a male tailor earn "two or three times as much," as a female counterpart "although the work done by each may be equally good?"

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

The Grimkés were the first to apply the abolitionist doctrine of universal freedom and equality to the status of women. When the prominent writer Catharine Beecher reprimanded the sisters for stepping outside "the domestic and social sphere," urging them to accept the fact that "heaven" had designated man "the superior" and woman "the subordinate," Angelina Grimké issued a stinging answer. "I know nothing," she wrote, "of men's rights and women's rights. My doctrine, then is, that whatever it is morally right for man to do, it is morally right for woman to do." Like their predecessors Frances Wright and Maria Stewart, the Grimké sisters soon retired from the fray, after Angelina married Theodore Weld. But their writings helped to spark the movement for women's rights, which arose in the 1840s.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the key organizers of the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, were veterans of the antislavery crusade. In 1840, they had traveled to London as delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention, only to be barred from participating because of their sex. The Seneca Falls convention, a gathering on behalf of women's rights held in the upstate New York town where Stanton lived, raised the issue of women's suffrage for the first time. Stanton, the principal author, modeled the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments on the Declaration of Independence. But the document added "women" to Jefferson's axiom, "all men are created equal," and in place of a list of injustices committed by George III, it condemned the "injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman." The first to be listed was denying her the right to vote. As Stanton told the convention, only the vote would make woman "free as man is free," since in a democratic society, freedom was impossible without access to the ballot. The argument was simple and irrefutable: in the words of Lydia Maria Child, "either the theory of our government [the democratic principle that government rests on the will of the people] is false, or women have a right to vote."

Seneca Falls marked the beginning of the seventy-year struggle for women's suffrage. The vote, however, was hardly the only issue raised at the convention. The Declaration of Sentiments condemned the entire structure of inequality that denied women access to education and employment, gave husbands control over the property and wages of their wives and custody of children in the event of divorce, deprived women of independent legal status after they married, and restricted them to the home as their "sphere of action." Equal rights became the rallying cry of the early movement for women's rights, and equal rights meant claiming access to all the prevailing definitions of freedom.
Since I engaged in the investigation of the
rights of the slave, I have necessarily been
led to a better understanding of my own; for
I have found the Anti-Slavery cause to be . . .
the school in which human rights are more
fully investigated, and better understood and
taught, than in any other [reform] enterprise.
. . . Here we are led to examine why human
beings have any rights. It is because they are
moral beings. . . . Now it naturally occurred
to me, that if rights were founded in moral
being, then the circumstance of sex could
not give to man higher rights and
responsibilities, than to woman. . . .

My doctrine, then is, that whatever it is
morally right for man to do, it is morally
right for woman to do. . . . This regulation of
duty by the mere circumstance of sex . . .
has led to all that [numerous] train of evils
flowing out of the anti-Christian doctrine of
masculine and feminine virtues. By this
document, man has been converted into the
warrior, and clothed in sternness . . . whilst
woman has been taught to lean upon an
arm of flesh, to . . . be admired for her
personal charms, and caressed and
humored like a spoiled child, or converted
into a mere drudge to suit the convenience
of her lord and master. . . . It has robbed
woman of . . . the right to think and speak
and act on all great moral questions, just as
men think and speak and act . . .

The discussion of the wrongs of slavery
has opened the way for the discussion of
other rights, and the ultimate result will
most certainly be . . . the letting of the
oppressed of every grade and description
go free.

FEMINISM AND FREEDOM

Like abolitionism, temperance, and other reforms, women's rights was an international movement. Lacking broad backing at home, early feminists found allies abroad. "Women alone will say what freedom they want," declared an article in The Free Woman, a journal established in Paris in 1832. With their household chores diminished because of the availability of manufactured goods and domestic servants, many middle-class women chafed at the restrictions that made it impossible for them to gain an education, enter the professions, and in other ways exercise their talents. Whether married or not, early feminists insisted, women deserved the range of individual choices—the possibility of self-realization—that constituted the essence of freedom.

