with his plans. Abandoned into service at a young age to the Bellmonts, Frado experiences a vile form of racism and victimization at the hands of Mrs. Bellmont. Ironically, Mrs. Bellmont's community perceives her to be an exemplar of the cult of domesticity and "true womanhood." When her mother and Seth abandon the child, Frado's own life story takes central focus.

Wilson's text is valuable to black women's history and literature, not only in relation to the merits that Gates uncovers in his introduction to the work, but also because of the insights the text presents about a black woman's experience in service in nineteenth-century America. While Frado's story is typical in that quite a few black women were placed in service at a young age because of the dire financial straits of many nineteenth-century black families, it may be also atypical in that Frado's story includes a black child's life-time abandonment by a mother who has no regard for her care. Recent and ongoing historical scholarship suggest that the history of blacks involved a struggle to keep the black family together despite racial oppression and slavery. In extreme isolation from the black community, which is vital to a black child's self-esteem and maturity, Frado struggles to come to terms with her destiny and her life. Frado's story, then, becomes one in which the heroine endures a third of her life in continual maltreatment under the supervision of Mrs. Bellmont.

Under the terms of "true womanhood" women were to exert their influence in what was known as "women's sphere." In this instance, Mrs. Bellmont, known as a "she-devil" by the

lower and working classes, but as a "true woman" by the privileged classes, controls the Bellmont household. The men in the household are helpless before the tyranny of Mrs. Bellmont. While they attempt to intervene for Frado, their actions on her behalf are futile. In her early childhood, Frado experiences a continual onslaught of beatings, forced toil, and drudgery.

However, the very young Frado does experience bright moments in intellectual spheres when she is allowed to attend school with Mary Bellmont, who is resentful of her presence. After a brief episode of racial hostility from her classmates, Frado becomes one of the most popular and wittiest members of her academic setting. Frado's early quest for freedom and literacy is, however, imperiled by Mrs. Bellmont's insistence that Frado be treated as a "nigger." Because Mrs. Bellmont sees Frado as one who will provide cheap labor and be made to do the work of two women in a few years, she does not mind the "nigger in the child" (Wilson 26).

Frado's introduction to Christianity comes from the Bellmont's son, James, who introduces her to a slanted version of Christianity, one that is partial to whites. The unfairness of her life grates on Frado who finds her abuse unjustified. However, James counsels Frado "to be a good girl" (Wilson 50) despite her oppression. Frado does not see goodness as a solution to her desire for liberation and self-esteem. Whatever choices she makes, the results are the same. Whether good or not "I get whipped," Frado responds (Wilson 50). Such abuse results from the fact that Frado is viewed by Mrs.

Bellmont as an inferior member of the human race. As foremost black liberation theologian James Cone notes: "American white theology has not been involved in the struggle for black liberation. It has been basically a theology of the white oppressor, giving religious sanction to the genocide of Amerindians and the enslavement of Africans."[9]

As the narrative progresses, Frado is extremely overworked. During James' illness, her work load is made even more severe. Until moments before his death, James gives Frado religious instructions and insists upon her attendance at church. In church, the minister urges all blacks and whites to accept a compassionate Christ as their Saviour. Frado struggles to find salvation while the ministers and neighbors carefully observe her progress. Yet none of these people offers Frado solutions to her daily worries. Mrs. Bellmont, concerned that Frado will gain religious transformation, impedes her progress toward salvation. Ultimately Frado abandons her quest for relationship with a Deity defined by her oppressors. Realizing that their definition of God supports her oppression, Frado struggles to develop her own theology.

After her years of service are ended, Frado leaves the Bellmont household, but overwork and a resulting illness postpone her dreams of self-reliance. Because of racism,[10] Frado doubts that she will be able to find a usable skill that will foster her self-reliance: "But how should she, black feeble and poor, find anyone to teach her?" (Wilson 124).

Frado, however, has made progress toward a development of a black woman's hermeneutics of understanding the Divine.

Years of hidden study of Scripture prove to Frado that: "God prepares the way, when human agencies see no path" (Wilson 124). This understanding of a Deity who favors the liberation of blacks provides Frado with a sense of freedom and a desire to strive for self-elevation. Presenting to the world a "devout and Christian exterior," while inwardly developing a liberation theology in a black woman's mode, Frado finds new friends and acceptance in the community.

