

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT
Cult of Domesticity

Grade – 11 [differentiated instruction strategy included below]

Length of class period – 45 mins

Inquiry – In what way were perceptions of the role of women changing during the mid-19th century?

Objectives – Students will be able to identify the conflicting, and changing, perspectives on the role of women in mid-19th century America.

Materials – Excerpts from:

- Catherine Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*
- Angelina Grimke, *Letters to Catherine Beecher, in Reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism*

Activities – Students will analyze primary sources and participate in a class discussion.

During the lesson, teacher should circulate throughout the room and facilitate student interaction with the documents. Some students may need additional support to decode some vocabulary, or to draw their attention to specific concepts presented in the documents.

Differentiation for lower reading level students, or those who require additional scaffolding: *Students work in pairs or small groups to “translate” documents and put them into their own words. After this is completed, teacher will conduct class discussion based on analysis questions.*

Assessment – Students will be assessed

- on constructive participation in class discussion
- on ability to accurately identify opposing perspectives on a written end-of-unit quiz

Connecticut Grade Level Expectations

- Standard 1: Content Knowledge
 - 1.9 Assess the significance of the evolving heterogeneity of American society.
 - 1.26 Evaluate the impact of major belief systems on societies and nations.
 - 1.58 Analyze the impact of gender on personal development.
 - 1.59 Analyze the impact of gender on culture.
- Standard 2: History/Social Studies Literacy
 - 2.3 Cite evidence from a source to determine an author’s purpose and intended audience.
- Standard 3: Application

3.3 Use evidence to assess the role of traditions and customs on an individual or groups choices or decisions.

Cult of Domesticity
Changing Perspectives on the Role of Women

Preview the discussion questions below. Then read the excerpts from letters, highlighting the sections that will help you support your analysis. Be prepared to answer the questions and defend your ideas during class discussion.

1. What was the opinion of Catherine Beecher concerning the cult of domesticity and the role of women in American society? What should be a woman's sphere of influence?
2. What was the opinion of Angelina Grimke' concerning the cult of domesticity and the role of women in American society? How would she expand the role of women?
3. With which of these women do you think most nineteenth-century American women agreed? Why?

From: Catherine Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, Philadelphia, PA: Henry Perkins, 1837, 98-101.

It is the grand feature of Divine economy, that there should be different stations of superiority and subordination, and it is impossible to annihilate this beneficent and immutable law.

In this arrangement of the duties of life, Heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station, and this without any reference to the character or conduct of either. It is therefore as much for the dignity as it is for the interest of females, in all respects to conform to the duties of this relation.

But while woman holds a subordinate relation in society to the other sex, it is not because it was designed that her duties or her influence should be any the less important, or all-pervading. But it was designed that the mode of gaining influence and of exercising power should be altogether different and peculiar.

Woman is to win every thing by peace and love; by making herself so much respected, esteemed and loved, that to yield to her opinions and gratify her wishes, will be the free-will offering of the heart. But this is to be all accomplished in the domestic and social circle. There 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," as 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.

From: Angelina Grimke', *Letters to Catherine Beecher, in Reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism. Addressed to A.E. Grimke'*. Boston, MA: L. Knapp, 1838, 113.

I have often been amused at the vain efforts made to define the rights and responsibilities of immortal beings as men and women. No one has yet found out just where the line of separation between them should be drawn, and for this simple reason, that no one knows just how far below man woman is, whether she be a head shorter in her moral responsibilities, or head and shoulders, or the full length of his noble stature, below him, i.e., under his feet. Confusion, uncertainty, and great inconsistencies, must exist on this point, so long as woman is regarded in the least degree inferior to man; but place her where Maker placed her, on the same level of human rights with man, side by side with him, and difficulties vanish, the mountains of perplexity flow down at the presence of this moral being, not by the false weights and measures of mere circumstance of her human existence, and then the truth will be self-evident, that whatever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do. I recognize no rights but human rights – I know nothing of men's rights and women's rights; for in Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female.

Now, I believe it is woman's right to have a voice in all the laws and regulations by which she is governed, whether in Church or State; and that the present arrangements of society, on these points, are a violation of human rights, a rank usurpation of power, a violent seizure and confiscation of what is sacredly and inalienably hers—thus inflicting upon woman outrageous wrongs, working mischief incalculable in the social circle, and in its influence on the world producing only evil, and that continually. If Ecclesiastical and Civil governments are ordained of God, then I contend that woman has just as much right to sit in solemn counsel in Conventions, Conferences, Associations and General Assemblies, as man—just as much right to sit upon the throne of England, or in the Presidential chair of the United States.

Read the following excerpts from letters and translate the ideas into your own words. Be prepared for class discussion.

Based on: Catherine Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, Philadelphia, PA: Henry Perkins, 1837, 98-101.

It is the grand feature of Heaven's plan, that there should be different stations of superiority and subordination, and it is impossible to annihilate this good and unchangeable law.

In this arrangement of the duties of life, Heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station, without any regard or concern to the character or conduct of either. It is therefore as much for the dignity, as it is for the interest of females, in all respects to conform to the duties of this relation.

But while woman holds a subordinate relation in society to the other sex, it is not because it was designed that her duties or her influence should be any the less important, or all-pervading. But it was designed that the mode of gaining influence and of exercising power should be altogether different.

Woman is to win every thing by peace and love; by making herself so much respected, esteemed and loved, that to yield to her opinions and gratify her wishes, will be the free-will offering of the heart.

This is to be accomplished in the domestic and social circle. There 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 approached," as 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.

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I have often been amused at the vain efforts made to define the rights and responsibilities of immortal beings such as men and women. No one has yet found out just where the line of separation between them should be drawn, and because of this, no one knows just how far below man woman is, whether she be a head shorter in her moral responsibilities, or head and shoulders, or the full length of his noble stature, below him, i.e., under his feet.

Confusion, uncertainty, and great disagreements, must exist on this point, so long as woman is regarded as inferior to man. But place her where her Maker placed her, on the same level of human rights with man, side by side with him, and difficulties vanish. The mountains of confusion fall down at the presence of this moral being, and the truth will be self-evident, that whatever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do. I recognize no rights but human rights – I know nothing of men's rights and women's rights; for in Christ Jesus, there is neither male nor female.

Now, I believe it is woman's right to have a voice in all the laws and regulations by which she is governed, whether in Church or State; and that the present arrangements of society, on these points, are a violation of human rights. The human rights that are inalienable to women have been confiscated—thus inflicting upon woman outrageous wrongs, creating innumerable problems in the social circle, and continually causing evil in the world.

If the power to create Church and Civil governments is granted by God, then I contend that woman has just as much right to participate in Conventions, Conferences, Associations and General Assemblies, as man—just as much right to sit upon the throne of England, or in the Presidential chair of the United States.