

MARIA W. MILLER STEWART, "LECTURE DELIVERED AT FRANKLIN HALL"
(21 SEPTEMBER 1832)

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Abstract: As an early African American orator, Maria W. Stewart's Franklin Hall Address marked Stewart as the first woman of record to confront mixed gender audiences. Stewart's address is an uncompromising indictment of oppression and a rebuke of those unwilling to struggle against it, yet it is also an evangelical rendering of people struggling against tremendous odds. Her sympathetic description of a free black nation still held by invisible chains provided hope that change would come.

Key Words: Maria W. Stewart, black nationalism, black jeremiad, true womanhood, promiscuous audience

In the spring of 1832, a free, young African American woman, Maria W. Miller Stewart, rose to address a Boston audience. During the next three years, Stewart made a total of four public addresses, published a political pamphlet and a collection of meditations, and then retired deliberately from the public stage, seemingly defeated by the obstacles arrayed against her as both an African American and a female speaker.¹ Some critics give Stewart credit as the first American-born woman to deliver a public address before what was then called a "promiscuous" audience, one composed of both men and women.² It is more likely that Deborah Sampson Gannett, who disguised herself as a male soldier to serve in the American Revolution and subsequently lectured about her experiences, deserves that honor.³ However, Gannett's lectures were biographical rather than political. Maria Stewart was the first woman of record to confront promiscuous audiences with the contemporary political issues of race and gender during the troubled period leading to the Civil War.⁴

Stewart's unique place in political history may be captured by William Andrew's description of her as "the first Black feminist-abolitionist in America."⁵ According to Marilyn Richardson, she also was "[I]kely the first African American [of either gender] to lecture in defense of women's rights."⁶ Speaking six years before Angelina and Sarah Grimke and nearly a full decade before Frederick Douglass began his own public career in 1841, Stewart anticipates the great abolitionist, civil rights and women's rights speakers that followed her.⁷ In her four speeches are arguments, themes, and images echoed and given larger play not simply by Douglass and the Grimkes but by Sojourner Truth, Frances Harper, and decades later by W.E.B. Dubois.⁸ Stewart's unique and visible presence was almost guaranteed to make her a target. Although initially she found an audience, before long she was castigated for her public role and "doors in Boston soon closed to her."⁹

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The opposition that Stewart encountered as a speaker in 1832-1833 is understandable. Despite the existence of female preachers and missionaries in the early part of the nineteenth century,¹⁰ political speech was still deemed the exclusive domain of men. Yet Maria W. Miller Stewart poses a mystery for rhetorical critics even today. Why is this true pioneer so often overlooked in studies of African American and women's oratory? When her speeches are acknowledged in collections of rhetoric, why are they designated as religious rather than political--making Stewart, as Lora Romero puts it, "the stepchild of Teresa of Avila (as opposed to the sister of Nat Turner)"?¹¹ Although a talented wielder of religious allusion and argument, Stewart's message was both political and militant. For Stewart, "militancy" did not mean violence but the adoption of a more activist stance, one that challenged the passive acceptance of discrimination. Later militant reform movements would utilize dramatic demonstrations and civil disobedience to publicize the need for reform and force legislative action. Maria W. Stewart, through rhetorical devices alone, accomplished this same publication of the grievances suffered by free African Americans. By her very presence on the speaker's platform, Stewart challenged the boundaries set for women and free African Americans and enacted a new equality.

This examination of Stewart's 1832 Franklin Hall Address will reveal a woman not only groundbreaking in her persona as a speaker and the nature of the audiences she addressed but also in the rich and varied arguments she constructed to oppose constraints she faced as a woman and free black American. In her address, Stewart followed two rhetorical paths. One is uncompromising and confrontational, a direct indictment of oppression and a scorching rebuke of those unwilling to struggle actively against it. Yet this activist stance is interwoven with a detailed narrative based on personal experience, and an evangelical rendering of the trials of a great people struggling against tremendous odds. Her sympathetic description of a free black nation still held by invisible chains ultimately provided hope that change would come. Through a rhetoric that was at once caustic, militant, nurturing and hopeful, Maria Stewart reflected the complexity of the struggle for freedom of Northern black Americans.

In many ways, the free black community of Boston in 1832 provided the ideal location for the emergence of Maria Stewart as a speaker. It formed a "background of religious, militant activism"¹² that became the basis of Stewart's rhetorical force. An examination of the lives of free African Americans in Boston provides a better understanding of the necessity for reform, a need that supplied the impetus for Stewart's rhetoric.

The Context of the Speech

Free blacks in Boston lived in a shadow world: fortunate not to be part of the far larger slave population of the South yet living under constraints that made a mockery of the concept of freedom. From its advent in colonial America, slavery was a somewhat "porous" institution,¹³ and a small number of African Americans were able to gain status as freemen. Thus, before the 1783 general emancipation in Massachusetts, a free black community was already established in Boston.¹⁴ Settling

originally in the North End of Boston, near the docks that provided work in the maritime industry, Bostonian blacks by 1790 had begun a migration to the West End of the city. Although the wharves had provided a degree of employment, it was not a desirable place to live because of its isolation from the larger residential area of the city. By 1810, an area on the north slope of Beacon Hill became the home for the majority of Black Bostonians. This concentration of African Americans would be consistent during the period before the Civil War and was pronounced by Stewart's time. In 1830, the black population of Boston numbered 1875, only 3.1 percent of the city's population,¹⁵ and of that number 81.7 percent were clustered in the four "Negro wards" of the city.¹⁶ The reasons for this concentration give some insight into the lives of the free blacks of Boston.

The simple fact is that free blacks in Boston were, as George Levasque puts it, "viewed and treated by whites as little more than slaves without masters."¹⁷ Without slavery to draw a clear status line, whites relied on a pervasive discrimination to establish themselves as separate and superior.¹⁸ One of the clearest areas of discrimination appeared in employment. One reason for the concentration of the African American community in the West End was access to the menial jobs that blacks could obtain in the business district of the city.¹⁹ There did exist a small, black upper class consisting of a handful of male professionals (less than 1 percent of the population in 1830²⁰): doctors, attorneys, dentists, and some businessmen.²¹ They, too, lived in the West End community, not only because they relied almost exclusively on black patronage but also because attempts to move to better neighborhoods were blocked by the resistance of white neighbors.²² They shared with the black middle class (made up of artists and musicians, waiters, barbers, shopkeepers, carpenters and other mechanics) a sense of the precarious nature of their relative prosperity. The black upper and middle classes were driven less by dreams of aspiring higher than by the nightmare of tumbling into the vastly larger lower class.²³ The great majority of black males moved through a tenuous series of unskilled jobs (bootblack, day laborer, unskilled seaman, tender, porter, etc.) affording little pay and no opportunity for advancement.²⁴ Levasque captures well the impact of this sporadic, menial labor when he describes the life of lower-class blacks in Boston as "a treadmill of want, misery and degradation."²⁵

African American women also walked this treadmill, although the records of their employment are spotty, especially when the work involved taking in washing or sewing. Black women generally found employment as domestics for white Boston. Their jobs as cooks and maids were vital to the survival of their families because they were a more consistent source of income than the fluctuating seasonal work obtained by men.²⁶ Yet women would come home from their grinding domestic work in white houses only to repeat their duties of cleaning, cooking, and washing clothes for their own households.²⁷ The West End homes of free blacks provided little respite for their residents. African Americans, as a general rule, did not own the homes they lived in--even by 1850 only 1.5 percent owned any property at all²⁸--and "substandard" would be a kind assessment of the housing made available to them. The twisting, overcrowded streets seemed to concentrate the foul air, and the combination of poor

diet, squalid housing and overwork had a dramatic and negative effect on black mortality. Free black women in antebellum Boston outnumbered their male counterparts by a notable degree, and the opposite was true in the white community. Yet, despite the demographic benefit that female longevity should have conferred, it was not enough to combat the impact of foul living conditions as black mortality was close to twice that of white Bostonians.²⁹

The hardship and discrimination in employment and housing faced by free black Bostonians paled when compared to the crudities of racial abuse. Prince Hall, Grand Master of the African Lodge of Masons, had earlier complained of "daily insults met in the streets of Boston"³⁰ and spoke of the city streets as a place where "you may truly be said to carry your lives in your hands."³¹ This potential for violent abuse captured the attention of the Englishman William Chambers who noted that blacks were "openly assaulted by white persons, for no cause whatever."³² Concentration of black residents in certain portions of the West End, though based on multiple factors, provided a degree of protection from hostility or violence encountered in white parts of the city.³³

The West End of Boston was the community within which Maria Stewart found her voice, and it served as the nursery for a developing black nationalism. Black nationalism at this early stage was geared toward unity among blacks and did not seek--indeed was generally hostile to--a separate territory or homeland.³⁴ The free blacks of Boston, forced by discrimination into a community apart, would develop the independent institutions necessary for survival and from those institutions would arise new militant voices for change, among them the voice of Maria Stewart.