Women, wrote Margaret Fuller, had the same right as men to develop their talents, to "grow . . . to live freely and unimpeded." The daughter of a Jeffersonian congressman, Fuller was educated at home, at first under her father's
supervision (she learned Latin before the age of six) and later on her own. She became part of New England’s transcendentalist circle (discussed in Chapter 9) and from 1840 to 1842 edited *The Dial*, a magazine that reflected the group’s views. In 1844, Fuller became literary editor of the *New York Tribune*, the first woman to achieve so important a position in American journalism.

In *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845, Fuller sought to apply to women the transcendentalist idea that freedom meant a quest for personal development. “Every path” to self-fulfillment, she insisted, should be “open to woman as freely as to man.” Fuller singled out Abby Kelley as a “gentle hero” for continuing to speak in public despite being denounced by men for venturing “out of her sphere.” Fearing that marriage to an American would inevitably mean subordination to male dictation, Fuller traveled to Europe as a correspondent for the *Tribune*. There she married an Italian patriot. Along with her husband and baby, she died in a shipwreck in 1850 while returning to the United States.

**WOMEN AND WORK**

Women also demanded the right to participate in the market revolution. At an 1851 women’s rights convention, the black abolitionist Sojourner Truth insisted that the movement devote attention to the plight of poor and working-class women and repudiate the idea that women were too delicate to engage in work outside the home. Born a slave in New York State around 1799, Truth did not obtain her freedom until the state’s emancipation law of 1827. A listener at her 1851 speech (which was not recorded at the time) later recalled that Truth had spoken of her years of hard physical labor, had flexed her arm to show her strength, and exclaimed, “and aren’t I a woman?”

Although those who convened at Seneca Falls were predominantly from the middle class—no representatives of the growing number of “factory girls” and domestic servants took part—the participants rejected the identification of the home as the women’s “sphere.” Women, wrote Pauline Davis in 1853, “must go to work” to emancipate themselves from “bondage.” During the 1850s, some feminists tried to popularize a new style of dress, devised by Amelia Bloomer, consisting of a
loose-fitting tunic and trousers. In her autobiography, published in 1898, Elizabeth Cady Stanton recalled that women who adopted Bloomer’s attire were ridiculed by the press and insulted by “crowds of boys in the streets.” They found that “the physical freedom enjoyed did not compensate for the persistent persecution and petty annoyances suffered at every turn.” The target of innumerable male jokes, the “bloomer” costume attempted to make a serious point—that the long dresses, tight corsets, and numerous petticoats considered to be appropriate female attire were so confining that they made it almost impossible for women to claim a place in the public sphere or to work outside the home.

In one sense, feminism demanded an expansion of the boundaries of freedom rather than a redefinition of the idea. Women, in the words of one reformer, should enjoy “the rights and liberties that every ‘free white male citizen’ takes to himself as God-given.” But even as it sought to apply prevailing notions of freedom to women, the movement posed a fundamental challenge to some of society’s central beliefs—that the capacity for independence and rationality were male traits, that the world was properly divided into public and private realms, and that issues of justice and freedom did not apply to relations within the family. In every realm of life, including the inner workings of the family, declared Elizabeth Cady Stanton, there could be “no happiness without freedom.”

THE SLAVERY OF SEX

The dichotomy between freedom and slavery powerfully shaped early feminists’ political language. Just as the idea of “wage slavery” enabled northern workers to challenge the inequalities inherent in market definitions of freedom, the concept of the “slavery of sex” empowered the women’s movement to develop an all-encompassing critique of male authority and their own subordination. Feminists of the 1840s and 1850s pointed out that the law of marriage made nonsense of the description of the family as a “private” institution independent of public authority. When the abolitionists and women’s rights activists Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell married, they felt obliged to repudiate New York’s laws that clothed the husband “with legal powers which . . . no man should possess.”

Feminist abolitionists did not invent the analogy between marriage and slavery. The English writer Mary Wollstonecraft had invoked it as early as the 1790s in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (discussed in Chapter 8). But the analogy between free women and slaves gained prominence as it was swept up in the accelerating debate over slavery. “Woman is a slave, from the cradle to the grave,” asserted Ernestine Rose. “Father, guardian, husband—master still. One conveys her, like a piece of property, over to the other.” For their part, southern defenders of slavery frequently linked slavery and marriage as
natural and just forms of inequality. Eliminating the former institution, they charged, would threaten the latter.

