

## ROLES AND INFLUENCE OF WOMEN

- “Everything I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.” – Abraham Lincoln
- From *The Frugal Housewife*

“Man is daring and confident, woman is diffident and unassuming; man is great in action, woman in suffering; man shines abroad, woman at home; man talks to convince, woman to persuade and please; man has a rugged heart, woman a soft and tender one; man prevents misery, woman relieves it; man has science, woman taste; man has judgment, woman sensibility; man is a being of justice, woman of mercy.”

*Galena (Ill.)Advertiser 7 March 1835, quoted in Riegel, Young America, 218.*
- The roles of men and women throughout the nineteenth century tended to divide along gender lines.
- Magazines and religious publications promoted an image of women that focused on their roles as the purveyors and keepers of religious values, their role as bastions of purity holding back the aggressiveness of men, their role as models of submissiveness to their husbands, and their role as practitioners of committed domesticity.
- Legally, women had no status beyond identity with their husbands who might regard them as property without fear of censure.
- A woman might divorce her husband if he committed adultery, if he abandoned her, or if he practiced habitual drunkenness.
- Women convicted of adultery faced up to three months in prison while males so convicted were required to pay a fine of \$300.
- Women convicted of crimes that carried a prison sentence could, alternatively, be required to do hard labor in a county jail.
- The education of women concentrated on preparing them for their morally prescribed role in marriage and the managing of the household.
- The spirit of the Revolution and the tenets of democracy, however, led women to challenge traditional roles.
- Families slowly became less hierarchical as wives slowly moved away from total subservience toward a more equal partnership.
- Though women also studied the practical aspects of domesticity at several Eastern academies in the first half of the nineteenth century, they could also study reading, moral and natural philosophy, arithmetic, chemistry, astronomy, geography, history, and drawing.
- Two such academies in Indianapolis had curricula that included composition, history, natural philosophy, spelling, grammar, and sciences.
- Intellectuals and reformers – including Horace Mann – championed in increasing numbers women's right to a full academic education.
- In contrast to the ideal wife, many women worked to reform American society as they worked with mission societies, abolitionist groups, and temperance unions.

- Violating the image of the ideal woman, they spoke out in public and experienced a backlash that redoubled both their awareness of what was denied them but also the desire to achieve rights commensurate with those of men.
- Women's role in child-rearing prevented them from fully entering the realm of politics.
- In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention produced Declaration of Sentiments (paralleling the Declaration of Independence) that called for women's suffrage as well as other rights.
- Lucy Stone, a leading reformer, developed the idea of the parallel between the treatment of women and slaves.
- Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton became early leaders in the campaign for equality for women.
- Despite the limited role of women in the public sphere, Elizabeth Peabody, a teacher in Massachusetts, influenced education for young children. She opened the first English-language kindergarten in the United States in 1860. She based it on the German models of formal schooling for children younger than six, and as the editor of *Kindergarten Messenger* (1873-77) helped establish kindergarten as an accepted institution in U. S. education.
- For a more detailed look at nineteenth-century women in Indiana, click on <http://www.connerprairie.org/HistoryOnline/womrole.html> or <http://www.connerprairie.org/historyonline/1880wom.html>

#### **A Timeline of Women's Rights in the Nineteenth Century**

- 1839** Mississippi grants women the right to own property – provided they have their husband's permission.
- 1848** The Seneca Falls Convention produced Declaration of Sentiments (paralleling the Declaration of Independence) that called for women's suffrage as well as other rights.
- 1866** The Fourteenth Amendment specifies voters as males.
- 1869** The Territory of Wyoming grants women the right to vote in territorial elections.
- 1870** The Fifteenth Amendment does **not** specify voters as men.
- 1870** The first American women to serve on a grand jury do so in Cheyenne, Wyoming.
- 1873** In *Bradwell v. Illinois*, the Supreme Court rules that a state may prohibit a married woman from practicing law.
- 1875** In *Minor v Happersett*, the Supreme Court rules that women constitute a separate category of "persons" that consists of "non-voting citizens."
- 1879** Belva Lockwood becomes the first woman to argue a case before the Supreme Court (by way of an exceptional action of the US Congress).
- 1890** The State of Wyoming grants women the right to vote in all elections.
- 1900** Women in all states of the United States have at least limited property rights.