Frances Smith Foster suggests that Wilson's Frado is a representation of a "true woman" in that she is a "pious" mulatto, who is "sensitive and long-suffering."[11] On the other hand, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. suggests that Frado's "devout and Christian" exterior is an outward act of pretence. While it is true that Frado adopts the outward manifestations of a devout Christian, inwardly Frado develops an intimate relationship with the Divine on her own terms. As indicated in previous chapters in this dissertation, black women's quest for piety and virtue may consist of an androgynous pursuit, rather than one specifically designed to meet the ideologies of the "true woman."

Frado attempts to find happiness through the traditional avenue for women, marriage. She marries a man who pretends to be an ex-slave touring the lecture circuit with white abolitionists. This experience illustrates that Frado's initial attempts to define herself in terms of "true womanhood" are disastrous: As a result her "first feelings of trust and repose on human arm" (Wilson 127) leave her again destitute and ill. With the extra burden of a child to support and a husband

who frequently abandons her, Frado is placed in the county house. During each abandonment, Frado seeks to become independent and self-reliant. After her husband's death, Frado seeks employment among white abolitionists as a means to care for her child but finds rejection because of her race:

> ...Maltreated by professed abolitionists, who didn't want slaves at the South, nor niggers in their own houses, North. Faugh! to lodge one; to eat with one; to admit one through the front door; to sit next one,awful! (Wilson 129)

Divine Providence again favors Frado and she is able to acquire a useable skill which may have been hair coloring. At the end of her text, Frado continues her journey toward self-reliance and religious liberation. Harriet E. Wilson, whose life parallels Frado's, attempts as well to become self-reliant. In her preface, Wilson writes: "Deserted by kindred, disabled by failing health, I am forced to some experiment which shall aid me in maintaining myself and child without extinguishing this feeble life."

Frado's story is the bildungsroman of an isolated black woman's coming of age. Wilson's protagonist grows from a young female who asks the wrong questions ("Why was I made? Why can't I die?") (Wilson 75) to one who finds a black appropriation of the Divine. This leads to Frado's understanding of the means to find release from drudgery and enslavement. William E. B. DuBois insists that such questions are merely "wasted" and "bitter" cries of anguish that provide no answers and lead to hopelessness.[12] Escape for Frado comes almost too late because she has waited almost too long to ask

the right questions, questions that would lead her to utilize her understanding of a liberation theology for self-reliance. Ill health as a result of years of drudgery almost makes her unfit for her dream of self-reliance; she realizes at the end of her narrative that such independence is crucial to black transcendence of oppressive socio-political codes in the nineteenth century. However, at the end of her narrative Frado continues her journey toward liberation in the Divine.

> And thus, to the present time, may you see her busily employed in preparing her merchandise; then sallying forth to encounter many frowns, but some kind friends and purchasers. Nothing turns her from her steadfast purpose of elevating herself. Reposing on God, she has thus far journeyed securely. (Wilson 129-130)

Published two years after Wilson's Our Nig and shortly before the outbreak of the American Civil War, Harriet Ann Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself demonstrates the importance of the black community in the development of a young woman's self-esteem, self-reliance and a black theology of liberation. Jacobs' autobiography, like Stewart's Productions, is a model of self-reliance and self-authorization. Like Our Nig, Incidents indicts the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity and true womanhood. As the author of a secular slave autobiography, Jacobs provides a subtext of self-determinism through a black appropriation of the Divine.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl is the story of an African-American female's transcendence of the system of American chattel slavery and the nineteenth-century socio-political codes of "true womanhood."[13] Like most slave

narratives, Jacobs' text adheres to the motif of the slave's journey to freedom and literacy.

Many antebellum slave narratives present a prose portrait of a happy childhood until the slave comes to a realization early on that he or she is a slave for life. Jacobs' text is no exception. When she becomes the slave of Dr. and Mrs. Samuel Norcom, presented in the text as Dr. and Mrs. Flint, Jacobs' life takes on an even more tragic turn. Daily Jacobs faces maltreatment at the hands of her new mistress. Yet her painful encounters with Mrs. Flint are lessened by the support of her maternal grandmother, Molly Horniblow, represented in the text as Aunt Martha. Although Jacobs' grandmother (a former slave) is unable to buy Jacobs' freedom (despite her constant struggles to do so), she provides Jacobs with a theological perspective and self-esteem that will enable her to develop a strong sense of self.