The Speaker

Maria W. Miller Stewart was born Maria Miller in Hartford, Connecticut in 1803 and orphaned at the age of five. Information about her early life is limited and mainly supplied by a brief autobiographical paragraph in her 1831 inaugural essay. According to Stewart's account, she was "bound out" to work in a clergyman's family and "had the seeds of piety and virtue early sown in my mind, but was deprived of the advantages of education, though my soul thirsted for knowledge."³⁵ Leaving this family presumably at the close of her indenture at fifteen, she seems to have supported herself through domestic service while garnering whatever education was available by attending a series of Sabbath school classes.³⁶ Unfortunately neither letters, journals, nor other personal writing have yet been found to tell us more of Stewart's early years.³⁷ As is typical of the scanty life records of nineteenth-century women, we next have official records of Maria Miller through her marriage certificate: "James W. Stewart & Maria Miller (people of color) married by the Rev. Thomas Paul 10 August 1826."³⁸

James Stewart, a veteran of the War of 1812, who served for a time under Stephen Decatur, was forty-seven years old; his new wife was twenty-three. Characterized as "a tolerably stout well built man," Stewart had found success as an independent shipping agent. Operating out of offices at 83 Broad Street, Stewart worked to outfit whaling and fishing vessels.³⁹ This would be a fortuitous marriage for

both bride and groom. James Stewart's success, despite the obstacles facing black Bostonians, speaks to his drive and intelligence, and marriage to him guaranteed entry into the small circle of the black middle class. In his bride, Stewart would find youth, remarkable intellect, and verbal skill. Although no portraits exist of her, at least one source referred to Maria Miller as "one of the most beautiful and loveliest of women."⁴⁰ Despite these tangible benefits, perhaps the sign that this was a marriage of deep affection was Maria Stewart's decision to adopt her husband's middle initial as her own.⁴¹

The couple's choice of officiant reveals the elite nature of their circle in Boston and gives insight into their political beliefs. The Rev. Thomas Paul was the founding minister of the African Baptist Church located in the African Meeting House on the north side of Beacon Hill, a center of educational and spiritual power in the black community.⁴² The need for a black church in Boston grew partly out of "response to the needs for self-expression"⁴³ in the African American community, but it also evolved as a response to discrimination blacks encountered when attending white churches. African Americans found that they were, at best, tolerated by white parishioners as a Christian duty rather than welcomed as Christian brothers and sisters.⁴⁴ "Negro Pews" were established in white churches that placed black worshippers out of view of the minister and congregation, and rare attempts by African Americans to purchase a pew outside of the black section met with harsh resistance (even to the removal of the pew itself).⁴⁵ African American activist David Walker, writing in 1829, confirmed this practice:

Even here in Boston, pride and prejudice have got to such a pitch, that in the very houses erected to the Lord they have built little places for the reception of coloured people, where they must sit during meetings or keep away from the house of God, and the preachers say nothing about it.⁴⁶

Once established, black churches in Boston provided both unity across African American social classes and a forum for Christian messages of political and social justice.⁴⁷ They became the haven where a nascent campaign against racial injustice could flourish.

From within this circle of intellectual and dissident voices, Maria Stewart met the man she would later refer to as "the most noble, fearless, and undaunted David Walker,"⁴⁸ who would have the greatest impact on her thoughts and rhetorical style. Born free in Wilmington, North Carolina around 1796 of a free black mother and slave father, Walker had settled in Boston by 1825.⁴⁹ He found unusually quick prosperity with a used clothing store on Brattle Street that outfitted sailors and most likely served as an initial point of contact for his friendship with James Stewart. Equally quick to develop was his reputation as a community activist, philanthropist, and polemicist for racial justice. Noted for his generosity to the needy, Walker was also a contributor to *Freedom's Journal*, founded in 1827, the United States' first African American newspaper.⁵⁰

Yet Walker's lasting reputation for militant activism resides in his 1829 publication of *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*. The *Appeal* remains a fiery and inspiring document, a combination of religious allusion, specific example, and close argument. Notably, in his *Appeal*, Walker directly takes on Thomas Jefferson and the insulting rationale for white supremacy found in Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*.⁵¹ Walker alternated between a finely honed rage, replete with warnings of justified revolution to come, and hope that America may yet be redeemed by offering blacks an equal place in her larger mission.⁵² It was Walker's form of black nationalism, grounded in religious appeals and arguments for justice, that would have the greatest impact on Maria W. Stewart's thoughts and rhetorical style.

Chances are strong that Maria Stewart would have worked behind the scenes or eventually published anonymously, two acceptable means of nineteenth-century female activism, had not three events in rapid succession changed her life. The first was a private tragedy: the death on December 17, 1829 of her husband of three years from heart disease. Driven to his bed by the sudden onset of illness and anticipating his death, James Stewart had time to complete a Will and Testament bequeathing one third of his estate to his young wife.⁵³ The second event was a tragedy of a different order; white businessmen affiliated with her husband moved to cheat Maria Stewart out of her portion of the estate. After two years of litigation and, according to Marilyn Richardson, "legal maneuvers so blatant and shameless that even the presiding judge found them hard to stomach,"⁵⁴ Stewart was robbed of her inheritance. This was a common enough occurrence that David Walker writes about it in his *Appeal*:

But I must, really, observe that in this very city, when a man of colour dies, if he owned any real estate it most generally falls into the hands of some white person. The wife and children of the deceased may weep and lament if they please, but the estate will be kept snug enough by its white possessor.⁵⁵

Discrimination of race and gender was never an abstraction for Maria Stewart, and the legal record of this case reminds us of how much it was part of her lived experience.

The third event that would propel Stewart to a public role came on August 6, 1830, when the body of her mentor, David Walker, was discovered near the door of his shop.⁵⁶ Explanations for this unexpected death took a sinister cast in Boston's black community, and these theories were detailed (although not confirmed) by Henry Highland Garnet in his 1848 biography of Walker. By this account, men in Georgia, angered over Walker's *Appeal* had put a substantial bounty on his head. Despite the urging of friends that he escape to Canada, Walker refused to run. "He was soon laid in his grave," Garnet wrote, having possibly been "hurried out of life by the means of poison."⁵⁷ The impact of the *Appeal*, brought into the South by sailors and free black couriers, was dramatic enough to make such stories plausible. Extensive new laws were passed across the South simply to prevent its distribution.⁵⁸ It is more likely, however, that Walker died, as stated in his death record, from the same consumption that days

earlier killed his infant daughter, Lydia Ann.⁵⁹ Walker was probably a martyr not to violence but to the untenable living conditions endured by Boston's black community.