Marriage was not, literally speaking, equivalent to slavery. The married woman, however, did not enjoy the fruits of her own labor—a central element of freedom. Beginning with Mississippi in 1839, numerous states enacted married women’s property laws, shielding from a husband’s creditors property brought into a marriage by his wife. Such laws initially aimed not to expand women’s rights as much as to prevent families from losing their property during the depression that began in 1837. But in 1860, New York enacted a more far-reaching measure, allowing married women to sign contracts, buy and sell property, and keep their own wages. In most states, however, property accumulated after marriage, as well as wages earned by the wife, still belonged to the husband.

“SOCIAL FREEDOM”

Influenced by abolitionism, women’s rights advocates turned another popular understanding of freedom—self-ownership, or control over one’s own person—in an entirely new direction. The emphasis in abolitionist literature on the violation of the slave woman’s body by her master helped to give the idea of self-ownership a concrete reality that encouraged application to free women as well. The law of domestic relations presupposed the husband’s right of sexual access to his wife and to inflict corporal punishment on her. Courts proved reluctant to intervene in cases of physical abuse so long as it was not “extreme” or “intolerable.” “Women’s Rights,” declared a Boston meeting in 1859, included “freedom and equal rights in the family.” The demand that women should enjoy the rights to regulate their own sexual activity and procreation and to be protected by the state against violence at the hands of their husbands challenged the notion that claims for justice, freedom, and individual rights should stop at the household’s door.

The issue of women’s private freedom revealed underlying differences within the movement for women’s rights. Belief in equality between the sexes and in the sexes’ natural differences coexisted in antebellum feminist thought. Even as they entered the public sphere and thereby challenged some aspects of the era’s “cult of domesticity” (discussed in Chapter 9), many early feminists accepted other elements. Allowing women a greater role in the public sphere, many female reformers argued, would bring their “inborn” maternal instincts to bear on public life, to the benefit of the entire society.

Even feminists critical of the existing institution of marriage generally refrained from raising in public the explosive issue of women’s “private” freedom. The question frequently arose, however, in the correspondence of feminist leaders. “Social Freedom,” Susan B. Anthony observed to Lucy Stone, “lies
at the bottom of all—and until woman gets that, she must continue the slave of men in all other things.” Women like Anthony, who never married, and Stone, who with her husband created their own definition of marriage, reflected the same dissatisfaction with traditional family life as the women who joined communitarian experiments. Not until the twentieth century would the demand that freedom be extended to intimate aspects of life inspire a mass movement. But the dramatic fall in the birthrate over the course of the nineteenth century suggests that many women were quietly exercising “personal freedom” in their most intimate relationships.

THE ABOLITIONIST SCHISM

Even in reform circles, the demand for a greater public role for women remained extremely controversial. Massachusetts physician Samuel Gridley Howe pioneered humane treatment of the blind and educational reform, and he was an ardent abolitionist. But Howe did not support his wife’s participation in the movement for female suffrage, which, he complained, caused her to “neglect domestic relations.” When organized abolitionism split into two wings in 1840, the immediate cause was a dispute over the proper role of women in antislavery work. Abby Kelley’s appointment to the business committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society sparked the formation of a rival abolitionist organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which believed it wrong for a woman to occupy so prominent a position. The antislavery poet John Greenleaf Whittier compared Kelley to Eve, Delilah, and Helen of Troy, women who had sown the seeds of male destruction.

Behind the split lay the fear among some abolitionists that Garrison’s radicalism on issues like women’s rights, as well as his refusal to support the idea of abolitionists voting or running for public office, impeded the movement’s growth. Determined to make abolitionism a political movement, the seceders formed the Liberty Party, which nominated James G. Birney as its candidate for president. He received only 7,000 votes (about one-third of 1 percent of the total). In 1840, antislavery northerners saw little wisdom in “throwing away” their ballots on a third-party candidate.