When Jacobs becomes a young woman, she experiences continuous sexual harassment from Dr. Flint and, as a result, heightened cruelty from Mrs. Flint. These oppressive circumstances cause Jacobs to exercise her will in choosing a lover and, thus, in determining the father of her offspring. When Jacobs can no longer tolerate her oppression she flees slavery. However, Jacobs' love for her children causes her to remain hidden in her grandmother's attic for seven years as an escaped slave so that she can be near them. Through many dramatic episodes of outwitting her master, Jacobs finds freedom at the end of her narrative.

The historical and literary importance of Jacobs' text is well-documented in recent historical and literary studies.[14] In Jacobs' text, for the first time, details about the institution of American slavery are told from the perspective of an African-American female who retains control of her own text. Angry at the silence of many nineteenth-century American churches on the subject of slavery, Jacobs' text employs a black female liberation hermeneutics meant to challenge the institution of patriarchy, that system best demonstrated in American chattel slavery. In order to attack effectively this institution in mid-nineteenth-century America, Jacobs attacks the traditional readings of Christianity used in support of it.

Published before the outbreak of the American Civil War, during the era when women began to organize for political force and power, Jacobs' narrative is addressed to white women in the North. Her aim is to persuade her audience that they have the power as a unified group to put an end to slavery and racism. While the text is known largely as abolitionist literature, it may also be considered a jeremiad in which Jacobs presents a lamentation of woe regarding the sexual exploitation of the female slave and a warning to American women about the dire consequences for America of the evils of slavery and racism.

Sacvan Bercovitch defines the American jeremiad as a mode of public exhortation which originated in the European pulpit. The jeremiad typically employs "social criticism" and "spiritual renewal."[15] In short, it is a political sermon in which politics and theology are "welded" to establish what might be considered God's will for the present and future.[16]

Bercovitch expands Perry Miller's definition of the American jeremiad by classifying it as fundamentally optimistic. Bercovitch adds that public figures who present jeremiads are considered practical and spiritual guides who present a vision of America as it "ought to be."[17] Further Bercovitch argues: "American writers have tended to see themselves as outcasts and isolates, prophets crying in the wilderness so they have been, as a rule: *American* Jeremiahs, simultaneously lamenting a declension and celebrating a national dream.[18]

This chapter argues that Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl offers a subtext of liberation theology in a black woman's voice. Jacobs' text is a sermon delivered by a fallen woman who claims that position as an authority figure. Although Jacobs is isolated from mainstream America because of the socio-political codes of race, gender, and class, she fights for the national dream of freedom for herself and her people. One of the few slave narratives in which an ex-enslaved female controls her own text, Jacobs' narrative presents an argument based on the premise that slavery does not have Divine sanction. Jacobs writes:

> I am glad that missionaries go out to the dark corners of the earth; but I ask them not to overlook the dark corners at home. Talk to American slaveholders...Tell *them* it is wrong to traffic in men. Tell them it is sinful to sell their own children, and atrocious to violate their own daughters. Tell them that all men are brethren, and that man has no right to shut out the light of knowledge from his brothers. Tell them they are answerable to God for sealing up the Fountain of Life from souls that are thirsting for it. (Jacobs 75)

In adopting the role of exhorter to the women of the North, Jacobs' stance is a radical interpretation of scripture.

As Jean Fagan Yellin notes, Jacobs' "easy use of Biblical quotations and references throughout her narrative"[19] indicates her thorough knowledge of canonical Biblical texts.

Knowing one's audience is essential to being read. In the pietistic era in which Jacobs writes, she finds it necessary to establish a Biblical, critical, historical precedent for her radical exegeses of Scriptural texts. Jacobs does establish a Biblical historical precedent for her actions. Before discussing Jacobs' text it is necessary to locate the place where Jacobs establishes such a precedent. Editor Jean Fagan Yellin documents Jacobs frequent Biblical quotations for easy reference. When Jacobs quotes Jesus' observation that the fields are "ripe for the harvest and awaits the reapers" (Jacobs 73), Fagan Yellin locates the text in two places of Scripture: Revelation 14:15 and John 4:35. The location of the Scripture in John 4:35 where Jesus states: "... look on the fields: for they are white already to harvest," provides a Biblical reading that may be used in support of women's right to preach.