The grief and frustration caused by this cascade of events galvanized Maria Stewart to rhetorical action. Her first act, while public, was intensely personal. Although already associated with the First African Baptist Church, she had a "born again" experience and, in 1831, publicly professed her faith.⁶⁰ This conversion seems to have solidified Stewart's desire to witness not simply to her faith but to her experiences.⁶¹ Walker's death convinced her of the immorality of those opposed to justice for the African American community and the shortness of the time granted her to effect change. Jacqueline Royster describes this realization: "Stewart could also raise for herself the most consistent questions in the struggle among African Americans for change: If not now, when? If not me, who?"⁶²

Stewart's first move was characteristically bold. In the fall of 1831, she entered the offices of *The Liberator* with manuscript in hand. *The Liberator* had only been in existence since January 1, 1831, and William Lloyd Garrison with his partner Isaac Knapp were struggling to maintain what would become the vital voice of the abolitionist cause.⁶³ Garrison, who became the lynchpin connecting black and white abolitionist efforts,⁶⁴ immediately recognized the quality of Stewart's writing. There exists a charming letter written by Garrison to Stewart following an 1829 Boston reunion. With the gallantry of that age, Garrison spoke of being "carried back in memory" to their first meeting when Stewart was "in the flush and promise of a ripening womanhood, with a graceful form and pleasing countenance." Garrison continued:

You will recollect, if not the surprise, at least the satisfaction, I expressed on examining what you had written . . . I not only gave you words of encouragement, but in my printing office put your manuscript into type, an edition of which was struck off in tract form . . .⁶⁵

Ultimately, Garrison would publish not simply this essay and an 1832 collection of essays, *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*, but also would provide space in *The Liberator* (in the Ladies Department) for transcripts of Stewart's public speeches.⁶⁶

Stewart's voice could not be confined to the printed page, and in the spring of 1832, she took the almost unprecedented step for a woman of delivering a public speech. This first speech, presented to the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society, was presumably before a female audience. It was in her second address, delivered on September 21, 1832, in Boston's Franklin Hall, that Stewart broke with traditions that restricted women to private influence rather than public advocacy. From her words, it is apparent that her audience was not only composed of men and women ("promiscuous" in the terminology of the day) but also made up of black and what was probably a minority of white listeners. Because the speech was reprinted in *The*

Liberator on November 17, 1832, it would also reach a far larger audience. It is this speech, one of only four made by Maria W. Stewart, which will be analyzed here.

The Speech

Many critics have noted how "comfortably" Maria Miller Stewart's rhetoric fits into the frame of the "black jeremiad,"⁶⁷ and her 1832 Franklin Hall Address is no exception. The jeremiad is a rhetorical tradition that has structured American discourse since the time of Puritan New England. The term is taken from the prophet Jeremiah, believed to be author of the book of Lamentations, and his description of "the humiliation of Israel, prostrate at the feet of Babylon."⁶⁸ It is the melancholy cry of a people beloved by God yet visited with tragedy, and it embodies warnings of further judgment and greater sufferings to come. Wilson Jeremiah Moses describes the "black jeremiad" as an adaptation of this larger tradition and a means by which black America warned whites of "the judgment that was to come for the sin of slavery."⁶⁹ It preempts the image of America as a chosen people in thrall to Britain, delivered as was Israel from the control of Egypt, with the superior claims of a people still in bondage. Black Americans could speak of themselves as chosen, characterizing their enslavement as a sign that God was perfecting them through oppression and would certainly bring forth a mighty judgment. The black jeremiad did not challenge the notion that America itself was a chosen nation, but it charged that whites had broken their heavenly covenant in their treatment of blacks.⁷⁰

Elements of the black jeremiad provide much of the flavor of Stewart's address, as she used it to support a vision of black nationalism. Recent scholarship does not speak with one voice about the roots of black nationalism, although its "core components" have been identified by Patrick Rael and others as "black identity and black autonomy."⁷¹ One understanding of early black nationalism has been called "Ethiopianism" by George Frederick, based on Psalm 68: "Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands to God" (a favorite Biblical text for Maria Stewart). God would bring good from the evil of slavery, as Christian African Americans would "purify the land of their exile" and, through missionary work, bring new light to the African continent.⁷²

The 1820's and 1830's seem to have formed a turning point between the post-Revolutionary War version of black nationalism and that which developed in the decades leading to the Civil War. The difference in these two iterations of black nationalism hinged on African Americans' role in the working out of God's perfect will. The general counsel to black Americans dating from the Revolutionary War urged patience and the awaiting of God's deliverance. With the rise of black political leaders in the four decades leading to the Civil War, the emphasis shifted to the agency of African Americans. Although still in accord with their perception of God's will, black nationalists began to emphasize a unified effort to free themselves from oppression.⁷³

It is this latter form of black nationalism that is apparent in Stewart's Franklin Hall Address. Utilizing a series of structuring analogies, Stewart repositioned free blacks from their current place as outcasts, dependent on the society that oppressed them, to a vision of African Americans as the true heirs of the American dream. Using narrative

detail and probing rhetorical questions, Stewart uncovered the hidden lives of free blacks, making visible the invisible and using it as the rationale for change. Through a series of finely crafted metaphors, Stewart goaded her black audience toward an active seizing of their rights at the same time she confronted her white audience with proof of their complicity in oppression.

Transformation through Analogy

The overall structure of the Franklin Hall Address is determined by a series of transformative analogies that shift the relationship between free blacks and whites, between an emerging African American nation and the larger white nation in which it was embedded. The initial analogy comes at the very opening of Stewart's speech:

Why sit ye here and die? If we say we will go to a foreign land,
the famine and the pestilence are there, and there we shall die. If we
sit here, we shall die. Come let us plead our cause before the whites:
if they save us alive, we shall live--and if they kill us, we shall but die. (1)⁷⁴

As with other religious references in this speech, this paraphrase of 2 Kings 7: 3-4⁷⁵ is woven seamlessly into Stewart's narrative, functioning more like a literary allusion than a biblical proof. This exceedingly clever analogy compares black America to four leprous men at the gates of Samaria. Realizing that to enter the city, then in famine, meant death as surely as did their present position, they determine to throw themselves on the mercy of the Syrians. At the lepers' approach, the Syrians hear instead the sound of many armies and flee, leaving behind their treasure.

In this analogy, black America (the four lepers) is rejected and set apart by the nature of their skin. They cannot survive as they are. Only by importuning those who oppress them (white America) can they find hope. With this opening, Stewart quickly makes two analogical arguments that would not have been lost on her audience. First, passivity is the only sin. The opening sentence, "Why sit ye here and die?" (1) argues for a new militancy, one that reaches for rights denied even if it means a direct confrontation with white America (the Syrians in their camp). It should be recalled here that Stewart is speaking only one year following the violence of the Nat Turner slave rebellion in Virginia. The four lepers posed no actual threat, nor does black America; yet, God is capable of using their activism to inspire the fear of just retribution in their oppressors.

Here, too, was an argument against colonization, a plan that Stewart opposed as had her mentor David Walker. Under the colonization plan, not only would slaveholders be compensated for their lost "property," but also a scheme to deport all free blacks to Africa would guarantee whites against sharing the nation with African Americans as their legal equals. Not only did blacks, as native-born Americans, claim their right to stay in a country they had built with their labor, many also refused removal to what was commonly viewed as a dangerous, tropical climate.⁷⁶ Although Stewart, like many African Americans, felt a deep connection to Africa--which she

extolled as a seat of learning and culture--she also knew herself and her community to be acclimatized to North America. Thus, changing the biblical text to read, "If we say we will go to a foreign land, the famine and pestilence are there, and there we shall die" (1), at once encapsulated and rejected arguments for colonization.

