

Launching a New Journal: Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000

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This article traces the founding and development of an online journal, Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000 (WASM), which Sklar & Dublin began editing in 2003. A quarterly journal, a database, and a website, WASM publishes edited collections of primary documents and full-text sources that focus on the history of women and social activism in the United States. The journal's editors discuss their experience in launching the journal and reach out to scholars in the UK to expand the transnational and comparative dimensions of the project.

Three years ago we launched a new journal in American women's history—*Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000* (available by academic subscription at <http://www.alexanderstreet.com/wasm>). Experimental in its format, which emphasizes document projects, and in its medium, which is online, the journal is off to a promising start. Authors are providing us with a healthy pipeline of forthcoming publications and libraries are subscribing in sufficient numbers to permit us to meet our costs. In 2005–06 we did much of our editorial work in Oxford, where Kitty Sklar was Harmsworth Professor of US History, and Tom Dublin was a Fellow at the Rothermere American Institute. We thought readers of *Women's History Review* would be interested in the new perspectives we have gained on the journal/database/website by

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editing it in the UK. And we hope that historians of anglophone women might be interested in working with us to create a comparative and/or transnational dimension to the journal/database/website.

We have spoken frequently about the journal at academic gatherings in the UK and were pleased to find strong interest in the project. We spoke about the site at the annual meeting of British American Nineteenth Century Historians (BrANCH) and at seminars at Cambridge, Oxford, Leeds, Newcastle, and at London's Institute for Historical Research. Our talks were followed with excellent questions, showing that British academics are excited about the database resources that online projects can provide. Some British scholars plan to author document projects for the journal and several British libraries are subscribing. Moreover, we have encountered considerable interest in adding to WASM comparative and transnational perspectives that would bring historians of women in the USA, the UK, and other English-speaking countries into dialogue. These are exciting developments and we look forward to building on the momentum that has developed.

Readers of *Women's History Review* can view a share of the WASM's document projects on its freely-accessible editorial website at <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com>. Or they can ask their librarian to request a free thirty-day trial subscription, available at <http://alexanderstreet.com/products/wasm.htm>. In this article we describe the editorial choices that have created the present site and mention some future plans that we think might be of interest to British colleagues.

Our main goal in establishing the site was to make documents pertaining to US women's history more widely available. Three rationales prompted that priority. First, the Internet is a perfect venue for the publication of documents, since space is not a major consideration. The Internet has moved us from a publishing world of scarcity to one of plenty, making it of special utility to historians whose main work is that of interpreting documents but who are not usually able to publish the full texts of the documents they interpret.¹ The ability to publish documents online is therefore a significant new path for historical studies.

Second, we want to use this new plenitude to make documents about women available to historians of the United States. The cascade of scholarship published about American women in the past thirty years is underrepresented in the mainstream of US history. Perhaps scholars who are not willing to explore the wide range of secondary writings about women might be willing to read and digest primary documents about women, especially if they relate to that scholar's own research interests. Thus, for example, historians of the American Revolution might be interested in the writings of Esther Reed and other elite Philadelphia women who raised funds to support the patriot army during the war.²

Third, we want to draw scholars in US women's history and in women's history generally into greater dialogue across specializations. Like other historical fields, that of women's history has developed specializations that often make it impossible for scholars to learn about work outside their own precinct. Thus, scholars in the history of women's health in the antebellum era might not know about recent work in women's labor history in the Progressive era, or the history of African American women in the

civil rights movement. Here too we hope that it might be easier for scholars to learn about fields outside their own specialty by having the opportunity to access primary sources. Secondary works sometimes require a considerable commitment of time to digest. Primary documents offer a more direct route to learning.

One brief example can show how a document project in US women's history might contribute to all three of these rationales: make documents more available generally; influence mainstream interpretations of US history by engaging historians who otherwise might not take the time to read secondary sources in US women's history; and facilitate more communication across the boundaries that separate historians of American women.