While the achievement of most of their demands lay far in the future, the women’s rights movement succeeded in making “the woman question” a permanent part of the transatlantic discussion of social reform. As for abolitionism, while it remained a significant presence in northern public life until emancipation had been achieved, by 1840 the movement had accomplished its most important work. Over 1,000 local antislavery societies were now scattered throughout the North, representing a broad constituency awakened to the moral issue of slavery. The “great duty of freedom,” Ralph Waldo Emerson had declared in 1837, was “to open our halls to discussion of this question.” The abolitionists’
greatest achievement lay in shattering the conspiracy of silence that had sought to preserve national unity by suppressing public debate over slavery.

**REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. In what ways did the reform communities resemble each other?
2. Why was this a period of institution building?
3. What forms did the antislavery movement take?
4. How did the abolitionist movement and the women's movement influence each other?
5. How did abolitionism change the meaning of American freedom?

**Voices of Freedom:** What is the doctrine put forth by Angelina Grimké in *The Liberator* and how did she come to formulate that doctrine?
In 1855, Thomas Crawford, one of the era’s most prominent American sculptors, was asked to design a statue to adorn the Capitol’s dome, still under construction in Washington, D.C. He proposed a Statue of Freedom, a female figure wearing a liberty cap. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, one of the country’s largest slaveholders, objected to Crawford's plan. A familiar symbol in the colonial era, the liberty cap had fallen into disfavor among some Americans after becoming closely identified with the French Revolution. Davis's disapproval, however, rested on other grounds. Ancient Romans, he noted, regarded the cap as “the badge of the freed slave.” Its use, he feared, might suggest that there was a connection between the slaves' longing for freedom and the liberty of free-born Americans. Davis ordered the liberty cap replaced with a less controversial military symbol, a feathered helmet.
Crawford died in Italy, where he had spent most of his career, in 1857. Two years later, the colossal Statue of Freedom, which weighed 15,000 pounds, was transported to the United States in several pieces and assembled at a Maryland foundry under the direction of Philip Reed, a slave craftsman. In 1863, it was installed atop the Capitol, where it can still be seen today. By the time it was put in place, the country was immersed in the Civil War and Jefferson Davis had become president of the Confederate States of America. The dispute over the Statue of Freedom offered a small illustration of how, by the mid-1850s, nearly every public question was being swept up into the gathering storm over slavery.

FRUITS OF MANIFEST DESTINY

CONTINENTAL EXPANSION

In the 1840s, slavery moved to the center stage of American politics. It did so not in the moral language or with the immediatist program of abolitionism, but as a result of the nation's territorial expansion. By 1840, with the completion of Indian removal, virtually all the land east of the Mississippi River was in white hands. The depression that began in 1837 sparked a large migration of settlers further west. Some headed to Oregon, whose Willamette Valley was reputed to be one of the continent's most beautiful and fertile regions. Until the 1840s, the American presence in the area had been limited to a few fur traders and explorers. But between 1840 and 1845 some 5,000 emigrants made the difficult 2,000-mile journey by wagon train to Oregon from jumping-off places on the banks of the Missouri River. By 1860, nearly 300,000 men, women, and children had braved disease, starvation, the natural barrier of the Rocky Mountains, and occasional Indian attacks to travel overland to Oregon and California.

THE MORMONS' PLIGHT

Another migration brought thousands of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons, to modern-day Utah. One of the era's numerous religious sects that hoped to create a Kingdom of God on earth, the Mormons had been founded in the 1820s by Joseph Smith, a young farmer in upstate New York. Smith claimed to have been led by an angel to a set of golden plates covered with strange writing, which he translated as the Book of Mormon. He claimed that his church descended from the lost tribes of ancient Israel.
John Gast's 1872 painting American Progress, commissioned by the author of a travel guide to the Pacific coast, reflects the exultant spirit of manifest destiny. A female figure descended from earlier representations of Liberty wears the Star of Empire and leads the march of pioneers, enlightenment, and technological progress westward, while Indians and the buffalo retreat before her.

