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**BENEVOLENT SURVEILLANCE:
PRISON MATRONS AND WOMEN'S PRISON REFORM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICA**

A Dissertation in
History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the development of women's prison reform in the United States during the antebellum period. Women's prison reform societies focused on two key issues during this period—the separation of women from men within prisons, and the hiring of prison matrons to protect and discipline female prisoners. I argue that the prison matron was critical to women prison reformers' efforts to promote their visions of moral reform and prison discipline. These reformers—who were predominantly from white, middle-class, Protestant backgrounds—asserted their moral authority to influence and control the rehabilitation and punishment of female prisoners. My research examines several different prison reform organizations and benevolent societies in the United States, discusses the work of Elizabeth Fry who first imagined the role of the prison matron, and analyzes the work of some of the earliest prison matrons in US prisons.

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Introduction

“It is absolutely essential to the proper order and regulation of every prison, that the female prisoners should be placed under the superintendence of officers of their own sex,” Elizabeth Fry declared in 1827. “Females confined in our prisons are, for the most part, persons of light and abandoned character. To place them under the care of *men* is evidently unreasonable, and seldom fails to be injurious to both parties...One *matron* will be able to maintain far greater order amongst a number of female criminals than several male turnkeys.”¹ Fry, one of the most influential figures in women’s prison reform in both England and the United States, advocated for prison discipline and reform. Having visited the female department at Newgate Prison in England, she had seen the conditions female prisoners faced while incarcerated. Fry’s publicized visits culminated in the creation of a new women’s prison reform association, as well as the development of new theories for improving prison systems. Fry introduced the position of prison matron to prisons in England, and her reform efforts were soon replicated in Europe and the United States. Though understudied by historians, prison matrons offer a critical lens for advancing scholarly understanding of nineteenth-century prison reform and the ways in which women contributed to the development of the carceral system in the United States.

My dissertation argues that the prison matron was critical to women prison reformers’ efforts to promote their visions of moral reform and prison discipline. These women asserted their moral authority to influence and control the rehabilitation and

¹ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill; Hatchard & Son, Piccadilly, S. Wilkin, Norwich, 1827), 26-27. Emphasis in original document.

punishment of female prisoners. They did not seek to radically change the structure of discipline within the existing carceral system, but instead sought to center themselves in conversations surrounding reform and in implementing new forms of prison discipline. My dissertation traces the development of women's prison reform by examining the origins of prison reform societies in the United States, and analyzing the ways in which prison matrons became increasingly important to women's reform efforts. I examine several different prison reform organizations and benevolent societies in the US, discuss the work of Elizabeth Fry who first imagined the role of the prison matron, and analyze some of the earliest prison matrons in US prisons. While my dissertation traces the development of women's prison reform, my primary focus is on the creation of the position of prison matron and the introduction of matrons to US prisons.

The prison matron served multiple purposes for reformers—she had symbolic value as a representative figure within reform efforts, she offered new means of providing surveillance and protection as an employee within prisons, and she helped reformers make an argument for the economic utility of improving conditions for imprisoned women. However, prison matrons were not reformers. Once employed in prisons, they served their roles within the carceral system, a system of punishment that was not designed for female prisoners. Previous studies have acknowledged the existence of prison matrons within the larger histories of women's prisons and women's prison reform. However, the majority of these studies relegate prison matrons to a paragraph or a footnote. My work intervenes in the existing historiography by focusing on the prison matron as a means of better understanding the origins and limitations of women's prison

reform. I add to existing research on women's prison reform by analyzing the significance of early prison matrons in the United States.

Assumptions about gender and sexuality heavily influenced prison design and organization. Early prison reformers sought to separate prisoners by sex, and prisons sought to control prisoner communication and cohabitation.² Their commitment to separation contributed to the advocacy of a separate women's prison system. The women's prison system has differed in its historical development, administrative structures, disciplinary measures, and the experiences of female inmates.³ Women's incarceration has developed in stages; in the first stage (1790-1870), prisons housed female prisoners in penal units that "outwardly resembled" male penal units and institutions. However, women prisoners typically experienced inferior care and conditions. During the second stage (1870-1935), reformers worked to establish new institutions, specifically, the women's reformatory, in order to provide safer conditions for women, and reform, female prisoners.⁴ The third stage of the women's prison system began in 1935 and continues to the present, perpetuating traditions of differential treatment.⁵

The first stage of the women's prison system is best understood as following a custodial model of incarceration. The custodial model focuses on the security, discipline,

² See Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). See also, Jen Manion, *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

³ Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," *Crime and Justice* Vol. 5 (1983), 132.

⁴ Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," 129. Rafter is not the only scholar to distinguish between the different phases of development in the women's prison system. Estelle B. Freedman also acknowledges the shift in models of women's prison systems in her work, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 1984), specifically noting the reformatory approach emerging in the 1870s, followed by further reforms during the Progressive Era.

⁵ Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," 129.

and subordination of prisoners; this model requires strict discipline and regulated behavior.⁶ Within the custodial model, retribution is key to incarceration.⁷ The custodial model did not disappear. In fact, most prisons in the United States today still follow it. However, during the second stage of women's prison development, reformers attempted to establish a reformatory model focused on rehabilitating prisoners.⁸ Rehabilitation was not unique to the reformatory model, but this system focused on new means of transforming criminals into functioning members of society.

My research focuses primarily on the first stage of women's prison development. This period saw the creation of new types of prisons within the United States, which sparked debates about superior means of housing, punishing, and reforming criminals. This period also saw the many attempts, and failures, of women's prison reform efforts. Understanding the theories behind these reform efforts, the ways in which reform was implemented, and the failures of these efforts that eventually led to the development of the reformatory model, helps shed light on the advancement of the carceral system in the US.

⁶ Todd R. Clear and George F. Cole and Michael D. Reisig and Carolyn Petrosino, *American Corrections in Brief*, Second ed. (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 146.

⁷ Retribution refers to the loss of liberty. The theory suggests that keeping convicted people in prison will serve as a punishment that will, ideally, prevent them from committing further crimes. See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007), 14.

⁸ The term reformatory model is specific to this time period. However, the term rehabilitation model would be comparable. The rehabilitation model describes programs and institutions focused on the reformation of offenders. Some specify that this model is specific to the mid-twentieth century, but it is clear that there were comparable nineteenth-century reform efforts. For definitions and information about the use of the term rehabilitation model as it pertains to the twentieth century see Clear et al., *American Corrections in Brief*, 147. For more on the development of women's reformatories see Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990). Theories of rehabilitation within prisons typically propose that loss of liberty provides prisoners with an opportunity to reflect and acquire new skills that will then allow them to live "respectable" and/or crime-free lives upon their release. See Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, 14.

My dissertation builds on a growing body of literature analyzing criminal punishment and prison reform. During the 1970s, studies of criminal punishment and the creation of the modern prison system focused on social control. Social control theory, broadly defined, refers to the idea that crime occurs due to inadequate social constraints; this extends to the idea that crime and deviance are predictable behaviors, and can be controlled through processes by which people become socialized to obey rules. David Rothman's pioneering study, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the Early Republic*, argues that Americans in the Early Republic lost faith in social organization and community ties, and their fear of social disorder fostered the rise of the asylum as a solution to deviancy, dependency, and mental illness.⁹

Perhaps the most influential scholar to emerge within debates on social control theory is Michel Foucault. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* has had an enormous influence on studies of prisons, punishment, and surveillance. Foucault argues that, beginning around the turn of the nineteenth century, methods of punishment began to change. The use of public punishments—highly visible forms of punishment targeting the physical body—were replaced with forms of labor and punishment meant to aid in a process of personal reformation. Thus, retributive punishment was replaced by penal reformation. This shift did not mean an end to punishment; the goal was “to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity.” For Foucault, the rise of the modern penitentiary represented the institutionalization of the power to punish. Prisons were not the only sites of

⁹ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised Edition (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008), xxiv.

discipline and control, but they became emblematic of this power. Foucault further argues that discipline within prisons created “docile bodies” that could be “subjected, used, transformed, and improved.” The prison was thus a “complete and austere institution” that transformed prisoners into docile bodies.¹⁰

More recent studies on criminal punishment and prison reform have shifted focus away from discussions of social control and have focused more on the ways in which patriarchy affected the development of the modern prison system. These studies do not necessarily reject the work of scholars like Foucault and Rothman. For example, Michael Meranze’s *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* argues that discipline became a central element in the development of liberal institutions. Meranze analyzes the privatization of punishment, detailing how the public, corporal punishments of the eighteenth century were eventually replaced with privatized incarceration at institutions like Eastern State Penitentiary. Meranze argues that this process reveals the influence of patriarchal and paternalistic systems on reformers; these reformers professed the desire to transform prisoners into model citizens, yet they simultaneously created institutions that made this transformation unlikely, if not impossible.¹¹ Mark Kann’s *Punishment, Prisons and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic*, argues that the legitimization of the penitentiary system “demonstrated that patriarchal political power could be perpetuated in a liberal

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), 82, 129-130, 135-138, 235.

¹¹ Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

society.”¹² Both Meranze and Kann analyze the tensions between patriarchy and liberty in the Early Republic.

Social control extends beyond studies of incarceration. Social control through moral stewardship was critical during the antebellum period, as both legislators and reformers attempted to “protect the moral and spiritual welfare of their fellow man through restrictive legislation.” When legislation failed to achieve reformers’ goals, they used organizations at the local, state, and national levels to spread their beliefs throughout the country.¹³ Reformers and reform efforts were deeply connected to the state. White, middle-class, Protestant reformers focused on a number of social issues as a means of addressing problems they associated with the poor, immigrants, and different ethnic and racial groups. Studies such as Clifford S. Griffin’s *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* argue that evangelical voluntary organizations promoted a specific form of religious morality to the poor to ensure social stability.¹⁴ Raymond Mohl’s *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* further argues that middle-class activists and philanthropists did have concern for the poor, but agrees that reformers and benevolent societies tried to instill specific, religious morals.¹⁵ The language of benevolence and the use of religious and moral claims are key to understanding how reform societies implemented reform efforts. As my dissertation will discuss, women’s prison reform societies fit into a social control model. These reformers

¹² Mark E. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1.

¹³ J. Thomas Jable, “Aspects of Moral Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 102, no. 3 (Jul., 1978), 345.

¹⁴ Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960).

¹⁵ Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

relied on the language of benevolence, but their reform efforts focused on influencing and controlling female prisoners.

Scholars of women's history have further advanced understanding of the histories of criminal punishment, prison reform, and the development of the modern prison system. Estelle B. Freedman's *Their Sisters Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930*, examines the origins of middle-class, Protestant women's concern for female prisoners in the United States, and details the histories of women reformers, their ideas and the institutions they created.¹⁶ Her work details the campaign to create, and the creation of prisons run by and for women; her study focused on reformers, and the function of the women's sphere in the context of prison reform. Freedman argues that women reformers were motivated by both ideals of solidarity, and, simultaneously, ideologies about women's moral superiority. These women involved in prison reform were not women's rights activists, but instead adopted a "separate but equal" approach to prison reform. They did not reject the prison system; they sought to improve material and, what they viewed as, spiritual conditions for women and ultimately became "keepers in their own prisons."¹⁷

Part 1 of Freedman's book, "The Origins of Women's Prison Reform," is most relevant to my project. This section includes a brief discussion of the work of Elizabeth Fry as well as some discussion of prison matrons. Freedman argues that Fry provided a personal example of what women's prison reform could accomplish as well as new

¹⁶ Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 1.

¹⁷ Freedman, *Their Sisters Keepers*, 2.

theories about prison reform.¹⁸ Freedman credits Fry for first proposing the need for prison matrons, and she notes that the hiring of matrons became part of reform efforts. However, she spends little time detailing Fry's work. Freedman argues that early prison matrons had neither the authority within prisons to reform women, nor was this a required part of their duties. While she does not detail the work of prison matrons, save for a short discussion of Eliza Farnham, Freedman's work was a crucial starting point for my research.

Nicole Hahn Rafter has contributed several crucial books and articles to the study of women's prisons and women's prison reform. Her work, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control* traces the development of women's prisons, focusing on the creation of the distinct custodial and reformatory models. Rafter argues that incarcerated women have always faced "partial justice," which took two forms. In the first form, prison administrators treated women with greater leniency; women faced terrible conditions in custodial institutions, but they often performed less physically-demanding labor, and officials did not always enforce rules equally for women. However, this partiality came with a price for incarcerated women, as they typically had fewer opportunities to go outside, less access to prison officials and staff, and less protection. In the second form of partial justice, in prisons where men and women were treated with "seeming impartiality," women still suffered more because these institutions were designed for men and housed a far greater number of male prisoners. Rafter argues that even when male and female prisoners were treated with "seeming impartiality" women suffered more. She claims that the lack of attention paid to women led to them feeling "more

¹⁸ Freedman, *Their Sisters Keepers*, 22.

stigmatized” than male prisoners, and she further argues that, prior to the hiring of matrons, the lack of female supervision put women at greater risk for humiliation and violence. Rafter acknowledges that male prisoners were also stigmatized and faced similar treatment to women in many respects, but she insists that female prisoners faced additional burdens due to their sex. Rafter contends that these issues remained contentious in the late-twentieth century.¹⁹

While Rafter and Freedman overlap in some aspects of their work, Rafter’s discussion of prison reformers and the larger prison system is much more focused on social control. As Rafter argues in the preface to the second edition of *Partial Justice*, the women’s reformatory movement was an attempt to increase social control. However, Rafter’s discussion of prison matrons is similar to Freedman’s. She briefly mentions Elizabeth Fry, and she agrees that reformers pushed the idea that matrons could offer “special treatment that only other women could provide.”²⁰ And, Rafter agrees that matrons did not actually serve as reformers within prisons. Although she spends little time discussing their work and their roles within prisons, she contends that they had little effect on practice before 1870.

Recent scholarship has continued to add to the understanding of criminal punishment and the modern prison system. Jen Manion’s 2015 monograph, *Liberty’s Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America*, argues that ideas concerning race, gender, and sexuality played a critical role in the development of criminal punishment in the

¹⁹ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), xxx. The first edition of *Partial Justice* was published in 1985; the second edition was published in 1990. When Rafter refers to the present in each edition, she is referring to these periods.

²⁰ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 15.

United States from 1785 to 1835. Manion's study focuses on the questions contemporaries asked about incarceration and punishment in early America, and pays particular attention to women's roles in punishment and women's place in the nation.²¹

Erica Rhodes Hayden's *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* provides a needed perspective on the history of criminal women. Hayden traces the experiences of criminal women and details the histories of their crimes, arrests, trials, and incarceration. Her work provides insight into the lives of the women who were the subject of reform efforts, and offers valuable information about how criminal women were treated in antebellum society. I rely on some of her quantitative research on women's crimes in Pennsylvania including information about the types of crimes women committed and the length of their sentences. Hayden argues that despite their circumstances criminal women actively shaped and influenced their lives, demonstrating an awareness of their place in society as well as the ways in which antebellum Americans viewed and valued women. Hayden shows how many incarcerated women resisted discipline and punishment within the prison system. She is particularly focused on the issue of respectability.²² Hayden contends that female respectability

²¹ Jen Manion, *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

²² Nineteenth-century contemporaries used the terms respectable and respectability as a means of differentiating moral and socially acceptable behaviors and people from those deemed immoral or criminal. It is difficult to find an exact definition of respectability that contemporaries uniformly used. However, in historical accounts from the United States, white, middle-class, Christian women who appeared domestic and moral were typically used as the primary examples of respectability. These women who served as the standard-bearers of respectability were also able to determine who was not respectable. Respectability was not necessarily an obtainable goal or standard, but served instead as a tool for judging, shaming, and excluding. For discussions on respectability and criminality see Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006) and L. Mara Dodge, *"Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind": A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002.) For a study that addresses respectability and sex work, see Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

played a crucial role for female offenders, and she further argues that respectability was employed by female criminals in numerous situations.²³ Hayden, along with Theresa R. Jach, also edited the collection, *Incarcerated Women: A History of Struggles, Oppression, and Resistance in American Prisons*, which sheds further light on the histories of criminal women.²⁴

In addition to addressing histories of criminal punishment and the modern prison system, my work engages thoroughly with women's history, particularly studies of women's reform efforts. Women's prison reform efforts must be understood within the context of the broader women's reform activities in the antebellum period. To understand women's reform, it is important to recognize the numerous studies analyzing the ideology of Protestant women's moral superiority. This belief in women's moral virtue was based in the ideology of separate spheres. Numerous feminist scholars and historians of women and gender have studied and critiqued separate spheres, or, the cult of domesticity, the idea that women naturally served in roles relegated to the private, domestic sphere, while men served in roles in the public sphere. This ideology nurtured and shaped a particular reform world view, and women drew on beliefs in women's benevolence to support their involvement in activism, reform, and politics.

²³ Erica Rhodes Hayden, *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2019), 3.

²⁴ *Incarcerated Women: A History of Struggles, Oppression, and Resistance in American Prisons*, ed. Erica Rhodes Hayden and Theresa R. Jach (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017). Further important studies of women's crime and punishment include Michele Lise Tarter and Richard Bell, eds. *Buried Lives: Incarcerated in Early America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), Susa Branson, *Dangerous to Know: Women, Crime and Notoriety in the Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), and Anne M. Butler, *Gendered Justice in the American West: Women Prisoners in Men's Penitentiaries* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Key studies have analyzed the ways in which women drew on the ideology of separate spheres. Nancy Cott's foundational work, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* argues that the common bonds of female virtue and domesticity brought middle-class, Protestant women together.²⁵ Her work addresses the contradiction within these bonds; there were limitations placed on women due to their relegation to a "separate" sphere yet there was also potential for gaining female solidarity from that experience. Subsequent studies have built on Cott's work to show the ways in which reformers drew on the ideology of separate spheres to justify their involvement in benevolent work. Christine Stansell's *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* argues that middle-class women and men used the ideology of separate spheres to define their cultural identity in opposition to the laboring classes. She contends that domesticity "became an element of bourgeois self-consciousness," and middle-class reformers sought to transform the poor and working-class into their own image.²⁶ Stansell's work shows the ways in which laboring women were excluded from, and subverted, strict ideas about women's domesticity and nature.²⁷

The rhetorical use of the ideology of separate spheres is significant, but this ideology served to obscure the actual functions of capitalist society. In *Home and Work:*

²⁵ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 98.

²⁶ Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), xi-xiv.

²⁷ Other important works within this historiography include Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 75, no.1 (June 1988): 9-39, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), and Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the New Republic Jeanne Boydston argues that the dichotomy between “public” and “private” was not a reflection of the material organization of society. Women’s housework was made invisible due to the powerful influence of the ideology of separate spheres, yet women’s unpaid labor was essential to capitalist industrialization. Boydston’s work demonstrates the discursive uses of ideology in the transformation of paid and unpaid labor. Lori Ginzberg also discusses this gap between rhetoric and reality in *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. Ginzberg argues that male and female reformers drew on the ideology of separate spheres as a weapon against female organizing that served interests deemed too radical. And, while women’s benevolent work was clearly connected to business enterprises, contemporaries continued to use this ideology to argue benevolence was a “natural” extension of the nature of women.²⁸ Both works demonstrate that the ideology of separate spheres had key rhetorical uses, even as it failed to reflect the lived experiences of men and women.

My work is also influenced by, and engages with, feminist theory. I view women’s prison reform through the lens of current-day abolitionist feminism. Abolitionist feminism focuses on envisioning a world beyond the policing and prison systems that currently exist. It emphasizes building stronger communities and approaching problems with a focus on social justice.²⁹ As Angela Davis discusses in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* abolitionists and prison reformers are not the same. She begins her work by

²⁸ Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the New Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.)

²⁹ For a recent, thorough discussion of abolitionist feminism see Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).

acknowledging the ways in which prisons and the system of mass incarceration in the United States has become naturalized. “The prison is considered an inevitable and permanent feature of our social lives,” she writes, noting that most people are unaware of the history of prison abolition and that they assume being “anti-prison” simply means wanting to ameliorate prison conditions.³⁰ For Davis, there is a clear distinction between abolitionists and these types of reformers. Reform is still necessary, and Davis acknowledges that key reform issues, such as the elimination of sexual abuse and medical neglect in women’s prisons, are important. However, these reforms tend to fall into frameworks of thinking that produce and reproduce the idea that “nothing lies beyond the prison.”³¹ The reformers I study were not prison abolitionists but reformers. These women focused on reform efforts that sought to improve existing prisons, not to think beyond the prison.

My dissertation research adds to the work of existing scholarship by expanding upon studies of the criminal punishment of women and women’s prison reform. It focuses on the antebellum period in order to explore the early development of women’s prison reform. My research centers primarily on Northeastern cities in the United States, as these were the locations of the earliest prisons in the country, as well as the homes of the earliest prison reform societies.³² Thus, it draws heavily on archival sources from

³⁰ Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 9.

³¹ Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, 20.

³² For a discussion of the differences between penal reform in northern and southern states during this period see Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Planation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Hindus argues that Massachusetts had a stronger network of reform compared to South Carolina, and he further explains that reform efforts were more deeply tied to politics in Massachusetts. This aided in the development of permanent reform organizations and the election of reformers to public office.

Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New York.³³ However, my work is not solely concerned with the United States. Chapter Two examines Elizabeth Fry and her work as a reformer in England. Fry's influence on women's prison reform is critical to understanding the development of prison discipline because she created the position of the prison matron. Although she was not the only influential woman involved in women's prison reform, her theories on the use of prison matrons are essential to my work. As such, that chapter focuses on archival sources from Norwich and London in order to better understand Fry's ideas and transatlantic influence.

Elizabeth Fry firmly believed in the efficacy of institutions. Despite her critiques of women's treatment in prisons, and her efforts to establish women's prison reform associations, she was adamant that institutions were essential. For Fry, a woman could be "placed in the prison for her crimes, in the hospital for her sickness, in the asylum her insanity, or in the workhouse for her poverty."³⁴ Fry and other women prison reformers saw institutions as the solution to societal issues. Rather than challenging these carceral spaces, they sought to improve them through women's benevolent work. These reformers continuously drew on women's benevolence as a means of claiming influence and power.

Many nineteenth-century penologists and reformers did not believe female criminals were redeemable.³⁵ During the antebellum period, women were typically

³³ A note on archival research and sources. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to complete some of the planned research for this project. Specifically, a scheduled research trip to archives in New York had to be cancelled, and I have relied on digital primary sources and secondary sources to fill in gaps where archival research could not be used.

³⁴ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 7-8.

³⁵ For example, penologist Francis Lieber, who is credited with coining the term penology, believed female criminals were more depraved than male criminals. See, Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 11. This will be further discussed in Chapter Three.

arrested and incarcerated for crimes that violated social norms and crimes of a sexual nature. Whether through acts of adultery, disorderly conduct, or vagrancy, these women transgressed social boundaries that led to incarceration and stigmatization. Women's prison reformers' insistence on the viability of women's moral reform and prison discipline pushed back against some commonly held beliefs about female criminality. These reformers continuously claimed that they could introduce moral reform in prisons, and that their reform efforts could make female criminals more respectable and more productive. By challenging beliefs about criminal women and influencing reform efforts, women's prison reformers advanced the carceral system in the United States.³⁶

When asked about her vision of prison reform, Elizabeth Fry stated, "if I had a prison completely such as I should like it, it would be a prison quite apart from the men's prison, and into which neither turnkeys nor anyone else should enter but female attendants and the Inspecting Committee of Ladies."³⁷ Fry advocated for the employment of prison matrons because she believed that female prisoners required female supervision. However, her vision of prison discipline extended beyond hiring matrons. Although she never saw it come to fruition, she believed female prisoners should be incarcerated in entirely separate penal institutions run by women. The prison matron was a crucial first step in creating a system of women's moralistic prison discipline.

This dissertation focuses on prison matrons and the proliferation of an ideological rhetoric used to justify the hiring of women within prisons and the eventual creation of

³⁶ It is important to note that ideas about female criminals shifted toward the end of the nineteenth century. During the late-nineteenth century, many people began to view female criminals as pitiable, impressionable, and frail as opposed to morally depraved or wicked. This shift came with shifting ideas about women's prison discipline, notably with the rise of the reformatory movement. See Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 49-51.

³⁷ E. R. Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), 87. Pitman cites the House of Commons.

women's prisons. I argue that prison matrons came to epitomize women's prison reform during the antebellum period. Women's prison reform was not solely focused on employing matrons; members of these organizations regularly visited female departments in prisons, provided moral and religious instruction to prisoners, encouraged domestic habits amongst prisoners, and provided some immediate aid. However, efforts to hire prison matrons are key to understanding the development of women's prison reform. Matrons represented the primary means by which reformers could implement prison discipline during the antebellum period. And, beyond the antebellum period, women's prison reform efforts would eventually culminate in the creation of entirely separate female penal institutions.

Chapters One and Two focus on early prison reform and help to explain why the position of prison matron emerged. In Chapter One, I discuss the development of jails and prisons in the United States, as well as the creation of the earliest prison reform societies in the country. I detail the development of prisons and discuss the ways in which women were neglected within different prison systems despite emerging ideas about reform and debates about superior means of incarceration and punishment. I argue that the creation of the position of prison matron was a direct result of the early neglect of female prisoners. In Chapter Two, I focus on the role Elizabeth Fry played in women's prison reform. I trace her involvement in women's prison reform in England, and I discuss her conception of the role of prison matron. I argue that the introduction of prison matrons created new forms of prison discipline, particularly with the advancement of the surveillance of female prisoners.

