Political Influence Before Women’s Suffrage: Insight into a Wider Definition of Political Engagement

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Introduction

The Preamble of the Constitution begins with the famous phrase, “we the people of the United States.” The founding documents of this nation were revolutionary. They set forth an ideal of government that enshrined inalienable rights, guarded against tyranny, and constructed checks and balances. It is no secret that the execution of this ideal has been a challenge that Americans still grapple with to this day. The reality was that the states decided who was franchised and therefore chose who had a hand in the laws that governed “the people.” Those who make up “we the people” have grown throughout time, often through constitutional amendments. The largest of these expansions in the definition was the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote. This amendment effectively doubled the American electorate.

Women were elected in record numbers in 2019, but our current and historic elected officials are overwhelmingly white and male. Women make up 25% of the Senate, 23.4% of the House of Representatives\(^1\) and 18% of the governors.\(^2\) In 1984 Geraldine Ferraro got the nomination to be a Vice Presidential candidate and in 2008 Sarah Palin was nominated for Vice President, but it was not until the 2016 election that either of the two major American political parties nominated a woman as a presidential candidate.\(^3\) Representation and voter turnout are easily quantifiable metrics for female political engagement. That being said, they are only effective means of quantifying female political engagement after 1920. Prior to that time all female political engagement was forced to occur outside the established electoral system.

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Nevertheless, before women and people of color had the right to vote, their voices were still present in the political dialogue.

A careful look at history will show that women were engaged politically, in a way that had tangible legislative results prior to women’s suffrage. Throughout movements for female education, abolition, anti-prostitution, sanitation commissions, temperance and suffrage, their identities as women were intimately connected to their political engagement. That being said, when women act in the political sphere today, they are not always centering their identities as women -- and this was also the case in the period before women had the franchise. Many of the issues that engendered female political engagement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were deeply connected to the female experience -- biological and/or social. But not all of them were. Even so, most women felt they needed to connect their political voices to their identities as women in order for their engagement in the public sphere to be acceptable and effective. Throughout these movements women were engaged in a constant tug-of-war over how to package their female identity in the political sphere.

Women in the United States were engaged politically long before the 19th Amendment guaranteed their right to vote. An exploration of their engagement prior to 1920, makes it clear that women understood their identity as women to be the foundation of their political engagement. When it came to the issues abolition, women’s education, lynching, temperance, and more, women brought their collective female identity into the public sphere, and they self-consciously viewed these issues through the lens of the female experience. The life’s work of Ida B. Wells, Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frances Willard and Carry A. Nation will offer a taste of the array of tactics women used to be politically engaged leaders.
Chapter 1: Political Engagement, Female Identity and Political Socialization

As members of society we are shaped by the world around us as well as offered the opportunity to mold it in the image of what we would like to see the world become. The reality is that most people will not change the world, but if people put intention into what they do, everyone has the power to change the institutions that they are a part of throughout their lives. This power is further magnified when people work together toward a collective goal.

What motivates people to fight for change in the world around them is often driven by personal experience. Identity is often crucial to political and social engagement. In this chapter we will lay down a shared understanding of what it means to be politically engaged, how we conceptualize female identity and how political socialization impacts how people see themselves in the political landscape.

Political Engagement

Robert Putnam defines political participation as “relations with political institutions.” This is a broad and amorphous definition. The Pew Research Center takes this abstract concept and turns it into metrics that can be quantified. They think of political engagement as something that “can take on many forms” including “voting, contributing money to a campaign event, contacting an elected official… attending a campaign event, and working or volunteering for a candidate.” All of these metrics are focused on the electoral system, voting and campaigning. These are all really helpful measures when looking at modern politics because the franchise is an...

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easy and publicly available means of noting political engagement. When reflecting on history, particularly history prior to 1920, these conceptualizations of political engagement are not helpful.

Instead of focusing on political engagement centered on voting and campaigning, I will focus on a much broader definition. Political engagement includes any and all actions taken to try to change or reform the status quo in politics. Civic engagement, on the other hand, includes actions designed to support and/or maintain existing political institutions.

There are plenty of scholars that expand the understanding of political engagement. In doing so, they offer ways to categorize and differentiate different types of engagement. Nancy Burns, for example, argues that it is important to distinguish roles that include compensation from those that are unpaid. She explains this difference by distinguishing unpaid political engagement as “voluntary political engagement.” Voluntary political engagement is both voluntary, no one is forcing a person to do it, but also voluntary in the sense that the person is not profiting from it. This framework would exclude political engagement where someone takes a salary for their work.

Profiting from political engagement can be indirect. Burns points out that many people will take on roles with no compensation to build their networks and otherwise impact their jobs and careers. In 1920 women made up only 20% of workers getting either wages or salary. Political engagement was not monetarily profitable for the majority of these women, a wider understanding of how political engagement can benefit networks is important to understanding

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7 The Private Roots of Public Action, 5.
how women bridge the gap between their political aspirations and the gendered norms of their time.

A broad conception of political engagement (both voluntary and compensated) allows me to look into the wide array of activities women participated in with the goal of changing and reforming the status quo. They the breadth of these activities stretches from investigative work, leveraging gender, to community organizing.

In each of these endeavours women had to bring together and convince them to act. In this way the ability to connect with people in crucial to political engagement. Putnam calls this “social capital.” For him, social capital he means the “relations [we have] with one another.” He thinks that these networks create mutual obligation by definition.

Putnam envisions these networks forming out of activities that are not inherently political, like being part of a bowling league. As people get involved in groups they form relationships with each other in a way that allows them to meet people different from themselves. Forming these relations humanizes people that would otherwise see each other as inconceivably different. As Marilynn Brewer explains this is the result of “group based identity.” These are collective “we” identities that create and in-group and out-group dynamic. They also create group cohesion, a crucial component to political engagement.

Although people form networks out of groups like Putnam describes, they also form group cohesion by coalescing around shared identities. Brewer tells us that outside of group based identities there are three other categories: person based identities, relational based identities, and collective identities.

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Person based identities emphasize the “content of identity, the acquisition of psychological traits, expectations, customs, beliefs, and ideologies that are associated with belonging to a particular social group or category.” Person based identities focus on who a person is as a specific identity. Identities may include race, gender, ethnicity, social class, or more. In the case of my research, we look specifically at gender identity and how a person sees herself as a woman. People are made up of a plethora of identities, but in the case of my research I will be looking at how women felt compelled to engage in politics because of their unique perspective as women.

Relational based identities highlight “the influence on the self-concept of societal norms and expectations associated with occupying particular roles or social positions, and the nature of the specific interpersonal relationships within which that role is carried out.” These identities focus on the relationships people share with others. Brewer breaks these into three categories, “occupational role relationships (doctor-patient, teacher-student), familial relationships (parent-child, sibling-sibling), and close personal relationships (friendship and sexual partnership).” In the case of women, they may conceptualize themselves in a number of ways within these frameworks. Understanding these categories can help us look specifically at ways that women unify as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and around other relationship based identities.

Lastly, collective identities are focused on identities that form around a common goal. However identities form and bring people together they create group cohesion. Group cohesion is crucial to political engagement because change happens when there is overwhelming pressure.

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10 The Many Faces of Social Identity, 115-125.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Change does not happen at the hands of one person. As much as change is inevitable it is also something that people resist. Although some people resist change because they like things better the way they used to be, most people just find new things uncomfortable and therefore find change uncomfortable. Those who seek to change the status quo have to work together, they have to find ways to coalition build and grow the number of people who believe in their cause. In this way, Putnam correctly noted the importance of social capital to political engagement.

Urban psychologist Xavier de Souza Briggs urges us not to think of social capital solely as a positive for society. The same characteristics of social capital seem like the democratic ideal norm, are the same characteristics that can turn horribly wrong. Putnam cites urban gangs, NIMBYs (“not in my back yard”), and groups like the Klu Klux Klan who exploit social capital and use it to “achieve ends that are antisocial.” We must not forget that when you bring people together to affect change or influence reform, it is not always one that seeks to make our world more inclusive.

**Female Identity**

Modern scholars make a distinction between sex, gender identity, and gender expression. Sex generally refers to biological characteristics like body, shape, genitalia, hair, hormones, and chromosomes. Gender identity is a personal understanding where the individual defines gender. Gender expression encompasses how an individual presents gender in their actions, dress and demeanor toward others.

Theoretical frameworks like identification theory and societal learning theory seek to answer how people acquire gender expressions. Neither of these frameworks believe that biology
fully explains gender expression. They both therefore look at socialization, the nurture side of the nature versus nurture debate, to explain gender expression behaviors.