Carol Faulkner's document project, 'How Did White Women Aid Former Slaves during and after the Civil War, 1863-1891?', analyses the gendered construction of power in the freedmen's aid movement during Reconstruction.³ She offers documents that demonstrate women reformers' opposition to the policies of the male leadership as articulated by General Oliver O. Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau, or Horace Greeley, noted editor of the *New York Tribune*. These policies led to the early closing of the Freedmen's Bureau in 1869 because these men feared that assistance to freed people would lead to their economic dependency. The leading historian of Reconstruction, Eric Foner of Columbia University, has described the dominant ethos in the Bureau as reflecting 'not only attitudes towards blacks, but a more general Northern belief in the dangers of encouraging dependency among the lower classes.'⁴ Faulkner's exploration of correspondence between General Howard and freedmen's-aid advocate Josephine Griffing shows that women reformers tried to provide more generous aid to freedmen and did not accept Howard's concern about dependency. Faulkner's document project shows us that the publication of documents in US women's history can alter our understanding of major issues in American history.

These rationales led us to devote the better part of the past ten years to developing a new format—the document project. With each quarterly issue of our journal we publish two new document projects. Our site now features more than seventy-five such projects, each making monographic contributions to knowledge in US women's history. Each document project begins with an interpretive question that builds on the historiography and aims to contribute to our understanding of women and social movements in the United States. Each project contains about 20-30 primary documents that address the question. Each is accompanied by an interpretive introduction, supplemented by a bibliography and set of related www links. Each document in the project is given a complete scholarly citation, an interpretive headnote, and annotations as needed. Each document project is peer reviewed, a process that we find quite valuable for improving the historiographic contribution that each project makes to historical knowledge. We key enter documents into HTML so that they can be more effectively indexed and made full-text searchable. These important characteristics of our documents cannot be achieved by scanning the originals. Finally, the journal is indexed in *America: history and life* and the 'Research Scholarship Online' section of the *Journal of American History*, the two leading bibliographic resources in US history, meaning that students and scholars

can learn about these contributions and WASM publications will enter ongoing historiographical debates.

The document project format permits scholars to showcase key documents related to a compelling question arising from their research. By publishing transcripts of entire (sometimes quite lengthy) documents, author/editors permit readers to join in the exploration of the sources and enter into the analytic, interpretive process for themselves. This feature of the journal particularly appeals to teachers in Britain who are very used to employing primary documents with students. Even more than in the United States, British historians rely on engaging undergraduates in the analysis of primary sources, or at least so it has seemed to us in our exchange visits.

In 2002, as we neared the end of the grant money that had sustained the initial development of the site, we faced two options—let the site slowly disintegrate or seek funding elsewhere. Our editorial expenses were fairly substantial. In addition to the copyediting, permission gathering, and other aspects of journal publishing, we also bore the expenses of website publication and maintenance. To meet these expenses we spent a great deal of time recruiting what turned out to be very little money and we were ready to abandon the site when we were approached by Alexander Street Press with a proposal to co-publish the site and make it available through library subscription.

We have come to see Alexander Street Press as the Alfred Knopf of online publishing in US history and are now entering our fifth year of productive collaboration with them. This partnership has allowed the site to expand dramatically and has stabilized its funding. We are still captives of the site and work on it night and day, but our labours are complemented by the ASP staff, making it possible for us to add about five thousand pages a year of full-text sources, and to index all the site's documents. The indexing capacity of ASP is especially impressive since it is not just a full-text search function, but the result of a human being who reads the material. So, for example, if a text discusses 'contraception' but does not use that term, the indexer will mark the passage as 'contraception'-related.

The site's recent expansion has included publishing about thirty thousand pages of full-text documents consisting of books, pamphlets and convention proceedings related to the struggle for woman suffrage in the United States, 1830–1930. Thus we bring together for the first time all the published proceedings of the women's anti-slavery conventions of the 1830s and all those of the many women's rights conventions held in the 1840s, 50s, and 60s. Women's rights conventions are not just about Seneca Falls any more. Instead, scholars can now view change over time in the women's rights convention movement, seeing that movement much more fully than was ever possible in the past because scholars can now use the database functions of the website to retrieve information like the number of speeches or letters in convention proceedings that mentioned married women's property rights, or education or health.