Chapter Three focuses on the efforts of women's prison reform societies to aid female prisoners materially and spiritually. This chapter details the work of the Female Prison Association of Philadelphia, which was a significant women's prison reform society. I analyze how women's prison reform functioned as well as how they compared to other contemporary benevolent organizations. This includes discussions of how the Female Prison Association of Philadelphia worked with other prison reform societies, their writings on their reform efforts, and comparisons to the Magdalen Society and the Rosine Association. Although the Female Prison Association of Philadelphia tried to aid female prisoners and former convicts in multiple ways, I argue that reformers' work did more to strengthen the prison system than to aid individual prisoners.

Chapters Four and Five are focused on prison matrons in the United States. Chapter Four details the introduction of prison matrons to US prisons, how some of the earliest matrons were hired, and what their work entailed. Using sources from multiple matrons and assistant matrons, I analyze how prison matrons functioned within prisons. I argue that matrons became integral to aiding, surveilling, and punishing incarcerated women, and they were able to conduct this work because they lived and labored within the prison. Chapter Five focuses on the roles prison matrons played in administering punishment and violence. I discuss the punishment of prisoners, debates reformers had about the ethics of punishment, and the ways in which matrons engaged in different forms of punishment and violence. I argue that reformers used the language of benevolence as a veil to obscure the violent realities of prisons and prison reform, and that this rhetoric was crucial to promoting their vision of moralistic prison discipline.

Chapter One:

“Cruel treatment is one thing, and punishment is another”: The Development of Prisons in the United States

In early 1789, the male members of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons discussed a key problem at the local jail—the separation of the sexes. During one of their visits “they found that the men and women had general intercourse with each other, & it was afterwards discovered that they were locked up together in the rooms at night.”¹ The society immediately deemed this contact unacceptable. Women’s presence in jails and prisons presented immediate concerns for reformers, who believed interactions between the sexes were bound to cause problems.² The separation of the sexes became a key component within discussions of prison reform. However, these reformers often discussed prisoners as a broad category that presumed a white, heterosexual, male subject. Despite women’s presence in jails and prisons, they were often neglected. Women were always part of the carceral system in the United States, but they were often pushed to the periphery, both in discourse and in prisons. I argue that the creation of the position of prison matron is a direct result of the neglect of female prisoners. Reformers responded to neglect by creating a new forms of prison discipline.

¹ Volume 1. Minutes 1787-1809, Minutes from January 12, 1789, Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

² Jails and prisons serve different functions within the criminal justice system. Prior to the creation of the first modern prison, jails were the primary institutional means of incarcerating criminals and holding people awaiting trial. With the development of prisons, jails began to serve as institutions focused on prisoners facing shorter sentences. In contrast, prisons became institutions for housing people convicted of felonies who would serve longer sentences. However, during the nineteenth century, some institutions that would be recognized today as jails are referred to as prisons. For example, Moyamensing, or, the Philadelphia County Prison is referred to as a prison but it served the purpose of a county jail.

This chapter discusses the development of jails and prisons in early America, as well as the creation of the earliest prison reform societies in the country. Examining the origins of the carceral system in the United States is critical to understanding how, and why, women's prison reform emerged. The carceral system was not a singular entity, but multiple systems operating in conjunction. Nor does the carceral system share a single historical narrative. Scholars have heavily debated the origins of and reasons for the modern prison as a means of punishment. Some scholars argue penal reform and the creation of modern prisons came about due to disillusion with the British penal codes and the influence of the Enlightenment.³ These studies have ranged in their admiration of reformers, with some studies claiming reformers were humanitarian and heroic while others recognize the violent and exploitative practices developed from Enlightenment thought.⁴ Other studies have argued the prison developed as a means of discipline and social control.⁵ And, critical studies have shown the enduring connections between the system of slavery and the development of prisons.⁶ Most scholars agree that despite

³ For example, Thomas L. Dumm, *Democracy and Punishment: Disciplinary Origins of the United States* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

⁴ For example, Negley Teeters refers to the founders of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons as men of heroic action who were focused on helping prisoners, and he frequently applauds the members of the society in his work. See, Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937). In contrast, Michel Foucault is highly critical of prisoner reformers. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995). Mark E. Kann is also much more critical of the development of prisons and prison reform. See Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy* (New York: New York University Press, 2005)

⁵ See David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised Edition (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008), Alexander W. Pisciotto, *Benevolent Repression: Social Control and the American Reformatory-Prison Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1994) and Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

⁶ The work of Angela Davis is particularly useful for understanding the relationship between slavery and the development of prisons. See Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003). See also, Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), and Mark Colvin, *Penitentiaries, Reformatories, and Chain Gangs: Social Theory and the History of Punishment in the United States* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

arguments about the ideological or intellectual origins of the prison, prisons quickly became custodial institutions.

Incarceration became normalized during the antebellum period. Removing people from society and incarcerating them became the agreed-upon solution to addressing deviancy and dependency without actually addressing the root causes of those issues. However, prisons are not the sole means of understanding carcerality in the United States. As many scholars have noted, there were multiple, interconnected, means of policing and punishing. Community monitoring, church authority, and the system of slavery all enforced a particular social order.⁷ And, as scholarship has shown, carceral institutions like the prison and the insane asylum developed in close connection. White, middle-class, Protestant reformers were not solely focused on containing criminality—poverty, mental illness, and multiple forms of deviancy and dependency concerned the general public, clergy, and lawmakers. Workhouses, almshouses, houses of refuge, prisons, and asylums all served different functions, but they were intended to address these societal problems. The asylum, for instance, became the cure for insanity, providing specialized incarceration intended to contain and cure the mentally ill.⁸ Reformer Dorothea Dix, who

⁷ Many scholars have discussed the different means of social order and control in early America. For references on the relationship between slavery, social order, and the carceral system see Michael Stephen Hindus, *Prison and Plantation: Crime, Justice, and Authority in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1767-1878* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980.) For an overview on the influence of religion on the development of the penal system and prisons see Andrew Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000). For discussion of the role of churches in social control see David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised Edition (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008), 14-20.

⁸ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 133. Originally published in 1971, Rothman's work focuses on the development of penitentiaries, asylums, and other institutions intended to address problems within society. Other scholars have discussed the prison in connection to other institutions. Notably, Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995). Foucault draws connections between the prison, hospitals, schools, and other institutions. He discusses the prison as a form of punishment, but discusses similar technological powers used in other institutions. Michael Meranze also argues that discipline became a central element in liberal

was involved in both prison reform and efforts to establish asylums during the nineteenth century, advocated for asylums due to the incarceration of the mentally ill in prisons.⁹ As Dix explained in her *Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts*, the wardens of prisons and the masters of almshouses were obligated to accept the mentally ill. However, the punishments used in prisons were not effective treatments for the mentally ill. She specifically noted that criminals and the mentally ill should be treated as different kinds of people, stressing that many mentally ill people were not guilty of any crimes. For Dix, keeping both criminals and the mentally ill together made it difficult to aid either party.¹⁰ For Dix and other reformers, incarceration was not the problem itself, but rather, that the mentally ill needed the specific care provided in asylums.

Professional police forces and modern prisons did not exist in early colonial America, but colonies were subject to penal codes that punished those who disturbed the social order.¹¹ The English penal code, which was used in several colonies, was harsh, and employed capital punishment for a large number of offenses.¹² Punishments were not meant to reform the accused criminal but were to serve as retribution and deterrence.

institutions. See Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996)

⁹ Dix later continued to lobby for state hospitals for the mentally ill, and for the removal of the mentally ill from prisons. However, the process of establishing separate hospitals for those with mental illness who had committed crimes was slow. As Harry E. Barnes notes in *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania: A Study in American Social History* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1968), it was not until 1905 that PA passed an act ordering the erection of a state hospital for the “criminal insane,” and this hospital did not open until 1912. See page 4

¹⁰ Dorothea Dix, *Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts* (Boston: Munroe & Francis, 1843), particularly pages 29-30.

¹¹ Adam Malka describes the history of policing in *The Men of Mobtown: Policing Baltimore in the Age of Slavery and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018). Malka aptly states, “Before there were policemen and penitentiaries, there were white men,” 19, addressing the long history of white policing before the modern, professional police force. See also Matthew Guariglia, “The American Problem: Race, Empire, and Policing in New York City, 1840-1930” (2019), Doctoral Dissertations, 2111.

¹² Orlando F. Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs, 1776-1845, with Special Reference to Early Institutions in the State of New York* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 9.

These punishments were not always carried out fully. The penal code contained clauses that allowed punishments to be reduced and also allowed for pardons.¹³ Still, particular punishments served as a deterrent of crime due to their brutal, and public, nature.

Criminal sentences were publicly executed, allowing an audience to witness the retributive force on criminals.¹⁴ Public punishments that focused on physically harming the criminal's body made both criminals and the justice system visible to the general public. These would eventually be replaced by the modern prison—where punishments would still be enacted, but retributive force would be replaced by labor and punishment that were meant to aid in a process of personal reformation.¹⁵ The prison represents an attempt to make punishment private, but public punishment survived.¹⁶

The British penal code was the not sole means of order and punishment in the colonies, and some colonies rejected aspects of the code entirely. When William Penn, a Quaker, established the province of Pennsylvania, he obtained permission to establish a different, less violent penal code.¹⁷ Under the Great Law of Pennsylvania, enacted in 1682,

¹³ Thomas L. Dumm, *Democracy and Punishment: Disciplinary Origins of the United States* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) 72-73. Dumm refers to the use of “pleaing clergy” as well as the sovereign’s ability to use pardons.

¹⁴ Dumm, *Democracy and Punishment*, 73.

¹⁵ Michel Foucault discusses the ways in which punishment became the most hidden part of the penal process in his work, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995). Foucault’s work has heavily influenced scholarly debates about the history of incarceration, and his theories will be further discussed in later chapters.

¹⁶ Public punishments survived in multiple forms. As jails and prisons developed further, there were forms of public punishment, including public labor. However, the best example of highly visible punishment is the chain gang. Multiple scholars have discussed the significance of the chain gang as a form of punishment and as a part of incarceration. Notably, Dennis Childs discusses how the chain gang provides a clear example as to why Foucault’s arguments about the invisibility of punishment in *Discipline and Punish* is flawed. See Dennis Childs, *Slaves of the State: Black Incarceration from the Chain Gang to the Penitentiary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 43-45.

¹⁷ For an overview on William Penn and the history of Quakers and penal and prison reform in Pennsylvania see Andrew Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), 31-36. Jen Manion notes that Quakers were less violent compared to Puritans in New England and various slaveholders in the south in *Liberty’s Prisoners*, 20.

the death penalty would only be employed in cases of homicide, and it replaced torture and mutilation with hard labor.¹⁸ However, corporal punishments could still be employed for multiple crimes, and there were many laws policing public morality that could result in penalties and imprisonment.¹⁹ Despite the continued use of the death penalty and corporal punishment, these changes represented a significant shift away from the English penal code. After Penn's death in 1718, the English penal code became law in Pennsylvania, and remained in force until after the American Revolution.²⁰

Colonial America had many local jails, but they proved inadequate for both housing and punishing prisoners.²¹ The first jail built in Philadelphia was described as a cage, "seven feet long by five feet broad."²² Deemed insufficient, the cage was soon replaced

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs*, 10-11. See also, Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, ix. The Great Law is also referred to as the Great Act in different texts.

¹⁹ Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), ix. See full quote as follows, "In the main, crimes of violence against the person were punished by imprisonment at hard labor in the 'house of correction.' For assaulting a parent the child was to be confined in the house of correction during the pleasure of the parent....If a servant assaulted a master he was to be punished at the discretion of two justices of the peace and was to be punished 'according to the nature and circumstances of the fact.' Dueling was penalized by a fine of five pounds or three months' imprisonment. Rioting was accounted an act of violence and was punished accordingly...In defining the crimes against property and prescribing the punishments therefor, it was decreed that arson should be punished by rendering double satisfaction to the injured party, imprisonment for one year and by receiving such corporal punishment as the court should see fit to impose. Breaking, entering and theft of goods was punishable by four-fold restitution and three months' imprisonment....the longest list of crimes and penalties related to offenses against public morality. The punishment imposed for 'defiling the marriage bed' was whipping and one year's imprisonment for the first offense and life imprisonment for the second....The first offense of bigamy was to be punished by life imprisonment." (Teeters citing Barnes, *Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1927, 32)

²⁰ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, x, 9. See also, Dumm, *Democracy and Punishment*, 65.

²¹ The jail was not the only means of punishment. Workhouses were built beginning in the colonial era, and they were sometimes used as a form of incarceration at hard labor. See. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 25.

²² Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 10. Full description, "twenty feet long and fourteen feet wide in the clear...the upper seven feet, and the under six and half feet, of which four feet under ground [sic], with all convenient lights and doors, and casements—strong and substantial, with good brick, lime, sand and stone, as also floors and roofs very substantial; a partition of brick in the middle through the house, so that there will be four rooms, four chimneys, and the cockloft, which will serve for a prison; and the gaoler may well live in any part of it, if need be—the whole to cost £140."

with a hired house, owned by a man named Patrick Robinson, the clerk of the Provincial Council. Robinson's family lived in one side of the house, while the jail occupied the other side. Records show that this jail proved inadequate, as one reformer described as nothing more than a house with a few additional "bars and fetters." The Robinson's house was not used for long; work on the brick jail, known then as the "High Street Gaol" began in 1685, but was not completed until 1695. It was a two-story house with a "partition of brick in the middle through the house, so that there will be four rooms, four chimneys, and the cockloft, which will serve for a prison." After only a few years, the Provincial Council deemed the brick jail antiquated and declared it a public nuisance, and the Act of February 27, 1718 approved a new "Stone Prison" that was completed several years later. Conditions in this stone prison were poor, but it served the city until 1780.²³ Each iteration of the jail in Philadelphia was limited in their capacity and functions. Jails held people who were awaiting trials and sentences, as well as those who were unable to pay debts, but they were not expected to serve as long-term correctional facilities.²⁴ Jails were not an early model of the prison, but instead served as models for reformers of inferior forms of punishment and deterrence.

As jails developed in Philadelphia, prison reform organizations emerged. The Philadelphia Society for Assisting Distressed Prisoners (PSADP), founded in 1776 by Richard Wistar, primarily focused on providing prisoners with food while they were detained.²⁵ While there are few records detailing the activities of the PSADP, this

²³ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 10-13. Teeters quotes Roberts Vaux at length to demonstrate the dissatisfaction reformers had with the Stone Prison. He also quotes Thomas Westcott, who supports Vaux's statements about the deplorable conditions of the prison.

²⁴ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 53.

²⁵ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, x. Records from the PSAMPP in 1861 claim that the PSADP was founded on February 2, 1776. See, Volume 3, Minutes 1852-1880. Vol. 4, Pennsylvania Prison Society Records

organization serves as an important marker for the origins of prison reform in the US. At the time the PSADP formed, the Walnut Street Jail was partially completed, and over one hundred prisoners had been transferred there. The society used covered wheelbarrows to collect food, which would then be taken to the prisoners.²⁶ They also studied the conditions of jails in Philadelphia, and they were able to influence some changes in the criminal law following 1776. Their members paid an annual subscription of ten shillings to support the organization's work. The organization lasted for less than two years, when the British army entered Philadelphia and took control of public jails.²⁷ Despite its short existence, the PSADP influenced later organizations such as the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons.

Jails became the focus of reform efforts, and, through reform, Pennsylvania created the first prison. The Walnut St. Jail was erected in 1773 and designated a penitentiary-house by the General Assembly of Pennsylvania sixteen years later. The following year, another act provided an additional cell block in the yard of the prison.²⁸ Combined, these acts transformed the Walnut St. Jail into the first prison in the United States of America.²⁹

(Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Barnes lists the original managers of the PSADP as Joseph Allen, Christopher Marshall, Christopher Ludwick, Isaac Howell, Richard Wells, Benjamin Shoemaker, Joseph Paschall, Benjamin Marshall, Joseph Stansbury, Benjamin Poultney, Richard Humphreys, Samuel Sansom, and Thomas Moore. Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 80.

²⁶ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 14-15.

²⁷ Robert Vaux, *Notices of the Original, and Successive Efforts, to Improve the Discipline of the Prison at Philadelphia and to Reform the Criminal Code of Pennsylvania: With a few Observations on the Penitentiary System* (Philadelphia: Kimber and Sharpless, No. 93 Market Street. I. Ashmead & Co. Printers, 1826), 9. See also, Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, x, 15-17.

²⁸ Negley Teeters, *The Cradle of the Penitentiary: The Walnut Street Jail at Philadelphia, 1773-1885* (Philadelphia: Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1955), 1.

²⁹ Orlando F. Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs, 1776-1845, with Special Reference to Early Institutions in the State of New York* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 25. Lewis argued that the Walnut Street Prison became the model for the prison system in the United States. Michel Foucault also discusses the unique aspects of the Walnut Street Prison in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), 123-126.

The Board of Inspectors for the prison state the purpose of this new institution was to address three key functions, public security, the reformation of prisoners, and humility toward those “unhappy members of society.”³⁰ Soon after, legislatures funded new institutions in New York, New Jersey, and several other states.³¹ The Walnut St. Prison became a model for incarceration in the United States, and, within decades, the prison became the answer to addressing crime. At the same time, penal reform became a prominent issue. The 1776 Pennsylvania Constitution stated, “the penal laws as heretofore used shall be reformed by the legislature of this state, as soon as may be, and punishments made in some cases less sanguinary, and in general more proportionate to the crimes.”³² Pennsylvania was not alone in addressing penal reform, and in the years following independence, there was a wave of publications and legislation focused on this issue. Influenced by the writings of men like Cesare Beccaria, Americans began to speak out against the old English penal code.³³

Enlightenment thinkers heavily influenced penal reform in the US.³⁴ Cesare Beccaria’s 1764 treatise, *Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, condemned torture and the

³⁰ Leonard H. Roberts, “The Historic Roots of American Prison Reform: A Story of Progress and Failure,” *Journal of Correctional Education*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sept., 1985), 107.

³¹ Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum* 61. *Some Account of the State Prison or Penitentiary House, in the City of New York* (Dover: J. B. Wootten, Printer, 1809) discusses the development of the new prison in NY, involves efforts of Eddy and Schuyler. P 11-12

³² *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and other Organic Laws of the United States, Part II* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1877). 1547. [Compiled by Ben: Perley Poore.] This is from Section 38 of the 1776 Constitution. This same section is also referenced by William Bradford in his famous work, *An Enquiry How Far the Punishment of Death Is Necessary in Pennsylvania*. See William Bradford “An Enquiry How Far the Punishment of Death Is Necessary in Pennsylvania,” *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 12, No. 2 (Apr., 1968): 122-175.

³³ Key figures in this discussion include Benjamin Rush, Thomas Eddy, William Bradford, etc. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 60.

³⁴ Discussions of Enlightenment influence often center on discussions of the influences of liberal, utilitarian, and retributivist perspectives. See Mark E. Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 22-26 and David W. Carrithers, “Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Punishment,” *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 19, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 213-240.

death penalty, and advocated for “proportion between crimes and punishment.”³⁵ He argued that creating a hierarchy of penalties, rather than relying on the terror of torture, would provide a better means of preventing crime. For Beccaria, “deterrence is caused less by the severity of punishment than by the certainty of punishment.”³⁶ To him, the contemporary practice of relying on brutal, public punishments would not deter crime as effectively as creating a standardized system of punishments. Similarly, the philosopher Montesquieu also called for proportional punishment. His treatise, *The Spirit of Laws*, criticized governments that relied on severe punishments; he argued that proportional punishments would signal to society that it was more dangerous to commit serious crimes, and so the threat of severe punishment would deter potential criminals.³⁷

Proportionality proved popular amongst reformers and lawmakers who saw it as a better means punishment.³⁸

Prison reformers were inspired by Beccaria. John Howard, an early advocate of penal reform in Britain, modeled some of his ideas on Beccaria’s theories in *On Crimes and Punishment*. After being appointed high sheriff of Bedfordshire in 1773, Howard became appalled by the conditions he saw during his visits to the Bedford jail. Howard spent the

³⁵ Cesare Beccaria, *An Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, 5th ed., (Dublin: Printed by John Exshaw, No. 86, Dame Street, 1778), 17-18. Quote with explanation, “It is not only the common interest of mankind that crimes should not be committed, but that crimes of every kind should be less frequent in proportion to the evil they produce to society...therefore there out to be a fixed proportion between crimes and punishments.”

³⁶ Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, A Division of G. K. Hall & Co., 1990), 3.

³⁷ Carrithers, “Montesquieu’s Philosophy of Punishment,” 213-214, 218. See also, Rebecca M. McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment: Protest, Politics, and the Making of the American Penal State, 1776-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24-25.

³⁸ McLennan, *The Crisis of Imprisonment*, 21-23. McLennan discusses Beccaria’s influence on Thomas Jefferson, and discusses the use of proportionality in new bills and laws. See also W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 17-18.

next several years visiting prisons throughout Europe, and in 1777 he published *The State of Prisons in England and Wales*. Howard's work included information about prisons he had visited and instructions for needed improvements.³⁹ This publication helped to introduce the practice of single-celling—assigning an individual prisoner to one cell rather than allowing multiple prisoners to live together—in England, and later the United States.⁴⁰

In March of 1787, Dr. Benjamin Rush gave an address concerning prisons and the need for penal reform at the home of Benjamin Franklin.⁴¹ Criminal and penal laws had continued to develop after the Revolutionary War ended. In 1786, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a law requiring prisoners to work on the public roads in Philadelphia in order to pay for their expenses.⁴² To Rush, this form of punishment, clearly visible to the public, was antiquated and inferior. Influenced by men like Cesare Beccaria and John Howard, Rush argued that public punishments would neither reform individual prisoners,

³⁹ Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 2-3. John Howard quotes Beccaria throughout his work in, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales: With Preliminary Observations, and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons* (London: Printed by William Eyres, Sold by T. Cadell in the Strand, and N. Conant in Fleet Street, 1777). For more on John Howard see also Robert Alan Cooper, "Ideas and Their Execution: English Prison Reform," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 10, no.1 (Autumn, 1976): 73-93.

⁴⁰ Orlando F. Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs, 1776-1845, with Special Reference to Early Institutions in the State of New York* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 33-35.

⁴¹ Several scholars have discussed this event. For examples see Orlando F. Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs*, and Robert R. Sullivan, "The Birth of the Prison: The Case of Benjamin Rush," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 31, no. 3 (Spring, 1998): 333-344, Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 1-2. Teeters, in particular, notes that this meeting might have been in connection with the organization, "The Society for Political Inquires, for Mutual Improvement in Knowledge, of Government, and for the advancement of Political Science," which had fifty members and met every two weeks. Teeters notes this connection due to Benjamin Franklin's house being the site of the meeting, and due to Franklin's association with the group, as well as other organizations during this period.

⁴² Sullivan refers to this legislation as the "Wheelbarrow Law" in "The Birth of the Prison: The Case of Benjamin Rush," 334. This reference is likely due to the use of the term "wheelbarrow men," which was used to describe the prisoners forced to labor in public. See Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 21-24.

nor deter crime. In fact, he believed public punishments led to increases in crime.⁴³ Rush was not against punishment as a response to crime, accepting that punishment could include “bodily pain, labour, watchfulness, solitude, and silence.”⁴⁴ However, he insisted that private punishment was key to ensuring effective deterrence and rehabilitation. Public punishment, in contrast, were “injurious to criminals and to society,” and so “crimes should be punished in private, or not punished at all.”⁴⁵ Rush’s address offered some of the key philosophical points that would come to define prisons in Pennsylvania and other states. Ideas concerning private punishment and solitude became critical to debates about deterring crime and alleviating some of the worst miseries within existing penal institutions.

Inspired by Rush’s address, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (PSAMPP) formed in May of 1787.⁴⁶ This group, comprised of influential white men in Philadelphia, worked to actively influence criminal law and change the structure and discipline of prisons.⁴⁷ The organization included physicians—Benjamin

⁴³ Benjamin Rush, “An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and upon Society,” (Philadelphia: Printed by Joseph James, in Chesnut Street, 1787), 4-5. Rush cites some of the influences on his thinking throughout “An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and upon Society,” 12, 13, 14.

⁴⁴ Rush, “An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and upon Society,” 13. Jen Manion notes that Rush did not comment on the resemblances between the forced labor he proposed for prisoners and the forced labor in slavery or indentured servitude. See *Liberty’s Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America*, 64.

⁴⁵ Rush, “An Enquiry into the Effects of Public Punishments upon Criminals and upon Society,” 12.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Rush’s signature appears first on the list of men present at the formation of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons. The list of names includes Benjamin Rush, John Swanwick, John Morrison, Thomas Harrison, Tench Coxe, Zachariah Poulson, Thomas Lloyd, Joseph Moore, William Rogers, John Kaighn, James Whitehall, Richard Wells, Thomas Wistar, Jacob Shoemaker, Isaac Parish, William Lane, Thomas Rogers, Samuel Griffitts, Francis Baily, Joseph James, Charles Marshall, John Olden, Caleb Lownes, Thomas Parker, John Morris, Dr. William Shippen, Dr. Gerardus Clarkson, Jonathan Penrose, Lawrence Sickle, John Baker, James Reynolds, Dr. George Duffield, Benjamin Wynkoop, and George Krebs. See, First Minutes and Constitution 1, Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons Minutes, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁴⁷ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, x.