Identification theory argues that behaviors learned through modeling figures an individual identifies with and that these traits remain constant throughout time. They focus particularly on the relationship between a child and their same-sex parent (coming from the assumption that families are heterosexual). For example, daughters model their mothers behavior because they identify with them. They then apply these learned behaviors generally, “a girl who has acquired a passive personality” should be passive in multiple aspects of life, from school discussions to interactions with people more broadly. In reality, traits are not stable in the way predicted by this theory. The assumption of trait stability in identification theory should enable researchers to scale up traits to the global level. “If dependency is a global feminine trait, then children especially females, who are dependent in one situation ought to be dependant in other situations as well,” but research from 1965 by Robert Sears found “very little generality of dependency behaviors across situations.” The Identification Theory is not more broadly quantifiable in research. When tested, it is not clear if behaviors are acquired because of identification or through other socialization. At the end of the day, identification is tied to internal motivations, which are difficult to measure.

Societal Learning Theory seeks to get around the shortcomings of identification theory. They do not assume stability of traits in gender expression. They look at a broader definition of role models, who extend past just the same-sex parent. Additionally they look at the connection between imitation and reward versus punishment. They hypothesize that children learn gender

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
norms by testing out behaviors when they are young. They learn to replicate behaviors they get
rewarded for and diminish behaviors that get them punished. In order for this theory to hold, “it
must be demonstrated that parents and other socializers differentially reinforce and punish boys
and girls in accordance with sex-role standards.”\textsuperscript{16} Studies do not find this to be true. In fact,
parents seem to treat their preschool-aged children the same when it comes to sex, but differently
when it comes to the age of the child.\textsuperscript{17}

Although it appears that preschool-age children are treated similarly, parents do have
different expectations of their children dependant on the sex. They have “clearly defined notions
about what behaviors are typical and appropriate for boys and girls.”\textsuperscript{18} This likely stems from
a parental instinct to protect their children from bullying and social pressures. As a result, parents
conform to standards and buy their daughters toy dolls and kitchen sets and get their sons trains
and trucks. Societal Learning Theory tells us that children like these toys because they receive
reinforcement to like them, but studies find that it is the familiarity that children prefer. It is not
that girls learn to like dolls because they are punished for liking other toys, but rather that the
dolls become familiar because they are the toys that they are given. Although this theory follows
logical conclusions, there is “no data testing this hypothesis” and therefore, we cannot evaluate
its accuracy.\textsuperscript{19} Although it may be true that reinforcement of behaviors plays a role in controlling
behaviors once they have been acquired, research does not find it to explain gender expression.

Gender expression, like so many other public presentations, is contextual. In the same
way that a student may act differently around her teacher than she would her friends, gender

\textsuperscript{16} Women and Sex Roles, 107.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 108.
\textsuperscript{19} Women and Sex Roles, 108.
expression shifts when an individual is in a space with a power indifference as opposed to a space where she is comfortable. An individual may alter the potency of her femininity is different spaces, but at the end of the day we recognize that there is a fundamental difference between femininity and masculinity that leads to a group identity and political engagement.

**Political Socialization**

Political socialization is a lens of understanding politics that is “people oriented,” looking specifically at their “knowledge, values and beliefs.” Political socialization can happen on a national. Richard Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt find that there are some political beliefs that are generalizable at the national level. They find that “widespread social and political mistrust seem to permeate the Italian political culture,” where as “Americans approach to political life with a sense of power to shape and mold political events.” They speculate that this American perspective on politics is closely tied to the American “frontier ideology.” The frontier ideology is closely tied to American individualism and the belief people have the capacity to shape their own future through hard work and stand out from those around them.

Political socialization can also happen on a more localized and personal level. Jill Greenlee explains that it plays a crucial role in developing the “political self,” which is “shaped by socializing agents such as family, friends, school, work, and historical events that structure an individual’s communication environment throughout the course of her life.” This socialization is impactful throughout someone’s childhood into adulthood. That being said, early adulthood,

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21 *Political Socialization*, 4.
22 Ibid.
roughly between the age of 18 and 25, are particularly important to the development of the political self. Scholars find that during this window “political attitudes begin to stabilize and patterns of political participation are set.”²⁴ All of these socializing agents help create a female political self that is distinct from her male peers.

We know that political involvement is closely tied to home life and the opinions of those around a person—their socialization. The Lawless and Fox article Girls Just Wanna Not Run, it is explained that “political socialization in the family is the premier agent in the development of young people’s political attitudes and behaviors.”²⁵ They find that college women have experienced comparable exposure to politics as their college age male counterparts, but women received less parental support. They find that 40% of male respondents as compared to 29% of female respondents reported encouragement to run for office later in life from at least one parent. The study also found that women were “significantly more likely than their male counterparts to report that their parents would prefer them to pursue a career other than politics.”²⁶ This is in an age where women can vote and run for office. In their book It Still Takes a Candidate Lawless and Fox find that of eligible candidates only 39% of women feel either very qualified or qualified whereas 60% of men feel either very qualified or qualified.²⁷ The research of Lawless and Fox is centered in our current epoch, but their findings are applicable across generations.

²⁴ The Political Consequences of Motherhood, 4.
²⁶ Ibid, 7.
Application of Concepts

With these shared understandings of political engagement, female identity and political socialization we have the shared context necessary to analyze the political engagement of women in early America. These women center their female identity in their political work. It is both crucial to their outlook of the world around them as well as how they bring people together to enact social change. The lives and political work Ida B. Wells, Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frances Willard and Carry A. Nation offer us a snapshot of how female identity and political socialization culminate in a wide array of political engagement, in a time before women could vote, run for office or even own property.
Chapter 2, Tactic 1: Investigative Work

Voting in new officials is an unreliable way to accomplish policy change.\textsuperscript{28} What many Americans, and even politicians, forget is that campaigning is completely different from governing.\textsuperscript{29} In order to get elected politicians either need to energize a base of voters or they need to recognize social trends and capitalize on them. Politicians often do the latter. They ride the waves of public trends rather than create them. On top of this, the political system in the United States is designed to be slow, as to dilute “tyranny of the majority.”\textsuperscript{30} Given this reality, the people who get elected are often good campaigners but not necessarily good policy makers. Often it takes external pressure from the public to actualize changes to policy. It is, therefore, important to look at the people who actually make the ripples that grow into waves of social and political change.

In this chapter, we will look at how the investigative work of Ida B. Wells’ influenced the society they lived in. As Justice Brandeis pointed out “Publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is the best disinfectant.”\textsuperscript{31} Female investigative journalists shown a light on social ills within American society. They shaped national conversations in an age when women in the United States did not yet have the right to vote. In doing so they forced people to confront ugly realities within American society. Their investigative work brought about social and political change.


\textsuperscript{29} Stephen J. Wayne Is This Any Way to Run a Democratic Election? (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press 2007), Ch. 9.


Ida. B. Wells

Ida B. Wells was born a slave and brought up by a family who had spent the majority of their lives as someone else’s property. She and her parents were technically set free by the Emancipation Proclamation, but were formally freed when the Union forces took control of the region she lived in Mississippi during the Civil War. She was therefore keenly aware of how the law of a land could both bar people from being recognized as human beings and grant protection to their basic rights as human beings.

Ida B. Wells' legacy is inextricably linked to her investigative journalism which exposed the injustice of lynching in the United States. Her work did more than look critically at the practice of lynching in the South. Her criticism of lynchings recognized the brutal horror of this practice. But Wells’ coverage did more than just expose the brutality; it also focused on the denial of due process that many of the lynching victims—who had been arrested on trumped-up charges of rape and miscegenation -- experienced. Wells’ focus on the denial of due process was premised on the idea that black people were entitled to the same basic rights as all other Americans.

Wells specifically chose the term “Afro-Americans” in discussing the injustice that black people faced. In adopting this term, she helped to create a community that was premised on both the black experience in America and the promise of American identity, as formulated more than 100 years before Wells began writing. At the time of the Founding, of course, black people were deliberately excluded from the promises of American identity. In using the term “Afro-American,” however, Wells was staking a deliberate claim to those promises for black people. She was challenging all of her readers -- black and white -- to recognize that she and her
black contemporaries were Americans. Their identities were as informed by the American project and their experiences with that project as much as they were by their African roots and the specific experience of race-based slavery.

Wells was not the only person to address the need for community-building for black Americans. W.E.B DuBois, a fellow scholar, orator and writer, spoke candidly in *The Talented Tenth* about the status of the Afro-American following slavery. He explained the ways that whites had made it impossible for black people to thrive, and he condemned the tendency of many white Americans to point at problems within the black community as a sign that black people were inferior to white people. If disease and crime were “the rule,” in some black communities, DuBois insisted, it was because “a silly nation made them the rule.” “For three long centuries,” DuBois noted, “this people lynched Negroes who dared to be brave, raped black women who dared to be virtuous, crushed dark-hued youth who dared to be ambitious, and encouraged and made to flourish servility and lewdness and apathy.”

DuBois pushed his readers to grapple with the history of terror experienced by the black community in America.

DuBois believed it was imperative that a new foundation be created for the black community in America. He saw education as a means of repairing some of the damage done by slavery and centuries of persecution. “The Negro people need social leadership more than most groups,” he argued. “They have no traditions to fall back upon, no long established customs, no strong family ties, no well defined social classes.”