Theologian Ben Witherington, III, recovers the history and heritage of women in early Christianity. His examination of Jesus' interactions with women demonstrates that the Messiah frequently and radically defied social customs of his age in regards to women. By speaking to women openly in public and touching them when they would have been considered ritually unclean, Jesus defied Jewish law and social ethics.[20]

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus engages in an intellectual conversation with a female adulterer and

converses with her as an equal. As Biblical scholar Leonard Swidler asserts, Jesus "deliberately" and flagrantly violated the then common code concerning men's relationship to women."[21]

In this famous encounter, Jesus also transcends racial prejudice. The woman asks a pertinent question of Jesus: "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans (KJV John 4:9). Swidler notes that in John 4, Jesus goes out of his way to enter into a conversation with a strange woman, to reveal himself to her as the Messiah, and to make her an instrument for the preaching of his "good news."[22]

Biblical theologian Denise Lardner Carmody argues that the Woman of Samaria is a witness for Jesus from outside the mainstream of Jesus' ethnic heritage. Carmody further states that many believed that Jesus was the Messiah because of the woman's testimony, which was "rooted in Jesus' understanding of her life."[23]

When the disciples return to find Jesus talking to a woman, they are shocked and amazed at his violation of Jewish law and social custom. However, they remain silent. To the woman of Samaria, a woman who might be defined as an adulterer, Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah and further sanctions her as preacher of his gospel. The woman of Samaria preaches the good news to fellow Samaritans crying: "Come, see a man, which told me all the things that I ever did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29) The men then "went out of the city, and came unto him" (John 4:30). Jesus informs his disciples that the fields are ready to harvest and that they

must reap what others had sown. At this point, the Samaritans come to see Jesus because: ... many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman which testified, he told me all that I ever did" (John 4:38). In verses 25-42 of John 4, Jesus presents the woman of Samaria as a sower and the disciples as reapers. A Biblical historical precedent is thus set for a former female adulterer to preach the good news.

Delivering a jeremiad to the "pure" women of America, Jacobs fulfills the role of the woman of Samaria. Jacobs makes no apologies for gender and transcends her adulterous past. Jacobs attempts to establish new roles for the women in her audience and to demonstrate to them that they are powerful enough to change the course of American history.

This chapter seeks to articulate the means whereby an enslaved black woman was able to develop a liberation theology which was directly responsible for her freedom and self-reliance. Such an understanding will bring to light the invisible religion of the African-American slave.

In 1978, religious historian Albert J. Raboteau wrote:

> We should speak of the "invisibility" of slave religion with irony; it is the neglect of slave sources by historians which has been the main cause of this invisibility.[24]

Citing the seminal contributions of historians John Blassingame, Sterling Stuckey, and Lawrence Levine and others in recovering the religious heritage of slaves, Raboteau argued that slaves left an articulate record of their religious experience. Raboteau continues: "I have tried to investigate

slave narratives, black autobiographies and black folklore in order to gather literally out of the mouths of former slaves, the story of their religious experiences during slavery."[25]

By redefining Christ as a liberator of women and blacks, Jacobs is able to exhort publicly and to write an autobiography which becomes a jeremiad to women of the North. Through a Biblical exegesis that confirms her humanity and liberation, Jacobs "seizes authority" to write an autobiography which includes a subtext of liberation theology. Arguing that the "doctors of divinity" are, on the one hand, blind, and, on the other hypocritical, Jacobs seeks to dispense a more valid exegesis of the Christian gospel.

Jacobs develops a liberation theology and successfully finds public voice through the combined elements of heritage, familial community, and black slave community. Through these social institutions, Jacobs is provided with a foundation of black religious and cultural beliefs which enables her to become self-reliant. By relying on the religious and secular beliefs of her ancestors as true, Jacobs is able to build a foundation for her own individual theology and to thwart her oppressors, thereby gaining a positive identity. The religious beliefs of her community, enable her to define herself positively.

Houston A. Baker states that the desire for self-definition and *being* is a common motif in slave narratives. Positive self-definition increased Jacobs' abilities to see possibilities for full humanity while existing in a system which promoted and fought for the dehumanization of blacks. The

black world view recorded and historicized in her narrative is central to Jacobs' definition of her culture and her world. Both the sense of heritage and community combined with this knowledge of common black religious beliefs, helped her to survive and to transcend the system of chattel slavery in America.

Studying Jacobs' text will refute any notion that most religious blacks in the antebellum era passively waited for God to free them. Rather, Jacobs' concept that it was God's will that she be free provides the impetus in her struggle for freedom.