Rush among them—merchants, artisans, printers, ministers, and lawyers within its ranks.⁴⁸ The PSAMPP believed in their ability to reshape prisons and reform prisoners. As prominent white men, they believed they were best suited to influence change. While the Philadelphia Society for Assisting Distressed Prisoners was the prototype for prison reform organizations in the US, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons quickly distinguished itself.⁴⁹ They sought to reshape penal codes and prisons, and their reform efforts focused on improving the means and results of incarceration.

Members of the PSAMPP belonged to different churches, but the organization's philosophies were heavily influenced by the Quakers, especially the philosophies of separation and reformation that would come to define the Pennsylvania system in the Antebellum period.⁵⁰ According to Quaker beliefs, salvation was possible for any person who opened themselves to the "Inner Light," which meant even people who committed crimes could be redeemed.⁵¹ And there were a number of influential Quakers within the ranks of the PSAMPP, including men such as Caleb Lownes, who served as one of the first inspectors of the Walnut Street Jail and oversaw its renovation. And in 1807, Roberts Vaux joined the PSAMPP, and he became intensely involved in prison reform and the

⁴⁸ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 90-92. Teeters drew on two eighteenth-century directories for a list of members' careers, but still found some members were unlisted. At the first meeting of the PSAMPP, Bishop William White, rector of Christ Church, was elected president of the organization, and Dr. J. Henry Christian Helmuth, rector of Zion Lutheran Church, and Richard Wells were elected to serve as vice presidents. Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 4.

⁴⁹ Richard Wells is the only member of the Philadelphia Society for Assisting Distressed Prisoners who also became a member of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons. See Barnes, *The Evolution of Penology in Pennsylvania*, 83.

⁵⁰ Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System*, 31-36, 51-59.

⁵¹ Christopher Adamson, "Evangelical Quakerism and the early American Penitentiary Revisited: The Contributions of Thomas Eddy, Roberts Vaux, John Griscom, Stephen Grellet, Elisha Bates, and Isaac Hopper," *Quaker History* Vol. 90, no. 2 (Fall 2001) 36-37.

debates over prison systems.⁵² Christian influence pervaded the constitution and work of the PSAMPP. The constitution for the PSAMPP began with the biblical quote, “I was in prison & ye came unto me and the king shall answer, and say unto them, verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Mathew. 25.36.40.”⁵³ In fact, one of the PSAMPP’s first reform efforts was the introduction of religious services at the Walnut Street Jail.⁵⁴

The Constitution of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons included the establishment of committees and physicians to visit the local prisons.⁵⁵ Physicians were charged with visiting “the Prisons when called upon by, or to give advice to the acting committee respecting such matters are connected with the preservation of the health of Persons confined therein, or subject to the government of the officers of the prison.”⁵⁶ Physicians included John Jones, William Shippen, Gerardus Clarkson, and Benjamin Rush.⁵⁷ The organization also established an acting committee that would visit prisons at least once a week to “enquire into the circumstances of the Persons Confined; they shall report such abuses as they shall Discover to the officers of Government who are authorised [sic] to redress them and shall examine the influences of confinement or Punishment upon the morals of the persons who are the subjects of

⁵² See Christopher Adamson, “Evangelical Quakerism and the early American Penitentiary Revisited,” 38-39, 41-43. For biographical sketches of Lownes and Vaux see Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 103-104 and 152-160.

⁵³ First Minutes and Constitution 1, Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons Minutes, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁴ Skotnicki, *Religion and the Development of the American Penal System*, 33.

⁵⁵ First Minutes and Constitution 3, Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons Minutes, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁶ First Minutes and Constitution 3, Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons Minutes, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁷ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 4.

them.”⁵⁸ The earliest accounts of the visits to prisons discuss providing “moral and religious instruction,” as well as supplying food, clothing, bibles, and medical assistance.⁵⁹ They were concerned with the conditions of prisons, and wanted to ensure that those imprisoned were treated humanely. However, they believed direct relief would not be enough to fix the problems they sought to solve.

Enlightenment thinkers provided theories for understanding punishment, but they did not put forward a clear plan for a reformed carceral system. Organizations like the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons addressed means of fixing prisons and influencing the structure of incarceration. In their meeting minutes they noted problems with exacting fees against people who were already in debt, irregularities within prisons, and the lack of separation between male and female prisoners.⁶⁰ The organization attempted to influence the law with their first “Memorial to the Legislature.”⁶¹ This Memorial protested against public punishment and suggested the use of “private or solitary Labor,” which became a core feature of the Pennsylvania prison system.⁶² The members were not the first men to discuss solitary labor or confinement—reformer John Howard’s work in England had already introduced the practice of single-celling in 1777—but they helped to popularize the idea in the United States.⁶³

⁵⁸ First Minutes and Constitution 3, Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons Minutes, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁹ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 49.

⁶⁰ First Minutes and Constitution 44-45, 50, 66, Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons Minutes, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶¹ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 27.

⁶² Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 447. Teeter’s Appendix I contains the full text of the first memorial, dated January 29, 1788. The Pennsylvania prison system eventually became known as the “separate system” due to its emphasis on solitary labor and confinement.

⁶³ Orlando F. Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs, 1776-1845, with Special Reference to Early Institutions in the State of New York* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 33-35. See also Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 33.

The first Memorials of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons discussed the lack of sufficient clothing for prisoners, poor accommodations, and the problem of prisoners attempting to purchase alcohol within jails.⁶⁴ The society also took issue with the intermixing of debtors, untried prisoners, and convicted prisoners. They argued that prisons needed to classify and separate prisoners in order to prevent these groups from communicating, for “debtors in mixing with the criminals have formed connexions [sic] which ultimately led to their being convicts themselves.”⁶⁵ If interactions between different types of incarcerated subjects would lead to more criminals and more crime, then the solution was to separate these prisoners.

The philosophy of separation became a primary feature of the reform efforts of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, and they directly linked separation to moral reformation. Separation served as a solution for addressing some of the many problems that Protestant reformers saw in prisons—problems that they also directly associated with the poor. They highlighted illicit sex, the consumption of alcohol, and the need to perform hard labor as key issues they needed to address immediately. Thus, they offered the unanimous opinion that “Solitary confinement to hard labor and a total abstinence from spiritous liquors will prove the most effectual means of reforming these unhappy creatures, and that many evils might be prevented by keeping the debtors from the necessity of associating with those who are committed for trial as well as by a constant separation of the sexes.”⁶⁶ They argued separation would prevent hardened criminals from corrupting other prisoners, while simultaneously providing a better

⁶⁴ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 29-30. See also Appendix I, Memorial No. 1 and Memorial No. 2.

⁶⁵ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 450. Appendix I, Memorial No. 2.

⁶⁶ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 451. Appendix I, Memorial No. 2.

means for prisoners to reform themselves. Hard labor was also key to their reform efforts. Labor was meant to serve as a punishment for prisoners, and, simultaneously, reformers believed labor would prevent prisoners from being too idle. Convict labor was also profitable, and hard labor became a key aspect of most prison systems.⁶⁷

Promoting the separation of the sexes did not lead to an end to sex in prisons. As Regina Kunzel's work has shown, same-sex sexual practices took place in prisons throughout the nineteenth century. Prison reformers, architects, and officials attempted to create institutions and spaces that would isolate prisoners, but sex, including masturbation which was also considered a "solitary vice" was always present in prisons.⁶⁸ Different forms of sexual acts, including consensual sexual practices persisted in jails and prisons despite continuous attempts to regulate sex.

Separation also failed to completely protect women from non-consensual sex and men's abuse. Women prisoners were also particularly vulnerable to sexual assault, forced prostitution, and rape. Before prison matrons were hired, female prisoners were supervised by men, who could easily take advantage of their vulnerability. Female prisoners were also often blamed for sexual misconduct; prison officials and male prisoners blamed female prisoners for driving men to masturbation, fostering prostitution, and engaging in sex that led to pregnancy. These complaints forced blame on women with no regard for their ability to consent to or deny sex.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Martin B. Miller, "At Hard Labor: Rediscovering the 19th Century Prison," *Issues in Criminology*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 1974), 91.

⁶⁸ See Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15-43. Jen Manion also discusses same-sex intimacy and same-sex sexual practices in *Liberty's Prisoners*, 169-178.

⁶⁹ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), xxx, 11-12. Rafter discusses multiple complaints leveled against female

Early records demonstrate the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons wanted women to be protected from men in prisons, and they discussed issues women faced when they had their children with them.⁷⁰ However, their main ideas about prison reform tended to focus on men. Part of the emphasis on a male prisoner subject was due to the predominance of male prisoners compared to the lower number of female prisoners.⁷¹ Although they were incarcerated at lower rates, women did commit crimes throughout the antebellum period and they did face arrest and incarceration.⁷² Women were most likely to be incarcerated for petty crimes. Petty crime included so-called moral offenses such as disorderly conduct, vagrancy, drunkenness, adultery, fornication, and a number of property crimes. This meant that women were more likely to be arrested and charged for committing crimes of a sexual nature or crimes deemed immoral.⁷³ The gendered nature of crime is significant, as it demonstrates what social transgressions were most likely to lead to a woman's arrest and incarceration. Women

prisoners including comments from a former male inmate, reports from a Sing Sing Chaplain, and national authorities on prison management.

⁷⁰ Volume 1. Minutes 1787-1809, Minutes from January 12, 1789, Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁷¹ Several primary and secondary sources confirm the comparatively lower number of female prisoners throughout US prisons during the nineteenth century. For example, Dorothea Dix noted the low number of women in state prisons during the antebellum period, and even suggested women should be sentenced to country prisons due to lower numbers in her *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, Second edition (Philadelphia: Josephite Kite & Co., Printers, 1845), 107-108. Nicole Hahn Rafter has also discussed the lower number of female prisoners in her article, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," *Crime and Justice* Vol. 5 (1983): 129-181. Estelle B. Freedman also discusses the issue of women's incarceration rates in *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930*, 8-15.

⁷² Contemporary penologists disagreed about the exact reasons for women's lower rates of incarceration. Francis Lieber argued the women were incarcerated at lower rates due to their nature and position within society. However, William Crawford argued the fewer women were incarcerated because prisons lacked space for female prisoners and courts were reluctant to commit women to prisons that were not sufficiently suitable for women. See Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 11. Rafter quotes Lieber's "Translator's Preface," and Crawford's *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States*.

⁷³ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 22-24.

also committed more violent crimes such as manslaughter and murder, and when convicted of such crimes, were sentenced to serve in penitentiaries.⁷⁴

Still, while penologists found that fewer women were imprisoned compared to men, the reasons proved complex. A study by Francis Lieber claimed that reasons for women's lower rates of incarceration were due to their nature as women and their position in society. He posited women were less likely to be exposed or tempted to commit crime, that they did not have the "courage or strength" needed to commit the crimes commonly committed by men, and that they could not easily commit a number of crimes that would lead to their incarceration.⁷⁵ William Crawford, however, argued fewer women were incarcerated due to the lack of space for women in existing prisons, as well as a general reluctance to commit women to prisons that were not suitable for them.⁷⁶ Regardless of the reasons, these lower numbers contributed to women's neglect in prisons.

The members of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons presented the separate system as an enlightened and more humanitarian form of punishment. However, the turn against public forms of violent punishment did not mean

⁷⁴ See Freedman, *Their Sisters Keepers*, 11, and Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 22-23. See also G.S. Rowe, "Women's Crime and Criminal Administration in Pennsylvania, 1763-1790" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 109, No. 3 (1985): 336-337.

⁷⁵ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 11. Rafter includes a block quote from Francis Lieber, "Translator's Preface," to Gustave de Beaumont and Alexis de Tocqueville, *On the Penitentiary System in the United States and Its Application in France* (orig. 1833; repr. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), 8. Lieber also argued that punishment and incarceration was directly related to an individual's ability or choice to cause danger to society. Thus, he likely believed that men were more capable of causing danger to society. See Francis Lieber, *A Popular Essay on Subjects of Penal Law, and on Uninterrupted Solitary Confinement at Labor: As Contradistinguished to Solitary Confinement at Night and Joint Labor by Day, in a letter to John Bacon, Esquire, President of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons* (Philadelphia: Published by Order of the Society, 1838), 31.

⁷⁶ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 11. Rafter includes a block quote from William Crawford, *Report on the Penitentiaries of the United States*, 1835 Reprint (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1969), 26-27.

an end to punishment or violence. “Cruel treatment is one thing, and punishment is another, and entirely different thing,” noted The Prisoner’s Friend; “the former enrages the passions and debases the moral principles; but the latter elevates the noble faculties of the mind, and leads to an abhorrence of all wrong, and a love and appreciation of right.”⁷⁷ Prison sentences already represented a form of punishment, but reformers believed the separate system would provide a replacement for the violent, public punishments of the colonial era. Maintaining enforced separation during incarceration was meant to serve as an additional punishment and deterrent to crime. However, as later chapters will discuss, violent discipline still existed in “reformed” prisons. The claims of humanitarianism did not necessarily lead to humane treatment for prisoners, and both male and female prisoners faced violence in prisons throughout the nineteenth century.

By the 1820s, reformers began debating the merits of different prison systems and designs. The Pennsylvania system, or separate system, required prisoners to serve their sentences in total isolation. The prison would house individuals in cells where they would work quietly and, theoretically, apart from other prisoners. This system contrasted the Auburn system, also called the silent system, developed in New York.⁷⁸ The Auburn system required solitary confinement at night combined with group activity in total silence during the day. In Pennsylvania, Eastern State Penitentiary was the primary example of the separate system, and in New York, Auburn Prison was the primary

⁷⁷ Rev. H. H. Baker, “Philosopher of Reform. Article IV,” *The Prisoner’s Friend: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Criminal Reform, Philosophy, Literature, Science, and Art*, ed. Charles Spear, Vol. II, No. 7 (March, 1850) (Boston: Published by the Editor, 25 Cornhill, New York: Fowlers & Wells, London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 306-307.

⁷⁸ The Auburn system, also called the silent system, is often viewed as the competing prison system to the Pennsylvania, or separate, system. See W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965).

example of the silent system. While both the Pennsylvania and Auburn systems emphasized the need to prevent prisoners from communicating and insisted on the importance of labor, debates raged about the merits and faults of the two competing systems.

Architecture and design became key to these debates. The fourth annual report of the Boston Prison Discipline Society stated, “there is such a thing as architecture adapted to morals; that, other things being equal, the prospect of improvement in morals, depends, in some degree, upon the construction of buildings.”⁷⁹ For reformers, the earlier iterations of jails and lockups were inefficient in design and structure. New prisons needed specific architecture and systems to improve both punishment and the possibilities of rehabilitation. The representative institutions of the Pennsylvania and Auburn systems each offered different prison designs. Designed by John Haviland, Eastern State Penitentiary was initially built with “seven radiating wings of cell blocks, each cell having an individual exercise yard.” Each wing held thirty-eight cells, and the partitioning walls between cells were eighteen inches thick to discourage the prisoners from communicating. Each cell was equipped with a “feeding drawer” and the double doors of each cell had peepholes that allowed prison officials to observe each prisoner.⁸⁰ In contrast, Auburn Prison designed a unique type of cellblock; Auburn’s north wing cell block was “an island of cells which was five tiers high and surrounded on all four sides by a vacant area eleven feet wide.” Each cell was seven feet long, seven feet high, and three

⁷⁹ *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1829), 55.

⁸⁰ Jacqueline Thibaut, “To Pave the Way to Penitence”: Prisoners and Discipline at the Eastern State Penitentiary 1829-1835,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 106, Bo. 2 (Apr., 1982), 192

and one-half feet in width. Each tier consisted of two rows of these cells placed back-to-back. The island of cells and the area around it were surrounded by an “outer shell pierced by small windows.”⁸¹ Thus, the Auburn and Pennsylvania systems offered different systems of punishment as well as different prison architecture.

Both the Pennsylvania and Auburn systems had their staunch supporters.⁸² However, the Auburn system was more widely adopted. Its success lay in its critiques concerning the constant solitary confinement of prisoners, but the far more convincing argument focused on costs. Establishing an institution modeled after the Pennsylvania system was more expensive; prisons modeled after the Auburn system cost less to construct and were able to show greater profits from convict labor.⁸³ State legislatures paid careful attention to prison budgets; the costs and productivity of prisons was an ongoing concern throughout the antebellum period.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 67.

⁸² Other examples of the Auburn system include the Connecticut Prison (Wethersfield) and the Maryland Penitentiary (Baltimore.) Other examples of the separate system include the Western Penitentiary (Pittsburgh, PA) and Moyamensing County Prison (also called Philadelphia County Prison in Philadelphia, PA.) See Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 7.

“Samuel Gridley Howe (a Pennsylvania advocate) against Mathew Carey (for Auburn, Dorothea Dix against Louis Dwight, Francis Lieber against Francis Wayland. Every report from the New York and Pennsylvania penitentiaries was an explicit apology for its procedures and an implicit attack on its opponents.” See, Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 81.

First and Second Annual Reports of the Inspectors of the Eastern State Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, Made to the Legislature at the Sessions of 1829-1830, and 1830-31 (Philadelphia: Printed by Thomas Kit, 64 Walnut Street, 1831). These reports were printed for the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons. The inspectors during this period include Charles Sidney Coxe (President), Thomas Bradford, Junr. (Secretary), Daniel H. Miller (Treasurer), John Swift, and Benjamin H Richards. The Warden during this period was Samuel R. Wood and the physician was Franklin Bache. Praise for the separate system begins on page 10, which is part of the second report, and this particular report was “attested” by Bradford and also signed by Coxe.

⁸³ For critiques of the PA system see M. Carey, *Thoughts on Penitentiaries and Prison Discipline* (Philadelphia: Clark & Raser, 1831), 36-40. See also Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 88.

⁸⁴ Notably, Eastern State Penitentiary was an expensive prison. The 1834 investigation into Eastern State Penitentiary heavily focused on the costs of the prison and the use, and misuse, of funds. For information on the investigation see Thomas B. McElwee, *A concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, together with a detailed statement of the proceedings of the committee, appointed by the legislature, December 6th, 1834, for the purpose of examining into the economy and management of that institution*,

Despite the widespread debates about the efficacy of the competing systems, neither Eastern State Penitentiary nor Auburn Prison applied their own systems to incarcerated women. Eastern State Penitentiary initially had a low number of female prisoners. However, when the first four women arrived there, they immediately posed problems to the system of solitude and labor set up at the prison, for the women performed domestic labor in public spaces, which explicitly went against the system of the prison.⁸⁵ Officials at Auburn prison also failed to apply their own system to the incarcerated women under their care. Even as the Auburn system prevailed, the women of Auburn spent their days sequestered in an attic space above the kitchen. In theory, the Auburn system should have required these women to labor in silence in a communal space during the day and spend their evenings in separate cells, but in reality, they were stuck in an overcrowded, unsanitary space. The head of the kitchen was charged with monitoring the women, but the New York Committee on State Prisons noted that the women were effectively unsupervised.⁸⁶ Reformers referenced women in their early discussions about the need for separation within prisons, yet the treatment of women at Auburn prison showed the reforms did not necessarily extend to incarcerated women.⁸⁷ Eventually, prison matrons would be identified as the solution to properly disciplining

embracing the testimony taken on that occasion, and legislative proceedings connected therewith, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Neall & Massey, 1835).

⁸⁵ Leslie Patrick, "Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country's Premier Prison, Eastern Penitentiary, 1831," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 67, no. 3 (Summer 2000), 365.

⁸⁶ Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," 134-135. Info taken from the New York Committee on State Prisons, 1832.

⁸⁷ For example, the first report of the Prison Discipline Society in Boston specifically cited the separation of the sexes as a key issue of penal reform. They argued separating men and women was an issue of classification, but noted that the separation of the sexes was an ongoing problem that had been neglected in too many prisons. See, *Reports of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston. 1826-1835*, vol. 1 (Boston: Press of T.R. Marvin, 1855), lxiii.

and punishing incarcerated women. The introduction of matrons was uneven and came with new forms of surveillance.⁸⁸

Reform efforts aimed at the universal improvement of prisons often failed to consider incarcerated women. The separation of the sexes, for example, was a measure meant to aid all prisoners, and yet it caused problems for women at multiple institutions throughout the antebellum period. As reform societies and state legislatures began to pay greater attention to incarcerated women, prisons increasingly enforced the separation of the sexes. By the late 1830s, several states had begun to house incarcerated women in individual cells, and many institutions had developed separate units, and in some cases entirely separate buildings, for women.⁸⁹ Reformers saw this separation as an improvement as it reduced crowding and gave women some more privacy. However, separation also brought other disadvantages in some prisons. In Ohio, the women's annex was separated from the main penitentiary. This gave women their own space as well as a yard for fresh air and exercise—all important improvements reformers wanted—however, separation from the main penitentiary also meant separation from the medical resources, educational resources, and religious services in the main building. The annex also became overcrowded, but the structure could not be enlarged.⁹⁰ Thus, reform efforts

⁸⁸ Prison matrons will be discussed more heavily in later chapters.

⁸⁹ Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 5 (1983), 135-136. Specifically, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio begin rejecting the "large-room plan" and start housing women in individual cells. Still, single-celling for women, and separation of incarcerated women from men was not consistent in all prisons or all states. Reports from prison reform associations through the antebellum period discuss separation as an ongoing problem. For example, the *First Annual Report of the New Jersey Prison Reform Association, Together with the Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting, Held in the City of Trenton, on the 16th, 17th, and 18th of January, 1850* (Trenton: Printed by Phillips & Boswell, 1850) discusses problems in Essex, Burlington, and Salem. See pages 14, 32.

⁹⁰ Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," 136.

aimed at helping female prisoners could still bring new problems, and new harms, to women.

Women constituted a smaller portion of the prison population in the United States, which contributed to their unequal treatment and neglect. Despite the labor women performed while incarcerated, some prison agents insisted incarcerated women were more trouble than they were worth. An 1812 report from Newgate Prison in New York stated the women were “the very refuse of society: They are ever complaining; very refractory; and, of course, very much under prison punishment; their work never has, and perhaps never will, be made productive.”⁹¹ Reports frequently indicated that women were more costly to prisons and less productive compared to male prisoners, which led to complaints from prison officials. In this sense, prison officials believed female prisoners were not worth the cost of incarceration because their presence in prisons would never lead to a profit for the prison. These complaints persisted through the antebellum era.⁹² Prison officials and state legislatures recognized that they could not simply stop arresting or convicting women, but women were neither wanted nor prioritized in prisons.

Female criminals constituted a particular problem in antebellum American prison systems. Women were not fully included in many reform efforts, and reformers, prison officials, and state authorities frequently identified incarcerated women as liabilities.

British Quaker reformer Elizabeth Fry insisted that separate prisons for women, run by

⁹¹ *Journal of the State of New-York: At Their Thirty-Seventh Session, Begun and held at the City of Albany, the Twenty-Fifth Day of January, 1814* (Albany: Printed by H.C. Southwick, for S. Southwick, 1814), 197. This particular section was written by Prison Agent, William Torrey, February 12, 1814. Torrey is listed as the agent of the state prison on page 268.

⁹² See Mark Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), L. Mara Dodge, “‘One female prisoner is of more trouble than twenty males’: Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896” *Journal of Social History* Vol. 32 no. 4 (1999): 907-930.

women, were the ideal solution for women's prison reform. Fry, who first envisioned the role of the prison matron, believed that female prisoners required female supervision. Fry's vision of prison reform inspired new efforts in the United States. Although the United States did not create an entirely separate female prison until 1873, the work of women prison reformers led to changes in American prisons.⁹³

⁹³ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 29-30. Although Mount Pleasant Female Prison is often recognized as the first separate women's prison in the US, it was still connected to Sing Sing Prison. Therefore, the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls, which opened in Indianapolis in 1873 is the first completely separate and independent women's prison. The Indiana Reformatory was also the first prison to be run by an entirely female staff.

Chapter Two:

Surveillance and the Prison Matron: Elizabeth Fry's Vision of Women's Prison Reform

"Yesterday we were some hours at Newgate with the poor female felons, attending to their outward necessities; we had been twice previously. Before we went away, dear Anna Buxton uttered a few words in supplication, and very unexpectedly to myself I did also. I heard weeping, and I thought they appeared much tendered; a very solemn quiet was observed; it was a striking scene, the poor people on their knees around us, in their deplorable condition."¹ Thus, Elizabeth Fry marked her first visit to Newgate Prison in February of 1813. Although this moment has been dramatized in subsequent biographies, Fry initially gave no indication that she intended to dedicate a great portion of her life to women's prison reform. However, Fry would become one of the most influential and revered figures in women's prison reform in both England and the United States. Fry's reform efforts focused on preventing harm to prisoners and helping them become reintegrated into society after their release. She inspired the creation of several prison reform societies and is credited with numerous prison reform efforts, including creating the position of the prison matron. However, her efforts to aid prisoners also created new means of surveilling and punishing women within prisons. Surveillance and control were central to her work even as she emphasized her motivations to protect women. Fry's advocacy set the standard for women's prison reform.

¹ Francis Cresswell, *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry: By Her Daughter, Mrs. Francis Cresswell. Abridged from the Larger Memoir, With Alterations and Additions* (London: James Nisbet and Co., Berners Street, 1868), 53. This memoir is an abridged version of a two-volume memoir created by two of Elizabeth Fry's daughters using Fry's journal and letters. The larger version is titled, *Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, with Extracts from her Journal and Letters. Edited by Two of her Daughters. In Two Volumes* (London: Charles Gilpin, 5, Bishopsgate Street Without. John Hatchard & Son, 187, Piccadilly, 1847).