As a journalist -- and an early founder of the black press in America -- Ida B. Wells worked to create new traditions and new customs for black Americans to fall back on. Her reporting worked to expose the injustice of lynching; but it

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33 Ibid, 11.
also worked to build an “Afro-American” community that saw justice as something to which all of its members were entitled.

Wells began writing about lynchings after three Afro-American men were lynched in Memphis, where Wells was living in 1892. In an editorial for *The Free Speech* following the lynching, she used the press to advocate for the Afro-Americans of Memphis to take tangible action. She explained the city had “demonstrated that neither character nor standing avails the Negro if he dares to protect himself against the white man or become his rival.” Without the ability to protect themselves from a city that denied them the protections of the law, there were few options left for Afro-Americans. In Wells’ eyes there was “only one thing left to do; save our money and leave a town which will neither protect our lives and property, nor give us a fair trial in the courts, but takes us out and murders us in cold blood when accused by white persons.”

Her writing harkens back to the alleged last words of Thomas Moss, one of the three men lynched, saying “tell my people to go West—there is no justice for them here.”

Wells explains that without the ability to arm themselves for their own protection, there were few remedies for the lack of protection from law enforcement and the denial of their right to due process. Wells told her fellow members of the Afro-American community in Memphis that there was therefore only one option left, they must leave and go somewhere that respects their rights. They listened. Two reverends moved their entire congregations west to Oklahoma following Wells’ editorial in response to the lynching and subsequent editorials lobbying for Afro-Americans to move specifically to Oklahoma.

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35 *Crusade for justice: The autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, 50.
Under threat of being lynched herself, Wells was unable to return to Memphis following the string of editorials following the lynching for the three Afro-American men in her community. In 1982, when she began writing about lynchings in Memphis, lynchings reached their all time peak with 241 people lynched, 66 percent of whom were Afro-American. The culture of lynching in the south was a point of pride. There were lynching “souvenirs” like postcards. The murders were sometimes turned into public events, carried out in broad daylight for spectators. People would even bring their children.\textsuperscript{37} During this time, within the Afro-American community there was a call for leadership, especially new leadership. Whether Wells was responding to this call or to her own internal passion for justice, she rose as one of the most notable female Afro-American leaders. She continued to use the presses to shine a light on the hypocrisy of legally recognizing black people as citizens and then systematically denying them rights.

Wells was, of course, angered by the brutalization of lynching, but her articles focused on how the community was being denied their inalienable rights as Americans. The prevalence of extrajudicial killings of Afro-Americans was a flat out denial of their right to life and liberty. Wells used her platform as a journalist to highlight this hypocrisy for both her black and white audiences.

Law acts as a civilizing agent in our society. Law creates a standard for justice that can be applied in a predictable way. Without a system of law, punishments and justice are arbitrary and as a result can spiral into violence as people disagree on what is “fair” and “just.” Part of the beauty of the American judicial system is the space it provides for non-violent remedies to

\textsuperscript{37} Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 81-82.
conflicts. Normally within the American judicial system if your rights to life and liberty had been denied, due process allowed for conflict resolution that apportions and creates justice. The practice of lynching denied people the right to due process and therefore denied them access to the civil means of conflict resolution. This was one of the many grievances Wells raised with lynching practices.

The mainstream press, which circulated to predominantly white audiences, built a false profile of black male rapists in through the coverage of lynchings. The Associated Press’ wire service distributed a string of stories that justified lynching as a retaliation for the rape of a white woman. Most famous was the story that ran under the headline, “More Rapes, More Lynchings,” which tied the two concepts together in American culture.\(^{38}\) It was printed in numerous white papers including the *Daily Commercial* and *Evening Scimitar* in Memphis just a couple weeks before the lynching of Thomas Moss, Will Stewart and Calvin McDowell.\(^{39}\) This story built on those that came before it as well as those that follow. It built the profile of the “horrible beastial propensities of the Negro race.” The coverage implied that the behavior was inherent and an animalistic trait within the race. It did not stop there. The coverage also painted white women as helpless, innocent victims of a black man who “watched for an opportunity when the women were left without a protector.”\(^{40}\) These kinds of statements were two pronged. It created an assumption that the alleged rape was premeditated and calculated. It also implied that women were being overpowered and taken advantage of. The mainstream media built up this narrative in its coverage of lynchings. It was on this faulty foundation that justifications for lynchings were built. Some papers argued that lynchings were an attempt to deter the “beastial desires” of the

\(^{38}\) *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930*, 82.


\(^{40}\) Ibid.
black man. More often lynchings were spoken of as a reflexive form of justice in defense of white women and their honor. These arguments relied on Northern ignorance, sexism and racism.

Any attempt to counter the mainstream media needed to address both the gendered and racial stereotypes that had been developed through its coverage. Wells memorialized how widespread the practice was in her books like *A Red Record*, which tracked statistics of lynchings in America. She also used specific case studies in that book, but more notably in *Southern Horrors* to emphasize the faulty logic used to justify lynchings. The case studies Wells highlighted openly discussed that taboo topic of female sexual and romantic desires. As wells noted in previous editorials, “nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread-bare lie that Negro men rape white women.” No one believed it because it was not uncommon for white women to have relationships with black men, it was just not spoken of. In “Southern Horrors” Wells worked her way through the examples of consensual relationships between white women and black men. She demonstrated that these relationships were not only willing but also in a number of cases initiated by the women. These sexual and romantic preferences had nothing to do with the class of either party. Wells examples spanned different social classes on both sides of the relationships. The men lynched never got the chance to tell this truth because they were lynched before their trials and denied their right to due process.

The Equal Justice Initiative estimates that approximately quarter of lynchings were based on charges of sexual assault and more than half were charges of a crime like murder or rape of white women. Almost all were killed without being convicted in a court of law. Wells’

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41 *Southern Horrors*, 3.
investigative work undermined the legitimacy of the charges these men faced. By going through the specifics of cases she demonstrated that the charges these Afro-American men faced were lies. She saw her writing and reports from the black presses as crucial to countering the false narrative circling in the white press about lynchings; “if there was no chance for a fair trial in these cases, we should have the facts to use in an appeal to public opinion.”

In *Southern Horrors*, Wells explained how white people manipulated their dominant position in the legal and economic system to deny black people due process even when the men lived to see their day in court. Her case studies show how much race played a role in the credibility of sources. Wells goes through the facts of cases where women had consensual romantic relationships with men of color, but for one reason or a another, often to shield their pride, they made false claims, sometimes even lied, against black men knowing that their word would be believed above that of a black man. One woman, years after her testimony that had sent an innocent man to jail with her testimony, revealed to her husband that she had lied in the hope of saving her own reputation. She explained that “the neighbors saw the fellows here,” and she was afraid she “had contracted a loathsome disease,” or that she “might give birth to a Negro baby.” The testimony of these women was given to parties who were often biased in the cases.

All white juries were one of the many ways that Afro-Americans were barred from accessing their rights to due process following the Civil War. A 1880 Supreme Court decision said that excluding black people from juries violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. That being said, having an all white jury was not a violation of due

43 Ibid.
45 *Southern Horrors*, 6.
process.\textsuperscript{47} It was not until 1935 that the Supreme Court decided that the practice of systematically excluding the names of black people from jury rolls was illegal.\textsuperscript{48} There were generations of people who were able to escape the threat of extrajudicial violence only to experience systemic racism within in the system what was supposed to provide them justice.

The specificity of the cases studies allows Wells to explain exactly how institutionalized white supremacy was used to deny Afro-Americans their right to due process. Her articles dealt with the prevalence of false testimony along with other issues of bias. For example, the judge who presided over the would-be trial of Thomas Moss, Will Stewart and Calvin McDowell and later the trail over their lynching was not only an ex-confederate comander, but he was also thought to have participated in the lynching of the three men.\textsuperscript{49} The jailhouse in Memphis had what was known as the “sweat-box,” a solitary confinement space used to break the spirit of those who refused to cooperate with testimony.\textsuperscript{50} Due to the humidity and heat in the south people who would be put in the small confines of the sweat-box would experience extreme dehydration, heat exhaustion and sometimes died. The fear of injustice loomed over the Afro-American community of which she wrote. This argument was as much for them as it was for the white people who needed to face the reality that justice was being warped in their favor to deny Americans their rights as Americans.

Once Wells had established that it was no secret that these men were often accused of rapes they did not commit, she further counters the argument that lynchings were not an action done by white men to “to protect their wives and daughters.” She again uses specific examples

\textsuperscript{47} Virginia v. Rives, 100 U.S. 313 (1880).  
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ida: A Sword Among Lions}, Paula J. Giddings, 193.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 187.
of black women and girls who were raped to outline how white people are not actually concerned
with defending the “honor” of women, but rather interested in protecting those within their own
race.\textsuperscript{51} Southern Horrors much like the name implies outlined the horror that Afro-Americans
were experiencing in America. The horror Wells compelled her readers to confront was both
physical harm and the denial of legal rights, the hypocrisy of the system that was both racist and
sexist.