In outlining a theology which embraces a Black world view and religious beliefs, Jacobs is able to do an effective rebuttal of the institutional Christianity of America. Taking on the role of spokeswoman for God, Jacobs explores a political Christianity of liberation in a black woman's mode as she argues for the freedom of Black women in slavery and against the mythology that blacks have no souls.

The quest in Jacobs' narrative is the quest for freedom and the quest for literacy. It is through writing that Jacobs brings order into her world and through writing that Jacobs establishes her full humanity. Literacy is important to Jacobs, who is aware that it is the ultimate act of rebellion for slaves: ..." [learning to read] was contrary to the law; and ... slaves were whipped and imprisoned for teaching others to read" (Jacobs 72).

In order to have success as an abolitionist, Jacobs has to construct a black political theology which demonstrates that

slavery is not the divine will of God. Since certain Biblical exegeses of institutional Christianity support slavery, Jacobs must construct a Biblical hermeneutics which refutes what she considers to be biased interpretations of scripture. In writing autobiography Jacobs historicizes the American version of Christianity which promoted ideas of black inferiority. Such a version became an abusive tool in the hands of slavemasters and is commonly known by black historians for its brainwashing effects. Jacobs' text is a record of the means by which a race can both reject and transcend the religion that promotes its massive oppression. John W. Blassingame notes that, in episodes of brutal oppression, group solidarity and religious ideals helped foster the survival of the oppressed.[26] By rejecting brainwashing Christianity, blacks survived.

Early in her text, Jacobs exposes a "true woman's" version of the Christian doctrine which is hypocritical in that it rejects black humanity:

> My mistress had taught me the precepts of God's word: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' But I was her slave, and I suppose she did not recognize me as her neighbor. I would give much to blot out from my memory that one great wrong. As a child, I loved my mistress: and, looking back on the happy days I spent with her, I try to think with less bitterness of this act of injustice. While I was with her she taught me to read and spell; and for this privilege, which so rarely falls to the lot of a slave, I bless her memory. (Jacobs 8)

By forgiving her mistress for the wrongs perpetrated upon her, Jacobs embraces what Olin P. Moyd designates as one of the core motifs of the black religious experience. Moyd suggests that blacks have always exemplified an "abiding humanity and a love

of God and neighbor, even [to] those who oppressed them."[27] Moyd further suggests that: "This humanity anchored in a belief in God is characteristic of black religion which touched all of black life."[28] Moyd continues:

> The practice of humanity and love which is the inevitable and abiding center of Black Christianity puts blacks in close proximity with the expression of righteousness of life on the part of the chosen people of the Old Testament and of the early Christian church.... Black Christians in general have been and are a people who affirm the dignity of human beings and practice the love they preach.[29]

By demonstrating love and forgiveness, Jacobs manifests an ideology central in the black world view that Christians should love and forgive those who have wronged them. In making the choice, inner freedom is realized for the slave. Forgiveness is an act of righteousness and helps the slave establish a better spiritual relationship with the Divine.

Any desire to hang on to feelings of bitterness toward her mistress would have chained Jacobs to past enslavement by preventing her from concentrating all her mental faculties on her goal of freedom. The slaves felt that deliverance would grant them the freedom to worship God in the manner with which they felt most comfortable. Olin P. Moyd suggests, moreover, that freedom in white theology represented freedom from sin and guilt but in a black world view freedom was more political.[30]

Jacobs' narrative reclaims the black familial past in slavery and the struggle of the black family for survival. Her attempt here is to prove what her audience may be unaware of: the black family struggled to survive in slavery. Community and family stability are important to the majority of human

beings. Human beings who have the power to change oppression should become concerned for their fellow human beings in slavery. In a heart-wrenching scene, Jacobs depicts a common occurrence in American slave history.

> On one of these sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction block. She knew that some of them would be taken from her; but they took all. The children were sold to a slave-trader, and their mother was bought by a man in her own town. Before night her children were all far away. She begged the trader to tell her where he intended to take them; this he refused to do. How could he, when he knew he would sell them,one by one, wherever he could command the highest price? (Jacobs 16)

By presenting a mother's perspective in her narrative, Jacobs demonstrates that family ties are important. Her example emphasizes the brutality vented on black mothers. Jacobs' example also demonstrates that women must develop their own theologies. In speaking of the slave mother, Jacobs writes: "She wrung her hands in anguish and exclaimed, 'Gone! All gone! Why don't God kill me?' I had no words wherewith to comfort her" (Jacobs 16).