This chapter examines Elizabeth Fry's prison reform efforts in England and the impact of her ideas in the United States. I analyze Fry's memoir, biographies, and Fry's writings in order to assess her ideas and reform efforts. This chapter pays particular attention to Fry's creation of the position of prison matron. I argue that the introduction of prison matrons created a new form of surveillance for incarcerated women. Fry believed this surveillance would protect female prisoners from harm and reform them. However, this new surveillance also introduced new rules and the possibility for increased punishment for female prisoners. Fry inspired many women's prison reform organizations in the United States, who came to share her goal of employing a prison matron became a goal for these organizations.

Christian hagiography has influenced accounts of Fry's life. Many contemporary depictions portray Fry as a saint-like individual.² Fry was, of course, not a saint, but someone whose life was bound up in the complexities of her own ideals, motives, and politics. Elizabeth Fry was born Elizabeth Gurney in Norwich, Norfolk, England in May of 1780. Her parents were prominent Quakers, and Fry was considered a hereditary member of the Quaker faith.³ Fry wrote of challenges in her childhood, "I had...a fearful, rather a reserved mind...I was considered and called very stupid and obstinate...I think, having the name of being stupid really tended to make me so, and discouraged my efforts

² For a full discussion on Elizabeth Fry and hagiography see Helen Rogers, "Elizabeth Fry and Sarah Martin," in *Making and Remaking Saint in Nineteenth-Century Britain* edited by Gareth Atkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). Examples of hagiographical portrayals include Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards, *Elizabeth Fry: The Angel of the Prisons* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1916) and Janet Whitney, *Elizabeth Fry, Quaker Heroine* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1936).

³ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 1-3. *Notably, Elizabeth Fry's mother, Catherine was a member of the Barclay family, the founders of the Barclays Bank.

to learn.”⁴ Subsequent biographers contrasted her struggles as a young child with her later successes. When Fry described losing her mother at age twelve, she wrote simply that remembering her mother’s illness and death remained sad in the present day. However, biographers stressed that her mother’s death was a turning point in Fry’s life. These early years are marked in writings by a lack of interest in learning, less interest in religious faith, a powerful fearfulness, and the loss of her mother—obstacles that Fry would eventually overcome in order to become a faithful Quaker, whose faith was integral to her eventual participation and leadership in prison reform. While Fry was not as religious as a child, she was influenced by Quaker missionaries as a teenager. At age seventeen, Fry met the American Quaker minister, William Savery. After listening to Savery speak at a meeting for the Society of Friends, Fry was inspired with renewed faith.⁵ “To-day,” Fry wrote, “I have felt *that there is a God.*”⁶ After meeting Savery, Fry became more dedicated to the Quaker faith, and she made new connections with Quakers from England and the United States.

The Society of Friends believed in the spiritual equality of the sexes, and afforded women greater religious authority than other sects. Fry expressed interest in serving as a minister for a number of years. However, she waited many years before beginning to preach. In 1800, at the age of twenty, Elizabeth married Joseph Fry, who also came from a

⁴ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 7. It is important to note that primary sources written by Fry during her childhood are limited. Fry did keep a journal as a child, however, in 1828 she destroyed all of her journals written prior to the year 1797. Her memoirs contain, instead, a short summary of her childhood. For more information on this see, Deanna Lynn Matheusik, “The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” PhD Diss., (Vanderbilt University, 2013), 55.

⁵ J.E. Brown, *Elizabeth Fry: The Prisoner’s Friend* (London: The Sunday School Association, 1902), 10-12. *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 17.

⁶ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 18.

Quaker family, although a stricter one.⁷ Joseph worked as a banker in London, and so Elizabeth moved and settled into a house at St. Mildred's Court.⁸ The couple would eventually have eleven children, one of whom died at a young age. When the Society of Friends publicly recognized Fry as one of their ministers in 1811, Fry already had seven children.⁹ Fry's connections to prominent Quakers, both familial and through various friends and societies, proved beneficial when she began her reform work, but she needed support beyond the Society of Friends in order to enact change.

Elizabeth Fry was not the first person to tackle prison reform in England. Long before Fry's first visit to Newgate, reformer John Howard had worked to spread ideas about prison reform. Howard had been inspired by the work of the enlightenment thinker, Cesare Beccaria, whose 1764 publication *On Crimes and Punishment* advocated for penal reform. Beccaria condemned torture and capital punishment, and he called for the creation of a hierarchy of penalties that would help prevent crime.¹⁰ Howard's *The State of Prisons in England and Wales* included information about prisons he had visited and instructions for improvements. He helped to introduce the practice of single-celling—

⁷ "Entry of marriage to Fry, Joseph." Photostat. (Original in General Register Office, Somerset House, London.) Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College. SC 044, FRY, MSS, 1800, 8m0 19. Matheuszik describes Fry's ongoing debates about her desire and ability to become a minister in "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 81-91.

⁸ Brown, *Elizabeth Fry: The Prisoner's Friend*, 19. *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 28.

⁹ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 41.

¹⁰ Larry E. Sullivan, *The Prison Reform Movement: Forlorn Hope* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 2-3. John Howard quotes Beccaria throughout his work in, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales: With Preliminary Observations, and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons* (London: Printed by William Eyres, Sold by T. Cadell in the Strand, and N. Conant in Fleet Street, 1777). For more on John Howard see also Robert Alan Cooper, "Ideas and Their Execution: English Prison Reform," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 10, no.1 (Autumn, 1976): 73-93.

assigning an individual prisoner to one cell rather than allowing multiple prisoners to live together—in England, and later the United States.¹¹

English Quakers, including members of Fry's family, were heavily involved in prison reform during the early-nineteenth century.¹² Fry's brothers-in-law Thomas Fowell Buxton and Samuel Hoare helped William Allen and Basil Montagu found the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge upon the Punishment of Death. And, in 1810, Fry's husband was listed as a committee member for the society, and several of Fry's family members were listed as subscribers.¹³ The Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge upon the Punishment of Death focused on creating a library of publications and works on capital punishment and prisons. They published some pamphlets, but stopped after 1817.¹⁴ While not directly involved as a member or subscriber, Fry had connections to the men engaged in these discussions on prison reform.

French-born American Quaker missionary Stephen Grellet was the key to Fry's first visit to Newgate Prison. Grellet arrived in London in December of 1812 to begin a religious mission. Several weeks after he arrived, Grellet, along with William Allen and William Forster, visited several local jails and prisons, including Newgate.¹⁵ "When I first entered, the foulness of the air was almost insupportable," Grellet wrote of his entrance to

¹¹ Orlando F. Lewis, *The Development of American Prisons and Prison Customs, 1776-1845, with Special Reference to Early Institutions in the State of New York* (Montclair, NJ: Patterson Smith, 1967), 33-35.

¹² See Robert Alan Cooper, "The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-23," *Quaker History*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring 1979): 3-19.

¹³ Deanna Lynn Matheuszik, "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," PhD Diss., (Vanderbilt University, 2013), 108-109. Robert Alan Cooper notes in his article, "The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-1823," that founders Allen and Montagu were inspired by reform in Philadelphia, in reference to the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons. (4)

¹⁴ Robert Alan Cooper, "The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-1823," 5.

¹⁵ Deanna Lynn Matheuszik, "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 1.

the women's quarters.¹⁶ And, after viewing the sick room, he wrote, "I was astonished beyond description at the mass of woe and misery I beheld." Sick women were lying on the bare floor, many lacked proper clothing, and several of the young children were "almost naked."¹⁷ Upon seeing these conditions, Grellet appealed to Fry, whom he believed would be willing to aid the women of the prison, and whose residence at St. Mildred's Court was a short walk to Newgate.¹⁸

Newgate Prison had already undergone some reform in the form of architectural changes in the eighteenth century, and was divided into quadrangles and designated spaces to separate prisoners, but conditions in Newgate were unsafe, unsanitary, and overcrowded.¹⁹ During Fry's visit, women were confined to the "untried side." However, the partition wall separating the women from the larger portion of the quadrangle was insufficient. This meant that male prisoners still had some access to female prisoners. And the space the women lived in was too small, "nearly three hundred women with their numerous children were crowded; tried and untried misdemeanants and felons, without classification, without employment." Fry saw hundreds of imprisoned women with children at Newgate, all of whom were under the supervision of a couple of men. Fry was

¹⁶ Stephen Grellet, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labors of Stephen Grellet*, Vol. 1, ed. Benjamin Seebohm (Philadelphia, 1862), 196.

¹⁷ Grellet, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labors of Stephen Grellet* (1862), 196.

¹⁸ Stephen Grellet, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labors of Stephen Grellet*, ed. Benjamin Seebohm (Philadelphia, 1870), 129-131. See also Robert Alan Cooper, "Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform," *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 42, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1981), 682. In Grellet's memoir he does not explain how he became acquainted with Fry. He wrote that after leaving Newgate he went to visit his "much valued friend, Elizabeth J. Fry." See Grellet, *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labors of Stephen Grellet* (1862), 196. This indicates that they had already met, likely due to their shared connections with other prominent Quakers, and developed some sort of relationship. Deanna Lynn Matheuszik also notes that Grellet and Fry served as Quaker ministers at the same time, and that Fry was already well-respected within the Quaker society despite only formally ministering for a few years at this point. See "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 1, 3.

¹⁹ Harold D. Kalman, "Newgate Prison" *Architectural History*, Vol. 12 (1969): 50-61 + 108-112.

also appalled by the lack of clothing and provisions for the women. The female prisoners did not escape her judgment, and Fry noted that the women begged from strangers, purchased liquor within the prison and drank openly, and used foul language.²⁰

The governor at Newgate did not trust the female prisoners to respect the visiting women. He advised Fry and her companion Anna Buxton to leave their watches in his care because the prisoners might steal their valuables. Fry claimed she and Buxton refused this offer, and went to see the women while carrying all of their possessions. Whatever plans Fry might have had to proselytize were not carried through, as the conditions were so deplorable that she and Buxton focused on meeting some of the physical needs of the female prisoners, for “at this time nothing more was done than to supply the most destitute with clothes.”²¹ This early visit gave Fry a lengthy list of conditions and problems which she, and the prison reform association she would form, would eventually address.

Although Fry later claimed that she was deeply moved by the women she met at Newgate in 1813, she did not resume her visits to the prison until the end of 1816.²² Certainly she gave no indication in 1813 that she would dedicate her life to prison reform. This 1813 visit was an ordinary practice of charity—a practice Fry already had engaged in for fifteen years. Fry had regularly supplied fabrics, medicine, and food for the poor but

²⁰ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 54-55. Note, untried prisoners differed from prisoners who had already faced trial and received a sentence for their crime. Untried prisoners included prisoners who awaited trials and sentencing.

²¹ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 55. E. R. Pitman also describes this event, and claims that nothing was stolen from Fry or Buxton. See E. R. Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), 42. Other accounts state Fry did leave her watch behind. See, Alison Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 148.

²² *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry* notes that her friends were still involved in correctional/prison related reform issues during the break between Fry’s activities. This suggests she was possibly still informed of issues, but busy with other matters. See pages 67-68.

she was not an activist or reformer. She acted in her capacity as a wealthy woman who could offer immediate material aid, like many of her peers.²³ For the next few years Fry was ill, gave birth to her ninth and tenth children, and dealt with the deaths of her oldest brother and her daughter Betsy. In addition, the Fry business suffered, and she continued to serve as a minister.²⁴ The emphasis on Fry's first visit to Newgate has been exaggerated to perpetuate a hagiographical retelling of Fry's life that ignores other aspects of her life.



Figure 1. Elizabeth Fry Reading to the Prisoners in Newgate, in 1816, engraving, proof before letters, Jerry Barrett, artist; Thomas-Oldham Barlow, engraver; n.d [[1860 print]]. Library Company of Philadelphia Print Department.

Figure 1 depicts Fry's visit to Newgate in 1816, showing Fry amidst the female prisoners. The man immediately to the rear and left of Fry is Stephen Grellet, who first exposed Fry to the conditions in Newgate. Other men in the picture include Fry's brother, Joseph Gurney and Fry's brother-in-law Thomas F. Buxton, who became a Member of

²³ Deanna Lynn Matheuszik, "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," PhD Diss., (Vanderbilt University, 2013), 103-104

²⁴ Matheuszik, "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 105.

Parliament in 1818.²⁵ The figures on the right side of the picture represent the women and children confined within Newgate. Some of the women appear to be listening to Fry, some weeping, while others are drinking and whispering amongst themselves.²⁶ The women's clothing appears tattered and some lack shoes. One woman is hiding a deck of cards behind her back, and the two children playing at the bottom of the picture are holding a card, to demonstrate the negative effects of gambling and games within the prison. The board on the wall reads, "NOTICE is hereby given, *That should any of the Bibles, Prayer Books, or other Printed Books which are deposited in the Ward, for the use of the Prisoners, be injured, mutilated or defaced every Prisoner in the Ward where such Offense may occur will be held responsible, and be subject to such punishments as the Keeper may direct.*"

Barrett's artwork depicted Fry as a benevolent guide to the women of Newgate. Fry is the clear focal point in the image; she sits at the center of the picture, reflecting her importance as the reformer who intends to aid the imprisoned women. The prisoners are depicted as women in need of her care and guidance, providing a particular viewpoint that reinforced the importance of Fry's intervention at Newgate. As one scholar notes, Fry is shown in her "Quaker garb, open palm, and hand on the sacred book (the latter propped over a white cloth that makes the plain table resemble an altar)," much like "the

²⁵ This information is provided by LCP on the folder for the original print from Figure One.

²⁶ This image matches a description of Newgate offered in Elizabeth Fry's memoir. During her first visit to the prison, she noted that women were openly drinking and breaking rules despite the presence of "military sentinels." She believed that there was no true discipline for the women, and found that the women could easily purchase liquor within the prison. See, *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 55. The presence of alcohol at Newgate was not a unique problem. As noted in Chapter One, the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons also found that prisoners were able to purchase alcohol within jails. See, Negley K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 29-30.

saints in art.”²⁷ This saint-like portrayal was intentional; Barrett wanted Fry to appear inspirational to other middle-class women.

The ideology of Protestant women’s moral superiority was critical to nineteenth-century domesticity, and, in turn, the work of nineteenth-century reformers. And, domesticity’s inextricable links to class are key to understanding how women used virtue as a means of participating in the public sphere.²⁸ Fry used her position as a middle-class, white, Christian woman to claim a particular kind of benevolent power—a virtue that was understood as being unique to women, but, particularly, women of Fry’s economic and social class.²⁹ Fry acknowledged the ideological importance of women “in all her domestic and social relations, when she is filling the station of a daughter, a sister, a wife, a mother, or a mistress of a family.” However, she insisted that it was a “dangerous error to suppose that the duties of females end here.” She argued that women’s “natural” qualities made

²⁷ Alison Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 151.

²⁸ The relationship between separate spheres, domesticity, and class has been studied by numerous scholars. Mary P. Ryan’s work in *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) is particularly important for the discussion of the relationship of the identity of the American middle class to family and domestic values. Two particularly useful articles for the British context are Amanda Vickery, “Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jun., 1993): 384-414, which offers a concise overview of the separate spheres framework and a critique of *Family Fortunes*. And, Dror Wahrman, “‘Middle-Class’ Domesticity Goes Public: Gender, Class, and Politics from Queen Caroline to Queen Victoria,” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 4, *Make the English Middle Class, ca. 1700-1850* (Oct., 1993): 396-432, which traces the changing relationship between the middle class and the “gendered separation of spheres,” 398.

²⁹ Sarita Srivastava argues that “colonial and contemporary representations of virtue, honesty, and benevolence have been a historical foundation of whiteness, bourgeois respectability, and femininity,” in “‘You’re calling me a racist?’ The Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism,” *Signs*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Autumn 2005), 30. Srivastava’s overall analysis is focused on a more contemporary discussion of feminism and social movements, but her discussion of the historical links between benevolence and whiteness are important for understanding how white, middle-class women drew on benevolence as a source of power.

them suited to many forms of work; that is, Fry believed middle-class women were best-suited for the work of aiding and reforming lower-class and poor women.³⁰

Fry's ideology had noticeable conservative trends. She drew on a history of associating women with domesticity and virtue. Numerous feminist scholars and historians of women and gender have studied and critiqued separate spheres, or, the cult of domesticity.³¹ A substantial amount of scholarship has focused on the ways in which the rhetoric of separate spheres influenced women's lives. However, scholars have demonstrated that this rhetoric obscured the actual functions of capitalist society.³² While there were legal and institutional restrictions that limited women's lives, race, class, religious affiliations, social networks, and the ability to travel all affected how women could negotiate their participation in the public sphere.³³ Many elite women, like Fry, did

³⁰ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill; Hatchard & Son, Piccadilly, S. Wilkin, Norwich, 1827), 3.

³¹ Many of the foundational texts within the study of the cult of domesticity focus on the United States. However, these works have been influential on studies of England and other parts of Europe. See, Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* Vol. 5, no. 3, *Toward a New Feminism for the Eighties* (Autumn, 1979): 512-529. Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 75, no.1 (June 1988): 9-39. For British historiography see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³² For example, see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the New Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Boydston argues that historians should not accept the dichotomy between "public" and "private" as an accurate reflection of the material organization of society. The ideology of spheres was still critical, as Boydston argues that this ideology functioned to support the emergence of a wage system needed for the development of industrial capitalism. Lori Ginzberg also discusses the use of the rhetoric of the ideology of separate spheres in *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.) Ginzberg argues that male and female reformers drew on this ideology as a weapon against female organizing that served interests deemed too radical. And, while women's benevolent work was clearly connected to business enterprises, contemporaries continued to use the ideology of separate spheres to argue benevolence was a "natural" extension of the nature of women. See pages 25, 59. Both works demonstrate that the ideology of separate spheres had key rhetorical uses, even as this ideology failed to reflect the lived experiences of men and women.

³³ There are a number of important works that provide important analysis as to how these various factors affected women's lives. Christine Stansell's study of women in New York is particularly useful for understanding the significance of class. Stansell's work shows the ways in which laboring women were

participate in politics, businesses, volunteer associations, and charities. And as Christine Stansell's work has shown, middle-class reformers used their power and influence to attempt to transform the poor and working-class into their own image.³⁴ Fry did not want to just help improve material conditions at Newgate, she wanted to influence and control the female prisoners.

Fry initially involved the female prisoners in her plans to reform Newgate. At first, she asked for their cooperation, and consent, to improve conditions. Fry proposed to establish a school for the children living within the prison, and she asked the prisoners to choose a schoolmistress amongst themselves.³⁵ An unoccupied cell was appropriated for use as a schoolroom, the prisoner, Mary Connor, was elected to serve as the mistress, and the school was opened for children and prisoners under the age of twenty-five.³⁶ At first, Fry gave prisoners opportunities to hold small positions of power in prison. Her early initiatives at Newgate centered the incarcerated women and gave them a level of control. However, the introduction of prison matrons showed Fry intended for prison employees

excluded from, and subverted, strict ideas about women's domesticity and nature. See, Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.) Lori D. Ginzberg's study analyzes women's work in a number of different reform organizations. Ginzberg's study builds on Stansell's work and argues that gender and class identities and interests were inseparable, and pays particular attention to the ways in which the rhetoric and ideology of benevolence was used during the nineteenth century. See Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). You-me Park and Gayle Wald's article, "Native Daughters in the Promised Land: Gender, Race, and the Question of Separate Spheres," *American Literature* Vol. 70, No. 3 (Sep., 1998): 607-633, examines representations in literature in order to critique the "binary logic of separate spheres," as well as the "binary logic of race." 610.

³⁴ Stansell, *City of Women*, xi-xiv.

³⁵ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 68-69.

³⁶ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 69. In Pitman's biography, the prisoner is named as Mary Cormer. "Mary Cormer, who had, although fairly educated, found her way to prison for stealing a watch." Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 55.

to maintain full authority and control at the expense of any cooperative efforts with the imprisoned women themselves.

In April of 1817, Fry, along with the wife of a clergyman and eleven members of the Society of Friends, founded “An Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners in Newgate.”³⁷ Their original mission was “to provide for the clothing, the instruction, and the employment of the women; to introduce them to a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and to form in them, as much as possible, those habits of order, sobriety, and industry, which may render them docile and peaceable whilst in prison and respectable when they leave it.”³⁸ Thus, Fry’s work fits into the social control model.³⁹ The association obtained permission and support from the sheriffs and city magistrates, and sought the prisoners’ submission as well. In the presence of the association, the sheriffs, the ordinary, and the governor of Newgate, Fry asked the female prisoners if they would be willing to abide by new rules, established with their cooperation, in the prison.⁴⁰ The women were supposedly unanimous in their agreement to obey any new rules.⁴¹ The association’s plan to reform the female prisoners became part of the system of Newgate. After meeting with the Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, and several aldermen, Elizabeth Fry and her associates soon received approval from local magistrates. The magistrates adopted Fry’s plan as “part of the system of Newgate,” while also taking on part of the expenses.

³⁷ Pitman notes that there is not a full record of the names of the original members. Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 59.

³⁸ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 72-73.

³⁹ For discussion of the historiography of social control please refer to the Introductory Chapter.

⁴⁰ The term ordinary refers to chaplain at Newgate.

⁴¹ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 73, 75.

They also gave the women authority to punish the prisoners with short periods of confinement if they disobeyed.⁴²

The new rules established regimented routines for the prisoners and eliminated practices that women like Fry considered immoral. The women needed to be engaged in productive work like knitting or needlework and to follow their schedules diligently. Fry's new rules demanded that the women no longer beg or swear, play games, or fight, and she banned any books or readings she and her committee deemed improper. Fry later wrote that female prisoners should be required to hear portions of the Holy Scriptures each day, and to visit the chapel when possible. Fry was particularly concerned with rules concerning health and sanitation in the prison. She noted the rules concerning prisoners' diets, dress, and medical needs—which included specific regulations concerning the treatment of male and female prisoners. She also expected prisoners to maintain a level of cleanliness in order to avoid sanitary issues.⁴³

The women were divided into classes of no more than twelve, and each class elected a monitor who was tasked with enforcing the rules within their class. Each woman was required to constantly wear a ticket denoting her class within the prison. Fry believed the women should be divided into different classes based on their crimes. The first class would consist of women “whose crimes are of no deep moral dye.” These women would have the greatest number of privileges within the prison. The second class would have fewer privileges, the third class even less, and the lowest class would consist

⁴² *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 76.

⁴³ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 54-62, 18-19. Some regulations applied to men and women. For example, all prisoners would have their clothing “fumigated and purified” or, if they lacked sufficient clothing, would have clean clothing provided for them, 60. However, there were separate rules about the suitable beds and separate cell spaces for male prisoners, 60.

of “the most hardened and desperate offenders” who had to undergo “*peculiar privations and hardships*.” Fry saw little need to classify the untried prisoners, except to divide “modest women” from sex workers.⁴⁴ In addition to monitors, the women also chose a yard-keeper who would have some level of authority. The monitors and yard-keepers were all required to report to the newly hired matron.⁴⁵ However, the other prisoners were allowed to check the authority of their fellow prisoners. If a monitor broke a rule or mistreated a fellow prisoner, she could be dismissed from her office. Prisoners could report transgressions directly to the prison matron, or discuss mistreatment with a visitor from the Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners in Newgate.

The prison matron created a new form of surveillance technology for women’s prisons—a system of control that relied on the constant monitoring of behavior in order to protect and reform female prisoners. Surveillance was not new to prisons, nor was the idea of using surveillance as a means of control. Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon Plan serves as an example of a contemporary effort to establish new means of surveillance technology in prisons, and it was the model for the Eastern State Penitentiary.⁴⁶ Bentham conceived

⁴⁴ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 17, 35-37.

⁴⁵ Rev. Thomas Timpson, *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Fry; Including a History of Her Labours in Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners, and the Improvement of British Seamen* (London: Aylott and Jones, 1847), 46-48. See also Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 60-62. Fry, *Observations*, 19. Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 17. Fry specifically notes that matron’s hold their authority “on behalf of “The Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners in Newgate.” Thus, Fry sees the prison matron as an extension of her own power within the prison. The matron extends Fry’s authority, and Fry enables the matron to allow prisoners to have small levels of authority within their classes.

⁴⁶ During the early-nineteenth century, Benthamism and Quakerism were two of the most important influences on English prison reform. Quakers, in general, had a greater influence on prison reform compared to Benthamites, but Fry and Bentham shared similarities in their beliefs. Both Fry and Bentham supported the classification of prisoners, both argued for the importance of productive labor in prisons, and both advocated for the maintenance of healthy and sanitary conditions in prisons. Robert Alan Cooper, “Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 42, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1981), 675. For more on the influence of English Quakers on Prison reform see Robert Alan Cooper, “The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-23,” *Quaker History*, vol, 68, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 3-19.

of a prison designed in a circular form, with the prisoners' cells arranged around the outer walls of the building and an inspection tower placed at the center. This design would allow for the prison's inspector to look into the cells of the prisoners at any time.

However, the prisoners would be unable to see the inspector, and therefore would never know if they were being watched. Michel Foucault described the Panopticon as a machine that could, "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."⁴⁷ For Foucault, Bentham's Panopticon was the ideal metaphor for the modern disciplinary society.