The absolute authority Smith exercised over his followers, as well as the refusal of the Mormons to separate church and state, alarmed many neighbors. Even more outrageous to the general community was the Mormon practice of polygamy, which allows one man to have several wives, a repudiation of traditional Christian teaching and nineteenth-century morality. Mobs drove Smith and his followers out of New York, Ohio, and Missouri before they settled in 1839 in Nauvoo, Illinois, where they hoped to await the Second Coming of Christ. There, five years later, Smith was arrested on the charge of inciting a riot that destroyed an anti-Mormon newspaper. While in jail awaiting trial, Smith was murdered by a group of intruders. His
successor as Mormon leader, Brigham Young, led over 10,000 followers across the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains to the shores of the Great Salt Lake in present-day Utah, seeking a refuge where they could practice their faith undisturbed.

During most of the 1840s, the United States and Great Britain jointly administered Oregon, and Utah was part of Mexico. This did not stop Americans from settling in either region. National boundaries meant little to those who moved west. The 1846s witnessed an intensification of the old belief that God intended the American nation to reach all the way to the Pacific Ocean. As noted in Chapter 9, the term that became a shorthand for this expansionist spirit was “manifest destiny.”

THE MEXICAN FRONTIER

Settlement of Oregon did not directly raise the issue of slavery. But the nation’s acquisition of part of Mexico did. When Mexico achieved its independence from Spain in 1821 it was nearly as large as the United States and its population of 6.5 million was about two-thirds that of its northern neighbor. Mexico’s northern provinces—California, New Mexico, and Texas—however, were isolated and sparsely settled outposts surrounded by Indian country. New Mexico’s population at the time of Mexican independence consisted of around 30,000 persons of Spanish origin, 10,000 Pueblo Indians, and an indeterminate number of “wild” Indians—nomadic bands of Apaches, Comanches, Navajos, and Utes. With the opening in 1821 of the Santa Fe Trail linking that city with Independence, Missouri, New Mexico’s commerce with the United States eclipsed trade with the rest of Mexico.

California’s non-Indian population in 1821, some 3,200 missionaries, soldiers, and settlers, were vastly outnumbered by about 20,000 Indians living and working on land owned by religious missions and by 150,000 members of unsubdued tribes in the interior. In 1834, in the hope of reducing the power of the Catholic Church and attracting Mexican and foreign settlers to California, the Mexican government dissolved the great mission landholdings and emancipated Indians working for the friars. Most of the land ended up in the hands of a new class of Mexican cattle ranchers, the Californios, who defined their own identity in large measure against the surrounding Indian population. Californios referred to themselves as gente de razón (people capable of reason) as opposed to the indios, whom they called gente sin razón (people without reason). For the “common good,” Indians were required to continue to work for the new landholders. The area also attracted a small number of American newcomers. In 1846, Alfred Robinson, who had moved from Boston, published Life in California. “In this age of annexation,” he wondered, “why not extend the ‘area of freedom’ by the annexation of California?”
THE TEXAS REVOLT

The first part of Mexico to be settled by significant numbers of Americans was Texas, whose non-Indian population of Spanish origin (called Tejanos) numbered only about 2,000 when Mexico became independent. In order to develop the region, the Mexican government accepted an offer by Moses Austin, a Connecticut-born farmer, to colonize it with Americans. In 1820, Austin received a large land grant. He died soon afterward and his son Stephen continued the plan, reselling land in smaller plots to American settlers at twelve cents per acre. By 1830, the population of American origin had reached around 7,000, considerably exceeding the number of Tejanos.

Alarmed that its grip on the area was weakening, the Mexican government in 1830 annulled existing land contracts and barred future emigration from the United States. Led by Stephen Austin, American settlers demanded greater

Westward migration in the early and mid-1840s took American settlers across Indian country into the Oregon Territory, ownership of which was disputed with Great Britain. The Mormons migrated west to Salt Lake City, then part of Mexico.
autonomy within Mexico. Part of the area’s tiny Tejano elite joined them. Mostly ranchers and large farmers, they had welcomed the economic boom that accompanied the settlers and formed economic alliances with American traders. The issue of slavery further exacerbated matters. Mexico had abolished slavery, but local authorities allowed American settlers to bring slaves with them. When Mexico’s ruler, General Antonio López de Santa Anna, sent an army in 1835 to impose central authority, a local committee charged that his purpose was “to give liberty to our slaves and make slaves of ourselves.”