Jacobs text provides not only a subtext of her liberation theology, but a subtext of her grandmother's story. By incorporating Molly Horniblow's story, Jacobs preserves the ancestral heritage of the black female past. Jacobs' grandmother represents not only Jacobs' legacy to the black past, but also the self-esteem and the grounding in a liberation theology that will later foster her freedom.

Jacobs' radical defiance of patriarchal authority and oppression may have, in large part, been developed by the example her grandmother provided. As Jacobs writes: "To this

good grandmother I was indebted for many comforts,...and after we ceased to be children we were indebted to her for many more important services" (Jacobs 6). Jacobs' realization that her grandmother, by perseverance and industry, was in control of her own household convinces her that it is God's will that she be free. Jacobs does acknowledge that her grandmother's belief in God is "beautiful" because she accepts God's will in many objectionable circumstances. However, her grandmother's lifestyle as a free and respected individual who gained that freedom and self-reliance through a work ethic convinces Jacobs that she and her brother should have freedom as well. Watching her grandmother use her business skills to buy her children while often experiencing many defeats gives Jacobs the ability to form and create new strategies for her freedom. Rejecting her grandmother's theology that she and her brother John accept God's will, Jacobs writes: "We reasoned that it was much more the will of God that we should be situated as she was" (Jacobs 17). Throughout Jacobs' text are undercurrents of the belief that one must take the first steps toward freedom. "He that is *willing* to be a slave, let him be a slave" (Jacobs 26). Jacobs' theology is not passive; rather, it is a theology based on action: "William *must* be free. He shall go to the north, and I will follow him" (Jacobs 42).

Incidents is a representative example of a black woman's ability to develop a practical theology of liberation and find freedom, emotional well-being, and self-reliance through a black female appropriation of the God. Incidents is a revolutionary text in which a woman in antebellum America

transcends the political institutions of racism in order to seize control of her own life and work.

NOTES

[1] Harriet E. Wilson, Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two-Story White House, North: Showing that Slavery's Shadow's Fall Even There, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (1859; New York: Vintage, 1983).

[2] Harriet A. Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (1861; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987).

[3] Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford UP, 1978) x.

[4] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., introduction, Our Nig, by Wilson xi.

[5] Leon Litwack, North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States 1760-1860, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) vii.

[6] Litwack vii.

[7] Litwack vii.

[8] Derivative of the heroine Alfrado's name.

[9] James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, New York, 1986) 4.

[10] See Litwack 25-36.

[11] Frances Smith Foster, "Adding Color and Contour to Early American Self-Portraitures: Autobiographical Writings of Afro-American Women," Black Women in United States History ed. Darlene Clark Hine, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1990) 405.

[12] William E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk. Three Negro Classics, ed. John Hope Franklin, (New York: Avon, 1965) 214.

[12] Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford UP, 1987) 40-61.

[13] In addition to Fagan Yellin's brilliant contribution to literary and historical scholarship with Jacobs' text cited above, see Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood; Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The Classic Slave Narratives (New York: New American Library, 1987); Mary Helen Washington, Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women 1860-1960, (New York: Anchor-Doubleday, 1987); Jean Fagan Yellin, "Texts and Contexts of

Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself," The Slave's Narrative, eds. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford UP, 1985) 262-282.

[14] Sacvan Bercovitch, The American Jeremiad (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978).

[15] Bercovitch 180.

[16] Bercovitch 181.

[17] Bercovitch 180.

[18] Fagan Yellin xvi.

[18] See Ben Witherington, III, Women in the Ministry of Jesus (Cambridge UP, 1984). Witherington suggests that Jesus' precognitive gifts would have made him aware that the woman would appear. For this reason, Jesus waited at the well purposely to speak to her. Jewish customs in Jesus' era warned against men speaking publicly to a woman. To knowingly have dealings with a woman known as an adulterer was forbidden. Further racial prejudice prevented social contact with Jews and Samaritans. Jesus is the first to break social customs. He asks the woman: "Give me to drink." The woman herself answers: "How is it that thou being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:7).

Jesus then orders the woman: "Go call thy husband, and come hither." The woman responds, "I have no husband." Jesus then presents her life history. "Thou hast well said, I have no husband. For thou hast had five husbands and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly" (John 4:16-18).

Witherington argues that the Woman of Samaria was commissioned by Christ to become the first female evangelist. Witherington posits that because of the social customs of the era the woman would have been considered unclean.