While Fry did not design a massive prison scheme in the same style as Bentham, she did discuss architectural changes that could accommodate the introduction of prison matrons. Fry proposed that matrons' apartments should be connected to prisoner cells to allow for greater surveillance. Matrons needed to watch all of the prisoners while they worked and during their hours of recreation, and Fry even suggested that matrons should overhear the prisoners at night. Fry recognized that this might be too much for one woman, but insisted that with the aid of female officers, matrons would be able to ensure the "vigilant and unremitting inspection" of female prisoners.⁴⁸ Fry's vision of female surveillance differed from Bentham's Panopticon; rather than an unseen guard, she wanted a visible female figure at the center of the women's prison. Yet her interest in creating an environment in which prisoners could not escape the eyes or ears of the matron suggests Fry was equally invested in creating an environment where prisoners

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* translated by Alan Sheridan, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 201.

⁴⁸ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners*, 33.

could not hide. Surveillance was at the heart of Fry's vision, and the prison matron was the key to this plan.

While surveillance was key to Fry's plan, she appealed to other wealthy Christian women by insisting that instruction was the "most interesting and important" aspect of her association's reform efforts. Fry noted that approximately one-third of the women under the care of the Newgate Committee were illiterate, and an additional one-third had low literacy. She argued that illiteracy had made the women ignorant with regard to "the truths of religion." Thus, Fry wanted matrons to be dedicated religious women who were capable of aiding the prisoners in their reformation. Fry wanted the prisoners to have access to a chaplain, but ideally this man would be married and "of *established* character," as she was wary of prisoners having any contact with men. In fact, Fry stressed that the best religious instruction was communicated by women. The matron would have her regular duties, but Fry believed religious instruction could not be "communicated to [prisoners] so well, so safely, or so efficaciously, as by *the ladies who visit the prison.*"⁴⁹

Fry's expectations for prison matrons reflected her own politics, and she provided a lengthy list of traits that she expected to find. Widows would be ideal. Unlike single women, Fry wrote, widows had "superior knowledge of the world and of life." Fry also wanted matrons to be sufficiently educated and to be of "respectable, orderly, and active habits." Fry's beliefs about hierarchy came through clearly in these expectations, for matrons should be, "although not *greatly* elevated above her charge, yet in a station of life so far superior to their own as to command their respect and obedience." Prisoners therefore should demonstrate an automatic deference to matrons, a separation that was

⁴⁹ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners*, 40, 42.

key to ensuring obedience and order. Despite Fry's initial plan to incorporate incarcerated women in the new system at Newgate, she firmly believed in social hierarchy. Matrons were in a separate, higher class, and she expected the prisoners to treat them accordingly. Fry also stress that matrons needed obey the male authorities of the prison.⁵⁰

While Fry claimed to respect the men who worked in prisons, and asked prison matrons and the women of local associations to do the same, she believed that it would be best for women to be under the care of women. Fry recalled visits to prisons where she observed, "one or two unfortunate young women — committed, perhaps, for some minor offence, (such as running away from an apprenticeship, or purloining a teaspoon) — placed under the sole care of a man, whose key will at any time unlock their door, and afford him admission to their society. This I cannot but consider a most unwarrantable and deplorable exposure." Fry's call for female supervision discreetly, but directly, pointed to the fact that female prisoners faced harassment and abuse at the hands of male turnkeys and officers. Prison matrons were meant to be the solution to this problem. Fry argued that a single prison matron would have greater influence over female prisoners than several male officers because the matron would always accompany the women, provide them with instruction, and could communicate with the women in a way that men could not.⁵¹ Fry tried to ensure that men would have limited access to the female prisoners. Ideally, ministers and doctors would be the only men to interact with the incarcerated women, but some interaction with male staff was bound to happen.

⁵⁰ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners*, 28-29.

⁵¹ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 26-27.

Fry's plan for Newgate focused on two key claims: she insisted that she could help protect the female prisoners from abuse, and she claimed that a female watcher was key to both ensuring protection and administering discipline. Thus, discipline, protection, and surveillance were crucial to her plans. Fry believed that the women of Newgate, and female prisoners more generally, could be reformed if they followed a carefully regimented routine. Fry wanted a female authority figure to see and hear everything that was happening to female prisoners within the prison in order to protect them. Without a prison matron, female prisoners could easily fall prey to attack from unruly male prisoners or untrustworthy prison staff, but with the right matron, this violence could be prevented. In effect, Fry wanted to exert control over the disciplining and protection of female prisoners at Newgate. She was making a claim for women, specifically middle-class, Protestant, white women, to control part of the functioning of prisons. She argued this would provide both protection and proper training to female prisoners. If prisoners followed the rules, then, under the vigilant eyes of the matron, they would be safer and more able to become respectable.

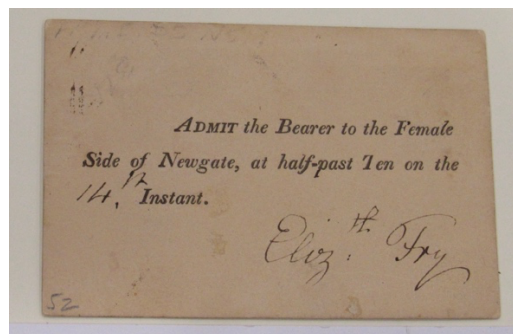


Figure 2. Undated. Fry, Elizabeth, Admission card for the Female Side of Newgate Prison. SC 044, FRY, MSS, undated. Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College. Figure 2 is one example of the admittance cards given to people interested in seeing Fry read to the female prisoners.

The general public's interest in prison discipline and the conditions of prisoners grew as Fry and the association publicized their work at Newgate. In many ways, Fry's work became a spectacle; the London magistrates even allowed her to offer tickets to her readings at Newgate. Viewing Fry in the prison was considered an "extremely impressive" event to behold.⁵² The anonymously published pamphlet, *An Hour in His Majesty's Goal of Newgate, on Friday the 22nd of December, 1820*, provides telling insight into how visitors responded. The anonymous "M." had obtained an admission card, an example of which is seen in Figure 2, to view Elizabeth Fry and the prisoners; M brought his wife, niece, and daughter along. Just before the reading began, "the eyes of the prisoners were fixed on Mrs. Fry. Those of the visitors were fixed on the prisoners."⁵³ The incarcerated women were key to spectacle. Visitors were keen to see Elizabeth Fry in action, but they were at least as curious about the incarcerated women who were being punished and reformed. And, while M's story of the viewing at Newgate reads like propaganda for Fry—praising her religious teachings, marveling at the tidiness of the female prisoners, complimenting the improvements at the prison—it also speaks to Fry's growing fame.

With fame came criticism. Many of the personal critiques leveled against Fry criticized her religious devotion as well as her devotion to her family.⁵⁴ Fry was aware of her celebrity status, and she worried the attention and publicity of her work might

⁵² Robert Alan Cooper, "The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-23," 9. The available sources do not specify if Fry sold these tickets or gave them away for free. It appears that Fry's work was a spectacle for visitors, and it's possible she sold the tickets in order to raise money for reform efforts.

⁵³ *An Hour in His Majesty's Gaol of Newgate, on Friday the 22nd of December, 1820*, 3rd ed. (S. Piper, Old Butter Market, no date), 5, 8.

⁵⁴ Matheuszik provides an overview of the criticism Fry received in, "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 237-260. Fry received public critiques of her reform efforts, criticism of her celebrity status despite being a Quaker, as well as personal criticism from family members who did not approve of her work.

conflict with her Quaker faith.⁵⁵ Members of the Society of Friends had warned that Fry was neglecting her duties at home as early as 1817.⁵⁶ Until she gained fame, Fry's position in society had been defined through her family and the Society of Friends. While the Frys were also dealing with financial concerns, Elizabeth Fry's rise in fame coincided with her sending her children to live with family members and spending more and more time away from home.⁵⁷ Despite these critiques, public visibility was critical to Fry's success. Fry established connections with the royal family—notably the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester—and she secured support for prison reform from key figures and politicians.⁵⁸

In February of 1818, a committee of the House of Commons called upon Fry to discuss her experiences in one of the prisons of London. According to Fry, the prisoners rarely broke the rules, and Fry and the other women of the association did not need to use punishment to enforce order. Fry also highlighted the women's productive labor, stating that the prisoners had made approximately twenty thousand articles of clothing; the women knit between sixty to one hundred pairs of socks and stockings per month, and they did some spinning. Averaging around eighteenpence per week per person, and Fry noted that this meant the women would, "subscribe out of their small earnings of work about four pounds a month, and [the association] about eight, which keeps them covered

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Fry, Journal Entry, August 28, 1817, Norfolk Public Record Office, MC 519, Volume 1.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Fry, Journal Entry, June 5, 1817, Norfolk Public Record Office, MC 519, Volume 1.

⁵⁷ Matheuszik, "The Angel Paradox: Elizabeth Fry and the Role of Gender and Religion in Nineteenth-Century Britain," 247-248.

⁵⁸ Cooper, "The English Quakers and Prison Reform 1809-23," 9. Cooper lists the Duchess of Wellington, William Wilberforce, and Lord Sidmouth as notable figures.

and decent.”⁵⁹ Fry suggested that prisoners could be employed by the Government—potentially by providing services for the army or navy.⁶⁰

Fry argued that her association’s efforts at Newgate had already yielded dramatic improvements. The women were following the rules they agreed to, which, for reformers, demonstrated that they were willing to change. However, the women could have followed the rules in order to avoid punishment. Fry claimed the women had also become more economically productive, which had the dual purpose of keeping them busy and having them contribute to production that benefitted the state. Although Fry remained a dedicated Quaker, she assured the committee of the House of Commons that the women of Newgate were not being forced to convert to any particular denomination of Christianity. The female prisoners were read passages from the scriptures twice a day, focusing on the moral lessons of the texts. Fry stated, “We consider, from the situation we fill, as it respects the public, as well as the poor creatures themselves, that it would be highly indecorous to press any particular doctrine of any kind, anything beyond the fundamental doctrines of Scripture.”⁶¹ The association at Newgate reported success providing religious instruction to the prisoners, and some of the women had learned to read the texts themselves.

Fry still found faults within Newgate and the system of prisons in England.

Prisoners remained intermixed, “old and young, hardened offenders with those who have committed only a minor crime, or the first crime; the very lowest of women with

⁵⁹ Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, citing the House of Commons 75-77.

⁶⁰ Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 87-88. Fry stated, “my idea with regard to the employment of women is, that it should be a regular thing undertaken by Government, considering (though, perhaps, I am not the person to speak of that) that there are so many to provide for; there is the army and navy, and so many things to provide for them; why should not the Government make use of the prisoners?”

⁶¹ Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 78.

respectable married women and maid-servants. It is more injurious than can be described, in its effects and in its consequences.”⁶² Although they worked to keep the women occupied during the day, the women could not be separated at night. Fry contended that moral discipline could never be complete within a prison if prisoners were allowed to sleep together in one room. Instead, it would be best if prisons allowed women to work together in groups and spend their mealtimes and hours of recreation together, but to remain separated at night.⁶³ This setup encouraged the women to be industrious and follow rules during the day and to remain quiet and obedient at night. In later writings, Fry proposed a classification system that divided female prisoners into four separate classes; the first class represented the women whose crimes were of “no deep moral dye,” and who behaved according to the rules in prison, and the last, and lowest, class represented prisoners who were considered “hardened and desperate offenders” who had been committed to prison several times. “Modest” women and “prostitutes” should be separated as well. In addition to these separations, Fry noted that the untried female prisoners should be considered a separate class from those who had been found guilty.⁶⁴

Fry also wanted to create an entirely separate women’s prison. She claimed that “women should be taken care of entirely by women.”⁶⁵ Even at Newgate, where she and the committee of women who visited the prisoners held a level of authority and control over how the prison treated the female prisoners, Fry believed that even the smallest

⁶² Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 79.

⁶³ Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 84.

⁶⁴ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 35-36.

⁶⁵ Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 86.

amounts of communication with men were damaging for the prisoners; this included the men employed at the prison. Fry thus advocated for the employment of matrons and female turnkeys and officers in prisons. Communication with men was only acceptable for male doctors or ministers. Fry's claims were bold. If separate women's prisons were established, she claimed, with "a thousand of the most unruly women they would be in excellent order in one week; of that I have not the least doubt."⁶⁶ Fry recognized the limits of women's prison reform within the British penal system. Without separate prisons for women, Fry would never see the full extent of her reform plans put into action.

The evidence Fry presented before the committee of the House of Commons further expanded her visibility. She received letters from people throughout the country who were interested in her reform efforts; some magistrates wrote to Fry hoping to improve prisons under their control, and numerous women wrote to Fry wanting to form their own associations.⁶⁷ In 1818 Fry and her brother, Joseph John Gurney, decided to tour the country to visit prisons and help establish new women's associations. Fry helped to make prison visiting a fashionable form of benevolent work for middle-class women. Together, Fry and Gurney helped to establish new associations throughout the country, and soon similar groups formed outside of the United Kingdom. By 1821, Fry helped to form the British Society of Ladies for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners with the intention of centralizing the work of those local prison associations.⁶⁸ Elizabeth Fry popularized women's prison reform in England through the creation of these new

⁶⁶ Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry*, 89.

⁶⁷ *A Memoir of Elizabeth Fry*, 79.

⁶⁸ Robert Alan Cooper, "Jeremy Bentham, Elizabeth Fry, and English Prison Reform," *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 42, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1981): 685. On page 684 Cooper also discusses how people wanted to be present to see Fry at work. See also Figure two, for one of the visitor cards used when people visited to see Fry read to prisoners.

women's prison associations.⁶⁹ Some of Fry's ideas were also adopted into legislation; the Gaols Act of 1823, initiated by Home Secretary Robert Peel, led to new general standards in prisons. The Act provided for visits by chaplains, established salaries for jailers, banned the use of irons and manacles, and, most importantly for the case of women's prison reform, required women wardens for female prisoners. It also established a system for inspecting and reporting on the conditions of prisons.⁷⁰

In 1827 Fry published *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners*, which offered updated explanations of her views on female prisoners, prison reform societies, and prison management. Fry acknowledged the importance of women's domestic and social relations, but she stressed that these roles were not the limit of women's usefulness in society. She argued that women, due to their, "gentleness, their natural sympathy with the afflicted, their quickness of discernment, their openness to religious impressions," were well-suited to doing the work of charity and reform.⁷¹ Fry positioned women as the ideal leaders of benevolent reform by tying ideas about women's skills and women's morality to their ability to help others. Fry pointed to the work of women's associations that already focused on visiting prisons as

⁶⁹ *The First Report of the Committee of the British Society, for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners* (London: William Belch, 1822). This report lists Newgate, Bedford, Borough Compter, Bristol, Carlisle, Chester, Colchester, Derby, Devon County Jail, Do. Bridewell, Durham, Dumfries, Dublin, Glasgow, Liverpool, Lancaster, Nottingham, Plymouth, and York on their current list of associations. The report also lists St. Petersburg, Turin, Geneva, and Berne as affiliated associations, 15. Within several years, the number of associations had expanded, and included new associations England, Scotland, Ireland, Basle, Berlin, Cleves, Dusseldorf, Geneva, Potsdam, and Treves. See "The Fourteenth Annual Report of the Committee of the Ladies British Society for promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners, 1835," in *Selection of Reports and Papers of the House of Commons Vol. 55 Prisons* (Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 28 July 1835), 550-558.

⁷⁰ Eric Stockdale, "A Short History of Prison Inspection in England," *The British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 23, no. 3 (July 1983): 214.

⁷¹ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 3.

proof of women's capacity to help other women, and she also encouraged women to turn similar attention toward hospitals, asylums, and workhouses.⁷²

Fry chose to work within the existing prison system in England, and she reinforced that system's hierarchies. Fry expected local prison associations to hold a level of authority in the prisons they visited, but she warned that there were limits to what they could, and should, do with their work. Members of the visiting committee needed to follow all of the rules of the prison, and to avoid interfering with the work of the magistrates and officers.⁷³ Fry also cautioned the women against intervening to lessen a female prisoner's sentence. Although Fry had spoken out in a case that involved capital punishment, she wrote, "while our laws continue as they are, unless they can bring forward decided facts in favor of the condemned, it is wiser for the visiting ladies to be quiet, and to submit to decrees, which they cannot alter."⁷⁴ Thus, Fry argued the association's power within prisons was contingent on their quiet, obedient behavior. While Fry articulated some more extreme ideas for her time, such as the idea for a prison run entirely by women, she did not challenge the core of existing carceral systems.⁷⁵

Elizabeth Fry's ideas advanced the carceral system in England, and influenced its development in the United States.⁷⁶ Fry's work gained significant attention in the United

⁷² Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 4.

⁷³ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 23-24.

⁷⁴ Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners*, 24.

⁷⁵ It is important to note that Fry is not unique in her approach to reform. As Ginzberg discusses in *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, drawing on the ideology of women's benevolence did not mean women were working toward radical reform. See pages 34-35, 95-97.

⁷⁶ Information about Elizabeth Fry and her prison reform efforts spread to the United States long before she published *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners*. As Judith Scheffler notes in "'Wise as serpents and harmless as doves': The Contributions of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia, 1823-1870," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (Summer, 2014), 330, journal articles praising Fry began appearing prior to the 1820s. For example, an article titled "Mrs. Elizabeth Fry," was reprinted from the *Ladies Monthly Museum* of June 1818 in the *Philadelphia Register and National Recorder* the following year.

States when John Griscom, an educator and philanthropist with close ties to Thomas Eddy, visited Europe and met with Fry. Fry took Griscom to Newgate, and he became convinced that her vision of prison reform would be beneficial for female prisoners in the US. When he returned to the United States, Griscom promoted Fry's work in an account of his travels.⁷⁷ Fry's reform efforts were eventually pushed aside in England in favor of other approaches to penal reform with legislation in 1835, but her introduction of prison matrons remained a significant reform effort. Reformers in the United States, mostly Quaker and evangelical women in cities, began forming their own associations to visit prisons in order to comfort and convert prisoners.⁷⁸ In 1822 the first prison matron was appointed in the United States. Hiring prison matrons in American prisons became a goal in the women's prison reform movement—a goal that would eventually prompt reformers to push for Fry's larger vision of entirely separate penal institutions for women.

⁷⁷ W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 160. Thomas Eddy was a highly influential prison reformer who eventually became known as the "John Howard of America." See Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 2-5.

⁷⁸ Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 24.

Chapter Three:

“To Secure from Vice and Degradation”: The Punitive Nature of Benevolent Reform

The stigma of incarceration posed unique challenges for women. “A woman who has once been in prison—a discharged convict—must necessarily be an outcast from society,” declared the Howard Institution in 1858, “Who will employ such an [sic] one? What family will receive an inmate the creature fresh from the penitentiary? Who can trust a woman convicted of theft? What mother will introduce among her daughters, or her servants, one familiar with a prison? It cannot be expected.”¹ Named after the famous prison reformer, John Howard, the Howard Institution served as a type of halfway house for former female convicts. The Howard Institution was one of several nineteenth-century organizations aiming to aid female prisoners and former convicts. The members of the Howard Institution believed women who had experienced prison faced difficulties due to their “moral atmosphere.”² Antebellum understandings and expectations of proper womanhood dictated women’s experiences as prisoners and former convicts. These women were in vulnerable positions, both in and outside of prisons. Some reformers believed criminal women could be redeemed. However, not all reformers shared this sentiment, and many reform societies were selective in their reform efforts.

Assumptions about women’s innate moral superiority—which white, middle-class, Protestant women drew on to claim authority as reformers—were used to judge the

¹ *An appeal to the Citizens of Philadelphia, for means to Purchase a Lot and Suitable Building for the Howard Institution for Discharged Female Prisoners*, (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, Book & Job Printer, George Street Above Eleventh, 1858), 8. This quote references a report from New York, but the exact report is not listed.

² *An appeal to the Citizens of Philadelphia, for means to Purchase a Lot and Suitable Building for the Howard Institution for Discharged Female Prisoners*, 9.

women who were the targets of reform. Contemporary experts documented gendered differences amongst criminals and debated the nature of these women. Some thought female criminals were worse than men. Francis Lieber claimed women who committed crimes acted “more in contradiction to her whole moral organizations, i.e., must be more depraved, must have sunk already deeper than a man.”³ In his estimation, the female criminal had gone against nature. However, some women, including the members of the Howard Institution, believed that female criminals were redeemable.⁴ In particular, women’s prison reform organizations consistently argued for the need, and their ability, to return female prisoners to some version of respectable womanhood. This set women’s prison reformers apart from many of their male contemporaries. While men expressed skepticism that female prisoners could be fully reformed, women reformers maintained that they could do just that.⁵ Their interest in uplifting female prisoners was rooted in religious beliefs, sympathy for their sex, as well as a desire for power and influence. They believed not only in reforming prisons as institutions but in their ability to reform female prisoners.

³ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 11. Rafter quoting, Francis Lieber, “Translator’s Preface.” Francis Lieber is credited for coining the term penology in 1838, and Lieber’s work serves as excellent examples of nineteenth-century penology. However, the actual practice of penology, referring to the study of crime, criminal activity, and punishment, can be traced back to earlier work such as Cesare Beccaria’s *Crime and Punishment* in 1764. For an overview of Lieber and his philosophy see Wilson Smith, “Francis Lieber’s Moral Philosophy,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Aug., 1955): 395-408.

⁴ Note, the Howard Institution did exclude some female criminals, notably sex workers, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵ Notably Roberts Vaux wrote to reformer Mary Wain Wistar expressing his deep skepticism that female prisoners could be fully reformed. See Erica Rhodes Hayden, *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 166.

Reformers maintained that the prison, and punitive institutions working in conjunction with prisons, were the best solution for rehabilitating female criminals.⁶ Through the antebellum period, poverty, mental illnesses, and social disorder were increasingly met with institutional solutions.⁷ Prisons, almshouses, and asylums all targeted different social ills, even as they saw the same people move among these places throughout their lives. Many reformers argued that their particular organization, or institution, provided unique care for women that would allow for rehabilitation. However, prison reform societies and related organizations shared similar practices for promoting rehabilitation—emphasizing moral reformation through religious instruction, education, and industry.⁸ These forms of rehabilitation could still be punitive. Women’s prison reform societies often reported failures and problems they faced. But even as some of these societies recognized their limitations, their support for institutional solutions, and for the carceral system, did not waver. These reformers did not imagine solutions outside of institutions. This chapter focuses on reformers’ efforts to aid female prisoners.

⁶ Women’s prison reform societies began to emerge during the 1820s, before the larger turn toward women’s involvement in institutional settings. These early women’s prison societies were largely focused on moral reformation. However, their focus on moral reformation was in an institutional setting due to their focus on the prison. For more information on women’s reform during the antebellum period and the shifts in reform efforts see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women in Antebellum Reform* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2000).

⁷ For discussion of the rise of institutions such as the prison see Chapter One. For references see, David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised Edition (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008), Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), and Michael Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁸ Many of these practices were not unique to prison reform societies. It’s also important to note that there were clear religious differences between some benevolent societies and reform organizations. For example, the Early Republic saw the creation of privately owned Catholic orphanages, created in an attempt to keep any potential Catholic children away from Protestants. The divide between Protestants and Catholics remained prevalent through the antebellum period. See Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum*, 207, 285.

Although they expressed great desire to help women in need, I argue that reformers' work did more to strengthen the prison system than to aid individual prisoners.

By the time the Howard Institution formed in 1853, women's prison reform, and reform movements more broadly, had gone through decades of development in the United States. Prison reform was but one movement within numerous reform movements, many of which were led by white, middle-class, Protestant women. The US experienced major transformations throughout the antebellum era. In the years after the American Revolution, northern states gradually abolished slavery. Debates raged as slavery and abolition became entangled with discussions of US nationalism and expansion. US trade expanded, transportation technology advanced, wage labor increased, and a new middle-class identity emerged.⁹ Reformers, who were predominantly middle-class, Protestant, and white, were connected to ideological contests about who counted as a citizen, who deserved particular rights, and what kind of nation the United States should become. The antebellum era saw the creation of numerous voluntary organizations including abolitionist societies, moral reform societies, temperance organizations, private charities, and prison reform organizations. These

⁹ This period of economic expansion and development is often referred to as the "market revolution." Historians have heavily debated the nature of the market revolution and this period of economic transformation. Charles Sellers portrays the market revolution in somewhat pessimistic terms. He argues that there was tension between capitalist and democratic forces during the antebellum period, and, ultimately, capitalism triumphed in the economy, politics, and American culture. This transformed the US from an agrarian to a capitalist society. See Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). There were numerous responses to Sellers's work, including a symposium, "A Symposium on Charles Sellers, 'The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846,'" published in the *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter, 1992): 445-476. Furthermore, Daniel Walker Howe argued against Sellers in his work, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.) Howe questions whether or not there was a "market revolution" as Sellers described it, and he instead argues that the "communications revolution" was more important for the development of the US. Howe further argues that the economic changes of the nineteenth century were viewed positively.

societies were all attempting to respond to a range of changes and problems they identified in the US. Historians later dubbed this interconnected network of reform societies the “Benevolent Empire.”¹⁰

The Second Great Awakening, a series of Protestant religious revivals that spread through the United States throughout the early-nineteenth century, sparked numerous reform movements.¹¹ While not all voluntary organizations were evangelical in nature, this period of reform is deeply connected to religious revivals. Historians have debated the nature and consequences of these benevolent societies, including the nature of social control they demanded and exerted.¹² Social control through moral stewardship was crucial during this period, as both legislators and reform societies attempted to “protect the moral and spiritual welfare of their fellow man through restrictive legislation.” When legislation failed to achieve reformers’ goals, they used organizations at the local, state,

¹⁰ The term “Benevolent Empire” was first used by Gilbert Hobbs Barnes in *The Antislavery Impulse: 1830-1844* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1933). Barnes used the phrase to describe American evangelicals’ involvement in abolitionist and antislavery activism. Other scholars such as Clifford Griffin and Charles Foster used terms like the “united evangelical front” and “evangelical benevolent empire” to describe these reform societies and reformers. The term benevolent empire has been used broadly to describe the network of Protestant and evangelical reform societies in the United States inspired by the Second Great Awakening. See Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960) and Charles I. Foster, *An Errand Of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

¹¹ For an overview on the debates concerning the construct of “great awakenings” see R.C. Gordon-McCutchan, “Great Awakenings?” *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer, 1983): 83-95.