Stewart's second structuring analogy came over three quarters of the way through her speech. Royster claims that in many of her religious references, Stewart took "her cues . . . from the evangelical practices of the day,"⁷⁷ and here we can also sense the impact of Stewart's own religious conversion:

My beloved brethren, as Christ has died in vain for those who will not accept of offered mercy, so will it be vain for the advocates of freedom to spend their breath in our behalf, unless with united hearts and souls you make some mighty efforts to raise your sons and daughters from the horrible state of servitude and degradation in which they are placed. (11)

This analogy is instantly accessible to a Christian audience steeped in the religious revivalism of the day. Christ provides His mercy only to those who reach for His grace. Salvation in this tradition is not passive but must be actively sought. Importantly, the tool for claiming Christ's mercy is public confession; and, by extension, it is a rhetorical tool that Stewart advocated for the secular salvation of the black community. The "advocates of freedom" (11), intercessors for the black community such as Garrison, are put in the Christ role. Yet, only through their active efforts to raise themselves and their children, only through unity and vocal demands for freedom would African Americans put themselves in a position to attain the proffered redemption.

Stewart returned to this Christian image at the close of her speech and used it to link to her final analogy. Stating her faith in the coming end of black oppression, she continued, "As the prayers and tears of Christians will avail the finally impenitent nothing; neither will the prayers and tears of the friends of humanity avail us any thing, unless we possess a spirit of virtuous emulation within our breasts" (11). As I will discuss later, this concept of "virtuous emulation" (11) is too often read in Stewart as a fawning imitation of white America. Yet, her subsequent rhetorical questions draw the inference clearly:

Did the pilgrims, when they first landed on these shores, quietly compose themselves, and say, 'the Britons have all the money and all the power, and we must continue their servants forever?' Did they sluggishly sigh and say, 'Our lot is hard, the Indians own the soil, and we cannot cultivate it?' (11)

African Americans are analogized here, not to whites in general but the pilgrims. Transplanted to a foreign land, acted on by forces of persecution (religious for pilgrims; racial for blacks), African Americans by this comparison become the quintessential Americans. Whites are analogous to the Britons, with the money and power to keep

blacks in thrall. At the same time, Stewart conducts an analogical shift: whites "own the soil" (11) like the Indians, a barrier to the means of cultivation. Stewart implicitly plays off of this word, tying the cultivation of the soil to the cultivation of the mind, the intellectual cultivation of a people.

Finally, Stewart completed the analogy by answering her own question, "No; they first made powerful efforts to raise themselves, and then God raised up those illustrious patriots, WASHINGTON and LAFAYETTE, to assist and defend them" (11). Having made active efforts in the face of overwhelming odds, it is God who inspires one great man from within the nation (Washington) and one great man from outside the nation (Lafayette) to offer well-timed assistance. Through this analogy, Stewart signals her prophetic anticipation of a great black advocate for abolition and racial justice who would work in concert with a white advocate possessing the resources and position to guarantee success for a noble cause. Thus, the analogical framework for the entire speech moves African Americans from a position of victims cast apart to those who, actively grasping their own salvation, are able to take their rightful place: a unified black nation sharing equally with whites as beneficiaries of a common American heritage. Maria Stewart's next task would be to inspire the activism needed to reach for that heritage, motivating her audience by sharing the harsh details of life in free black America.

Visualizing the Invisible

Although a vision of black nationalism, viewed through a lens of "civil religion,"⁷⁸ provided the structure for Stewart's speech, its power comes from her detailed, personal, and highly confrontational approach. Laura Sells sees in these first two aspects of Stewart's rhetoric elements of what is now called the "feminine style."⁷⁹ Among its other attributes, the feminine style relies on detailed examples and personal narratives that seek to create identification with an audience. This style seeks to raise the consciousness of the audience, making the listeners aware of oppression and at the same time, providing hope that this oppression can be overcome.⁸⁰

One primary task for the Franklin Hall Address was to give "presence" to the lives of free blacks. According to Chaim Perelman, giving presence, or "bringing to mind things that are not immediately present,"⁸¹ is a vital aspect of the orator's art. For Stewart's white audience, this process of providing presence was particularly important. If they were willing to attend a speech delivered by an African American, these white auditors were most likely abolitionists, attuned to the wrongs of slavery. Stewart must shift their focus from the dramatic sufferings of the Southern slave to a recognition of wrongs existing closer to home. "It is true," Stewart granted, "that the free people of color throughout these United States are neither bought nor sold, nor under the lash of the cruel driver . . ." (9). Yet, she later claimed, "Most of our color have dragged out a miserable existence of servitude from the cradle to the grave" (10). With this description Stewart attempted to make palpable the weight that slowed black progress. By making visible the invisible, by drawing into sharper focus the difficult lives of free blacks, the daily miseries of being "a servant of servants, or hewers of wood and

drawers of water," (3)⁸² she wanted to make apparent injustices that were overlooked, having been made customary and unremarkable through everyday contact. As part of this re-visioning, Stewart utilized a favorite couplet that appears elsewhere in her writing:

Though black their skins as shades of night,
Their hearts are pure, their souls are white. (5)

Stewart's use of this poem is disturbing to many rhetorical critics. Even Marilyn Richardson, responsible for recovering so much about Stewart's life and work, views the couplet as proof that Stewart was "more than merely vulnerable to the racist iconography of the day."⁸³ Stewart knew that her audience had absorbed the images that pit day against night, light against dark--white as a symbol of purity and black as a symbol of mystery and death. This is a cultural juxtaposition that has existed for centuries outside of issues of race. Here, Stewart seems to reference it purposefully in the racial arena, apparently in the context of an invitation. It offered white America an opportunity to move past the surface and find the hidden truth of black worth. A similar challenge to look deeper would be evoked over a century later by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his stated desire that his children be judged not "by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."⁸⁴

For Stewart's black audience in the hall, achieving "presence" consisted of calling to their minds facts of their everyday lives and, thus, involving them in a process of self-persuasion. She structured her examples around a series of rhetorical questions (*erotema*), a device that often appears in her speaking and writing.⁸⁵ A rhetorical question is self-answering; it functions to stimulate insight, to call to mind information already known by the audience. "Do you ask," Stewart queried, "why are you wretched and miserable? I reply, look at many of the most worthy and interesting of us doomed to spend our lives in gentlemen's kitchens" (11). Several important aspects are functioning in this interrogatory. First, Stewart began with women's hidden "place," a condition she knew well from her years in domestic service. Earlier in the speech, with a passion clearly inspired by personal experience, Stewart spoke of the backbreaking labor required for domestic work in the early nineteenth century:

. . . where constitutional strength is wanting, labor of this kind, in its mildest form, is painful. And doubtless many are the prayers that have ascended to Heaven from Afric's daughters for strength to perform their work. Oh, many are the tears that have been shed for the want of that strength! (10)

The plight of young women sent out to physical labor they were ill designed to complete formed a theme elsewhere in Stewart's work. Its most visual expression came in her first published essay, again in the form of a question: "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?"⁸⁶

Whenever she spoke of female domestic labor, Stewart provided a picture not only of toil but also of waste, a sense of potential negated and hidden. Here, she turned to literary allusion, invoking paraphrased lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard":

Owing to the disadvantages under which we labor, there are many
flowers among us that are '--born to bloom unseen
And waste their fragrance on the desert air.' (10)⁸⁷

And, slyly, Stewart's words hinted of flowers not simply unseen but despoiled, for it is in "*gentlemen's* kitchens" (11, emphasis added) that young black women wasted their lives.

Although Stewart spoke here of women as "many of the most worthy and most interesting of us," the overall pattern of her rhetoric follows a convention of, Richardson claims, "seeing in young men the hope for the future of the race."⁸⁸ Using a repeated introductory phrase (anaphora) of "Look at our . . ." to begin each description and a parallel structure interlaced with rhetorical questions, Stewart shifted her audience's view to the lives of black men. In a section recalling Shakespeare's "seven ages of man," Stewart provided portraits of free black men. "Look at our young men," she urged, describing them as "smart, active and energetic, with souls filled with ambitious fire." But then Stewart asked the rhetorical question, "what are their prospects?" and supplied the answer that, because of "their dark complexions," it can only be lives of the "humblest laborers." She shifted the audience view to "our middle-aged men, clad in their rusty plaids and coats," whose every penny was expended on the bare necessities of life. And finally she turned to "our aged sires, whose heads are whitened with the frosts of seventy winters." She portrayed them "with their old wood-saws on their backs," caught in a cycle of toil that even age cannot end. It is a dignified and loving portrayal, but her closing question made it a condemning one: "Alas, what keeps us so? Prejudice, ignorance and poverty" (11). Through the power of her descriptions of everyday life, Stewart helped her audience see clearly this trio of misery and made visible its effect on the future prospects of free black America. She then augmented these literal descriptions with the figurative power that metaphor could provide.

