

From Oppression to Reformation:  
A Collective Writing on Slavery, Religious Movements, and Women's Contributions in Early  
America

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### **Introduction:**

In the intricate tapestry of early American history, themes of oppression, reformation, and profound transformation are interwoven, particularly through the experiences of slavery, religious movements, and the pivotal contributions of women. "From Oppression to Reformation: Slavery, Religious Movements, and Women's Contributions in Early America" explores these critical dimensions, shedding light on the harrowing realities of the Middle Passage, the fervent spiritual awakenings, and the evolving roles of women in a nascent nation. This paper delves into primary sources to illuminate the multifaceted struggles and societal shifts that defined early America, offering a nuanced understanding of how these forces collectively shaped the nation's path towards greater inclusivity and justice. Through a detailed examination of historical documents and firsthand accounts, this journal articulates the resilience and agency of individuals who, despite facing formidable adversities, contributed significantly to the American historical landscape.

Primary Source Journal #1  
Experiences of The Middle Passage

Part 1:

The Portuguese Textbook was written in Portugal in the year 1994. As stated in the Portugal Textbook, it was thought that the blacks were capable of surviving the voyage to the West Indies because of their physical capacities and their better resisted to climate (Document A). The slaves suffered many hardships while they boarded on the ships. The three ways that the people experienced hardships during the Middle Passage were through heat exhaustion, ship's capacity, and improper and deficiency of good hygiene. Thomas Phillips was a white male, slave ship captain, who imported slaves to the West Indies. He worked for the Royal African Company. By reading Document B, one can perceive that Phillips was a racist and thought of himself and his crew of other while men as better than the slaves. With that, it influenced him to write the way he did in Document B. Phillips wrote, "No gold-finders can endure so much noisome slavery as they do who carry Negroes... but we endure twice the misery; and yet by their mortality our voyages are ruined" (Phillips, 1732), without and single remorseful feeling towards the death of hundreds of beautiful Africans who suffered and died in his ship. At the end, all he wanted others to remember was the fact that as sailors, they suffered so much to gain so little profit (Phillips, 1732). Both Documents A and B are similar in the fact that it describes the miseries and sufferings the slaves endured during the Middle Passage voyages; however, both also have their differences. Document A is an informative writing which allows readers to gain information about the Middle Passage. Document B provides justifications and reasonings behind the sufferings the sailors endured during the Middle Passage as they imprisoned the

slaves in the ship. For example, they attended to their needs such as keeping their lodgings as cleaned as possible, only to be defeated by their deaths (Phillips, 1732)

## Part 2:

Alexander Falconbridge was a slave ship doctor. As a doctor, Falconbridge was able to see how the treatments of the slaves and the uncleanliness of the occupied areas where the slaves were placed determined their survival. He perceived the health and well-being of the slaves through lack of food and water. This influenced the way he wrote about the Middle Passage. I believe the reason why Falconbridge said that most surgeons only worked on slave ships due to their financial situation was because the surgeons knew the survival percentages were extremely low. There were many diseases that spread rapidly in the ships. Falconbridge described the deck and floor of the rooms as “covered with blood and mucus which had proceeded from them in consequences of the flux” (Falconbridge, 1788). With all their efforts, experiences, and hard work, they were not able to keep the slaves alive or tend to their needs. It was a losing battle like putting out fires while more fuels are constantly being pour into the flames. Document D was produced to allow readers to see the horrific experiences and outcomes of the Middle Passage.

## Part 3:

Olaudah Equiano was an African slave. As a former slave, Equiano conveyed the horror and terror of the Middle Passage from the perspective of one chained under the deck. As someone who experienced the evil of men, he described the feelings, fears, and thoughts of the slaves perfectly. He heard with his ears the “shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying” (Equiano, 1790), and felt with his body the “suffocation from the want of fresh air” (Equiano,

1790). Equiano's experiences were indeed typical of a slave. If he had come to the New World as an Indentured Servant, his passage would have been provided, and his treatments would have been better. But as a slave, Equiano experienced the lowest treatments known to humanity. He and two of his countrymen preferred death instead of living in a life of misery (Equiano, 1790). These strong statements made by him conveyed to all readers what the injustice of evil selfish men had done to Africans.