¹² Theories about social control within reform movements have been discussed in numerous studies. Studies such as Griffin’s *Their Brothers’ Keepers* argues that evangelical voluntary organizations promoted a specific form of religious morality to the poor to ensure social stability. Raymond Mohl further argues that middle-class activists and philanthropists did have concern for the poor, but agrees that reformers and benevolent societies tried to instill specific, religious morals. See, Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). Carroll Smith Rosenberg’s study, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) argues that social control was secondary to religious revivalism. However, social control and religious revivalism were not mutually exclusive. There are also debates about the root cause of the Second Great Awakening. For discussion of the significance of organization, rather than revival, see Donald Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 1 (Spring, 1969): 23-43.

and national levels to spread their beliefs throughout the country.¹³ The social control model is evident in the work of women's prison reform societies. These organizations advocated for the moral reformation of prisoners, and their methods of rehabilitation required that prisoners modify their behavior in order to meet reformers' standards. These reformers consistently drew on the language of benevolence and insisted upon their desire to aid prisoners, but social control was at the heart of their efforts.

Women's activism was a key component of benevolent reform.¹⁴ The ideology of domesticity and the notion that women were "naturally" more moral and virtuous than men was compatible with reform. Women could, and did, draw on this belief in women's benevolence to support their involvement in activism, reform, and politics. Women also justified their involvement through the expression of women's "influence."¹⁵ Whether women engaged in the fight for abolition, anti-slavery, temperance, or participated in providing local charity for the poor, they shared a belief in the innate, moral superiority and influence of women. Despite the ideological belief that white, Protestant middle-class women were to remain in the private sphere, these women were able to use their positions as Protestant moral leaders to take part in the public sphere.¹⁶ However,

¹³ J. Thomas Jable, "Aspects of Moral Reform in Early Nineteenth-Century Pennsylvania," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 102, no. 3 (Jul., 1978), 345.

¹⁴ Numerous scholars have discussed the history of women's activism during the nineteenth century. These studies have shown not only that women were part of reform movements during the antebellum era, but that many women were dedicated to working within, and leading, movements. See, Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), and Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ Dorsey, *Reforming Men & Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*, 28-39.

¹⁶ Nancy A. Hewitt's work, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) is particularly useful for understanding how antebellum women engaged in

participation in benevolent societies was more than a means of aiding others. Within these organizations, women could engage in politics at a level they would be unable to reach individually. The language of women's benevolence often concealed their authority, access to funds and resources, and their actual labors.¹⁷ Women's benevolent organizations exerted and extended their influence through their activities.

While women involved in prison reform were not a homogenous group, their common bonds—vested in Protestant women's presumed virtue and the cult of domesticity—brought them together.¹⁸ They tended to come from middle-class and upper-middle-class Protestant, often Quaker, families.¹⁹ These women often joined multiple reform societies.²⁰ Female prison reformers shared commonalities; they had been trained to skillfully perform domestic tasks, they were socialized as “moral guardians” of the home, and they faced similar experiences in life.²¹

Men led early prison reform. Some organizations, such as the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners (PSAMPP), were particularly slow to admit

multiple reform efforts. Hewitt argues that rather than viewing women in a singular group of benevolent reformers, competing networks of women activists co-existed. These reformers were predominantly white, Protestant, and middle class, but they pursued different means of social change within their own economic, social and family networks.

¹⁷ Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 65. See also, Dorsey, *Reforming Men & Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*, 37.

¹⁸ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 98.

¹⁹ Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 24.

²⁰ Nancy Cott's work in *The Bonds of Womanhood* argues that evangelical women in New England often joined multiple societies, demonstrating that dedication to evangelical Christianity was more important than any of the specific goals held by benevolent organizations. See pages 140-146. Ann Boylan also discusses the overlap within women's organizations in *The Origins of Women's Activism*. She notes that as the number of women's associations grew, specifically between 1800-1840, there was clear overlap among the members and leaders of these groups. See Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism*, 39.

²¹ Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 24-25. Freedman notes that many prison reformers served as teachers and worked within their churches in different capacities. The majority of these women married, had children, and experienced the death of at least one child.

women.²² The first woman to join the PSAMPP as a corresponding member was Dorothea Dix, who was inducted on November 8, 1844. Over a decade later, in 1858, Rose Steadman joined as a regular member.²³ Due to the reluctance and refusal of the PSAMPP to accept women in their organization, separate and auxiliary societies formed to address concerns about incarcerated women. In 1823, a group of Orthodox Quaker women formed the first organization to work with female inmates, the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia (FPAFP).²⁴ Mary Waln Wistar, an Orthodox Quaker whose husband, Thomas Wistar, was a founding member of the PSAMPP, led the FPAFP. The group served as an auxiliary to the PSAMPP and shared close connections.²⁵

Quakers played central roles in organizations like the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, and the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia.²⁶ Sparked by Quaker minister Elias Hicks, the Hicksite-

²² This may be due to the influence of Orthodox Quakers within both the PSAMPP and the FPAFP. Judith Scheffler discusses this issue in “‘Wise as serpents and harmless as doves’: The Contributions of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia, 1823-1870,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (Summer, 2014), 304. Citing the work of Margaret Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (Philadelphia: Friends General Conference, 1986), Scheffler argues that wealthy Orthodox Quaker men tended to encourage women to observe unequal gender distinctions. Thus, compared to Hicksite Quakers, they were less likely to attempt to include women within their organization or to treat them as equals.

²³ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 248. Dorothea Dix was involved in multiple forms of activism, but her thoughts on prison reform are best summarized in her work *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States* (Boston: Munroe & Francis, 1845).

²⁴ Unfortunately, the minutes and records of the FPAFP have been lost. However, there are a number of remaining documents—through records of the PSAMPP and select publications—that shed light on the significant work done by this organization. Letters from the FPAFP recorded in the minutes of the PSAMPP are available in Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 248–75.

²⁵ Scheffler, “‘Wise as serpents and harmless as doves’”, 300-301. Records from Volume 3. Minutes 1852-1880. Vol. 4 Pennsylvania Prison Society Records (Collection 1946), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania confirm that the PSAMPP and FPAFP worked together. Although it is unclear if the FPAFP served as an official auxiliary organization, the two societies worked together at various points and appeared as partner organizations. See also, Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 248-264.

²⁶ The history of Quaker involvement in activism and reform is well-documented. Katherine Gerbner traces the origins of Quaker abolitionism back to the 1688 Germantown Quaker Protest against Slavery in, “‘We are Against the Traffik of Men-Body’: The Germantown Quaker Protest of 1688 and the Origins of American Abolitionism,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 2 (Spring, 2007): 149-172.

Orthodox separation had ramifications for both religious practices and communities, but also for the continued work and development of reform societies. In 1819, Hicks travelled to Philadelphia and began delivering sermons at the Society of Friends meetings; he attacked the “worldliness” of Philadelphia Quakers and criticized Quaker leadership in the city.²⁷ Hicks also preached different interpretations of the Bible; he reportedly claimed that Jesus was an ordinary man, and he “belittled the blood atonement of Christ.”²⁸ Threatened and angered, Quaker leaders attempted to censure Hicks and attack his doctrinal views. However, the split had already begun. Hicksite Quakers insisted Orthodox leadership was imposing Protestant doctrines that would make Quakers too much like other churches. They wanted to emphasize the “Inner Light” as a form “genuine” Quaker faith.²⁹ The ongoing fighting eventually culminated at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in April 1827, when the Hicksite Quakers separated themselves and formed their own independent meeting.

Orthodox and Hicksite Quakers’ approaches to reform differed in some respects, with Orthodox Quakers, who were generally wealthier, typically pursuing less radical forms of activism. For example, both Orthodox and Hicksite Quakers opposed slavery in theory, yet key issues proved divisive. Elias Hicks championed the movement to boycott the consumption of goods produced with slave labor, which Orthodox leaders believed

For further discussion of the history of Quakers, slavery, and abolition see Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

²⁷ Robert W. Doherty, “Religion and Society: The Hicksite Separation of 1827,” *American Quarterly* Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1965): 64-65.

²⁸ Bruce Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies: Philadelphia Benevolence and the Neglected Era of American Quaker History,” *Journal of the Early Republic* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998), 396. Robert W. Doherty notes that Quaker leaders in Philadelphia perceived Hicks’s statements as direct accusations as well challenges to their authority. See Doherty, “Religion and Society: The Hicksite Separation of 1827,” 65.

²⁹ Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies,” 396.

was an unreasonably high and impractical moral stance. Hicksite Quakers also tended to join antislavery societies at higher rates. During the 1830s, Hicksite Quakers made up “between sixty and seventy percent of the known Quakers” in Philadelphia antislavery societies.³⁰ Thus, in some respects, Orthodox Quakers were less radical than Hicksite Quakers, but within the context of prison reform, where radical change was not a goal, the two groups often worked together.

The Quaker-led Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia (FPAFP) was concerned both with improving conditions within prisons, and with providing female inmates with moral instruction. The members of this association looked to Elizabeth Fry as a model for women’s prison reform. Like the British Ladies Society for the Reformation of Female Prisoners, they promoted the separation of the sexes within prisons, encouraged the moral reformation of prisoners, and sought to have matrons hired. And the women were able to formally communicate with Elizabeth Fry, allowing them to seek guidance and exchange ideas.³¹ Thus, the Female Prison Association became an organization focused on women-led prison discipline and reform.

The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia conducted their first prison visit at the Arch Street Prison.³² “The engagement,” they reflected, “was entered upon with feelings of weakness and fear, under a sense of the importance of keeping in view our blessed Redeemer’s declaration, ‘Without me, ye can do nothing.’”³³ During their

³⁰ Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies,” 424-425.

³¹ Scheffler, “Wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” 311. See, Elizabeth Fry, letter to Roberts Vaux, June 14, 1824, *Vaux Family Papers*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³² At the time of the FPAFP’s founding, female prisoners in Philadelphia were jailed in the Arch Street Prison.

³³ “Female Convicts and the Efforts of females for their Relief and Reformation,” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy*, Vol. 1 no. 2 (Philadelphia: 1845), 111. Mary Waln Wistar, Thomas Wistar, and two unnamed women went on the first visit to the prison. After this initial visit, Anna Potts joined their visits. By

first visit, the women read portions of the holy scriptures to the prisoners. Believing this work demanded a continued presence in the prison, they secured permission from the Board of Inspectors to conduct regular visits.³⁴

The primary concern of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia was religious and moral instruction. However, the organization quickly realized that reforming prisoners would prove challenging. The continuous flow of new inmates, coupled with the lack of classification within the prison, made it difficult to conduct reform efforts. Tried and untried prisoners could be housed together, and prisoners who had committed minor crimes could be housed with prisoners who had committed more dangerous crimes. And, with women leaving the prison or being moved, the organization's members had little knowledge of whether or not their visits had any lasting effects on the women they met.³⁵ These results were concerning for reformers, as they wanted to have an impact on prisoners.

The women lacked confidence in their ability to influence female prisoners. However, reports of visits to prisons often exaggerated the significance of reformers' work. One "female visitor" to a prison reported that the prisoners she met with "listened to [me] with attention...they knew I sought their good, their restoration, their salvation...and many in time learnt to desire their own true good, a reformation of heart and life."³⁶ These prison visits were likely more significant to the female reformers than to

the end of the first year, the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia had thirteen female visitors.

³⁴ Visiting was not specific to the work of prison reform. Although Elizabeth Fry stressed the importance of visiting prisoners, she was not the first reformer to suggest this work. Early women's benevolent organizations stressed visitations. See, Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 41.

³⁵ "Female Convicts and the Efforts of females for their Relief and Reformation," 112.

³⁶ *An Address by a Recent Female Visitor to the Prisoners in the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Joseph and William Kite, No. 50 North Fourth Street, 1844), 6. The female visitor's name is

the prisoners themselves. Reformers wanted to believe they could transform criminals into model citizens. However, even with dramatized accounts published by reform societies, few prisoners served as examples of fully reformed criminals. Many of these published accounts of prison visits and prisoner transformations emphasized the good of the reformer, but these accounts reveal little about female prisoners.³⁷ These women may have adopted the standards of reformers in order to gain better treatment or better material conditions while incarcerated. It's also possible that some of these women embraced the reformers' ideas and wanted to change their behavior. However, reformers' publications offer highly stylized accounts of prisoners that make it difficult to understand the desires and motivations of the women who were the targets of reform efforts.

The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia expanded their influence beyond visitations in the spring of 1824. An "infectious disease" began to spread throughout the prison, and, after determining that the damp, enclosed room where prisoners spent the day was the likely cause of the illness, the association's members intervened. They sent a letter to the Board of Inspectors urging the construction of a bath house. They also asked the Board of Inspectors to employ a matron who would "enforce cleanliness and industry," as well as contribute to the "right conducting" of the women's

not given, but she may have been a member of the FPAFP, or perhaps a woman who performed volunteer labor for a benevolent organization.

³⁷ One example is the case of Julia Moore. Published by the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia, the story of Julia Moore paints the picture of a positive experience at Eastern State Penitentiary. They claim Julia feels the prison is her home and she is happy to be there. However, Julia's account is not an accurate portrayal of female prisoners at Eastern State Penitentiary or other prisons. See, *An Account of Julia Moore, A Penitent Female, who died in the Eastern Penitentiary of Philadelphia, in the year 1843, 2nd ed.* (Philadelphia: Joseph and William Kite, 1844). This account is further discussed in Chapter Five.

department. Although the board adhered to the women's request for a bath house, and built an additional building in the yard, they did not employ a matron.³⁸ The women did not give up; in subsequent years they requested that the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners reconsider hiring a matron. By 1835, the women's association firmly stated that there was little hope of reforming female prisoners if they were not under the supervision of a matron.

For the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia, the matron was both key to discipline and women-led reform. However, their insistence on the need for matrons revealed their own fears about the limitations of their work. The members worried their visits were not enough to ensure successful reformation and that only a matron's constant presence would achieve their goals. With a matron in place, the female prisoners would have female supervision as well as daily, rather than weekly, instruction and guidance. Based on the available evidence, the association's members seem to have assumed that the matron, and her labor, would function as an extension of the reformers' efforts. Thus, hiring a matron could serve a dual purpose for reformers; they viewed the employment of matrons as an improvement for prisons, and simultaneously linked the prison matron to their own reform efforts.³⁹

Although Eastern State Penitentiary received its first female inmate in 1831, the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia received its first invitation to the prison only after an 1834 legislative investigation into the management and treatment of

³⁸ "Female Convicts and the Efforts of females for their Relief and Reformation," 112-113.

³⁹ *Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston 1828*, second edition (Boston: Published by Perkins and Marvin, No. 114 Washington Street, 1830.) 66-67. This section is quoting from the Sixth Report of the London Society.

prisoners.⁴⁰ This legislative investigation focused on several charges, including “licentious and immoral” practices amongst officers and agents, the misuse of public property and labor, unnecessary expenditures for the construction of the penitentiary, illegal practices regarding the treatment of convict sentences, as well as the use of cruel and unusual punishment upon prisoners.⁴¹ There were only four women—Amy Rogers, Henrietta Johnson, Ann Hinson, and Eliza Anderson, all of whom were of African descent—incarcerated at Eastern State Penitentiary at the time of the investigation.⁴² Testimony revealed that prison officials did not force the women to remain in their cells, as was the prison’s policy, but called upon them to perform tasks and labor that went directly against the separate system’s mandate. Several testimonies from the investigation discussed the female inmates, and some of the women’s complaints about poor treatment were also included in reports.⁴³

White supremacy, racism, and anxieties surrounding ethnicity and immigration all contributed to the development of the criminal justice system and the different prison

⁴⁰ Moyamensing had opened in 1835, and the female prisoners who had been imprisoned in the Arch Street Prison were transferred there. Eastern State Penitentiary had opened in 1829, and served as the model for the separate system. While the FPAFP had been allowed to visit the Arch Street Prison, and later Moyamensing, they did not receive an invitation to visit Eastern State Penitentiary until 1835. After 1836, the FPAFP divided into two branches to conduct visits at Eastern State Penitentiary and Moyamensing County Prison. (For clarification, Moyamensing County Prison is also called Philadelphia County Prison in some records.) Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 168-169. See also, Scheffler, “Wise as serpents and harmless as doves,” 312.

⁴¹ Thomas B. McElwee, *A concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, together with a detailed statement of the proceedings of the committee, appointed by the legislature, December 6th, 1834, for the purpose of examining into the economy and management of that institution, embracing the testimony taken on that occasion, and legislative proceedings connected therewith*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Neall & Massey, 1835), 99-106.

⁴² Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 114. These women were the first four female inmates at Eastern State Penitentiary. Rogers and Johnson were admitted in April 1831 for manslaughter; Rogers received a sentence of three years, while Johnson received a sentence of six years. Hinson and Anderson entered the prison in December of 1831; both women received two-year sentences for manslaughter. All four women were in their twenties. Rogers was a washerwoman, Anderson and Hinson were both married and had children, and records noted that Hinson and Johnson could read.

⁴³ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 116-120.

systems of the antebellum period. Racial prejudices affected both men and women within the criminal justice system.⁴⁴ However, criminal women, particularly those of marginalized status faced additional stereotypes. Historian Mark Kann argues that the high percentage female criminals who were Black or impoverished immigrants made it easier for white citizens to stereotype the women “as ‘fallen,’ ‘unnatural,’ and ‘beyond the pale of moral rehabilitation.’”⁴⁵ Given these stereotypes, it is likely that the prison officials at Eastern State Penitentiary did not view Amy Rogers, Henrietta Johnson, Ann Hinson, or Eliza Anderson as capable of rehabilitation.

All four women at Eastern State Penitentiary had been convicted of manslaughter. Both the criminal justice system and the general consensus of contemporary experts thus considered them dangerous women in need of punishment, and, ideally, reform. However, the prison employees showed little interest in reforming them. Testimony revealed that the four women were let out of their individual cells, interacted with prison officials socially, were permitted to have alcohol, and wore different clothing other than the official prison clothing.⁴⁶ This treatment did not mean that the women acted as they

⁴⁴ Multiple studies have demonstrated that race played a significant role when it came to arrest and incarceration rates during the nineteenth century. Erica Rhodes Hayden’s study of Pennsylvania demonstrates that Black women faced different treatment in newspaper reports, court records, and arrest records. See, Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 18-21. For further discussion of disparities see Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). For further discussion of the treatment and experiences of Black women see Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). See also, Kali Nicole Gross, “African American Women, Mass Incarceration, and the Politics of Protection,” *Journal of American History* Vol, 102, No.1 (June 2015): 25-33. For a useful primary source that discusses beliefs about disorder in the US and analysis of different populations see Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, *On the Penitentiary System in The United States and Its Application in France*, trans. Francis Lieber (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1833), particular page 263.

⁴⁵ Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy*, 193. See also Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 18-25.

⁴⁶ McElwee, *A concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania*, 53. Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 116-120. See also, Leslie Patrick, “Ann Hinson: A Little-Known Woman in the Country’s Premier Prison, Eastern State Penitentiary, 1831,” *Pennsylvania History* Vol. 67, No. 3 (Summer 2000): 361-375.

pleased; rather, the prison officials treated the female prisoners like servants. Amy Rogers complained that she had been forced to wash the clothing of the prison officers that were “soiled with venereal matters, and medical substances designed for that disease,” and that she feared she might contract the disease if she washed the material. Prison officials demanded that all prisoners perform solitary labor as part of their punishments, but Rogers understood that they were making unreasonable and unethical demands of her labor. These prison officials actively ignored the women’s rehabilitation due both to the women’s gender and race.⁴⁷

Eastern State Penitentiary did not employ a prison matron until after the legislative investigation.⁴⁸ Instead, the prison relied on Mrs. Blundin, whose husband, Richard Blundin served as a gate-keeper for the prison. According to the warden, Samuel R. Wood, Mrs. Blundin was “not suited” to the position of matron but was nonetheless tasked with some duties within the prison.⁴⁹ Although she was not an official matron, Mrs. Blundin was referred to as such at times in the legislative investigation. Notably, on the charge of misuse of public property and public labor, the testimony singled Mrs. Blundin out for her “peculations, plunderings, and repeated larcenies.” The report further labeled her “a woman so criminal, so abandoned, so infamous...one of the most abandoned wretches in existence.”⁵⁰ Unlike reformers’ vision of the ideal matron—who was meant to uphold ideals of white womanhood and serve as an example for female prisoners—Mrs.

⁴⁷ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 117, 120.

⁴⁸ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 121. The Board of Supervisors had approved employing a prison matron at Eastern State Penitentiary in 1831, but the position was not filled until 1835.

⁴⁹ McElwee, *A concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania*, 80-83. Thomas Bradford Jr., one of the inspectors of the prison, noted that he saw Mrs. Blundin conducting various work when he visited. He mentioned seeing her in the kitchens, attending religious exercises, and stationed at various points throughout the prison.

⁵⁰ McElwee, *A concise history of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania*, 100.

Blundin committed crimes while working within the prison. In this respect, she became the opposite of what a matron was meant to represent. Mrs. Blundin's role in the crimes revealed by the legislative investigation served as a final push for Eastern State Penitentiary to hire an official matron, a clear victory for reformers. After 1836, the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia conducted regular visits at both Moyamensing and Eastern State Penitentiary. While it is unknown what the society thought of the legislative investigation of Eastern State Penitentiary, they expressed approval of the system after it concluded.

The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia continued to work closely with the male-led Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners (PSAMPP). Many members of the two organizations shared familial and social ties, which enabled smooth cooperation. The women sent annual reports and letters to communicate about practical matters and reform efforts. In return, the men's association helped support the women's visits to Moyamensing County Prison by providing the society with funds for a carriage to aid in the cost of transportation.⁵¹ On other occasions, they served as an ally in communicating with prison administrations. When inspectors at Moyamensing expressed displeasure at the women's visits, they asked their male allies to look into the matter. The well-connected men on the organization's acting committee spoke with officials, who provided a letter assuring the women's welcome at the prison.⁵²

⁵¹ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 250-251. The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners initially agreed to give the women \$50 to use for their expenses in carriage hire for visiting Moyamensing in 1836. One year later, they agreed to give the women \$75 for the same purpose. They also gave financial assistance again in 1840 and 1847.

⁵² Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 251. William J. Crans, clerk at the prison, responded to the Acting Committee with surprise, stating that the women had "always met the approval of the Inspectors, and have been considered both proper and desirable." He stressed that the women were welcome at the prison, and that the Inspectors believed the visitors were "beneficial" for prisoners.

Despite these close links, the two organizations did not always agree on the best methods of prisoner reform and aid. In October of 1852, the women's association sought to create a halfway house that would aid women who had recently been released from prison. The women called upon the PSAMPP, "the avowed friend of the Prisoner," and asked for the men's support. They argued that women leaving prison needed additional assistance,

Snares and temptations await them on every side, and with the stain of guilt upon their character, the very countenances of these betray a want of confidence in their own feeble resolutions; and need we marvel that the hand of strangers should turn away from such degraded objects; nor that they be driven back upon their associates in vice as burthen to Society, and themselves?

The Female Prison Association had already privately provided homes to some former prisoners, but they believed that individual, private aid was not a sufficient solution and wanted to extend their influence. Their proposal for a "stepping stone between the Prison, and the wide world," was meant to address the shortcomings of prison reform.⁵³ Their efforts to teach prisoners moral and religious teachings were not enough to sustain former convicts. The women reformers argued that if they were truly advocating for the moral reform of prisoners then they needed to do more to help women once they were outside of prison.⁵⁴

The women's appeal to create a halfway house for formerly incarcerated women was met with mixed results. The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners was committed to the philosophy of separation, and they firmly believed that

⁵³ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 252-253.

⁵⁴ There were institutions that aided women within Philadelphia. The Magdalen Society and the Rosine Association already served women who needed aid, but the FPAFP was interested in forming a home specifically for former prisoners. They made this distinction in their 1858 Fourth Report, "The Howard Home is the only institution of its character in the State of Pennsylvania and with the exception of the one in New York, is the only such institution in the country. The Magdalen and Rosine are for the degraded portion of our population, the Howard is for the decent prisoner." Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 264

prisoners should not communicate with one another or consort together. In contrast, the women's proposal suggested separation was not the answer to aiding former female convicts. The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia were willing to push back against the central philosophy of the PSAMPP in order to further their reform efforts. Their male allies disagreed, and they initially refused to support the project. Some members eventually supported the women's efforts; the men formed a new committee to meet with them, and the two organizations engaged in further discussions of a potential halfway house. In January of 1853, the PSAMPP discussed the possibility of supporting a home for women. First, they acknowledged that, despite the efforts of the Female Prison Association, many women within the female department at Moyamensing County Prison were not becoming reformed in a means deemed satisfactory by reformers. They further recognized that even the women who were open to education and moral teachings within prison often needed help beyond the carceral institution. Thus, both organizations acknowledged that reform efforts within the prison were insufficient.⁵⁵

Some members of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners drew on beliefs about the gendered differences between criminals to justify supporting the women's proposal. They argued that, unlike men, women did not usually "associate for the commission of crime," and therefore, if suitable arrangements were made, "they may be made even to contribute to each other's improvement."⁵⁶ The separate plan had not been properly applied to women incarcerated in Pennsylvania in

⁵⁵ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 253-254. This information comes from a report from the committee assigned to meet with the FPAFP dated January 7, 1853. The report was signed by Townsend Sharpless, William S. Perot, and John J. Lytle.