Metaphors of Ascension, Restriction, and Passion

Stewart utilized a series of metaphors to help her audience experience (or re-experience) the "continual hard labor" that "irritates our tempers and sours our dispositions" (9). The primary set of metaphors, running throughout the speech, alternates images of upward movement with metaphors of restraint and restriction. Stewart spoke often of blacks desiring "to rise above the condition of servants and drudges" (8). Yet restricting this free movement were the realities of specific prejudices. Stewart described her own past as imposing one restriction: "O, had I received the advantages of early education, my ideas would, ere now, have expanded

far and wide . . ." (3). African Americans seeking to rise above and thus escape restricted space are thwarted by a white perception that can only see them in a limited role: "As servants, we are respected; but let us presume to aspire any higher, our employer regards us no longer" (9). Through metaphor, Stewart tried to make apparent the invisible restraints that held free blacks down. They were "confined by the chains of ignorance and poverty to lives of continual drudgery and toil" (6). More touching to read today is the opinion of this obviously brilliant woman, restricted in her education by prejudice, that, "there are no chains so galling as the chains of ignorance--no fetters so binding as those that bind the soul, and exclude it from the vast field of useful and scientific knowledge" (3).

Stewart enhanced her metaphors of restriction with those of heat and fire. Tight confinement, like a metaphoric cutting off of circulation, "deadens the energies of the soul, and benumbs the faculties of the mind" (8). Worse, she continued, is the effect when:

. . . the ideas become confined, the mind barren, and,
like the scorching sands of Arabia, produces nothing;
or, like the uncultivated soil, brings forth thorns and
thistles. (8)

These twin similes evoke the effect of dryness, of a drought of opportunity during which nothing positive can flourish. Yet Stewart countered this simile of heat with the related, positive metaphor of fire and flame. Stewart spoke of young black men "filled with ambitious fire" (11), and she told her black community, "your spirit fires my breast" (6). And with an appeal directly uncovering the hypocrisy of white America, Stewart pointedly stated, "the whites have so long and so loudly proclaimed the theme of equal rights and privileges, that our souls have caught the flame also" (8). This fire of liberty, once lit, would not be easily extinguished and promised a catalyst for change. Stewart sought to ignite a passion for liberty in her audience by a direct challenge to apathy and resignation in the free black community.

Challenge to Black America

The most readily misunderstood aspect of this speech is Stewart's challenge to black America. Excellent critical scholarship over the past decade has helped to correct earlier readings that framed Stewart as advocating mindless imitation of white "virtues" as the only route to black progress.⁸⁹ Yet, Stewart's argument for black self-improvement is more complicated and radical than it initially appears. Jacqueline Bacon describes the "self-help" or "racial uplift"⁹⁰ thesis as a means utilized by African American speakers of both genders to establish solidarity in the black community at the same time that it provided a critique of white racism.⁹¹ In the Franklin Hall Address, Stewart moved slowly to her direct challenge of African Americans. Initially Stewart offered what Bacon calls a "somewhat simplistic"⁹² version of self help and moral improvement:

. . . methinks were the American free people of color to turn their attention more assiduously to moral worth and intellectual improvement, this would be the result: prejudice would gradually diminish, and the whites would be compelled to say, unloose those fetters! (5)

This passage, followed immediately by the black/white couplet discussed earlier, is largely responsible for a reading of Stewart as placing responsibility on blacks for some of their own oppression, placing too much trust in white goodwill, and underestimating the role of white prejudice. Yet, clearly it is white America who possesses control over these "fetters," and I will later discuss Stewart's stinging rebuke of white oppression. First, it is necessary to understand Stewart's challenge to her black audience and the way "she demonstrates that 'following the example' of white America is not a conciliatory effort, but can in fact be an act of defiance."⁹³

In Stewart's rhetoric, including her Franklin Hall Address, her critique of black America seems like a break in solidarity. Romero points to Stewart's willingness to acknowledge "inequities internal to the African American nation,"⁹⁴ a process of naming that is the necessary prerequisite to reform. She challenged first those who would be satisfied with whatever unskilled labor came their way. Because her audience would be largely composed of those holding these very jobs, she spoke from a credibility (ethos) based on her own past as a domestic servant. "And such is the horrible idea that I entertain respecting a life of servitude," Stewart stated, "that if I conceived of there being no possibility of my rising above the condition of a servant, I would gladly hail death as a welcome messenger." What followed was a remarkable section about which I can only speculate. First, Stewart pressed the point with a generalization based on her own observations: "Neither do I know of any who have enriched themselves by spending their lives as house-domestics, washing windows, shaking carpets, brushing boots, or tending upon gentleman's tables" (6). She rapidly followed with a defiant appeal for her right to voice an opinion:

I can but die for expressing my sentiments; and I am as willing to die by the sword as the pestilence; for I am a true born American; your blood flows in my veins, and your spirit fires my breast. (6)

This direct justification of a controversial view in the face of threatened violence has an extemporaneous quality. It leads me to wonder if this statement was a spontaneous attempt at quelling a disturbance in the hall and later was included in the published transcript. Or was it scripted as part of the original address, signaling Stewart's recognition of the controversy her words might engender? In either case, by evoking nationality, blood, and indomitable spirit, she claims that she is "consubstantial" or "substantially one" with her audience in the words of Kenneth Burke.⁹⁵

Later in the speech she countered possible charges of elitism by clarifying that she did "not consider it derogatory . . . to live out to service," (10) meaning to live and work in a household as a domestic servant, for those genuinely inclined. Still, her

rhetoric here and elsewhere was a goad to her black audience to aim higher, to reach for the solid and lasting rather than settling for the ephemeral and fleeting offered by whites. She turned once again to metaphor, saying even "the employments we most pursue are as unprofitable to us as the spider's web or the floating bubbles that vanish into air" (9). This, then, is the basis of Stewart's comparison of black to white, not admiring imitation but a defiant exposure of white exploitation of black labor.

A glance at other examples of Stewart's rhetoric clarifies these metaphors. In her Masonic Hall Address five months later, she would compare whites to King Solomon "who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the praise." African Americans were the invisible underpinnings of white success:

. . . in reality we have been their principal foundation and support. We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them.⁹⁶

And, in her first published essay, one which her Franklin Hall audience had undoubtedly read, Stewart wrote:

The Americans have practised nothing but head-work these 200 years, and we have done their drudgery. And is it not high time for us to imitate their examples, and practise head-work too, and keep what we have got, and get what we can?⁹⁷

This is a call for African Americans to reach out and seize for themselves what they justly deserve. As Bacon argues, Stewart's goal for the emerging black nation, was not acceptance by whites but "to assert themselves, avoid subservience to whites and determine their own futures."⁹⁸

Laura Sells sees in Stewart's goading of her black audience some of the "trickster role" of African folktales described by Henry Louis Gates.⁹⁹ In her desire to incite discontent, Stewart stated, "Few white persons of either sex, who are calculated for any thing else, are willing to spend their lives and bury their talents in performing mean, servile labor" (6). Her audience would have easily drawn several conclusions from this reference to the parable of the talents (Mathew 25: 14-30). The servant given the least buries the coin (the talent) his master leaves him rather than, through initiative, risking that which might yield more. Of course, there is also the pleasing double meaning of buried talents as the untapped gifts and aptitudes of a people. Simply evoking this passage implied a clever insult to whites hidden in the parable. In Matthew, the servant describes the master to his face as "a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed," a description even the master does not refute. Yet, for Stewart, it was not only the talents of African Americans in general that had been buried but also those specifically of women. In a subtle way, Stewart would build on the impact of her own presence as a public speaker to challenge the limitations placed on women's potential.