Thus, *Women and Social Movements* offers the advantages of a database as well as a journal. Our indexing of the six volumes of *The History of Woman Suffrage*, edited by Stanton, Anthony, Gage and Harper, totaling some 5800 pages, for example, shows that

those volumes contain 152 speeches, which our database identifies by author, race of author, date and place (among other variables). These volumes themselves were largely compilations of published documents and ASP's indexers and bibliographers catalog these works in ways that permit scholars to search for the authors and titles of hundreds of separate documents included in the volumes.

At this stage of its development, our database includes 78 document projects with a total of roughly 2300 documents, and more than 100 full-text sources with more than 3000 additional documents. Some 1680 individuals (with extensive biographical information) are identified as authors of the more than 5000 documents in the collection, providing many points of entry for searching the database and exploring its resources.

Early in the site's development we decided to add a variety of supporting materials to supplement the documents that comprise the core of the database. Users seem to find these resources valuable. Particularly important are the teaching tools that facilitate the use of the database in secondary, college and university classrooms. The interpretive organization of document projects makes documents accessible to undergraduates in ways that are not the case in archives or most online research collections. The use of historiographically-based interpretive questions has meant that teachers can assign materials in the database with a view to engaging students in the debates that are important to professional historians. Rather than simply providing students with secondary readings that present historical arguments, *Women and Social Movements* provides resources that permit students to understand the logic of historical arguments and to evaluate those interpretations. Moreover, sets of documents are always approachable from varied points of view and the teaching tools often pose new questions that permit students to explore other ways of looking at the documents than the approach selected by the project's author/editor. Thus the database supports varied approaches to primary materials and in that way permits students to be their own historians in terms of their work with primary documents. It promotes independent, critical thinking by students and scholars alike.

Our partnership with Alexander Street Press has made it possible to expand the content of each issue of the journal to include other resources. In September 2005 we added 'News from the Archives,' edited by Tanya Zanish-Belcher, head of the Special Collections Department and University Archives at Iowa State University. This feature permits archivists to post on the website notices concerning the accession and processing of archival collections of interest to scholars of US women's history. We hope that increasing numbers of archivists and curators will take advantage of this opportunity to reach prospective users of their collections, and, in turn, that researchers will come to *Women and Social Movements* to learn about resources of possible interest for themselves and their students. Consistent with this goal, we have also begun publishing book reviews and website reviews in US women's history, seeking to provide scholars and students with critical perspectives on recently published printed and electronic works that stand at the cutting edge of the field.

We have found in the course of our editorial work that we need to do more than respond to submissions; we need to shape the topics of document projects by actively

soliciting submissions. Toward this end we have launched three initiatives that are beginning to show results and to broaden the reach of the journal. First, we have appointed editors to head efforts to encourage submissions in chronological periods or topical areas that we would like to see more fully covered. Patricia Cleary of California State University, Long Beach is soliciting submissions of proposals for projects dealing with the Colonial and Early National periods. Carol Coburn of Avila University is seeking submissions focused on Catholic women and social movements. And Judith Ezekiel and Stephanie Gilmore (based in France and the USA respectively) are encouraging work on the history of the women's movement in the United States since 1960. In all these initiatives, our editors will draw on their networks among historians to alert colleagues to publishing opportunities on *Women and Social Movements* and will help prospective contributors with proposal development. With a new journal employing new formats for publication, these efforts seem particularly necessary. Historians are used to preparing scholarly articles for print journals, but it will take time for them to learn how to shape their research into online document projects.

Carol Lasser of Oberlin College is directing another effort to shape submissions to the journal. She is recruiting projects that interpret visual sources. *Women and Social Movements* has for some years encouraged author/editors to include images in their document projects, but typically the images primarily illustrate and complement textual documents, which continue to provide the core evidence for a project's interpretative perspective. This new initiative goes further.