## Primary Source Journal #2

### The Great Awakening

*What was the Great Awakening, and what were its causes and consequences?*

With the published of Early Piety, a collection of sermons and the writing of Increase Mather in 1711, the grandchildren of the first settlers were concerned that their faith had deteriorated and suffered (Yawp). This led them in search of spiritual renewals and revivals which eventually was known as the Great Awakening. The Great Awakening started from 1730 and ended in 1760. During these years, meetings were held in various locations. Each meeting had a different level of spiritual intensities. Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were two of the well-known preachers during this time. These preachers urged a more emotional and personal Christianity than that offered by the churches (Ch. 4 Slideshow). All were invited to these meetings including women, slaves, and Native Americans (Ch. 4 Slideshow). As a result of their powerful messages, many were converted to the new faith that allowed them to be born again. Samson Occom, a native who was part of the Mohegan Tribe, was also converted during one of these meetings to the new faith after listening to another minister's preaching. Shortly after his conversion, he studied into ministry and eventually became a missionary, minister, and teacher among the Indians (Occom, 1982). All colonists who attended the meetings agreed upon the same resolution for genuine and true revival. The American Yawp described their common resolution this way, "In all of these communities, colonists discussed the same need to strip their lives of worldly concerns and return to a more pious lifestyle" (Yawp).

During those years of revival, there were many wonderful things that happened. However, there were also some causes and consequences as well. Some preachers took advantage of their accomplishments and influences and used it for their own selfish gain. A preacher by the name of James Davenport claimed to have a certain knowledge from God and convinced his congregation to dance naked in circles at night while screaming and laughing to receive salvation or they can burn literature he disapproved (Yawp). The Great Awakening had changed America in every way. This would later ignite the nation to seek its own independence because the movement had provided a language of individualism, reinforced in print culture (Yawp).

*Who were some of the voices of the Great Awakening, and what was the gist of what they had to say?*

Jonathan Edward was the first voice during the Great Awakening. He preached boldly and strongly against sin and called his own congregation to look within themselves for sign of God's saving grace (Yawb). Edward delivered the most famous sermon of the eighteenth-century called "Sinners in the Hands of Angry God" (Yawb). In this sermon, he described hell to his congregation as, "that world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone extended abroad under you" (Yawb). Mid way through his sermon, he made the listeners reflect on what was preached by considering their unregenerate state and how they would be awarded of God's burning wrath (Edwards). Towards the end, he gave all the listeners an opportunity to turn away from their sins and turn to God. It was a warning to wake them up from their slumber lives and to escape from God's wrath.

George Whitefield was another voice during the Great Awakening. Whitefield believed that, “the only type of faith that pleases God was heartfelt” (Yawb). Whitefield also believed the Christian world were asleep and only a loud voice can wake them out of it. Eventually, he became that voice (Yawb). Whitefield preached about Jesus and sins, and he consistently gave invitation for all to turn away from those evil acts and into a life with God.



### Primary Source Journal #3

#### Women in the New World

*Compare and contrast what life was like for at least two women from the primary sources linked above.*

Charlotte Temple described her own life as, “so low, as to be only pitied... A poor solitary being, without society, here wearing out her heavy hours in deep regret and anguish of heart, no kind friend of her own sex to whom she can unbosom her grief.” (Rowson). Temple lived only miles from New York. Montraville, who is known to be her beloved, had placed her in a small home and supplied her with the finances she desired. However, because of business and pleasures, his time was constantly occupied and was not able to devote his time to her (Rowson). Temple was not a poor citizen. She had the means to purchase and own whatever she set her eyes on. Even a female servant was available to aid and assist her.

She desired love from Montraville instead of money, luxury, and power. She had placed all her future, dreams, and hope in this man. Temple relied greatly in a man and long for affection. When Montraville was not able to provide this, her whole world came crumbling down. Susannah Rowson, the author of this document, pointed out that Temple was a person who only saw her misfortune and possessed a “woe is me” or “pity me” mentality, and was closed minded on the errors of humanity. She reproved Temple and wrote, “when we reflect how many errors, we are ourselves subject to, how many secret faults lie hid in the recesses of our heart... we surely may pity the faults of others.” (Rowson). Rowson reproved some more and wrote on how mortals could look for mercy on the great day of retribution if they refused to overlook the faults of fellow-creatures (Rowson). Indeed, Charlotte Temple lived a difficult life and was

abandoned by her beloved. These painful experiences molded her thoughts. On the other hand, Mary Smith Cranch was different.

Much of Mary Smith Cranch life revolved around politics. Cranch was not afraid to voice her emotions and opinions. She often remarked on politics and sought out what was best for her country and loved ones. Throughout the document, Cranch commented regarding foreign policy, pending legislation, women's political participation, Shay's Rebellion, and vented her frustration with the Massachusetts state legislature to Abigail Adams. In one of her letters to Abigail Adams regarding women's participation, Cranch expressed, "Let no one say that the ladies are of no importance in the affairs of the nation... We do not want a spirit. We only want to have it properly directed" (Cranch). In another letter, Cranch vented her frustration with Massachusetts state legislature by pointing out Congress' lack of accomplishment and how the House had not done much with the lawyers, the court of common pleas (Cranch). Cranch had a voice of her own and was not afraid to express it.