The Limits of True Womanhood

The doctrine of self-help, as a part of African American women's consciousness, helped them overcome barriers to activism imposed on women by nineteenth century culture. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell bluntly summarized the situation, "Quite simply, in nineteenth-century America, femininity and rhetorical action were seen as mutually exclusive. No 'true woman' could be a public persuader."¹⁰⁰ The "cult of True Womanhood"¹⁰¹ reigned supreme at this period, largely as a result of increasing urbanization, as workers flooded into dirty, overcrowded cities. A cultural prescription developed that designated the private sphere of the home as the only appropriate domain of women, leaving men control over the public sphere. True Womanhood judged women by four criteria: "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity,"¹⁰² and a foray onto the public platform (and particularly to address men) violated both a woman's assigned sphere and her expected submissiveness.

As many critics have noted, this "cult of domesticity" was logically the purview of middle-class white women, as inappropriate to most free black women as it was to poor women generally.¹⁰³ Retirement to a home apart was not an option for black women struggling to augment the family income. Their need to take on domestic work in white households changed the entire concept of "domesticity," making it a commodity in the public sphere. As a matter of self-help, black women also needed to organize publicly to make up for a dearth in community services. For example, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton describe a group of black Bostonian women, in the 1840s, organizing a patrol to end a community noise problem.¹⁰⁴ Yet, as Martha Vicinus aptly states, "The power of a dominant stereotype can often be measured by its hold in areas totally inappropriate to the objective conditions."¹⁰⁵ Despite its inherent inappropriateness, concepts of True Womanhood possessed power in the black community, particularly among black men.¹⁰⁶ Although slightly altered, by necessity, to allow female domestic employment and participation in civic organization, black women's ability to fit the template of the white, middle-class True Woman was taken as a sign of "upward mobility, self-respect, and racial progress."¹⁰⁷

It was this cultural barrier that provided the greatest obstacle to Stewart's ability to find public voice. Her very presence on a public platform addressing a promiscuous audience made her something unnatural, an affront to common standards of decency and an embarrassment to the black community. The fact that she utilized a confrontational style, particularly in her Masonic Hall Address where she excoriated black men for their failure to speak for themselves, only aggravated her violation of appropriate submissiveness. Stewart met this challenge in the Franklin Hall Address by both acknowledging and subverting the constraints of True Womanhood.¹⁰⁸ As she moved toward the conclusion of her speech, she directly addressed the men in her audience ("My beloved brethren"), urging them to "make some mighty efforts to raise your sons and daughters from the horrible state of servitude and degradation in which they are placed" (11). She continued:

It is upon you that woman depends; she can do little besides using her influence; and it is for her sake and yours that I have come forward and made myself a hissing and a reproach among the people. (11)

Stewart acknowledged the constraints of True Womanhood by turning to the myth of woman's influence, the idea that the only acceptable inducement open to women was the private persuasion of male family members. She both negated the very act of her speaking (apparently including it in the "little besides using her influence" open to women) at the same time that she acknowledged the censure this act was already bringing upon her. It is interesting that Stewart coupled a reference to family ("sons and daughters") to a quote from Jeremiah.¹⁰⁹ It was as a part of her jeremiad, her prophetic voice, that Stewart put forth a vision of black nationalism. Yet, it was in their concern for family, their role as mothers of this emerging nation, that black women sought a right to enter into full citizenship and participation. What Eileen Boris refers to as African American "social housekeeping" is, in a larger frame, the notion of Republican Motherhood¹¹⁰ (or, as British suffragists termed it, race motherhood). This concept granted to women the right to political involvement in their domestic role as the nurturers of the next generation.

It is here, too, that we see some of the direct challenge to men that Stewart would bring to full force in her Masonic Hall Address. She has "come forward" (11) only to fill a void, the missing referent being the African American man who should be leading his people. As she would say in her third speech, five months hence:

Had those men among us, who have had an opportunity, turned their attention as assiduously to mental and moral improvement as they have to gambling and dancing, I might have remained quietly at home and they stood contending in my place.¹¹¹

At this point in her speaking career, however, Stewart turned not to the expediency of women's participation but to a divine justification. She met the demands for a True Woman's submissiveness by portraying herself as "a passive instrument in God's hands."¹¹² Very early in the Franklin Hall Address, she stated:

Methinks I heard a spiritual interrogation--'Who shall go forward, and take off the reproach that is cast upon the people of color? Shall it be a woman?' And my heart made this reply-- 'If it is thy will, be it even so, Lord Jesus!' (2)

Here, Stewart places herself in the role of her audience, as surprised as they are over God's selection but willing to do His bidding. She thus takes on "the prophetic stance of one who is a vessel for God's message," allowing her to present an uncompromising, even harsh, message as flowing through her from the divine source.¹¹³

Finally, it is as a woman speaking to other women--albeit of a different race--that Stewart took on a full refutational style. She first addressed charges by the "colonizationists" that African Americans were "lazy and idle" (7), that they were little more than "a ragged set crying for liberty" (8). Stating boldly that, "I confute them on that point," Stewart noted her own astonishment that there were "so many industrious and ambitious ones to be found" considering the white-imposed conditions that provided so little "to excite or stimulate us." She turned to her favorite device of the rhetorical question to throw the charges directly back in white faces. Granting "with extreme sorrow" that there were some blacks not "serviceable to society," Stewart posed this question to white America, "And have you not a similar class among yourselves?" (7)

Then, in two remarkable arguments that give this speech its edge, Stewart turned to the condition of black women. First, she described a survey of sorts that she conducted with "several individuals of my sex, who transact business for themselves" (4). Stewart asked these white businesswomen whether they would hire African American girls with excellent references. The businesswomen claimed to Stewart a personal willingness to do so but a fear that it would damage their business "as it was not the custom" (4). "And such," continued Stewart, "is the powerful force of prejudice" (5). She then drew the conclusion:

Let our girls possess what amiable qualities of soul they may; let their characters be fair and spotless as innocence itself; let their natural taste and ingenuity be what they may; it is impossible for scarce an individual of them to rise above the condition of servants. (5)

Here she used the criteria of True Womanhood, the emphasis on purity and amiable submission, in advocating young women's right to aspire beyond the domestic sphere in employment. Far from lulled by a belief that black self-improvement alone was the key to white acceptance, she posed twin questions challenging white racial prejudice, perceptions and goodwill, "Ah, why is this cruel and unfeeling distinction? Is it merely because God has made our complexion to vary?" (5) Although she moved on to a more hopeful view of white acceptance, these questions hang in the air, an affirmative reply giving voice to the hidden foundation of racial prejudice.

Second, Stewart turned directly to white women, addressing them by the vocative, "O, ye fairer sisters," and challenging those "whose hands are never soiled" to "go learn by experience!" (10) Posing her argument through rhetorical questions, she claimed that, with the same opportunities, black women's intellects would be as "bright" and "manners . . . as dignified" (10) as their white counterparts. Turning to a metaphor of the favored child, she put forth a hypothetical scenario where black women had been "nursed in the lap of affluence and ease" and "basked beneath the smiles and sunshine of fortune" (10). In that setting, "should we not have naturally supposed that we were never made to toil?" (10) Through a hypothetical reversal, Stewart anticipated the argument made by John Stuart Mill in his 1868 *The Subjection*

of Women. Claiming that woman's nature was an "artificial thing," nurtured like a hothouse flower to develop in some areas and be stunted in others, Mill argued for woman's rights based on what she *could* become given full opportunity for natural growth.¹¹⁴ Here, Stewart also claimed an artificial nurture, not nature, as the difference between the intellectual accomplishments, the delicacy in form and constitution of pampered white women and that of black women, forced to "continually drudge from Monday morning until Sunday noon" (10). In her call for empathy and support from her "fairer sisters" (10), Stewart revealed her ability to tap conventional images of True Womanhood while revising its assumptions and expanding its boundaries.¹¹⁵

Conclusion: "What if I am a woman?"

