

The Library Company OF PHILADELPHIA

Debating Woman's Place in America, 1860-1880 Library Company of Philadelphia Seminar, Fall 2020

Wednesdays, September 16 and 30, October 14, 2020
5:30 to 7 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Amy Sopcak-Joseph
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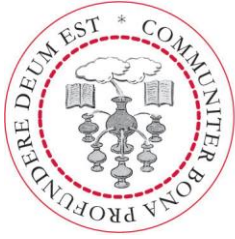
Seminar Description:

The 19th Amendment forbids denying the right to vote on the basis of sex. Yet its passage a century ago was less a definitive declaration of women's equality than it was one episode in a longer history. This seminar contextualizes this important anniversary by examining the 19th-century roots of foundational questions about gender roles: what can women *do*? What *should* their roles in society be? The Library Company's collections illustrate the competing answers posed during the crucial decades of the 1860s and 1870s. American women, both White and Black, shaped political conversations and public spaces in ways that were varied and complex, local and national, progressive and conservative – much like they do today.

Seminar Objectives:

This seminar was created in conjunction with the Library Company's 2020 exhibit, "Women Get Things Done: Women's Activism from 1860 to 1880." Participants in this seminar will:

- Explore how Americans thought about women's roles in society during the 1800s
- Examine debates over what was the 'ideal' role(s) for women in American society and how those ideas connected to the push for women's suffrage – debates that both women and men engaged in
- Compare those debates to the reality of American women's lives during the period of 1860 to 1880
- Consider how archival collections shape the narrative and understanding of women's history



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Schedule:

September 16: Separate Spheres and Suffrage

- *Agenda:* Introduction to the seminar series and discussion of the development of idealized “separate spheres” as well as the limitations of that ideal (both in the 1800s, and now, for our understanding of the period)
- *Suggested pre-reading:* article by Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860,” from *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), pp. 151-174.

September 30: Shattering the Sphere: Women’s Labor & Economic Power

- *Agenda:* Using Nast’s cartoon as a starting point, this session will focus on women’s work during the Civil War and the post-war years.
- *Suggested pre-viewing:* an illustration by Thomas Nast, “Our Heroines, United States Sanitary Commission,” in *Harper’s Weekly*, April 9, 1864, available here: <http://www.americanyawp.com/reader/civil-war-nurses/>

October 14: “Aggregated We Become Batteries of Power”: Benevolent Pursuits

- *Agenda:* Women got things done in the mid-19th-century U.S., often in collaborative environments. However, not all women worked together or towards the same ends. This final session will consider women’s involvement in benevolent organizations from 1860 to 1880, and will reflect on the connections between the period under study and today.
- *Suggested pre-reading:* TBA, by Sept. 30 session