[19] Leonard Swidler, Biblical Affirmations of Women (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 189.

[20] Swidler 220.

[21] Denise Lardner Carmody, Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts (New York: Crossroads, 1985).

[22] Raboteau x.

[23] Raboteau x

[24] John W. Blassingame, The Slave Community (New York, Oxford UP, 1972) 230-233.

[25] Olin P. Moyd, Redemption in Black Theology (Valley Forge: Jackson, 1979) 103.

[26] Moyd 103-104.

[27] Moyd 103.

[28] Moyd 56.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has been engaged in recovering some of the contributions black women made to America's political and religious history. Through the examination of representative autobiographies by nineteenth-century black women, such contributions have been delineated and analyzed.

The spiritual/secular autobiographical writings of Maria W. Stewart; the spiritual autobiographies of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw and Rebecca Cox Jackson; as well as the secular autobiographies of Harriet E. Wilson and Harriet A. Jacobs demonstrate that black women have indeed played a major role in the survival of the black community as they changed the structure of American politics and challenged the all-male bastions of authority in religious spheres.

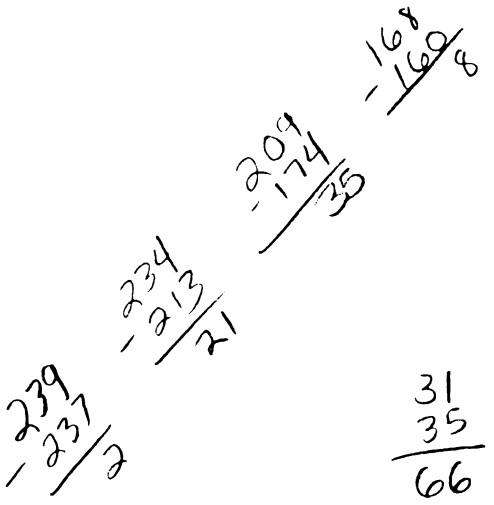
In 1835, Maria W. Stewart's Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart provided a literary vehicle for black women to challenge permanently America's socio-political structure and simultaneously to transcend the nineteenth-century socio-political codes of "true womanhood." In addition, Stewart penned the first known autobiography incorporating a black woman's theology of liberation. Such a radical act, born in a spirit of personal authorization and rebellion, created a possible vehicle for other black women's autobiographies.

These women might have been enabled by Stewart to provide first-hand accounts of the strategies black women used to make political and religious contributions. Without the development of a liberation theology in the form of a redefinition of the divine as a Deity in favor of black liberation, these challenges could not have been successfully executed.

The works studied here are valuable to recovery efforts in black women's literature and heritage because they have demonstrated that black women have participated in and contributed much to the black quest for civil rights in the North, the national abolitionist efforts, and women's quest for equality in secular and religious spheres. This study, however, is centered primarily on works by black women in the antebellum period. Further study in the development of an empowered consciousness in black women's history and literature may examine representative spiritual autobiographies of black women's transcendence of the socio-political forces in postbellum society. Such a study should include examination of autobiographies written by Julia A. Foote, Amanda Berry Smith and Virginia A. Broughton.[1] These works suggest that black women in the antebellum period provided a literary model for black women in the postbellum era to revise. Works by Foote, Smith and Broughton, among others, demonstrate that there is a paradigm shift in black women's consciousness in the late nineteenth century. For example, the struggle for freedom and literacy as well as the struggle to redefine themselves against secular oppression and theological silencing remain central to black women's writings in the postbellum era. However, black

women also struggle to become a part of the American mainstream. Again, the literacy achievements of black women in the antebellum era provide stepping stones for black women's accomplishments in the postbellum era of the nineteenth century.

Black women in the antebellum era were participants in the birth and development of an organized feminist and feminist theological consciousness. Until quite recently they have also been overlooked. Thanks to recovery efforts by William L. Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., among others, such oversights are being corrected. It is hoped that this dissertation will stand as a further contribution to this effort.



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[1] Julia A. Foote, A Brand Plucked From the Fire, Sisters in the Spirit, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987); Amanda Berry Smith, An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Amanda Berry Smith, ed. Jualynne Dodson (New York: Oxford UP, 1988); Virginia A. Broughton, Twenty Years a Missionary, Spiritual Narratives, ed. Sue E. Houchins (New York: Oxford UP, 1988).

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