Exactly one year after her Franklin Hall Address, Maria Miller Stewart took the stage for the final time, delivering her Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston on September 21, 1833. The pressures that caused her retirement from the public stage were probably best captured by the nineteenth century historian, William C. Nell. Twenty years after the fact, he wrote in a letter to Garrison:

In the perilous years of '33-'35, a colored woman--Mrs. Maria W. Stewart--fired with a holy zeal to speak her sentiments on the improvement of colored Americans, encountered an opposition even from her Boston circle of friends, that would have dampened the ardor of most women.¹¹⁶

It is instructive that many leading critics on Stewart's rhetoric use death images (as did Stewart herself) to discuss her decision to leave the public platform. What Laura Sells calls "the death of her own public character,"¹¹⁷ Marilyn Richardson describes as Stewart's "decision to, in effect, annihilate her public persona."¹¹⁸ Even more accurate may be Lora Romero's image of planned suicide, describing Stewart's rhetoric as one where she "repeatedly staged her death into 'forgetfulness.'"¹¹⁹ Certainly, Stewart's demise as a speaker was both planned and complete; she would leave Boston the following year.

Although Stewart left the public platform, she did not leave it quietly, and her Farewell Address is at once conciliatory and defiant. In what Richardson calls "a brilliant rhetorical ploy which curiously portends Sojourner Truth's famous cry . . . 'Ain't I a woman?'"¹²⁰ Stewart posed her most telling rhetorical question, "What if I am a woman?" Citing God's use of women in the past (Deborah, Esther, Mary Magdalene, the woman of Samaria), she defended the concept of her speaking even as she said farewell to its reality.¹²¹ The opposition Stewart received from her own community she expanded in her farewell as a general lesson for African Americans:

Had experience more plainly shown me that it was the nature of man to crush his fellow, I should not have thought it so hard. Wherefore,

my respected friends, let us no longer talk of prejudice, till prejudice becomes extinct at home. Let us no longer talk of opposition, till we cease to oppose our own.¹²²

Thus, what could have remained a personal experience was expanded by Stewart to be a part of her black jeremiad, a lesson to aid in the cause of unity and black nationalism. Like one dying to a former life and anticipating the new, she closed her speech in a spirit of reconciliation (yet one that still condemned):

The bitterness of my soul has departed from those who endeavored to discourage and hinder me in my Christian progress; and I can now forgive my enemies, bless those who have hated me, and cheerfully pray for those who have despitely used and persecuted me.¹²³

Despite the tone of finality in her Farewell Address, stepping into the shadows did not end Stewart's activism, and she would work the better part of five decades on the cause of racial justice.

After Stewart left Boston for New York in 1834, she taught at the Williamsburg Colored School. The publication by the "Friends of Freedom and Virtue" of a collection of her writing, *Productions of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Presented to the First African Baptist Church & Society, Of the City of Boston*, in 1835, guaranteed that her ideas would have a far wider audience. She would publish a new edition of this work in 1879, the final year of her life, adding personal letters and a sketch of her life. Stewart left New York in 1852 for the Baltimore and Washington, D. C. area where she continued to teach. Financial constraints seemed to follow her, and she ended her career as the matron of the Freedmen's Hospital (the forerunner of the Howard University Hospital). She also continued to teach, and, perhaps remembering the source of her own education, opened a Sabbath school near the Freedmen's Hospital under the auspices of the Episcopal church. Stewart was active in her final years, and in a satisfying turn of events, she successfully pressed a claim to receive her late husband's pension (\$8 a month) for his services in the War of 1812. She died in December of 1879 and was buried in Washington, D.C. on December 17, the fiftieth anniversary of her husband's death.¹²⁴

What can we claim as Stewart's legacy? It is not appropriate merely to reduce her to an object lesson of nineteenth-century women's difficulty in finding a public voice. It is true that her time as a speaker was marked by opposition, a situation she met by a strategic retirement to less visible activism. Yet, her coming to voice at all is extraordinary.¹²⁵ It would be wrong to overlook her accomplishment as Stewart "fashioned a new space for herself as an unauthorized speaker, making a point of entry into a conversation that had previously been closed."¹²⁶ *What* Stewart said is far more important to her legacy, however, than the fact that she spoke at all. As part of the American civil rights tradition, she offered a vision of black nationalism presented in a jeremiadic rendering that Wilson Moses describes as both "militant and direct."¹²⁷ It is that very militancy that may have denied Stewart her rightful place as first in the

pantheon of great women orators on African American and women's rights. Romero makes the telling point that Stewart's rhetoric contains the dual narratives of nationalism: "the language of life and the language of death." While not abandoning the discourse of nurturance, she places "sword, shield, and helmet on the woman warrior."¹²⁸ What Lora Romero calls Stewart's "bilingualism"¹²⁹ (and what Sells calls Stewart's "paradoxical persona that was militant and modest"¹³⁰) makes her difficult to categorize in understanding masculine and feminine style in the rhetoric of human rights. Stewart's rhetoric moves in paths of her own and did not match conventional gendered calls for African American and women's rights throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Expediency, that claim of women's superior morality so often used to justify their public participation, was confounded by Stewart's willingness to advocate rebellion and court death for a larger cause. And what Richardson calls her "severe, excoriating, and denunciatory style,"¹³¹ which she alternates with maternal and domestic appeals to solidarity, gives her rhetoric a unique construction that must be understood on its own terms.

Even Christianity, so often the entering wedge for female speakers, was adopted by Stewart as a militant goad to prod the free black community into activism. She displayed an evangelical fervor aimed at the conversion of her audience to a political vision with the compelling force of religious belief. It would take deep faith to find hope for African Americans in the political landscape of 1830s America. Stewart found signs pointing to the secular redemption of black America in the sacred text of the Bible and provided them as a guide for what she knew would be a perilous journey. Thus, her deeply held Christianity, a faith she shared in common with most of her audience, served a black nationalist vision of unity, struggle, and progress.

Today, despite the intervention of 175 years, a devastating civil war, and a protracted struggle for civil rights, many issues with which Stewart dealt remain unresolved. During Stewart's time, northern antebellum blacks were repeatedly assured that freedom from slavery was all that was necessary for their success, and Stewart's detailing of wider discrimination was an unwelcome message. Now, a mere forty years after the voting rights act and the demise of Jim Crow laws, white America has repeatedly declared the playing field of American society to be level for all races. Because the expression of overt racism is unacceptable, the beliefs that fuel such expression are widely assumed to no longer exist. Yet examples are still visible. To take one example, if black students sit together in a cafeteria, it is viewed with suspicion as "self-segregating." Surely, the reasoning goes, the need for unity and the comfort of common experience is unnecessary in a color-blind society. The majority of white Americans in particular appear genuinely shocked when black students find racial slurs written on the walls or message boards of their dorm rooms.¹³² Such incidents call into question our assumptions about the openness of modern society and our progress in racial harmony and understanding. It still must be asked whether marginalized communities--racial, social, ethnic, or religious--are truly free to define themselves or whether they merely shadow box new variations of old cultural stereotypes.