⁵⁶ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 254.

the past, most notably during the early years of Eastern State Penitentiary. However, this comment suggests that the philosophy of separation did not necessarily match women reformers' views of female prisoners' needs. If men and women represented different kinds of criminals, as penologists like Francis Lieber insisted, they would require different forms of rehabilitation. Although the PSAMPP did not alter their commitment to separation, their stance on the women's proposal shows that they recognized that this philosophy was primarily focused on male prisoners.

The Howard Institution fulfilled the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia's desire to establish a home for former prisoners, but the members of the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners remained torn on supporting it. Twelve members were in support of the home, and fourteen were opposed. Finally, the organization resolved to give the women's association one hundred dollars annually "for the relief of discharged Prisoners coming under their care, provided no part of said money be appropriated to the support or relief of convicts associated together under the care of that or any other association."⁵⁷ This stipulation allowed the male reformers to financially support the women's efforts, without approving the association of former convicts. With this resolution, the women guaranteed support from their male allies, while simultaneously breaking away from the philosophy of separation.

Ultimately, the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia did not wait for approval from the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisoners,

⁵⁷ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 259. This resolution was offered by J. Cooke Longstreth at a meeting in 1857.

and established a house for female moral reform under “their own immediate action.”⁵⁸ In 1853, they opened the Howard Institution to provide boarding, clothing, and instruction for discharged female prisoners. Women were to remain there for three to six months; during this term, the Association would surround the women with the “right influences” in order help them “return to respectability.”⁵⁹ Women at the Howard Institution were employed in plain sewing, quilting, laundry work, and cooking. The institution also employed an assistant matron who offered lessons in the evenings to instruct the women in reading and writing.⁶⁰

Much of the language used to describe the Howard Institution, and the work done therein, focused on promoted a working-class respectability by encouraging domestic labor.⁶¹ Although the women of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia and the Howard Institution believed female prisoners and former convicts were capable of reform—a belief that challenged the views of many contemporaries—they also believed some women were more redeemable than others. These reformers claimed that

⁵⁸ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 256. See also, *An appeal to the Citizens of Philadelphia, for means to Purchase a Lot and Suitable Building for the Howard Institution for Discharged Female Prisoners*. The home was located at 1612 Poplar Street.

⁵⁹ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 263. Teeters includes block quote excerpts from Annual Reports of the Howard Institution.

⁶⁰ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 263. Catherine Horn served as the first assistant matron.

⁶¹ Nineteenth-century contemporaries used the terms respectable and respectability as a means of differentiating moral and socially acceptable behaviors and people from those deemed immoral or criminal. It is difficult to find an exact definition of respectability that contemporaries uniformly used. However, in historical accounts from the United States, white, middle-class, Christian women who appeared domestic and moral were typically used as the primary examples of respectability. These women who served as the standard-bearers of respectability were also able to determine who was not respectable. Respectability was not necessarily an obtainable goal or standard, but served instead as a tool for judging, shaming, and excluding. For discussions on respectability and criminality see Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006) and L. Mara Dodge, *“Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind”: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002.) For a study that addresses respectability and sex work see, Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

their organization differed from other reform societies in Philadelphia due to their focus on aiding former convicts who truly desired to “return to respectability.”⁶² Echoing the language of reformers and institutions who categorized individuals as worthy or unworthy of aid, the women of the Howard Institution judged which former convicts were willing and capable of rehabilitation. These did not include sex workers, as one report stated that the Magdalen Society and the Rosine Association were institutions for the “degraded portion” of the population whereas the Howard Institution was for the “decent prisoner.”⁶³ While the FPAFP and the Howard Institution challenged some views about criminal women, they reinforced beliefs about the irredeemable nature of women who engaged in sex work. Their work also reinforced beliefs about the appropriate labor of former prisoners. They considered some women redeemable, but they did not train these women to eventually take on the work of teachers or matrons.

The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia was not alone in its attempt to intervene in the lives of women. Organizations such as the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia had already existed for several decades. The Magdalen Society formed in 1800 as the first society dedicated to rehabilitating “that class of Unhappy Females who have Strayed from Virtue.”⁶⁴ This class of “Unhappy Females” referred to sex workers, referred to at the time as “fallen women.” Prostitution was not an explicit crime, but women who engaged in sex work often faced vagrancy charges; these could include

⁶² Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 263. Excerpt of the 1853 “Original Plan” of the Howard Institution, as put forth by the matron, Mary Murray.

⁶³ Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 263. Excerpt of the 1858 Fourth Annual Report of the Howard Institution.

⁶⁴ Negley K. Teeters, “The Early Days of the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia,” *Social Service Review* Vol. 30, No. 2 (June, 1956), 158.

charges for being idle, drunk, or disorderly.⁶⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, the asylum rose to popularity during the Early Republic, just as prisons and other institutions emerged as popular solutions to societal ills.⁶⁶ The Magdalen Society hoped to reform these women through isolation and strict regimentation, including a strict regimen of “prayer and piecework.”⁶⁷ While the Magdalen Society Asylum purported to be a refuge for women who desired rehabilitation, it functioned as a punitive institution.

Decades later, the Rosine Association formed in 1847 with the explicit aim to help “fallen women.” The women behind the Rosine Association, primarily Hicksite Quakers, originally organized to petition for the abolition of capital punishment. However, at the suggestion of a member, they shifted to focusing on developing an institution to aid women.⁶⁸ The Rosine Association’s mission was,

to secure from vice and degradation, a class of women who have forfeited their claim to the respect of the virtuous—to prepare and maintain for them an asylum, which, by its system of religious instruction shall elevate their moral nature—teach them

⁶⁵ Jen Manion, *Liberty’s Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 86, 93-95. For further reading on the history of sex work see Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992) and Katie M. Hemphill, *Bawdy City: Commercial Sex and Regulation in Baltimore, 1790-1915* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶⁶ For discussion of the rise of the asylum see David Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised Edition (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2000). Rothman argues that fear of the breakdown of societal bonds coupled with the rise of poverty, crime, and insanity during the antebellum period led to the rise of the asylum. Rothman’s work fits into conversations about social control theory, as he argues that the desire for social order led to attempts to control the poor. Social control took the form of institutions like asylums and prisons.

⁶⁷ Steven Ruggles, “Fallen Women: The Inmates of the Magdalen Society Asylum of Philadelphia, 1836-1908,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Summer, 1983): 65.

⁶⁸ In January 1847 a group of women met in a private parlor to petition the Legislature of Pennsylvania to abolish capital punishment. They also arranged a public meeting of women to circulate the petition. Approximately five hundred women attended the meeting, an address was read, and within several weeks one thousand copies of the address had been circulated and over eleven thousand names had been added to the petition. Following this meeting, came the call to open a house for the purposes of reforming, employing, and instructing women who had fallen into immoral habits and livelihoods. See *Reports and Realities from the Sketch-Book of a Manager of the Rosine Association, December, 1855*. (Philadelphia: John Duross, Printer, 1855). Mira Sharpless Townsend Papers, Series 3: Rosine Association Records, Rosine Association, vol. 2, 1851-1858. Page iii.

how to gain an honest living ‘by the work of their own hands’—and eventually render them useful members of the community.⁶⁹

Thus respectability, religion, and moral reform were critical goals for the work of women’s benevolent organizations.

While they differed in some respects, institutions like the Magdalen Society Asylum, the Rosine House, and the Howard Institution focused on regimentation, education, and domestication to varying degrees. The Rosine House, the institutional base of the Rosine Association, functioned as an asylum for women; it was a domestic, confining space—intended to sequester women away from temptations and dangers until the reformers deemed the women fit to leave. Once they entered the Rosine House, the women became “inmates.”⁷⁰ Rehabilitation within the Rosine House involved following strict rules, gaining education, and performing productive labor. The Magdalen Society had already conducted work for decades prior to the Rosine Association’s formation; however, the Rosine Association was critical of the Magdalen Society because it was run by men and they believed it functioned like a prison—an argument that ignored the punitive nature of their own Rosine House.⁷¹ And the Howard Institution wanted to distinguish itself from the Magdalen Society and the Rosine Association due to their focus

⁶⁹ Preamble to the constitution of the Rosine Association from the *Semi-Annual Report of the Managers of the Rosine Association*, No. 204 North Eighth Street. Oct. 9, 1851. Mira Sharpless Townsend Papers, Series 3: Rosine Association Records, Rosine Association, vol. 2, 1851-1858.

⁷⁰ *Semi Annual Report of the Managers of the Rosine Association Oct. 9, 1851*, Mira Sharpless Townsend Papers, FHL-RG5-320, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, A00185767. The term “inmates” appears on page 8 of the report, describing how women who are brought into the Rosine House are usually administered a temperance pledge.

⁷¹ Marcia Carlisle, “Disorderly City, Disorderly Women: Prostitution in Ante-Bellum Philadelphia,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 110, no. 4 (1986): 567.

on “decent” criminal women rather than sex workers.⁷² Yet, these institutions all functioned as similar carceral spaces.

Many working-class women moved among the Rosine Association, Magdalen Asylums, Almshouses, prisons, boarding houses, and different homes throughout their lives.⁷³ Cases from the Rosine Association shed light into the lives of some of the women who moved through these various institutions. The first recorded case of the Rosine Association details the story of Julia McDonald, an Irish woman orphaned at a young age who, after working as an actress and then within a “house of ill fame,” entered the Magdalen Asylum in New York City. After leaving New York, McDonald entered the Philadelphia Magdalen Asylum where she remained for several months. Soon, McDonald was arrested for vagrancy and committed to Moyamensing Prison. The members of the Rosine Association found McDonald and attempted to intervene. However, they note, “the House of her friends, the dram shop, the prison, & the Alms House were alternately her homes for a year.” McDonald returned to the Rosine Association, but was not allowed to enter because she could not earn enough to cover her board. Although the Rosine Association claimed the Rosine House was a safe space for women, it was not a free space. The women were expected to cover costs for their boarding, and, as is clear in Julia’s case,

⁷² Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 263. Excerpt of the 1858 Fourth Annual Report of the Howard Institution.

⁷³ Many working-class women relied on temporary homes throughout their lives, but not all of these spaces functioned in the same way. The prison was a particular institution based around crime and punishment, but other institutions, such as almshouses functioned as temporary homes for the poor. Ruth Wallis Herndon’s article, “Poor Women and the Boston Almshouse in the Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* vol. 32, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 349-381, is particularly useful for understanding how important these institutions were for poor women. Not only did women make up the majority of the population at the Almshouse, but the Almshouse served as a space for women’s families and women’s labor. Monique Bourque also examines Almshouses in her article, “Women and Work in the Philadelphia Almshouse, 1790-1840,” *Journal of the Early Republic* vol. 32, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 383-413. Bourque stresses that women’s participation in the daily operations of almshouses was critical to their functioning. These almshouses could only function as temporary homes because of the labor of the women who lived and labored in these spaces.

this cost was too high for some working-class women. Julia's case ends with tragedy when she took Laudanum to end her life.⁷⁴

Women like Julia McDonald spent much of their lives moving among institutions whether by choice or through forced incarceration. Reformers considered some formerly incarcerated women rehabilitated and ready to live their lives conducting honest, respectable labor. However, many women never escaped this cycle. As cases from the Rosine Association show, reformers' efforts often ended in failure. Women left institutions unreformed, they rejected reformers' aid, and they often fled from the institutions designed to "save" them. Reform efforts did not eliminate crime, nor did they rehabilitate many criminals. The Magdalen Society Asylum, the Rosine House, and the Howard Institution all aimed to rehabilitate, and this necessitated that they function as punitive institutions. And reformers believed these punitive institutions were not only necessary, but helpful for women. Despite failure, despite recognition that their efforts often did not produce tangible results, they insisted on the supremacy of institutional, punitive reform.

Many reform efforts of the antebellum era were punitive. This was an inescapable truth for organizations involved in prison reform. Working within the carceral system meant relying on custodial institutions employing violent punishments and exploiting the

⁷⁴ Rosine Association Records, Rosine Association Casebook Vol. 1 1848-1851, Mira Sharpless Townsend Papers, FHL-RG5-320, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, A00185765. Julia's case is described as being the first case of the Rosine Association in her casefile. Her case is in Volume 1, appearing before the more organized list of women's cases begin. In the final pages of the casebook, she is listed as being under the care of the association, but not as an inmate of the house. She is listed as being from Ireland, and being under care for 2 years, age 26, death by suicide, page 169. While the casebook does not state whether or not Julia is Catholic, many of the women in the Rosine Casebooks are listed as Irish immigrants, leading me to assume that in some of these cases these Protestant reformers were specifically seeking out Catholic women.

labor of prisoners. Reformers believed in the efficacy of this system. Like their male counterparts, women who participated in prison reform sought to improve material conditions within the carceral system. Women's organizations were addressing a prison system that was still failing to fully account for female prisoners, but they accepted the prison as an acceptable and appropriate solution for crime and punishment. Efforts to aid women outside of prisons relied on similar beliefs about rehabilitating female criminals. These efforts to aid female criminals, prisoners, and former convicts influenced, and ultimately strengthened, the carceral system.

Chapter Four:

“My Prison Home. But I am not a Prisoner”:

The Introduction of Prison Matrons in US Prisons

“I was reading an evening paper. I glanced over the advertisements. One attracted my attention, and held it so strongly that I read it over and over, again and again. There was nothing unusual in it to ordinary observation. It read, ‘Wanted. –At the Penitentiary, a Matron. Inquire at the Institution.’”¹ Thus, writing under the pseudonym Belle Otis, Caroline H. Woods began the story of her journey to becoming a prison matron.² The advertisement was vague, as are many of the details about the name and location of the prison discussed in *Woman in Prison*. Whether Woods’s account of her work as a prison matron is true, lightly fictionalized, or entirely imagined, her story provides insight into the ways in which prison matrons and prison reform were understood during the nineteenth century.

Woods represented herself as the ideal candidate to become a prison matron—she was a widow, she desired employment, and she felt a strong desire, fueled by religious beliefs, to help prisoners in need.³ These were some of the key qualities emphasized by Elizabeth Fry in her own early descriptions and shared by American reformers. Initially excited about working at the prison, Woods’s tone quickly changed, as she found the

¹ Caroline H. Woods, *Woman in Prison* (New York: Published by Hurd and Houghton. Cambridge: Riverside Press. 1869), iii.

² Caroline H. Woods wrote under the pseudonym Belle Otis, and she published *Woman in Prison* in 1869, claiming it was an entirely truthful account of her time working as prison matron. In her previous publication, *The Diary of a Milliner*, she had claimed to be a widow left to survive on her own. Belle Otis, *The Diary of a Milliner* (New York: Published by Hurd and Houghton, 459 Broome Street, 1867.)

³ Woods explained her reasons for becoming a prison matron in the introductory section of *Woman in Prison*, “Why Written,” iii-vi.

conditions deplorable. The prisoners were stuck in dirty and uncomfortable cells, and the Deputy claimed it was too difficult to allow visitors, such as women from local reform societies, into the prison. Woods argued that visits were important for both the prisoners and the prison management; prisoners benefitted from being visited, and the management would receive oversight which might otherwise be ignored.⁴ Thus, Woods was immediately wary of the prison staff who did not share her desire to open the prison to the scrutiny and influence of reformers. This also suggests that Woods closely aligned herself with reformers.

Woods became further distressed when she learned that the “Head Matron” of the institution was in charge in name only—the head matron was paid a salary, but rarely did any of the labor. This head matron was set up as an example of the worst kind of matron. She received her position due to her husband’s job as the “Master” of the prison, yet she was absent from the prison and showed no desire to complete her work or aid the prisoners. It was largely due to her that this prison was in disarray. While it is unclear if Woods intended to draw connections between the head matron and any real matrons she might’ve known or read about, her description reveals her expectations that prison matrons should embody virtue and strive to aid prisoners in their reformation.⁵

The labor required of Woods was strenuous and overwhelming. “Is this a woman’s work?” Woods asked herself the first time she locked the prisoners in their cells for the evening, “May-be. If it must be done, it should be done tenderly.” Woods was aware that the matron position was a job for women, but there is a clear conflict between what she

⁴ Woods, *Woman in Prison*, 4-5.

⁵ Woods, *Woman in Prison*, 9, 15.

believed matrons did—a romanticized vision of reforming prisoners in a clean, well-run prison—and their actual labor. Woods was expected to perform approximately seventeen hours of labor each day, with additional labor being added on to her regular duties.⁶ She had no time to focus on helping prisoners, and her vision of the prison as a potential “missionary ground” was shattered. Woods quickly realized that her work was not helping the prisoners as she believed it would; she came to believe that the conditions in prison only further degraded the prisoners. Woods felt trapped as her bedroom was directly connected to the prison itself, and her health soon declined.⁷ By the end of the story, Woods, too exhausted to continue, left the prison filled with sorrow and regret.

Caroline Woods represented herself as an ideal prison matron frustrated with the conditions of the prison. She wanted to perform moral labor; her desire to work as a prison matron was rooted in her belief that she could bring “the light of moral knowledge, and the discipline of Christian charity” into the prison.⁸ Yet prison work threatened her moral code. Her objections to conditions in the prison stemmed from her insistence on the need for a different form of discipline and punishment. Thus, her leaving the prison was not a rejection of the carceral system. Woods believed the prison could be improved, and she criticized the failure of prison officials to implement a system of punishment she deemed acceptable. Woods’s story shows how matrons were key to prison discipline, but reveals that matrons alone could not fundamentally change prison systems.

Women’s antebellum prison reform societies advocated for two key reforms—the separation of female prisoners from male prisoners, and the installation of prison

⁶ Woods, *Woman in Prison*, 19.

⁷ Woods, *Woman in Prison*, 14, 19, 15, 67.

⁸ Woods, *Woman in Prison*, vi.

matrons. As discussed in Chapter One, the housing of female prisoners was early on considered less important than the housing of male prisoners. Even as prisons reformed and remodeled their institutions to better house incarcerated women, their care was often an afterthought. Prison matrons were meant to address this problem, but installing matrons in prisons was not a simple, uniform process. The presence of imprisoned women did not guarantee prisons would hire a prison matron or any assistant matrons. However, increased numbers of female prisoners, public scandals involving them, and the efforts of reform societies all contributed to the hiring of the earliest prison matrons. Once hired, prison matrons became part of the prison system—they were key figures whose work was fundamentally shaped by, and centered around, female prisoners. I argue that matrons became integral to aiding, surveilling, and punishing incarcerated women, and they were able to conduct this work because they lived and labored within the prison. However, prison matrons alone would eventually prove insufficient for reformers' larger goals to promote their vision of prison discipline and reform.

The Maryland penitentiary, often called Baltimore Penitentiary, opened in 1811, and immediately admitted women to the prison; eleven years later, it became the first prison in the United States to hire a prison matron. It is unclear why or how Rachel Perijo was selected, but she soon became an example of how matrons could improve conditions for female prisoners, aid the prison, and save prisons money.⁹ Perijo was charged with watching over approximately sixty female convicts, and, within a few years, reformers

⁹ Note, Perijo's name is also written as Rachael Perrigo in some sources. See Wallace Shugg, *A Monument to Good Intentions: The Story of the Maryland Penitentiary, 1804-1995* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society: 2000), 19. See also *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston, June 2, 1826*, 6th ed. (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1830), 34. 18-19.

considered her work a great success.¹⁰ Perijo helped save the prison money by turning the department's average annual deficit of \$1,099 into a surplus of approximately \$492.¹¹ She was able to improve the health of the female prisoners and lessen the number of days they spent in the hospital. Reformers also applauded Perijo for teaching the women "useful arts," helping the women learn to read, and encouraging them to practice religious duties.¹² Reformers believed these changes had led to the reduction of recommitments at the penitentiary.¹³

Reform societies marveled that "all these surprising and delightful results, in favor of the female department of Baltimore Penitentiary, have been produced without any peculiar advantages in the construction of the Prison, but the goodness, vigilance and skill of the matron."¹⁴ Prison design was at the forefront of prison reform debates during the 1820s. Yet, in the case of the Maryland State Penitentiary, design was not the key to reforming female prisoners. At the time of Perijo's hiring, the Maryland State Penitentiary was not firmly committed to either the Auburn or Pennsylvania system.¹⁵ And, even after

¹⁰ According to Vernetta D. Young, "All the Women in the Maryland State Penitentiary: 1812-1869," *The Prison Journal* Vol. 81, No. 1 (Mar., 2001), during the Antebellum period, the penitentiary received approximately 953 female prisoners, which averaged out to 19 women per year. According to Young's research, Black women outnumbered white women during most of this period. See article pages 116-118.

¹¹ Shugg, *A Monument to Good Intentions*, 19. See also *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society*, Boston, June 2, 1826, 6th ed. (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1830), 34.

¹² *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society*, 35. According to this report, "useful arts" included knitting, sewing, and spinning. The society considered these forms of labor useful for the women as they could help them earn money after they left prison. The report also noted that Perijo's daughter help her with teaching the prisoners to read. However, there is no information about the name or age of this daughter.

¹³ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society*, 35. After working at the prison for approximately three years, Perijo had reduced recommitments to the prison. In the three years preceding January, 1825, forty-seven women had left the prison and only seven had returned.

¹⁴ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society*, 34-35.

¹⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, the Auburn system required solitary confinement at night combined with group activity in total silence during the day. In contrast, the Pennsylvania system, or separate system, required prisoners to serve their sentences in total isolation. The prison would house individuals in cells where they would work quietly and, theoretically, be cut off from other prisoners.

the penitentiary committed to the Auburn system in the 1830s, the incarcerated women were not subjected to the same rules governing men's silence and separation.¹⁶ This suggests that while the male prisoners of Maryland State Penitentiary were subjected to the Auburn system, prison officials believed that employing a matron served as a more useful means of disciplining female prisoners.

The Boston Prison Discipline Society stressed that, "nothing is more important in such an institution, than the character of the person engaged as the immediate superintendent."¹⁷ Perijo seems to have agreed with this sentiment, as she testified before a legislative committee about her difficulties working with the Maryland State Penitentiary prison warden, Nathaniel Hynson, who she believed was not performing his duties properly. When asked if Hynson was "vigilant and industrious in the discharge of his duties," Perijo responded, "He is not."¹⁸ Perijo drew on her knowledge of the laws governing the prison as well as her professional experience as a prison matron to critique Hynson. She served as a key witness before the legislative committee, and her reputation and knowledge gave weight to her criticism.

Clearly, Perijo was competent as a matron, but for reformers, she was more than that. Perijo became a useful example for reformers to push for matrons at more prisons.

¹⁶ Shugg, *A Monument to Good Intentions*, 21-27. Shugg notes that women remained separated from men after the establishment of the Auburn system, but they were allowed to converse and they remained in congregate rooms for housing. According to Shugg, the female department consisted of six rooms on the second story at the south end of the dormitory, 19. See also, Vernetta D. Young, "All the Women in the Maryland State Penitentiary: 1812-1869," *The Prison Journal* Vol. 81, No. 1 (Mar., 2001): 114.

¹⁷ *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society*, 35

¹⁸ Shugg, *A Monument to Good Intentions*, 18. Perijo and the prison physician, William W. Walls both testified before a legislative committee concerning Hynson. Both Perijo and Walls answered questions about Hynson, and both agreed he was not performing his work well. In Walls's testimony, he noted that Perijo was qualified as a matron, and Shugg notes that even Hynson acknowledged Perijo as competent despite their disagreements. Shugg cites *Depositions Taken at the Penitentiary by the Committee Appointed for that Purpose by the Legislature of Maryland* (Annapolis: J. Hughes, Printer, ca 1823) Maryland Historical Society.

They argued that Perijo made female prisoners more economically productive, less costly to the prison, and better behaved—all of which made incarcerated women more valuable to the state. She was to some reformers, “another Mrs. Fry.”¹⁹

With the apparent success of Rachel Perijo at the Maryland State Penitentiary, the push for hiring prison matrons increased. Prison reform societies increasingly discussed the need to hire matrons at prisons, and sought to convince inspectors to do so.²⁰ However, Perijo’s success and reform societies’ demands did not guarantee immediate change. This period of penal reform still falls under the first stage of the development of the women’s prison system in the United States, and women’s prison reform was not a high priority.²¹ Twenty years after Perijo was hired, reformer Dorothea Dix noted that many prisons still had not appointed matrons. In some cases, this was due to the low number of incarcerated women at a prison. Dix argued that it would be better to sentence women to “county houses of correction” rather than state prisons, due to the expenses incurred by housing female prisoners and the lack of matrons appointed at several state penitentiaries.²² Matrons were hired throughout the antebellum period, but their

¹⁹ “Another Mrs. Fry,” *Salem Observer* (Salem, Mass.) July 29, 1826.

²⁰ For example, in Negely K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 250 there is a discussion of correspondence between the PSAMPP and the FPAFP in regards to hiring a matron at the Arch Street Jail. The women were unable to convince the inspectors to hire a matron there in 1833. L. Mara Dodge also discusses this issue in relation to Illinois Prisons in the article, “One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males’: Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 32 No. 4 (Summer, 1999): 907-930, see page 911 for the beginning of the discussion of hiring matrons.