Although Wells wrote prolifically on lynching in America, it took time for her message
to reach white audiences. The paper she worked for after the Free Speech, the New York Age,
was on the exchange list of many white papers, but Wells did not “remember [any papers]
commented on the revelations [she] had made through [her] columns.”\textsuperscript{52} Instead, it was through
the activism of two Afro-American women, Maritcha Lyons and Victoria Earle Matthew, who
read her columns in the Age that resulted in Wells reaching white audiences. Lyons and Matthew
began organizing their friends to highlight Wells’ work and attempt to restart the Free Speech in
the north.\textsuperscript{53} The idea was so popular that a community of Afro-American women grew around
the idea in New York City and later in other cities. Lyons and Matthews organized a speaking
event that led to speaking tours where Wells came to address white audiences, first in the United
States and then later internationally. Wells received a tepid response abroad and a lackluster one
in the States.

Wells struggled to build a coalition in the United States. She tried to join forces with
former abolitionists to build on previous interracial advocacy, but some former abolitionists
proved that although they did not think Afro-Americans should be enslaved, they were not

\textsuperscript{51} Southern Horrors, 9.
\textsuperscript{52} Crusade for justice: The autobiography of Ida B. Wells, 77.
\textsuperscript{53} Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930, 18.
willing to stand up for their rights. Most notably Frances Willard, president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) claimed in an interview with the New York Voice that “better whiskey and more of its is the rallying cry of great, dark-faced mobs” and threatened “the safety of [white] women, of children, of the home … in a thousand localities.” This argument fit naturally into the WCTU’s advocacy for “home protection”—tying race based fear with the Temperance advocacy. These statements created a rift in what would have been a natural partnership of former abolitionist leaders. Willard touted her history as an abolitionist and as a friend of black people while holding deeply racist points of view. Ida B. Wells would not stand for this hypocrisy. Wells brought copies of the New York Voice interview with her on her speaking tours in Europe, but it was not until Wells wrote to Fredrick Douglass for support in her argument that people took the critique of Willard seriously.

Willard disliked Wells as much as Wells disliked her. The two were deeply insulted by each others comments. Wells’ investigative pieces about the sexual and romantic preferences of white women outraged Willard. In her presidential address in 1894, Willard commented that Wells’ statements “concerning white women having taken the initiative in nameless acts between the races [she] has put an imputation upon half the white race in this country that is unjust, and, save in the rarest exceptional instances, wholly without foundation.” Willard was of the mindset that women had no capacity to lust, that they had inherent sexual passivity. Under this premise all acts between white women and black men were cases of sexual assault and rape in her eyes. Their disagreements caused fragmentation within Wells’ Afro-American base. Even though

55 Ida: A Sword among Lions, Paula J. Giddings, page 267.
Willard publically spouted her racist points of view, some Afro-American women were unwilling to critique her in the way Wells did. The WCTU was one of the few organizations that allowed black people to be members. There were a number of Afro-American women who would rather swallow Willard's bigotry in exchange for membership in the organization.

In many ways the issue of lynching had Wells caught between the forces of racism and sexism, making it hard for her to build a coalition for change. She struggled to create a coalition with white women, which fragmented her relationship with Afro-American women. In addition, Wells battled what she called the “silent indifference” of American liberals. Although she was able to educate many white people about the injustice of lynching, few were ready to take more tangible action than listening to her lectures. The issue of lynching were deflected by a white press that argued that solutions to the issues Wells raised would come from the Afro-American community. As one Indianapolis editor wrote, the solution “will undoubtedly be followed by others of her color.” Rather than shoulder the responsibility for change together, many white papers relegated the problem solving to Afro-American activists like Wells.

Wells continued to keep the issue of lynching in the headlines both in the United States and abroad. In 1895 she released *A Red Record* which, much like *Southern Horrors*, stated her arguments for anti-lynching. The dedication stayed true to her argument that lynching was a violation of the rights Afro-Americans had as Americans. The dedication was cheeky, reading: “Respectfully submitted to the Nineteenth Century civilization in ‘the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave.’” The tone notes her frustration with the lack of change since the release of

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57 *A Sword Among Lions*, 265.
58 Ibid, 267.
Southern Horrors three years earlier. The anti-lynching arguments in A Red Record went further than her previous writing on the issue. She explained “that after all, it is the white man’s civilization and the white man’s government which are on trial.” She argued that the persistence of lynching was a threat to the health of the country and the American project. The issue was “not for colored people alone, but for all victims of the terrible injustice which puts men and women to death without form of law.” Wells’ anti-lynching arguments always made a broader appeal than just the harms to Afro-American men. In Southern Horrors her critique of lynching rationale included statistics to demonstrate the innocence of Afro-American men as well as statistics to demonstrate that lynch mobs did not care about the issue of rape because they did not rally to defend the dignity of Afro-American women. A Red Record expanded the scope even further to make an argument for all those denied the rights to due process.

Wells’ work brought the Afro-American perspective on lynching into the mainstream media. In doing so brought the facts into the national and international mainstream conversation. To this day, there is no federal anti-lynching law, but the attempts like the Dyer bill in 1920 and later iterations of it in the 1930s and 1940s echoed Wells’ argument that lynching was a violation of due process rights. Her work inspired community organizing and community building within the Afro-American community. In these ways, Ida B. Wells’ investigative journalism was a crucial form of political engagement.

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62 Ibid.
Chapter 3, Tactic 2: Leveraging Gender

For the first hundred or so years of the United States, the majority of writing was non-fiction. So much so that Ralph Waldo Emerson gave the famous “American Scholar” speech to the graduates of the Harvard Divinity School in 1837 calling on them create a uniquely American literary history.\(^6^3\) It is not until the mid-1800s that fiction and specifically American fiction becomes part of the American literary discourse.

Even as American fiction began to develop, its consumers were largely female. Similarly, the American population during this time period was religious but the practice of religion was highly gendered. In 1851 Antoinette Brown became the first woman to be ordained a Protestant minister in the United States, but she was the exception and not the rule.\(^6^4\) Women were not seen as religious leaders, but they were exemplars and teachers of piousness and values. In this way, religion was one of the few realms that women were allowed to be assertive in. Within the gendered constructs of religion, there was room for female political engagement. Both Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sister, Catharine Beecher, were activists in their time. Both leveraged the role of women and these female realms to act politically and therefore publicly.

For the purposes of this chapter I will refer to these two women by their first names to avoid confusion.

The Beecher Sisters

Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sister, Catharine Beecher were both beneficiaries of women's education. Their early education, and ultimately their own perspectives on women’s

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education, was highly influenced by Benjamin Rush’s concept of Republican Motherhood—the idea that women needed an education due to their influence on the upbringing of their children, particularly their sons.\textsuperscript{65} The level and form of the education women should receive varied depending on the community.

The majority of the public schools first open to girls were taught by men and the curricula focused on memorization and punishments (mostly beatings) for failing to meet standards. Many superintendents and community leaders did not believe that women should be teachers because they did not think that women would be able to control the classrooms since they could not beat students like a man could.\textsuperscript{66} Plus, there was an overwhelming social expectation that middle-class, married women did not work, but rather focused on home-making. In 1833 it is estimated that there was a shortage of more than 30,000 teachers.\textsuperscript{67} Eventually the need was too great to ignore and the wage, although in some places the wage was almost a third of what men made as teachers, was enough to fill the vacancies. By 1870 there were roughly 200,000 teachers in primary and secondary public schools in American and more than half of them were women.\textsuperscript{68} As women came to hold the majority of teaching roles, the profile of a teacher shifted from a figure of intimidation to one who would nurture learning, but corporal punishment remained a tool used by teachers for generations to follow.

Both Beecher sisters attended the Litchfield Female Academy, founded by Sarah Pierce. Sarah Pierce not only founded a school for women but was also a strong believer that women

\textsuperscript{65} Rush, Benjamin, and Samuel Magaw. \textit{ Thoughts Upon Female Education: Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government, in the United States of America}. Prichard & Hall, in Market Street, between Front and Second Streets, 1787.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{ America’s Women} 106-107.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
were best suited to be teachers. She saw women as crucial to the development of the nation and key players in actualizing change, as she explained in an essay on patriotism, the destiny of women is to “instruct and enlighten the world.” She thought of women’s education and teaching as a highly important form of public service, explaining that a moral and religious citizenry are crucial to the existence of a republic. She specifically pointed to Spartan and Roman matrons who taught their children “to love their country beyond every earthly object.” Her hope was that the daughter of America would follow in their footsteps, building a citizenry that had learned the “early habits of piety and morality” and that these women would be a model of patriotism and education across the world and for future generations.