*Was life improved for these women after the War for Independence? Explain, using examples from the primary sources you considered for the first question.*

Life improved in some ways regarding freedom of expression and speech, but it did not improve in others. Mary Smith Cranch was able to voice her concerns and opinions about politics in her letters to Abigail Adams. However, Cranch letters were only to Adam, another contemporary and not to another man or group of man. For Charlotte Temple, however, life seemed to become more difficult. As businesses profit bloomed and different forms of pleasure became available through result of freedom and independence, some wives were abandoned in

their homes. Professor Brooks-Livingston pointed out a woman's feeling like this, "A woman fear at this time was largely confine to home" (Chapter 5 Class Lecture, The Internal Revolution, Part 2, 00:20). A lonely wife stranded in a home without her loved one for a long period of time was not an ideal marriage, even in a free nation.

*How did women fit (or not fit) into the governing documents being created in the new nation?*

Women fitted into the government document well by having a voice to express and speak out about their discontent and serve in areas they had not previously partake in. This can be seen in Abigail Adams' letters (1,100 letters in all) to John Adams, her husband. In one of the letters Abigail wrote, "If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any such laws in which we have no voice, or representation" (Ch. 5 Slideshow). If the freedom of expression was not established when Abigail voiced this, John Adams would have never been able to use her letters to help improve the constitutions. With liberty at hand, the women participated in crowd actions, boycotts, made clothing for families and the Army, and even acted as spies against the British (Ch. 5 Slideshow).

Though there was much freedom, the Bill of Rights did not allow women certain privileges compared to men. Yawb described the unfairness this way, "Women found no special protection or guarantee of a voice in government. Many states continued to restrict voting only to men who owned significant amount of property" (Yawb). It took years before the 19<sup>th</sup>

Amendment was passed that allowed women to vote. It also took several more years before women found special protection or guarantee of a voice in government.

## Primary Source Journal #4

### Technological Advancement & Slavery

*What was the most significant technological advancement in the early nineteenth century, and why is it more important than the others?*

The most significant technological advancement in the early nineteenth century was the development of steam power. Yawb defined steam power as “the technology that moved steamboats and railroads, fueled the rise of American industry by powering mills and sparking new national transportation networks” (Yawb). This was made possible by the Americans’ endless commercial drive. A Baltimore paper in 1815 reiterated this commercial drive as an “almost universal ambition to get forward” (Yawb). This was considered a market revolution which reconstructed the country and revolutionized its economy.

Though other constructions such as Erie Canal, a 363 miles long water passage that allowed goods to flow between the Great Lakes and New York City, turnpikes and toll roads, which amassed revenue through charging a toll for all who used it, the invention of the horse-drawn reaper and steel plow that enabled wheat production to triple, contributing to agricultural advancement, and the development of the telegraph, the steam power is more important because it enabled locomotives, steamboats, and textile mills to build America’s economy. Steam power allowed locomotives and steamboat to transport goods, produces, and people from one location to the next. Basil Hall was a witness of this in his account as a traveler along the Erie Canal. He took careful notes of this as he observed the growth of small towns and in upstate New York growth because of the Canal. Large quantity of wheat flour, beef, pork, pot, pearl ashes, whiskey,

along with manufactured goods were both sent out and imported it (Hall) on the Erie Canal. Steam power allowed farmers to grow and sell their crops to gain revenue through exportation and not merely just sustaining their lives (Yawb). With steam power, more factories and cities arose in the North and allowed men and women to be freed from the bound dependence of servitude (Yawb). These benefits of steam power are what makes the development of it more important than the other.

*What major migrations reshaped American life?*

From 1820 to 1840, over 250,000 Irish immigrated to the United States. These immigrants did not have the required and necessary skills to own and run their own business through farming. Professor Brooks-Livingston described the Irish immigrants in his class lectures this way, “They were poor. They lacked industrial skills.” (Chapter 8 Class Lecture, The Market Revolution, Part 2, 01:25). With that, the Irish settled mostly in northeastern cities and performed work that did not require much skills in some of America’s most unsafe and unsanitary jobs such as building railroad, building canals, and working as common laborers (01:30). The women usually work as servants or in textile factories, and both men and women filled low-wage unskilled jobs that native born Americans did not want to work in (01:35). The Irish, though seemed to be so low-class people and insignificant, had their impact and reshaped American lives in many ways as well. Through the establishment of churches and Catholic schools, the Irish immigrants shaped the urban landscape of America’s northern cities (Yawb). Numerous working Irish formed trade union during the early days with organizations such as the Philadelphia’s Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers and the Carpenters’

Union of Boston. These organizations protect their members economic power by creating closed shops and occasionally went on strikes to improve working conditions (Yawb). One of these strikes geared toward the establishment of a ten-hour workday across all industries for intellectual and moral improvement (Chapter 8 Slideshow). Other strikes focused more on child labor that limited children under the age of twelve from working more than ten hours a day (Yawb). In factories, demanding native-born American women were replaced by textile owners with Irish immigrants (Chapter 8, Slideshow). Although the Irish people did not have the intentions to steal away employment from American people nor did they want to cause problems, the idea of freedom and economic opportunity co-existed with hostility from the native-born Americans.