As part of this effort to integrate visual materials more fully into the journal/database/website, we published an essay by Carol Lasser and Joanna Steinberg that analyzes an image titled 'The Slaves of the Sweaters,' published in *Harper's Weekly* on April 26, 1890.⁵ This image appears in the website's document project 'How Did Florence Kelley's Campaign against Sweatshops in Chicago in the 1890s Expand Government Responsibility for Industrial Working Conditions?'⁶ Using formal art history techniques and contextual research, the essay demonstrated how this sophisticated image 'worked' to rouse popular support for amelioration of the conditions under which women and children worked in the sweated trades. By publishing both the artist's image and an editorial that accompanied it in *Harper's Weekly*, Lasser and Steinberg provided a path-breaking analysis of alternative perspectives toward state regulation of emerging sweatshops in the 1890s. We are hopeful that this essay and Carol Lasser's efforts will encourage more submissions that take images seriously as documents and help fill a new section of the journal that we are calling, 'The Visual Record.'

Our plans for the future include several dynamic possibilities. In April 2006 we launched a 'Scholarly Community' online discussion group for historians who study the resurgence of feminism after 1960, or what is popularly known as 'Second Wave Feminism.' Employing software that permits threaded discussions with Wikipedia capacity for uploading images and textual documents, we expect that this new feature of the site will stimulate discussion of recent and contemporary feminism. The initiative will be edited and moderated by Judith Ezekiel and Stephanie Gilmore, the same scholars who are directing our effort to stimulate submissions of new document projects about this period. While the website proper remains available through library

subscriptions, the Scholarly Community is freely accessible to all participants who register with its editors.

Another future possibility is the addition of a comparative, transnational section on the website featuring anglophone women's history. The website is widely available at Canadian universities and we recently established a 'Canadian initiative,' aimed at encouraging document projects for a special issue on Canadian women and social movements which we hope will be the prelude to the regular publication of projects on Canadian topics fully integrated into the journal. This effort is part of a larger effort to engage historians outside the United States and to discuss comparative and transnational projects. Possibilities for collaboration are also strong in Australia and New Zealand. With British scholars, we might begin by adding documents about campaigns for woman suffrage, which could be compared to those we have already posted about the seventy-two-year American struggle. There were many areas of collaboration across national borders among anglophone women activists. We are hoping to address those efforts through document projects. Let us know if you might be interested in contributing to an effort to explore that history.

Our year at Oxford was an eventful one as we learned what it meant to be journal editors in the electronic age. It is a smaller, more interconnected scholarly world than the one in which we were first trained thirty-five or forty years ago. There are more formal venues for publishing scholarly work and more informal ones for the exchange of ideas. A journal today serves more varied purposes and varied constituencies than was the case four decades ago. We look forward to hearing from readers of *Women's History Review* so that we can continue this dialogue from our home base in the United States. Feel free to reach us through the editorial website of *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000* at <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com> or at our email addresses at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Notes

- [1] John McClymer (2005) *The AHA Guide to Teaching and Learning with New Media* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association), pp. 1–8. See also Daniel J. Cohen & Roy Rosenzweig (2005) *Digital History: a guide to gathering, preserving, and presenting the past on the Web* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- [2] Kathryn Kish Sklar & Gregory Duffy (2001) How Did the Ladies Association of Philadelphia Shape New Forms of Women's Activism during the American Revolution, 1780–1781, *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000*, 5.
- [3] Carol Faulkner (1999) How Did White Women Aid Former Slaves during and after the Civil War, 1863–1891? *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000*, 3.
- [4] Eric Foner (1988) *Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row), p. 153.
- [5] Carol Lasser & Joanna Steinberg (2005) Making Gendered Poverty Visible: W.A. Rogers's 'Slaves of the Sweaters' and attitudes toward women and child wage earners, *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000*, 9(3).
- [6] Kathryn Kish Sklar & Jamie Tyler (1998) How Did Florence Kelley's Campaign against Sweatshops in Chicago in the 1890s Expand Government Responsibility for Industrial Working Conditions? *Women and Social Movements in the United States, 1600–2000*, 2.