The Litchfield Female Academy was one of the first schools open to girls and young women, founded in 1792. The belief of Sarah Peirce was key to the education of the student body and undoubtedly rubbed off on Harriet and Catharine. It taught both secular and religious history, geography, science, writing and composition. Being eleven years older, Catharine took up working first and became a pioneer for women’s education. In 1823 she co-founded the Hartford Female Seminary with her sister, Mary, in Hartford, Connecticut. After her own education at the Litchfield Female Academy, Harriet attended her sister’s school. Under her sister’s tutelage, Harriet develop strong skills in writing and analysis, as well as languages, mathematics and arts. Within a few years Catharine made Harriet a teacher at the school.

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Similar to many schools for women at the time, the Hartford Female Seminary’s curriculum focused on fine arts and languages, but it was considered progressive at the time because of its physical education courses. These physical education courses challenged the concept of female fragility that was prominent at the time. Catharine Beecher also advocated for education in history, mathematics, algebra and other skills that grew into a curriculum she called “domestics.” Domestic curricula long outlived Catharine Beecher and became family and consumer sciences.

Catharine Beecher saw women’s education as crucial because, young girls were “not being trained for their profession.”\(^{72}\) Their profession, in her eyes, was being mothers or teachers. Her goal was to raise the standard of women’s education and respect for domestic labor to the level of rigor and respectability men had in their education and for their work. Much like Sarah Pierce, she saw women’s education as an endeavour tied closely to teaching the morals of a nation. She and Harriet taught morality through Bible readings at the Hartford Female Seminary and at one point Catharine even led a town-wide revival.\(^{73}\) The two women were strong believers in a woman’s ability to lift up a society through teaching their children and others. The Beecher sisters taught women “modes of exerting moral influence” in a way that made Catharine’s schoolrooms rival the power of the pulpit.\(^{74}\)

Catharine Beecher was a public figure, although she would have denied the title. She traveled around the country fundraising, lecturing, recruiting teachers, writing and founding schools for women. For someone who believed strongly that women should stay within the

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\(^{74}\) *The Passionate Beechers*, 65.
domestic sphere, she often leveraged her female role to shape the future generations and advocate for causes close to her heart. She anonymously authored the open letter titled “To the Benevolent Women of the United States” which expressed outrage at the 1830 Indian Removal Bill and encouraging women to sign a petition in protest of the removal. In fact she argued women had a particular duty to get involved because “they are protected from the blinging influence of party spirit, and the aspirates of political violence.” Women’s lack of presence in the public, political sphere is exactly what made their voices relevant as advocates.

Catharine called on women to act and they did. It is estimated that more than 1,400 women signed the petition and, even though this attempt to lobby the government was unsuccessful, it marked the first time that women appealed as a collective to the federal government in this way. In the years that followed, women, particularly middle-class women, continued to use this method of political engagement. They petitioned on issues ranging from abolition, suffrage, as well as individual needs such as divorce and a widows pension. Without the right to vote, petitions were one of the few options available to women to steer the issues they wanted politicians to act on.

Harriet, much like her sister, leveraged her role as a woman to lobby for issues she believed to be core to a moral, Christian nation. She shared Catharine’s passion for the education

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of women and girls, and the power that that gave women to form the moral compass of
generations of Americans.

In 1832 Harriet moved to Cincinnati, Ohio with her father. Harriet continued to advocate
for women’s education because she “had come to the conclusion that the work of teaching will
never be rightly done until it passes into female hands.” Teaching children, particularly boys, she
explained required “tact and talent.” If men possessed these traits they better served society by
becoming ministers and missionaries. Plus she noted, “if men have more knowledge they have
less talent at communicating it, nor they the patience, the long suffering, and gentleness
necessary to superintend the formation of character.”

As her sister, Catharine, founded the Western Female Institute, a university for women, Harriet spoke, wrote and traveled to support
her sister and the ideal of women’s education. It was this work that brought her across the river
to Kentucky, a slave-owning state.

Harriet faced critique that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was out of touch with the reality of slave
life, but many of the stories were informed by her own experiences and from narratives told to
her. Her friend and fellow teacher, Mary Dutton, recalled, in a letter, their 1833 trip to Kentucky.
She explained that it did not appear that Stowe was paying much attention to the world around
her at the time but “in reading ‘Uncle Tom,’ [Dutton] recognized scene after scene of the visit
portrayed with the most minute fidelity.” It was not until close to twenty years after the
Kentucky visit that Harriet authored *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

There are varying stories about what led Harriet to write the novel. She claimed that in
church she had a vision of a slave being beaten brutally and him saying of his attackers, “they

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79 Ibid 71-71.
know not what they do.** From this vision she described her writing process as though she was a vessel that the story came through to reach the public. More personal documents note a less public rationale. In 1949, Harriet lost her son in a cholera outbreak in Cincinnati. Not long after, she wrote, “Having experienced losing someone so close to me, I can sympathize with all the poor, powerless slaves at the unjust auctions. You will always be in my heart Samuel Charles Stowe.” Another heavily retold story is that the book was a direct response to the Fugitive Slave Act.

In 1950, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which required escaped slaves to be returned to their masters, even if they were in a free state. Due to the cholera outbreak Harriet had been out of touch with the social and political conversation surrounding the law. Once she left the city and was staying with her brother and his wife in Boston, she was overwhelmed by horrifying stories about the treatment that fugitive slaves experienced when they were caught. Once she left, her brother’s wife continued to write her about the issue. In one note she wrote, “Hattie, if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something to make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is.” According to Harriet’s children, she had been reading the letter out-loud to the family and when she got to that line, she crumpled the letter and said, “I will write something. I will if I live.” Just over a month after, she began writing.

There are several accounts that hint that many of the stories were inspired by things Harriet experienced or heard. Be that experiences like the one Mary Dutton shared about their trip to Kentucky, or the stories by her sister-in-law shared about fugitive slave or even the story

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80 The Passionate Beechers, 115.
81 Ibid.
83 The Passionate Beechers, 147.
84 Ibid, 148.
of Eliza’s escape in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* many major plot points seemed to be informed by Harriet’s life.

Regardless of the possible true experiences behind the plot points, the book is ultimately a work of fiction with a public policy agenda. The story was designed to demonstrate the immorality of slavery. As with all things in her life, Harriet grounded her abolitionist plea in religion. In truth, religion has been such an integral part in the lives of Americans that it is key to understanding American identity, especially during this epoch.

From the very creation of the United States, religion and appeals to “the creator” were used to unite people and legitimize the endeavor of forming a new nation. Americans are not united by any shared lineage, language, or even experiences, but they are united by a shared set of ideals. For many Americans, including the Harriet and Catharine, those ideals were values learned and passed on through religious practice. The nation explicitly and intentionally did not establish any federal religion, even though most Americans practiced some sect of Christianity. For many Americans Christianity was the mechanism through which values were learned and conveyed.

Even though the founding documents of this country did not establish a federal religion, those documents were far from secular. As put in the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal… endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Of course, “all men” did not in practice apply to all men. The institution of slavery was among the litany of times throughout history that the United States failed to live up to its founding ideals. As Frederick
Douglass explained, “the rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me.”

Christianity was not only one of the most salient motivators of the nineteenth century, but it also allowed people to legitimize their arguments as something more than man-made. It is particularly for this reason that both slavery apologists and abolitionists used Christianity to undergird their arguments. Part of what made *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* so effective was that the arguments were cloaked in a story and made emotional and relatable through the lives of the characters. For women like Harriet Beecher Stowe, founding arguments in religion was a way to access the public sphere. Unlike her brothers, her husband or her father, Harriet did not and could not assert herself as a minister or a formalized religious leader. She did not even speak on her own book tour for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, her husband spoke in her stead. Her novel allowed her to shape public opinion and reach more people than were in her family’s congregations. In this way Harriet asserted herself as a moral leader, in one of the few ways she could in her time. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* directly engages with the convergence of slavery and religion. Many of Harriet’s main characters, like Tom and Eliza, are practicing Christians. Throughout the book you follow these characters as they struggle to practice religion within the confines of slavery. One of the things that becomes evident early in the book and continues as a theme throughout is that slavery is a condition that is inhospitable to practicing Christianity.

Harriet uses their stories to show how people, Americans, separated husbands from wives, children from their mothers. In doing so they were not only breaking up families but also undermining the moral goals of practicing Christians. Early in the story, Eliza’s husband George

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86 *The Passionate Beechers*, 79.
comes to speak with her because his master wants to marry him off to another woman. When presented with this situation, Eliza exclaims, “but you were married to me, by the minister, as much as if you’d been a white man.” The reality is that a white man’s freedom is crucial to his ability to actually experience marriage. George explains, “I can’t hold you for my wife, if he chooses to part us.” Even though Eliza and George had received the sacrament of marriage, their ability to live out that reality was subject to the whims of their masters.