The increase of immigration triggered a backlash from native-born Americans which is known as Nativism. The movement sought to limit immigration and prevent the establishment of churches and school (Yawp). Professor Brooks-Livingston explained Nativism this way, “Nativism encourages prejudice base on their original and their ethnic background, their race or their religion... It led to what we will now call ‘Hate crimes’ that frequently went unpunished as well as new law being passed to restrict immigration’ (2:50). In May and July of 1844, some of the bloodiest rioting took place as anti-immigrant mobs attacked the homes of some Irish American and churches in Philadelphia before being subdued by the militia (Chapter 8 Slideshow).

## Primary Source Journal #5

### The Second Great Awakening

*What was the Second Great Awakening? How was it different from the first, and who was involved (both as speakers, and as audience)?*

The Second Great Awakening was a time of reigniting Protestant spirituality during the early nineteenth century in the United States (Yawp). Revivals that took place during this movement incorporated worshippers into communities throughout the Country and equipped them with evangelical mission (Yawp). Speakers associated with the Second Great Awakening were Grandison Finney and Lyman Beecher. The audience of these two speakers consisted of younger generations of Americans like people from urban centers, rural farmlands, and frontier territories (Yawb). During this movement, the Methodist churches incorporated itinerant preachers, known as circuit riders. These preachers won converts over by traveling west of the United States, bringing religion to new settlers who had deep spiritual needs (Yawp). The meetings occurred in homes and churches.

The Second Great Awakening was different from the first Great Awakening in a sense that the revivals also inspired social reform. When the first Great Awakening went underway, the grandchildren of the first settlers were concerned about their faith's deterioration, which led them in search of spiritual renewals and revivals (Yawb, Ch 4). All who were affected by the early movement saw a need to strip their lives of worldly concerns and return to a more pious lifestyle (Yawb, Ch 4). The Second Great Awakening geared in a little different direction. Yawb puts it like this, "revivals also provided a unifying moral order and new sense of spiritual



community for Americans struggling with the great changes of the day” (Yawb). With new changes occurring at such a fast pace, it was overwhelming to many. Revivalist preachers Finney and Beecher were quick to recognize the cultural shift (Yawb). Finney placed theological issues aside and ministered to the people needs by appealing their hearts and emotions (Yawb). Beecher adopted a less orthodox method to Calvinism doctrine as he made this appealed to the young people (Yawb).

*How did new religious movements respond to changing economic and gender relations?*

The new religious movements responded to changing economic and gender relationship by lending moral support to workers in a significant scale of social reform projects (Yawb). Some of these social reform projects are the temperance movement, which is designed to curb Americans’ alcohol consumption, the abolitionist campaign, a movement to help eliminate slavery in the Country, and women’s right agitation, a projects that improves women’s political and economical rights (Yawb). With such reform projects in combination with missionary zeal, the result was fabulous (Yawb). Yawb puts it this way, “Christians formed a “benevolent empire” that swiftly became a cornerstone of the antebellum period” (Yawb).

*In what specific ways did religion try to inspire Americans to solve social problems?*

Religion had impacted the way some Americans viewed social issues. The Second Great Awakening had armed Christians with a moral purpose to speak up and remove many social problems they saw ascending from these dramatic demographic shifts (Yawp). Such voice can be heard from Henry Highland Garnet, an African American minister, in his address to the Slaves of the United States. He bravely stated, “In every man’s mind the good seeds of liberty are planted, and he who brings his fellow down so low, as to make him contested with a condition of slavery, commits the highest crime against God and man” (Garnet). He further voiced that God required everyone to love Him supremely and to love one’s neighbor as well (Garnet). Had religion not inspired Henry, he would not spoke in this way. Charles Finney, a revivalist minister, gave a lecture on the Revivals of Religion. In this lecture, he spoke about God and against slavery. He made this remark, “There is so little principle in the church, so little firmness and stability of purpose, that unless the religious feelings are awakened and kept excited, counter worldly feeling and excitement will prevail, and men will not obey God” (Finney). Religion had inspired both these men to deal with social issues in their days by being a voice to those who are directly affected by it.

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