The appearance of Santa Anna’s army sparked a chaotic revolt in Texas. The rebels formed a provisional government that soon called for Texan independence. On March 13, 1836, Santa Anna’s army stormed the Alamo, a mission compound in San Antonio, killing its 187 American and Tejano defenders. “Remember the Alamo” became the Texans’ rallying cry. In April, forces under Sam Houston, a former governor of Tennessee, routed Santa Anna’s army at the Battle of San Jacinto and forced him to recognize Texan independence. Houston was soon elected the first president of the Republic of Texas. In 1837, the Texas Congress called for union with the United States. But fearing the political disputes certain to result from an attempt to add another slave state to the Union, Presidents Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren shelved the question. Settlers from the United States nonetheless poured into the region, many of them slaveowners taking up fertile cotton land. By 1845, the population of Texas had reached nearly 150,000.

POLK AND EXPANSION

Texas annexation remained on the political back burner until President John Tyler revived it in the hope of rescuing his failed administration and securing southern support for renomination in 1844. In April 1844, a letter by John C. Calhoun, whom Tyler had appointed secretary of state, was leaked to the press. It linked the idea of absorbing Texas directly to the goal of strengthening slavery in the United States. Some southern leaders, indeed, hoped that Texas could be divided into several states, thus further enhancing the South’s power in Congress. Late that month, Henry Clay and former president Van Buren, the prospective Whig and Democratic candidates for president and two of the party system’s most venerable leaders, met at Clay’s Kentucky plantation. They agreed to issue letters rejecting immediate annexation on the grounds that it might provoke war with Mexico. Clay and Van Buren were reacting to the slavery issue in the traditional manner—by trying to keep it out of national politics.

Clay went on to receive the Whig nomination, but for Van Buren the letters proved to be a disaster. At the Democratic convention, southerners bent on annexation deserted Van Buren’s cause, and he failed to receive the two-thirds
majority necessary for nomination. The delegates then turned to the little-known James K. Polk, a former governor of Tennessee whose main assets were his support for annexation and his close association with Andrew Jackson, still the party's most popular figure. Like nearly all the presidents before him, Polk was a slaveholder. He owned substantial cotton plantations in Tennessee and Mississippi, where conditions were so brutal that only half of the slave children lived to the age of fifteen, and adults frequently ran away. To soothe injured feelings among northern Democrats over the rejection of Van Buren, the party platform called not only for the "reannexation" of Texas (implying that Texas had once belonged to the United States) but also the "reoccupation" of all of Oregon. "Fifty-four forty or fight"—American control of Oregon all the way to its northern boundary at north latitude 54° 40'—became a popular campaign slogan. But the bitterness of the northern Van Burenites over what they considered to be a betrayal on the part of the South would affect American politics for years to come.

Polk was the first "dark horse" candidate for president—that is, one whose nomination was completely unexpected. In the fall, he defeated Clay in an extremely close election. Polk's margin in the popular vote was less than 2 percent. Had not James G. Birney, running again as the Liberty Party candidate, received 16,000 votes in New York, mostly from antislavery Whigs, Clay would have been elected. In March 1845, only days before Polk's inauguration, Congress declared Texas part of the United States.

James K. Polk may have been virtually unknown, but he assumed the presidency with a clearly defined set of goals: to reduce the tariff, reestablish the independent treasury system, settle the dispute over ownership of Oregon, and bring California into the Union. Congress soon enacted the first two goals, and the third was accomplished in an agreement with Great Britain dividing Oregon at the forty-ninth parallel. Many northerners were bitterly disappointed by this compromise, considering it a betrayal of Polk's campaign promise not to give up any part of Oregon without a fight. But the president secured his main objectives, the Willamette Valley and the magnificent harbor of Puget Sound.

Acquiring California proved more difficult. Polk dispatched an emissary to Mexico offering to purchase the region, but the Mexican government refused to negotiate. By the spring of 1846, Polk was planning for military action. In April, American soldiers under Zachary Taylor moved into the region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande, land claimed by both countries on the disputed border between Texas and Mexico. This action made conflict with Mexican forces inevitable. When fighting broke out, Polk claimed that the Mexicans had "shed blood upon American soil" and called for a declaration of war.