When reflecting on slavery, it is easy for people to fall into an anachronistic assumption that all slave owners were brutal and mean individuals who did not see their slaves as people. If that were true, slavery would not have lasted so long. It is the existence of slave owners like Mr. Shelby that perpetuate and maintained the institution of slavery because they are less hateable. As George explains, Eliza seems justified in obeying her master because they “brought [her] up like a child, fed [her], clothed [her], indulged [her], and taught [her], so that [she] had a good education.” When presented with the offer to separate Eliza from her child, Mr. Shelby is disgusted by the idea of separating a family. He comments that he would like to “kick the [slave trader] down the steps,” but later in the same monologue he acknowledges that he is cornered by his debt. Mr. Shelby ultimately decides to sell Eliza’s son despite being what Eliza describes as a “kind master” because at the end of the day they are his property and he is in financial trouble. The entire situation outlines how, even slave owners with good, Christian intentions cannot keep families together because their relationships with their enslaved people are circumstantial. When push comes to shove, the enslaved people are considered property. It is not

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87 Norton Anthology, Volume B, 1710.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Norton Anthology, Volume B, 1706.
92 Ibid.
enough to say that there are kind slave owners, because even with such slave owners, circumstances can change such that protecting the sanctity of a family is no longer a tenable option.

Not all of Harriet’s critique of slavery in the novel were so reliant on empathy. The conversations between characters deal with the debates that were happening outside the pages of her book. Outside the pages of her book, her readers would have been exposed to ministers, preachers and other religious leaders cited Bible stories in defense of slavery.

In a sermon in 1856, Thornton Stringfellow delivered a sermon doing just that. In it he explains that there are no shortage of examples of slavery in the Bible. It is important to note that even though there are many instances of slavery in the Bible they do not necessarily match the slavery that existed in the United States. Slavery in the United States was both race-based and hereditary, meaning that it was not enough to say that slavery existed in the Bible, slavery apologists needed to do more to defend the slavery that existed in the United States. Slavery apologists had to point to instances in the Bible that defended such a system. Stringfellow, and many other slavery apologists pointed to the phrase “cursed be Canaan” and the story of Ham to defend race-based hereditary slavery. Many slavery apologists called on people to look at the original text of the Bible.

Harriet took on these societal and political debates through the mouths of her characters. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a clergyman makes the same argument referenced by Stringfellow and so many other Americans at the time. In response another character in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* comments that “men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them… that is scripture, as much as

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92 Stringfellow, Thornton. *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery*. 1856.
‘Cursed be Canaan.’”\textsuperscript{93} The exchange emphasizes the pitfall of interpreting the Bible literally. If people look at the original wording of the Bible, they will inherently run into contradicting sections. Reading the Bible literally leads people to pick and choose the sections they want to apply and literally follow. At face value it may seem that slavery apologists had an easier time arguing for the perpetuation of slavery, but in reality, the text is contradictory, leading to a stalemate in the argument where people pick and choose what sections they want to apply to their lives. It is for this reason that abolitionists called for people to look at the overarching message of the Bible. Rather than make this point in a stump speech or a lecture, Harriet brought the debate into people’s homes where they could mull it over in their own time and wrestle with their own beliefs.

Books like \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} also demonstrate both the egregious as well as the more minute ways in which slavery is immoral and inhospitable for practicing Christianity. In appealing to the themes of the Bible, abolitionists had an easier time. They did not have to get bogged down in specific and technicalities of scripture and could focus on appealing to the hearts and minds of Christians.

Finding a publisher for an abolitionist narrative was no small feat. Apart from Fredrick Douglass’s 1845 \textit{Narrative}, many writers could not get northern or southern publishers to carry their work unless they were already an abolitionist group. Editors tended to be cautious, not wanting to offend their southern subscribers. Many writers were forced to give up hopes of publishing, publish themselves or face the ramifications of speaking publicly on the issue. For example, Grace Greenwood, who wrote regularly for the \textit{National Era}, lost her position as

\textsuperscript{93} Norton Anthology, Volume B, 1738.
editorial assistant at *Godey’s Lady’s Book* following a series of anti-slavery essays she wrote for another publication.\(^94\) The majority of the established publishers approached by Harriet and her sister Catharine, who was helping Harriet find a publisher, were unwilling to publish the book because of its content.

The novel was originally published in forty installments over the course of ten months by the *National Era*, an abolitionist weekly paper published out of Washington D.C. Although the paper had a limited range, the story’s popularity exceeded expectations and crucially for Harriet caught the attention of the wife of Boston publisher John J. Jewett.\(^95\) She convinced her husband to read the serialized story and he proceeded to contact the Stowes to publish the story in book form. It sold over 300,000 copies in its first year. For reference, the popular slave narrative by Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass* sold 30,000 copies between 1845 and 1860 and Solomon Northups’ *Twelve Years a Slave* sold 27,000 copies in its first two years in print.\(^96\) By 1857, five years after *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s publication, it is estimated that over two million copies were sold worldwide.\(^97\) In addition to its wide readership, the story was adapted into plays. Into the 1900s there were still several acting troupes performing the play. Between its different narrative forms, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had a huge cultural impact and catalyzed conversation in American households across the United States.

The book was so widely read that its social and political fingerprints stretch throughout history. The year it was published, 1852, 300 baby girls in Boston alone were named after the


\(^{95}\) The Passionate Beechers, 159.


character Eva from the story. The book spurred an entire genre of slavery-themed novels, both mimicking *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in admiration and angerly responding to it.

The cultural and political response to the book was so polarizing in the nation that some people came to cite it as the cause of the Civil War. When Harriet and her family were invited to the White House for dinner in 1862 President Lincoln allegedly greeted Harriet by saying, “So this is the little lady who made this big war?” Harriet’s book did not start the Civil War but the novel’s wide consumption did bring the discussion of slavery in America to the surface in communities across the country and the world.

Neither of the Beecher sisters wildly challenged the gendered framework of their time, but each leveraged their womanhood and motherhood to act publicly and politically. Their social, cultural and political impacts are still evident in American society today.

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Chapter 4, Tactic 3: Community Organizing

Throughout the history of the United States religion and activism have often been tied closely together. In today’s milieu that is evident in the movement to overturn Roe v. Wade and limit access to abortion associated with evangelical and Catholic voters and the Republican Party. The link between religious groups and policy agendas is nothing new. Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, for example, provided reformers in the United States with both the motivation and population crucial to America’s labor movement. This led to a strong connection between labor unions and the Democratic party. This partnership facilitated by the anti-catholic rhetoric of the Republican party as well as the natural overlap between the policy goals of the Democratic party and the teachings of *Rerum novarum*, its interpretations and the subsequent activism. This is just one of many examples where people’s faith have driven them into the political sphere to advocate for what they believe to be moral, right and good.

For many American women, religious activism provided a bridge between the private and public spheres that enabled them to be politically engaged before they had the right to vote. It was their identity as women, wives and mothers that that compelled so many American women to become politically engaged via the Temperance Movement—and also gave them the freedom to become engaged in such a public way.

In this chapter we will look closely at the activism of Frances Willard and Carrie A. Nation and investigate how their religiosity in connection with their female identity was crucial to their work.

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A Higher Calling

The Temperance Movement was a slowly evolving movement that was very closely tied with religion from the very beginning. It arguably began in 1773 with Methodism’s founder, John Wesley, describing alcohol consumption as the consumption of poison. His public speeches were explicit about the connection between religion and alcohol explaining that people who choose to consume alcohol made a sinful decision, one that “blasphemed” God and dishonored the blessing of grace that God had made available to human beings through Christ’s sacrifice. His statement condemned literally thousands of people in Europe and America because the fact of the matter was that in the eighteenth century, alcohol was a staple in Euro-American diets.

People of all ages, from toddlers to the elderly often began their days with an alcoholic drink. The reality is that drinking alcohol was a necessity because water contamination was so common. The majority of drinks, especially those consumed by children were ciders made from peaches and apples. These drinks had a low alcohol content. Before the American Revolution, rum was the hard drink of choice in the colonies, but that changed with British blockade which kept molasses and rum from reaching the colonies. A large corn surplus filled the demand vacuum with whiskey. Whiskey became the American drink of choice. It was the perfect storm, a symbol of patriotism and it was remarkably cheap. By the 1820s whiskey was the cheapest drink in the market, selling for twenty-five cents a gallon. The average person in the 1820s consumed seven gallons per year. Throughout the 1830s alcohol consumption continued

101 John Wesley, "Sermon 140 on Public Diversions" (speech).
to rise and was mostly in the form of whiskey. In the 1840s, however, whiskey consumption dropped considerably to just three gallons per year, per capita. This significant decrease in consumption was largely due to the work of women.

The rise of industrialization made it dangerous to have such high and consistent levels of intoxication. Between industrialization and the Second Great Awakening there were growing calls to address the drinking habits of Americans, particularly American men. Like many reform movements, however, the Temperance Movement was fractured by disagreements about goals and tactics. In particular, the Temperance Movement in the United States was marked by disagreements between those who called for moderation and those who called for prohibition of alcohol. Women predominantly called for the latter, and were able to unify and rally national momentum to ultimately amend the constitution.