It also is a question, nearly two centuries after Maria Stewart spoke, whether we are open to hear the hard truths of lived experience. What kind of reception would

Stewart's blend of denunciatory and nurturing rhetoric receive in this post-feminist, highly mediated era? Could we accept, as Stewart's nineteenth century audience could not, such an uncompromising message presented by a woman? Perhaps we are more attuned to the subtleties of blended appeals or perhaps her harshest comments would be pulled out of context and publicized in the media to dismiss her larger message. When we consider the reception that might greet a modernized version of her rhetoric, it becomes very clear that Stewart was a bellwether of progress on issues of race and gender. Today, as rhetorical critics increasingly explore the interplay of "violence and nurture,"¹³³ we have the opportunity to further understand Maria W. Miller Stewart's distinctive voice and prescient vision.

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Notes

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2 George A. Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750 – 1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 340; Jacqueline Bacon, *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 50.

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4 Laura R. Sells, "Maria W. Miller Stewart (1803–1879), First African-American Woman to Lecture in Public," in *Women Public Speakers in the United States: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 339.

5 William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the 19th Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 22.

6 Marilyn Richardson, "'What If I Am a Woman?': Maria W. Stewart's Defense of Black Women's Political Activism," in *Courage and Conscience: Black & White Abolitionists in Boston*, ed. Donald M. Jacobs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 194.

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- 8 Sells, "Maria W. Miller Stewart," 339.
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- 10 Richardson, "What if," 194.
- 11 Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 55.
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- 16 Levesque, *Black Boston*, 34.
- 17 Levesque, *Black Boston*, 8.
- 18 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 67.
- 19 Levesque, *Black Boston*, 129.
- 20 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 10.
- 21 Levasque, *Black Boston*, 120.
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- 23 Levasque, *Black Boston*, 121.
- 24 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 9.
- 25 Levasque, *Black Boston*, 121.
- 26 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 19-20.
- 27 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 19.
- 28 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 10.
- 29 Levasque, *Black Boston*, 441.
- 30 Quoted in Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 69.
- 31 Quoted in Levasque, *Black Boston*, 130.
- 32 Quoted in Levasque, *Black Boston*, 130.
- 33 Levasque, *Black Boston*, 37.
- 34 Patrick Rael, "Black Theodicy: African Americans and Nationalism in the Antebellum North," *The North Star*, 3 (2000) <http://northstar.as.uky.edu/volume3/rael.html>.
- 35 Maria W. Miller Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build," in *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 28-29.
- 36 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 3.
- 37 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, xvi.
- 38 Quoted in Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 121, n1.
- 39 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 3; Royster, *Traces*, 162.
- 40 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 3.
- 41 Royster, *Traces*, 162.

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- 42 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 3.
- 43 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 39.
- 44 Levasque, *Black Boston*, 132.
- 45 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 39-40.
- 46 David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter P. Hinks (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 42.
- 47 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 39.
- 48 Stewart, "Religion," 30.
- 49 Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, iii.
- 50 Royster, *Traces*, 162-163.
- 51 Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, xxvi-xxvii; Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 6. At one point Walker writes, "Here let me ask Mr. Jefferson, (but he is gone to answer at the bar of God, for the deeds done in his body while living) . . ." (Walker, *Appeal*, 16).
- 52 Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, xxxvii.
- 53 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 7. A copy of this Will is available in Appendix A of Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 113-115.
- 54 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 7.
- 55 Walker, *Appeal*, 12.
- 56 Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, xlv.
- 57 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 7-8; Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, xlv.
- 58 Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, xxxix, xl, xli.
- 59 Hinks, *David Walker's Appeal*, xlv.
- 60 Stewart, "Religion," 29.
- 61 Royster, *Traces*, 165.
- 62 Royster, *Traces*, 166.
- 63 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 10-11.
- 64 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 83.
- 65 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 10-11.
- 66 Richardson, "What If," 193.
- 67 Royster, *Traces*, 174; Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 242; Romero, *Home Fronts*, 53; Halford Ross Ryan, "Maria W. Miller Stewart (1803-1879), Essayist, Educator," in *African-American Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Richard W. Leeman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 312.
- 68 Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Black Messiahs and Uncle Toms: Social and Literary Manipulations of a Religious Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 30.
- 69 Moses, *Black Messiahs*, 30-31.
- 70 Moses, *Black Messiahs*, 30-33.
- 71 Rael, "Black Theodicy," np.
- 72 Rael, "Black Theodicy," np.
- 73 Rael, "Black Theodicy," np.

74 Here and elsewhere passages from Stewart's "Lecture Delivered at Franklin Hall" are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the text of the speech that accompanies this essay.

75 "And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die." 2Kings &: 3-4, King James Version.

76 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 91.

77 Royster, *Traces*, 174.

78 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 343.

79 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 343-344.

80 For the developing sense of what constitutes feminine style, see Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric (Vol 1)* (New York: Praeger, 1989); Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn, "'Feminine Style' and Political Judgment in the Rhetoric of Ann Richards," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 286-302; and Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Gendered Politics and Presidential Image Construction: A Reassessment of the 'Feminine Style,'" *Communication Monographs*, 63 (1996): 337-353.

81 Chaim Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning" in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings From Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1990), 1088-1089.

82 This same biblical text was cited later by Frederick Douglass in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, "In times past we have been the hewers of wood and drawers of water for American society . . ." quoted in Levasque, *Black Boston*, 119.

83 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 13.

84 Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/38.htm>.

85 Royster, *Traces*, 174.

86 Stewart, "Religion," 38.

87 The original lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" read, "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, And waste its sweetness on the desert air." <http://www.thomasgray.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?text=elcc>.

88 Richardson, "What If," 198.

89 For example, Halford Ryan, although later acknowledging Stewart's call for activism, speaks of Stewart "exhorting blacks to be white-like." He identifies as a master theme in Stewart's rhetoric the concept that "whites enslaved blacks because they were debased" and once blacks had achieved "white-like" piety and education, they would find ready acceptance by whites. See Ryan, "Maria," 312.

90 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 23.

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- 91 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 54-55.
- 92 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 171.
- 93 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 174.
- 94 Romero, *Home Fronts*, 61.
- 95 Kenneth Burke, "A Rhetoric of Motives," in *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings From Classical Times to the Present*, eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1990), 1020.
- 96 Maria Stewart, "Masonic Hall Address," in *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 59.
- 97 Stewart, "Religion," 38.
- 98 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 173.
- 99 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 345.
- 100 Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak For Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric, Volume One* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 9-10.
- 101 Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21.
- 102 Welter, *Dimity*, 21.
- 103 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 341; Royster, *Traces*, 164; and Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 20.
- 104 Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 19.
- 105 Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), xii.
- 106 Royster, *Traces*, 164.
- 107 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 341.
- 108 Royster, *Traces*, 169-170.
- 109 Jeremiah 29: 18, King James Version: "a hissing and a reproach, among all the nations."
- 110 Romero, *Home Fronts*, 63.
- 111 Stewart, "Masonic," 60.
- 112 Richardson, "What If," 196.
- 113 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 202.
- 114 John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*
http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/m/mill/john_stuart/m645s/chapter1.html
- 115 Bacon, *The Humblest*, 175.
- 116 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 27.
- 117 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 346.
- 118 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 27.
- 119 Romero, *Home Fronts*, 62.
- 120 Richardson, "What If," 202.
- 121 Maria W. Miller Stewart, "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address To Her Friends In the City Of Boston," in *Maria W. Stewart: America's First Black Woman Political Writer*, ed. Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70.

122 Stewart, "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell," 70-71.

123 Stewart, "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell," 74.

124 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 80-109.

125 Royster, *Traces*, 165. As Royster claims, "it is remarkable that she permitted herself the desire to speak; it was much more remarkable that she was assertive enough to find a means to do it."

126 Royster, *Traces*, 175.

127 Moses, *Black Messiahs*, 37.

128 Romero, *Home Fronts*, 68-69.

129 Romero, *Home Fronts*, 68.

130 Sells, *Maria W. Miller Stewart*, 346.

131 Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart*, 15.

132 Recent racial slur incidents have been reported at Northwestern University, University of North Texas, and the University of Virginia, among others.

133 Romero, *Home Fronts*, 69.