

DBQ 6. Women and Society, 1800-1860

Question: The role and place of women in American society changed markedly between 1800 and 1860.

Examining the documents and your knowledge of the period, analyze the extent to which social, economic, and political opportunities opened for women in the antebellum era.

Document A

Source: Catharine Beecher on the Desired Character of Women, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, 1837.

Let every woman become so cultivated and refined in intellect, that her taste and judgment will be respected; so benevolent in feeling and action, that her motives will be revered; so unassuming and unambitious, that collision and competition will be banished; so "gentle and easy to be entreated," that every heart will repose in her presence; then, the fathers, the husbands, and the sons, will find an influence thrown around them, to which they will yield not only willingly but proudly.

Document B

Source: American Anti-Slavery Society Protest, 1839.

We, the undersigned, members and delegates of the American Anti-Slavery Society, as a duty and, therefore, a right, hereby protest against the principle assumed by a majority of persons representing said Society at its present meeting that women have the right of originating, debating, and voting of questions which come before said Society, and are eligible to its various offices . . .

Document C

Source: Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls, 1848.

We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed . . . But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

Document D

Source: Maria Perkins to her husband, 1852.

I write you a letter to let you know of my distress . . . my master has sold albert to a trader on Monday court day and myself and other child is for sale also and I want you to let me hear from you very soon . . . I want you to tell Dr. Hamelton your master if either will buy me they can attend to it know and then I can go afterwards.

I don't want a trader to get me . . . they asked me if I had got any person to buy me and I told them no . . . they told me to the court house too . . . they never put me up . . . A man buy the name of brady bought albert and is gone . . . I don't know where . . . they say he lives in Scottsville . . . my things is in several places . . . some is in Stanton and if I would be sold I don't know what will become of them. . . I don't expect to meet with luck to get that way till I am quite sick . . . I am and ever will be your kind wife.

DBQ 9. Role of Women, 1880–1920

Question: Utilizing the documents and your knowledge of the period, to what extent did the roles of American women change in the years 1880–1920?

Document A

Source: Senator George Vest, address, *Congressional Record*, 49th Congress, 2nd Session, January 25, 1887.

... What man can, without aversion, turn from the blessed memory of that dear old grandmother, or the gentle words and caressing hand of that dear blessed mother . . . , to face in its stead the idea of a female justice of the peace or township constable. For my part I want when I go to my home — when I turn from the arena where man contends with man for what we call the prizes of this paltry world — I want to go back, not to be received in the masculine embrace of some female ward politician, but to the earnest, loving look and touch of a true woman. I want to go back to the jurisdiction of the wife, the mother; and instead of a lecture upon finance or the tariff, or upon the construction of the Constitution, I want those blessed, loving details of domestic life and domestic love.

... I do not believe [women] are adapted to the political work of this world. I do not believe that the Great Intelligence ever intended them to invade the sphere of work given to men, tearing down and destroying all the best influences for which God has intended them. . . .

It is no more insulting to say that women are emotional than to say that they are delicately constructed physically and unfitted to become soldiers or workmen under the sterner, harder pursuits of life . . .

... I believe that woman as she is to-day, the queen of home and of hearts, is above the political collisions of this world, and should always be kept above them. . . .

[Granting women the right of suffrage] would take her down from that pedestal where she is today, influencing as a mother the minds of her offspring, influencing by her gentle and kindly caress the action of her husband toward the good and pure.

Document B

Source: Mary Church Terrell, "Club Work of Colored Women," *Southern Workman*, August 8, 1901.

For years, either banding themselves into small companies or struggling alone, colored women have worked with might and main to improve the condition of their people. The necessity of systematizing their efforts working on a larger scale [led to the formation in 1896 of] the National Association of Colored Women. . . . Handicapped though its members have been, because they lacked money and experience, their efforts have for the most part been crowned with success.

Kindergartens have been established by some of its [local] organizations, from which encouraging reports have come. A sanitarium with a training school for nurses has been set on a firm foundation by the Phyllis Wheatley Club of New Orleans . . . and the municipal government of that Southern city has voted it an annual appropriation. . . .

Questions affecting our legal status as a race are sometime agitated by our women. In Tennessee and Louisiana[,] colored women have several times petitioned the legislature of their respective states to repeal the obnoxious Jim Crow [railroad] car laws. . . .

Some of our women are urging their clubs to establish day nurseries, a charity of which there is an imperative need. The infants of wage-earning mothers are frequently locked alone in a room from the time the mother leaves in the morning until she returns at night.

Document C

Source: Martha E. D. White, "Work of the Women's Club," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 93, May 1904.

... Outwardly for twenty years, the woman's club remained an institution for the culture and pleasure of its members; but within, the desire for a larger opportunity was gradually strengthening. ... The inherent longing for power, coupled with the confidence in the wisdom and beneficence of whatever women should do, brought the leaders of the ... [General Federation of Women's Clubs] to a conception of social service. ...

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Six years ago the General Federation undertook to help the solution of certain industrial problems, notably to further organization among working-women; to secure and enforce child labor legislation where needed; to further attendance at school; and to secure humane conditions under which labor is performed. State federations have acted ... to appoint standing industrial committees, procure investigations, circulate literature, and create a public sentiment in favor of these causes. In Illinois this indirect power was of much aid in securing a Child Labor Law.

Document D

Source: Woman suffrage before 1920.