Like many female leaders of her time, Frances Willard was an educator. She was the first president of the women’s college at Northwestern. This role was as formative for her as it was for her pupils. She had long been an advocate for women’s movements and encouraging equity between the sexes. She watched their passion as women came together in protest of alcohol. For many, including Willard the women’s movement and the Temperance movement merged in 1874. In 1873 and 74 when she was bullied into resigning from her tenured teaching position, she decided to join the Temperance Movement herself. Willard’s personal involvement in the Temperance Movement began in 1874 when she participated in the founding convention of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and was elected the first Corresponding

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104 Ibid.
105 “Alcohol in America”, 17.
106 Ibid.
Secretary. By 1876 she had risen in the role to the head of the WCTU’s Publications Department where she was tasked with using their weekly newspaper, *The Union Signal*, to build a national audience surrounding the issue of temperance. By the time she became the organization’s president in 1879, a post she held until her death in 1898, she had carefully constructed a public message about why women needed to be a part of national debates on policy like Temperance.

Willard authored the WCTU’s “Declaration of Principles” which outlined the goals and motivations of the organization. The first stanza of the “Declaration” makes the religious motivations of temperance reformers clear; it reads, “We believe in the coming of His Kingdom whose service is perfect freedom, because His laws, written in grace, are perfect, converting the soul.”\textsuperscript{108} This is a direct reference to postmillennialism, the evangelical belief that Christ would come following the millennium. The “millennium” refers to the “one thousand years” of Revelation 20, where the Gospel would be spread over the whole world and the human experience on earth, while still far from perfect, would be greatly improved by the Gospel. Christ would return after the millennial age, hence postmillennialism, and this would mark the end of history.\textsuperscript{109} As Christians who were keenly focused on Christ’s return, Postmillennialists worked to bring about the Millenium that would precede Christ’s coming; they worked to make the world as close as possible to ideal in preparation for the second coming of Christ.\textsuperscript{110}

The perspective was most prevalent in the United States between the time of the Revolution and the First World War. There was a dip in belief following the Civil War because the carnage and loss was so shocking for many Americans.\textsuperscript{111} Whether it was the return of men to

\textsuperscript{109} Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American culture*. Oxford University Press, 2006, 49.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
neighborhoods or a means of coping with the devastating loss of life following the Civil War, there was a surge in the number of saloons in the towns across the United States following the war. This trend was paired with a rise of participation in the Temperance Movement nationally.

Unlike previous social movements, the Temperance Movement really embraced female involvement. The Order of Good Templars, an organization focused on reducing dependency on drugs and alcohol, accepted women as members saw its membership ballooned from 50,000 in 1859 to over 400,000 by 1869. Similarly the Prohibition Party allowed women to participate, making it the first convention where women were able to participate as delegates.

Postmillennialism offered a particularly empowering message for women, allowing them to act publicly in the name of religious activism and societal reform. The WCTU choice to begin their platform referencing the postmillennial second coming of Christ is important. It helped frame the activism of these women not as women’s activism, but rather as these women acting as messengers of God. This allowed women to create a stark dichotomy with themselves and their policy initiatives as a moral good and opposition as inherently sinful by digressing from the wishes of God. The WCTU’s motto “For God” was another reminder of both their mission and motivation. This moral imperative for reform was also a women’s imperative, one that was socially acceptable during the highly gendered times these women lived in. The calling from God gave them higher authority than women would customarily have in the public sphere. They used this association as God’s messengers to establish a women's rights and importance. It gave them the authority to criticize men, political leaders and social norms.

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112 Frances Willard, 65.
This rhetorical choice of Frances Willard helped establish a connection between rights that women deserve and credibility for both women within the WCTU and the movement more broadly. At the time, women speaking publicly was a taboo and often led to social ruin.\textsuperscript{114} As a messenger of Jesus these women were more shielded from the harsh realities of politics and political engagement.

Women were often victims of alcoholism, but the Temperance Movement’s rhetoric supplanted this narrative of victimization. Instead of constructing a narrative that focused on horrors women experienced as a result of alcoholism like women who stayed up late at night anxiously awaiting their husband’s return from the saloon, or the women and children beaten by drunk husbands and fathers or mothers who struggled to make ends meet for their families after the husbands earnings were spent on drinks rather than food and clothes, the movement constructed a narrative where women were leaders in their families, marriages and communities. The rhetoric was focused on depicting the role of women as exemplars who led men and society more broadly toward reform.\textsuperscript{115} This role as “moral exemplars” allowed women to be the moral compass of the society and particularly for men. They were symbols of purity, morality, and religiosity.\textsuperscript{116} The WCTU capitalized on the leadership opportunities this offered women.

In addition to the language in the WCTU’s founding documents, Frances Willard made other intentional decisions for the longevity of the organization and the betterment of the temperance movement. The Temperance Movement, which culminated in a constitutional amendment, required large scale unity to successfully achieve its goals. Willard knew that

\textsuperscript{115} Scott C. Martin, \textit{Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-class Ideology. 1800-1860} (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University, 2008), 53.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
unifying women is easier said than done. Women may receive treatment that is often paired with a minority group, but they are not a minority. They exist in every stratification socioeconomic status regardless of race or ethnicity. As pointed out by feminist philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir, women live “dispersed among men, tied by homes, work economic interests, and social conditions.” Women are more closely connected to the people in these groups, both men and women, than to women in general. This explains why white women often “are in solidarity with white men and not black women.” Willard organized the WCTU in an attempt to unify women while still allowing for this spectrum of differences in local chapters.

Willard placed great emphasis on retaining the autonomy of local chapters within the WCTU. The Temperance Movement spanned many states, ideologies and party alignments. Willard initiated a policy called “Do Everything” which encouraged members to advocate for whatever motivated them in addition to Temperance. As a result in many towns across the country the WCTU chapter was the hub of women’s political activity. Willard’s “Do Everything” model welcomed women of color to be members, but also allowed for a structure that kept white women comfortable. White women were not forced out of their comfort-zones to interact with women of color. Some places, like Tampa, Florida had three different WCTU chapters, one for blacks, one for white and one from the Cuban American community in the city. WCTU chapters like the ones in Tampa were not uncommon especially as the movement grew to be national in size. It was important to the unity of the national message to keep local chapters happy and motivated. So, even as the organization expanded nationally, Willard made sure it retained it’s local autonomy structure. Local chapters raised most of their own capital for their own

118 Ibid.
initiatives. Local chapters had to pay dues to the national WCTU and they needed to champion temperance, but outside of those requirements local chapters were free to pursue the work they wished. This enabled the organization to have a wide swath of chapters spanning different regional lines, as well as racial and cultural differences.\footnote{Fletcher, \textit{Gender and the American}, 110-111.}

Willard avoided the fracturing that could have been caused by trying to have a completely universal narrative. The WCTU maximized its support by making itself malleable to differences that existed from place to place, community to community. As a result, membership in the WCTU was wildly popular. It was the largest women's organization in history up until that point. There were ten times as many women in the WCTU in the 1890s than there were in all the suffrage groups in the country combined.\footnote{Collins, Gail. \textit{America's women: 400 years of dolls, drudges, helpmates, and heroines}. Harper Collins, 2009, 318.}

Carrie A. Nation was one of the many women who benefited from the free reign given to local WCTU chapters. She founded her own chapter of the WCTU in the town of Medicine Lodge, Kansas. She gained national attention in 1900 when she threw stones in an attempt to damage the elegant bar at the Hotel Carey in Wichita, Kansas. She successfully ripped the huge nude painting of \textit{Cleopatra at the Bath} and then is said to have driven patrons from the bar with her cain.\footnote{\textit{America's Women}, 318.} She was none for taking a more radical approach that could be seen as terrorism. Although she did not hurt patrons, she racked up a long arrest record by taking a hatchet to people's property, be it a salon or an orchard. Given this, she went down in history as a radical, crockety, humorless woman obsessed with ending alcohol consumption in the United States.
Nation’s life had been directly impacted by the horrors of alcoholism. In 1867 she married Charles Gloyd, a young physician and school teacher who worked near Carrie Nation, then Carrie Amelia Moore’s family farm. The two fell in love, much to the chagrin of her parents who did not think he was a “suitable match.” Marrying for love was almost unheard of at the time. Marriages were generally unions between families to boost or maintain social status. Gloyd was a severe alcoholic. He even allegedly showed up tipsy the morning of their wedding. His alcoholism left him with little money to support his wife and their child that was on the way. He was often out all night or stumbled home late only to fall into a drunken sleep. Within six months of their marriage, she gave way to her parent’s pleading and left Gloyd. The couple separated in 1867, just before the birth of their child, Charlien. Gloyd died from his alcoholism later that year. Carrie Glyod was shortly remarried to David Nation, but she never lost her love for Charlie. His love letters were amongst her papers when she died, forty-four years later. In this way her methods although stark were less humorless and more a desperate attempt to protect other women and families from the depressing and hopeless circumstances she had experienced.

The saloons Nation destroyed were illegal. They were flagrant examples of the lax enforcement of the state’s ban on alcohol consumption. Nation built a national following through her actions. Her legal and bail fees were paid with the money she made commodifying her activism. People supported her activism by buying souvenir hatchets and paying to hear her speak. Her fines were also paid by ministers and businessmen who supported her work and the Temperance Movement.

123 Ibid, 46.
124 Ibid, 48.
125 Ibid, 42.
Nation motivated thousands of people to engage in property damaging raids of saloons. In one instance she organized a group including 2,000 men to raid and damage local illegal saloons. In this instance the activism was protected quite literally by numbers. The mob was successful in closing the saloons in the surrounding area, granted their guns, cannons and threat to hang anyone who harmed an anti-saloon member may have helped.\textsuperscript{127} For all the people who go out and protest there needs to be people who back them both in their message and through financing in order to enable the activism.

In this way Nation’s activism differed from that of Frances Willard. The two women were motivated to create a national prohibition by radical means. Willard, through passing an amendment to the constitution and Nation by scaring men into changing their ways. Nation however highlighted the spectrum of political engagement. In most cases she was not protected by a literal mob, but rather through the financial support and public image she had built.

The women may have differed starkly on methods but their motivations came from the same book. Similar to Frances Willard, Carrie A. Nation saw her activism as closely connected with her faith and her belief in postmillennialism. Nation described herself as “a bulldog running along at the feet of Jesus, barking at what He doesn't like.”\textsuperscript{128} Through marriage her name was Carrie Ameilia Moore Gloyd Nation, in 1903 she legally changed her name to Carry A. Nation claiming that God had chosen her to “carry a nation” to prohibition.\textsuperscript{129}

Marrying for love may have been uncommon for women of Nation’s time, but her experience in her first marriage was not. Women were often the victims of alcoholic husbands.

\textsuperscript{127} Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition, 83.
\textsuperscript{128} Donald Barr Chidsey, On and off the Wagon: A Sober Analysis of the Temperance Movement from the Pilgrims through Prohibition (n.p.: n.p., 1969)
\textsuperscript{129} Carry A. Nation, 2.
because they did not have the ability to leave as Nation did. At the time women did not have the legal standing to own land, have custody of their children or even make pleas for divorce.\textsuperscript{130}

There were few jobs where women could make a living and even fewer that would allow them to support their families in their husband’s stead. If we think back to the Beecher sisters, we will remember that even in teaching positions women made less than a third of what men made in a year. Alcoholism also led to higher levels of domestic violence. Given this reality, activism was one of the few options women had available to them. For many female leaders in the movement, the Temperance Movement was deeply related to their faith and their families.

Having so few options available to them was especially dangerous in a time before there were domestic violence shelters and sustainable means to be independent from husbands. In many ways the Temperance Movement was progressive. Many Temperance groups allowed female membership and it was an issue that women were able to carve out a public platform for themselves. Even though that was the case, the movement and its male leaders were heavily influenced by the gender stereotypes of the time. Many men within the movement did not advocate for liberation from gender norms. They argued that even if a woman was being abused in their relationship she had an obligation to stay and help her husbands lead a more moral life. Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Carrie Nation and Susan B. Anthony took the term “moral exemplar” to mean that women were leaders as well as advocates for their own safety. They presented the idea that women should leave their husbands if the situation was not safe for themselves or their children. Susan B. Anthony pointed out that if an alcoholic husband knows that his “pure minded and virtuous” wife “assuredly [to] leave him, and take with her the

\textsuperscript{130} America’s Women, 317.
“property and children,” it would motivate men to put down the bottle.\textsuperscript{131} She explained that women could motivate their husbands to change if they had the freedom to leave.

Carry Nation was poor her entire life, but she had small stints of prosperity. In the times that she did have enough money to buy a home, her house was not only home to her, but also open to any women and children who needed shelter from drunkards and abusers.\textsuperscript{132} Her life’s work is an example of the spectrum of political engagement and community organizing. She led both radical, violent raids on local saloons with the physical and financial backing of thousands and she also engaged in more subtle activism by creating a space for women fleeing the realities of the time when the did not have the rights or means to protect themselves.

The Temperance Movement brought the issues of women’s rights into mainstream discussion. Temperance may have been about the issue of alcoholism at face value but the issue magnified the injustice of the American system that did not provide women with the same legal rights as men. Even without the right to vote Temperance leaders like Willard and Nation were able to create national change. Nation organized people within her state to enforce the laws that were already on the books. Willard led a national campaign that culminated in an amendment to the constitution. All of this happened at a time when women could not own property, let alone vote or run for office.

The Temperance Movement not only offered a platform that allowed women to act as equal partners to male leaders, but it also motivated women engage in community organizing and activism centered around their identities as women. Prohibition may have been a societal failure that led to widespread organized crime, but the act of achieving prohibition is a testament to the

\textsuperscript{131} Martin, Devil of the Domestic, 52
\textsuperscript{132} Carry A. Nation, 253.
extraordinary capacity of women’s political engagement and specifically their community organizing.
Conclusion

Throughout the history of the United States women have been monumental in pushing the nation to live up to the ideals set forth in the Constitution. Their identities as women have provided them with unique experiences that have given them insight into the meaning of “natural rights” and the challenges involved in being a nation that is premised upon the idea that human beings are “equal.” Their experiences as women have shaped their outlook on the world and informed their passion and activism. The lives and careers of Ida B. Wells, Catharine Beecher, Harriett Beecher Stowe, Frances Willard and Carry A. Nation provide us with some understanding of the form, breadth, and impact that female political engagement has had on the legal and cultural landscape in the United States. Their lives and work compel us to think more broadly about what political engagement looks like and who our political leaders are, have been, and might someday be.

The pioneering investigative journalism of Ida B. Wells challenged the flagrantly racist and sexist narratives in her time. Her investigative reporting on lynching in America helped form a powerful and proud, uniquely Afro American identity in the United States. She literally and figurative moved people with her pen. Like so many female political leaders, and political leaders more generally, she recognized the political power of the press. Facts and their presentation, both in the news and in opinion writing, have the power to set the agenda in their epoc. Ida B. Wells is one of many women like Ida Tarbell, Nellie Bly and many more in generations to follow who used the power of reporting to expose injustice and compel society to change.
Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe both leveraged their identities as women in their political work. Both women, by their own choosing, did not try to turn the gender norms of their time on their head. Even so they acted publically and impacted the world we all live in today.

Catharine Beecher fought for a number of women’s issues. She was a life-long advocate for a woman’s right to an equally rigorous education and especially higher education. She founded schools across the nation, fundraised and advocated for this ideal. She also was the first to organize women to petition the government. This political engagement tool is still a relevant way of voicing the wishes of the people to elected officials, but it held even more weight during her own time when women could not vote. Her work paved the way for generations of highly educated women as well as a practice of petitioning on issues that were not being addressed through more traditional forms of political engagement like voting.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, much like Ida B. Wells, relied on the power of her pen. Unlike Wells she capitalized on the capacity of fiction to activate political engagement. Her book, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, emphasized the power of publishing. The book activated conversation on the issues of race and slavery in America on an unprecedented scale. Writing, her tactic of political engagement, is a reminder that speaking publicly can come in many forms from lectures, to rallies to novels. The massive readership of her novel also demonstrates the political power of creating a message that speaks to so many, “goes viral,” and catalyzes change.

Frances Willard and Carry A. Nation demonstrated the challenges as well as successes of community organizing as a form of political engagement. Frances Willard united a national movement of women who came from different backgrounds, races, communities and who had
different ideas of how to address their common goal of temperance. She, like so many leaders before and after her, walked the fine line between uniting and fragmenting a large scale movement. The united front that she constructed captured the incredible political power that comes with coalescing around common policy goal.

Carry A. Nation shared the same goal as Frances Willard and the Temperance Movement but her form of community organizing had a much more radical flavor. The laws that Willard fought to pass nationally, Nation literally fought for their enforcement locally. Her community organizing emphasized the power of fear as a political engagement tactic.

The United States and its political leaders are far from perfect. As is true with all people Americans are influenced and biased by the times they are brought up in and the world around them. In every era, there were leaders who found ways to push for political change and drive the nation closer to its founding ideals. The women whose stories are captured here offer just a flavor of the many forms of political engagement that stretch more broadly than election and campaign involvement.

My hope is that the stories of these women and their tactic for political engagement will remind us all of the wide scope of political engagement. With this more inclusive understanding of political engagement, so too comes a wider and more diverse population of political leaders -- and a more sophisticated understanding of how meaningful and lasting cultural and legal change is identified and accomplished.