²¹ Nicole Hahn Rafter, “Prisons for Women, 1790-1980,” *Crime and Justice*, Vol 5. (1983): 132. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter One.

²² Dorothea Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, Second edition from the First Boston Edition (Philadelphia: Joseph Kite & Co., Printers, 1845), 107-108.

employment hinged on the number of female prisoners at a prison, as well as the influence and political connections of prison reformers.²³

In February of 1826, the *Connecticut Herald* reported on a trial against a keeper at Auburn Prison in New York. The keeper, Ebenezer B. Cobb, faced charges of assault and battery against the prisoner, Rachel Welch, who had been imprisoned a year earlier for larceny. Welch, an Irish immigrant, became pregnant while incarcerated and was flogged by Cobb during her sixth or seventh month of pregnancy.²⁴ Although she survived the whipping, Welch became sick after being beaten. She died shortly after giving birth, and her attending physician insisted that the whipping had contributed to her death.²⁵ The state of New York prohibited the whipping of women, and the public responded with outrage.²⁶ The *Connecticut Herald* condemned “the practice of whipping and beating convicts, as followed by turnkeys and petty overseers in this prison,” calling it “barbarous and inhuman to the last degree.” The newspaper went on to detail Welch’s injuries: “the

²³ It is important to note that prison reform associations differed in their power and influence throughout the nineteenth century. For example, W. David Lewis describes the ongoing struggles of the New York Prison Association in their attempts to influence and control prison discipline in New York. At times, prison officials worked with the organization, but shifting authorities and political regimes meant that there were also times when prison officials refused to work with the organization. See, W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965). See also Teeters, *They Were in Prison*, 250 for discussion of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia’s early attempts and failures to have a matron hired.

²⁴ It is unclear who impregnated Rachel Welch. Some prison employees testified that a convict cook named John White who was assigned to bring Welch her meals was the likely culprit. However, years after Welch’s death, a local minister claimed that the prison warden, Elam Lynds had impregnated Welch. See Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 118.

²⁵ W. David Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” *New York History* Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 1961), 220. Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 94.

²⁶ The state of New York had banned the whipping of female convicts in 1819. The law specifically stated that prison keepers, under the direction of inspectors, were permitted to use corporal punishment against male prisoners who had refused to comply with rules, refused to perform daily tasks, resisted prison officers, or destroyed property within the prison. However, whipping female prisoners was supposed to be banned. See *Laws of the State of New-York, Passed at the Forty-Second, Forty-Third, and Forty-Fourth Sessions of the Legislature. From January 1819 to April 1821*, volume 5 (Albany: William Gould & Co. and Gould Banks), 87

female in question was bruised from her neck down to about the middle of the back, so that the whole surface of the skin appeared purple, or black and blue, besides having several other marks on her sides and legs.”²⁷ Ultimately, the jury found Cobb guilty, and he was charged twenty-five dollars. However, he retained his job at Auburn Prison due to support from his superiors.²⁸ Despite laws and reform measures, violence was common in nineteenth-century prisons, but its use against someone the public considered worthy of pity—a white, pregnant prisoner—drew public concern.

The scandal surrounding Welch’s beating and death helped lead to reforms at Auburn Prison. At the time of her death, men and women of Auburn prison faced noticeably different conditions while incarcerated. The male prisoners of Auburn spent their days working in total silence, with only two breaks each day for meals. While they worked, the men were under the close supervision of guards and faced harsh punishments for breaking any rules. When the men finished their daily labors, they spent the evenings in separate cells. By contrast, the women inmates were sequestered in a crowded and unsanitary attic space above the kitchen. According to the New York Committee on State Prisons, the head of the kitchen was charged with monitoring the women, but the women were largely unsupervised.²⁹ By 1832, the penitentiary’s board of inspectors deemed the women’s space unacceptable and called for immediate action. The prison was remodeled, and new, temporary, quarters were created for the women.³⁰ The success of Rachel Perijo at Baltimore Penitentiary served as examples of the benefits of

²⁷ “From the Cayuga Republican Jan. 25,” Connecticut Herald, February 7, 1826.

²⁸ Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” 220-221. Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 95.

²⁹ Rafter, “Prisons for Women, 1790-1980,” 134-135. Info taken from the New York Committee on State Prisons, 1832.

³⁰ Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” 222.

prison matrons, and hiring a matron became part of the plan to reform Auburn Prison. At the instruction of the prison board of inspectors, the warden hired Lucinda Foote to serve as the first prison matron at the institution. Foote began her work in 1832, and she was initially paid sixteen dollars per month for her labors.³¹ Inspectors and legislators kept note of Foote's work at the prison, as she was considered key to female prisoners' reform.³²

Prison matrons like Lucinda Foote existed in a space between reformers and prisoners. Their employment took place as a result of reform, but they labored as workers within the prison system. "This is an unexpected field of action that I am invited to labour in," Foote wrote of her choice to become a matron, "if I can be the means of saving one of those degraded females from pollution in future life And her soul from the facing of the second death I will go."³³ Like prison reformers, Foote emphasized the salvation of the female prisoners, and referred to God as her source of strength in both work and life.³⁴ However, Foote did not consider herself a reformer, but a paid laborer. She never

³¹ Hired for \$16 a month in 1832. Later records show she was paid \$20 a month. See *Documents of the Senate of the State of New-York*, 58th Session (1835), Vol. I, no. 1-26 (Albany: Printed by E. Croswell, Printer to the State, 1835), 162. Foote's initial salary of \$16.00 equaled approximately \$4.00 per week. For comparison, Jeanne Boydston notes that middle-class women who became teachers during the mid-nineteenth century seldom earned more than \$1.50 per week plus board, and they were not paid outside of school terms. A full-time seamstress might earn up to \$2.50 a week, but she stresses that many needlewomen earned far less. See Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 134.

³² *Documents of the Senate of the State of New-York*, 58th Session (1835), Vol. I, no. 1-26 (Albany: Printed by E. Croswell, Printer to the State, 1835), 31. Inspectors noted ongoing interest in the matron's work in their official report. Inspectors of Auburn Prison in 1835 listed on page 33 as, E. Williams, Bruelley Tuttle, Thomas Y. How Jr, John Garrow, and U. F. Doubleday.

³³ Lucinda Foote, *A common place book containing variety: written in haste without premeditation, by Lucinda Foote while engaged as a matron in Auburn Prison (1832-1835, 1846, 1876)*The Winterthur Library, Document 246. Diary entry, Auburn June 17, 1832. P.1. Note from archive on biographical information: "Lucinda Foote was born on September 30, 1799, in Cornwall, Addison County, Vermont, the daughter of Jared and Lucinda Jennings Foote. She was a matron at the Auburn Prison in Auburn, New York, for over three years. Lucinda Foote married Judge Henry Day of Indiana on October 16, 1846. She died on June 16, 1881, in Jonesville, Michigan."

³⁴ Foote, *A common place book*, Diary entry, Auburn June 17, 1832. P.2

described her work as being similar to reform organizations, and she differentiated between herself, other prison staff, board members, agents, and visitors to the prison. For reformers, the prison was a distant institution they could visit to perform charitable works. For prison matrons, the prison became the site of their labor and their domestic lives. These distinctions are key to understanding how some matrons aided reform efforts while standing apart from reformers.

For reformers, the ideal prison matron encompassed multiple roles. She needed to be capable of handling many tasks—watching over prisoners, enforcing rules, educating them, guiding their labor, and, at times, acting in the capacity of a nurse.³⁵ Yet, all of the matron’s roles centered around a belief in the superiority of white, middle-class women’s virtue. According to reformers, female prisoners, who tended to come from working-class backgrounds, needed the aid of other, more respectable, women.³⁶ They advocated for moral reform and education within prisons that would encourage these women to adopt a working-class respectability focused on productive industry, notably domestic labor, as well as Protestant religious values. Within this vision, the prison served as the institutional base for incarcerated women’s reform.

³⁵ In some cases, matrons and their assistants were expected to aid during medical crises. For example, when there was a cholera outbreak at the Philadelphia County Prison, some of the women working in the Female Department acted as nurses. Records show one assistant matron, Eliza Lyons who was described as an assistant matron and an “intelligent nurse” who died during a cholera outbreak at the prison. See, *The Third Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Philadelphia County Prison, Made to the Legislature, February, 1850* (Philadelphia: Evening Bulletin Job Office, No. 46 South Third Street, 1850), 18. Later records show matrons discussed using similar language and terms. For example, when reporting the death of Ellen L. Spencer, who had served as matron for fifteen years, the report noted that she had done tremendous work during “epidemics of sickness, especially typhus,” showing that matrons often had to aid in medical crises. See *The Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Philadelphia County Prison, Made to the Legislature, February, 1870* (Philadelphia: James A. Chandler, Printer, 306 & 308 Chestnut Street, Girard building), 17.

³⁶ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill; Hatchard & Son, Piccadilly, S. Wilkin, Nowrich, 1827), 28-29.

Reformers explicitly linked domesticity to womanhood. Penologist and prison reformer Francis Lieber used the ideology of domesticity and separate spheres to articulate the differences between male and female criminals. For Lieber, “the wife’s sphere is supremely that of domestic life,” and the domestic sphere was, “the circle of activity for which she is destined.”³⁷ Lieber, like many reformers, believed women had an innate moral virtue that differentiated them from men. Yet it was this “natural” virtue that also made Lieber believe female criminals were more depraved than their male counterparts. When a woman committed a crime, it was an act “more in contradiction to her whole moral organization.”³⁸ And women who committed crimes were well aware of the ways in which this ideology affected their lives. The performance of middle-class respectability and the behavior women exhibited at trial and in prison greatly affected their experiences. Some reformers believed incarcerated women were capable of redemption—and this was a common goal for women’s prison reform societies—but this was determined by whether or not these women could meet the standards of respectability that Protestant middle-class reformers established for the laboring classes.³⁹ Thus, domestic practices were part of the process of rehabilitation.⁴⁰

³⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, *On the Penitentiary System in The United States and Its Application in France*, trans. Francis Lieber (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1833), xiv.

³⁸ *On the Penitentiary System in The United States*, xvi.

³⁹ For example, the Howard Institution did not believe all female criminals were redeemable or worthy of aid. They refused to aid women who were known sex workers. In contrast, organizations such as the Magdalen Society and the Rosine Association did believe sex workers could be “redeemed.” For discussion of female criminals, criminality, and women’s respectability see Erica Rhodes Hayden, *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2019.) See also, L. Mara Dodge, “One female prisoner is of more trouble than twenty males’: Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896” *Journal of Social History* Vol. 32 no. 4 (1999): 907-930.

⁴⁰ Domestic practices can refer to a number of things such as performing labor like sewing, spinning, and weaving, practicing reading and writing, improving sanitation and hygiene, improving personal appearances, and following moral and religious instructions. We see examples of these kinds of practices being encouraged by the first prison matron in the US, Rachel Perigo. See, *First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society*, 35. For further reference, see the discussion of Eliza Farnham

The treatment of female prisoners differed from that of male prisoners. Women experienced inequality and neglect in prisons. A writer for the *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* argued that male prisoners were treated with far more compassion than women who committed similar, or lesser, crimes. They contended that many male convicts received “prompt attention and considerate kindness,” and that these men could “return to employment and trust, and even virtue.”⁴¹ Whether or not this claim reflected reality for male prisoners is suspect, yet this person seemed convinced that male prisoners were receiving far better treatment.⁴² For many women’s prison reformers, the matron was a key solution to this problem. They believed female prisoners’ labor, education, religious instruction, and personal habits could all be monitored by a matron. One British prison matron explained that the treatment of female prisoners differed from male prisoners due to the need to care for the women as individuals rather than as a group of prisoners. She claimed, “Each wants personal and peculiar treatment, so that the duties fall much more heavily on the matrons than on the wardens.”⁴³ Reformers and prison officials expected that prison designs and prison systems would sufficiently

below. For discussion of women’s labor and women’s domestic labor and household manufacturing see, Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the New Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴¹ “Female Penitentiaries” *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy* Vol. 3, No. 4 (1848): 190.

⁴² For a broader discussion of the treatment of male prisoners in the Northeast during the antebellum period see W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965). Lewis discusses politicians’ and reformers’ ideas about the treatment of prisoners throughout this study. He details ideas about rehabilitation as well ongoing debates concerning, and uses of, punishment. For discussion of how male and female inmate experiences differed in Pennsylvania, see Erica Rhodes Hayden, *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2019.) For a broader discussion of sex discrimination at prisons see Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, Second Edition (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990). Rafter’s discussions span beyond the antebellum period, but she provides information about multiple prisons and breaks down the ways in which women and men have been treated differently in the US carceral system.

⁴³ L. Mara Dodge, “One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males’: Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896,” 913. The article notes the quote is from the book *Female Life in Prison*. See, *Female Life in Prison* Third Edition, Revised. In Two Volumes. Vol. 1. (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1863).

manage incarcerated men. Their gendered expectations of men and women shaped the care of prisoners.

As a matron, Lucinda Foote focused on the religious salvation of the women of Auburn Prison. To her, the prisoners were pitiable women in need of aid.⁴⁴ Foote was concerned that when the women left prison, they would be unable to resist the temptations and evils that surrounded them in regular society.⁴⁵ Foote's concern speaks to commonly held sentiments about female criminals during the antebellum period. As Erica Rhodes Hayden's quantitative research on female criminals in Pennsylvania during this period has shown, women were frequently arrested and charged for committing crimes of a sexual nature or crimes deemed immoral. These offences included charges of adultery, fornication, bigamy, and alcohol-related offenses.⁴⁶ Foote likely knew about the sentences of the women under her care, and she responded sympathy and judgment that aligned her more closely with middle-class, Protestant values.⁴⁷

Foote discussed the female inmates in broad terms; she did not mention their individual names, nor did she spend a great deal of her time writing about experiences with prisoners. In fact, at many points, Foote wrote of being exhausted and bored with the "dull monotony" of her work and seemed unmotivated to reform the women of the prison.⁴⁸ Perhaps, she was simply exhausted by the labor. As Caroline Woods's writing suggests, prison matrons performed a great deal of labor on a daily basis. Yet prison

⁴⁴ Foote, *A common place book*, 8.

⁴⁵ Foote, *A common place book*, Diary Entry, Oct. 25, 1833, 19-20.

⁴⁶ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 22-24.

⁴⁷ For information on the development of the divide between working-class and middle-class citizens, see Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution*, Philadelphia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Foote, *A common place book*, 66.

reformers expected prison matrons to care deeply for the prisoners under their care, as well as those who left their care. Reformers believed that “the benevolent interest of the matron will not be confined to the walls of her gaol.” They expected prison matrons to continue aiding women as they were discharged from prisons even when it was not required as an official part of their labors.⁴⁹ Reformers’ expectations for matrons did not necessarily match the expectations matrons had of their own labor, nor did they always align with the demands of prison officials.⁵⁰

Prison served as a penal-domestic space for both prisoners and matrons. The prison seems incompatible with domesticity on its surface. Prisoners were removed from general society and placed into facilities designed to separate criminals from the public. Prison laborers, such as matrons, separated themselves from the public by accepting their employment. However, this separation forced the prison to function as a domestic space for prisoners and the prison laborers who resided there. The public, private, and penal spheres met in prisons. Ann Aungles argues the relationships between the domestic space of the home and the prison take multiple forms, “the home *within* the prison; the home *outside* the prison; the home *outside but allowed into* the prison; and finally the prison within the home.”⁵¹ Domestic and penal spaces are interdependent.⁵² Prison matrons functioned within the penal-domestic space of the prison; they lived and worked within the same space.

⁴⁹ *Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston 1828*, second edition (Boston: Published by Perkins and Marvin, No. 114 Washington Street, 1830.) 66-67. This section is quoting from the Sixth Report of the London Society.

⁵⁰ See discussion of Eliza Farnham.

⁵¹ Ann Aungles, “The Home and the Prison,” (Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Wollongong, 1990), 133.

⁵² Aungles, “The Home and the Prison,” 1.

Lucinda Foote described Auburn as “my Prison home. But I am not a Prisoner.”⁵³ Matrons worked and lived within “the sights and sounds and smells of prison.”⁵⁴ Foote was not confined in the same way the prisoners were confined, and yet she simultaneously had two homes. Auburn prison, where she lived and worked, functioned as a home as did the home of her family and life outside of the prison. While one was explicitly linked to familial ties, both spaces were sites of productive, reproductive and domestic labor.⁵⁵

The penal-domestic environment was significant for women’s prison reform efforts, as reformers explicitly linked domesticating practices to their work. Women’s prison reform societies focused on raising female prisoners to a level of respectability they deemed socially acceptable for women of the working class. These efforts consisted of teaching the women to read, providing moral and religious instruction, training the women to perform domestic tasks, and encouraging better hygiene.⁵⁶ Domesticating practices were therefore a key aspect of reformers’ vision of women’s rehabilitation in

⁵³ Foote, *A common place book*, Diary Entry, 1833, 23-24.

⁵⁴ Clarice Feinman, *Women in the Criminal Justice System* Second Edition (New York: Praeger, 1986), 138. This particular section from block quotes from Kate O’Hare, who was imprisoned in 1919 in Jefferson City, Missouri.

⁵⁵ There is extensive literature on women’s reproductive labor and domestic labor. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are credited with first discussing the idea of reproductive labor as a means of differentiating between the production of goods and services and the reproduction of the conditions, through labor and other means, that maintain that production. This concept was challenged and further developed by Wally Secombe, who argued that housewives and housework were fundamentally important for the functioning of capitalism. See Wally Secombe, “The Housewife and her Labour under Capitalism,” *New Left Review*, Vol. 0, No. 83 (Jan., 1974): 3-24. See also, Heidi Hartmann, “Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring, 1976): 137-69, Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the New Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol 18, No. 1 (Autumn, 1992): 1-43, and Dorothy Roberts, “Spiritual and Menial Housework,” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism*, Vol. 9, No. 51 (1997): 51-80.

⁵⁶ For a full discussion of Elizabeth Fry’s thoughts on reform see Chapter Two. For discussion of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia, the Magdalen Society, and the Rosine Association see Chapter Three.

prison. And many reformers believed that prison matrons served as extensions of their own efforts. For reformers, the penal-domestic environment provided a space for female prisoners to redeem themselves.

Prison environments proved challenging for matrons and assistant matrons. Although Lucinda Foote was initially eager to work as a matron, the labor and lifestyle took its toll on her mental state. As time passed, she began to view her own confinement as a “test and a burden.”⁵⁷ When possible, and necessary, prisons did hire assistant matrons.⁵⁸ In prisons where matrons had the aid of assistant matrons, work could be shared; for example, matrons could take turns sleeping in the “prison chamber” in order to watch over the prisoners at night.⁵⁹ However, even with assistants and a division of labor, caring for prisoners within the penal-domestic space put strains on these women.

As Caroline Woods’s 1869 publication suggests, hiring prison matrons could not on its own drastically change prisons. Despite reform efforts, British writer and social theorist, Harriet Martineau aptly pointed out that the inmates at Auburn Prison were “pale and haggard,” and that despite improved conditions and the hiring of a matron, conditions remained abysmal.⁶⁰ All of the female prisoners were confined in one large room—no longer stuck in the attic, but still left without separate cells—and there was no

⁵⁷ Foote, *A common place book*, 8.

⁵⁸ Based on available sources, it’s clear that several larger county and state prisons did hire assistant matrons to aid in the surveillance and care of female prisoners. Philadelphia County Prison (Moyamensing Prison) employed matrons and assistant matrons, as did Mount Pleasant Female Prison. In some cases, assistant matrons would take over the position of matron, but in other cases they remained in assistant positions. It seems likely that hiring assistant matrons was based on need within prisons as well as prison finances.

⁵⁹ Georgiana Bruce Kirby, *Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1887), 195.

⁶⁰ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* Vol. 1 (London: Published by Saunders and Otley. New York: Sold by Harper & Brothers, 1838), 123.

enforced silence within the space. Martineau described the noise in the room: “the gabble of tongues among the few who were there was enough to paralyze any matron.”⁶¹

Martineau was critical and unsympathetic. For her, the prison was noisy and upsetting. Yet her comments are revealing of the limits of reform initiatives. Reform efforts, like hiring a matron, were not enough to resolve the larger problems within the women’s prison system. Auburn, like many prisons, neglected female prisoners, prison officials considered the women a nuisance, and they argued that female prisoners should be removed from their institution.⁶²

In 1839, due to financial difficulties, Auburn sent most of their female inmates to the Mount Pleasant Female Prison at Sing Sing Prison.⁶³ Mount Pleasant Female Prison became the first women’s prison established by an act of the legislature. Although it was close to Sing Sing Prison, and remained administratively dependent on it, Mount Pleasant had a separate building and staff.⁶⁴ However, they were unable to completely separate the women from men. Mount Pleasant was close enough to Sing Sing that male prisoners often passed near the building, which made communication between the male and female prisoners an ongoing problem. Male prisoners could also gain access to the women when

⁶¹ Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, 124.

⁶² W. David Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” *New York History*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 1961): 222-226.

⁶³ Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” 224-229. Mount Pleasant served as a separate prison for female prisoners in connection to Sing Sing Prison. Records from the NY State Legislature show discussion of plans to create a separate prison for women in order to address ongoing concerns about the state of conditions for women at existing prisons in NY. See, *Documents of the Senate of the State of New-York*, 58th Session (1835), xxiv, clxxxii, 31, 40-41. See also, Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” 228-229. By the end of 1839, only one female prisoner remained at Auburn. Mount Pleasant effectively became the primary prison for women in New York.

⁶⁴ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, Second Edition (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 16. Women from other New York prisons were transferred to Mount Pleasant after it opened. This included transfer from Bellevue and Auburn. In 1841, a New York law ruled that all women sentenced to a state prison would be sent to the female department (Mount Pleasant) at Sing Sing. Rafter, 16-17.

they entered the women's prison to work on equipment. The new institution had not been equipped to cook food, and thus the women's prison had to rely on male waiters to bring food from Sing Sing. The inspectors at Sing Sing worried that communication between male and female prisoners would lead prisoners to be "disorderly and disobedient."⁶⁵ Thus, the separation of the sexes remained an ongoing concern despite the construction of separate facilities.

Eliza Farnham, Mount Pleasant's matron, actively tried to reform the prison. Farnham was not the first matron hired to work there; she was appointed in 1844 after the previous matron left the position due to riots within the women's section. An assistant matron to Farnham, Georgiana Bruce Kirby described the previous matron's failures in her memoir, *Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative*. Kirby explained that the previous matron was "respectable, but incompetent" and had faced attacks from the prisoners who had rebelled against her orders. Farnham was chosen as a replacement to bring discipline and order to the women's section of the prison. Kirby also explains that Governor Young and Judge John W. Edmunds helped to hire Farnham. According to New York State records, the previous matron was Isabella Bard who had taken over the position from a Mrs. Army.⁶⁶ Once hired, Farnham gained attention for her efforts to transform the treatment of prisoners within Mount Pleasant.

⁶⁵ Lewis, "The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845," 230. For further discussion of the limitations of women's facilities within prisons refer to discussions of Eastern State Penitentiary and Auburn Prison in Chapter One.

⁶⁶ Georgiana Bruce Kirby, *Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1887), 190-191. See also, *Documents of the Senate of the State of New York, 67th Session, (1844), Vol. I, no. 1-50* (Albany: E. Mack, Printer to the Senate, 1844), 186. A newspaper in 1843 also reported on the female prisoners at Sing Sing rioting due to the changing of the prison matron, "Multiple News Items." *Mountaineer*, May 5, 1843, *Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers* (accessed April 17, 2021). <https://link-gale-com.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/apps/doc/GT3009767181/NCNP?u=psucic&sid=NCNP&xid=17818bd2>.

Farnham was a proponent of phrenology, the science of analyzing the shape and size of the skull to interpret an individual's character and capabilities.⁶⁷ Phrenology had deep ties to prisons and prisoners. Physician and anatomist Franz Joseph Gall founded the science when, in 1805, he and his assistant, Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, began to visit prisons in Berlin and Spandau to examine the craniums of convicts. Historian Courtney Thompson argues that Gall's research in prisons rendered the prison "a laboratory for the production of knowledge about the correspondences between heads and characters."⁶⁸ Prisons in the United States became key to the work of phrenologists, who saw criminals as readily available subjects for their research.

Phrenology became important within discussions of criminal responsibility and penal systems in the United States. Despite espousing the belief that there were immutable characteristics of the mind that helped to define criminal types, some phrenologists also believed in the merits of reform and re-education for prisoners. However, phrenologists disagreed about the benefits and limitations of rehabilitation and education. Some argued that the existence of "recidivists," which referred to convicts who had repeatedly committed offenses, could not be properly rehabilitated and would potentially require "indefinite incarceration." However, others argued that reform and education would eliminate the need for prisons for most criminals. These questions surrounding the ability of prisons to rehabilitate prisoners were never fully resolved.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ For the history phrenology as it relates to crime, criminality and prisons see, Courtney E. Thompson, *An Organ of Murder: Crime, Violence, and Phrenology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

⁶⁸ Thompson, *An Organ of Murder*, 11-13. Phrenology originally went by other names. Gall called his new science "Schädellehre," (which translated to "doctrine of the skull") or "organologie". This term later became "organology" or "craniology" before eventually becoming phrenology. Gall developed his theories of phrenology in the 1790s.

⁶⁹ Thompson, *An Organ of Murder*, 81-82.

Farnham worked with phrenologists while serving as the prison matron of Mount Pleasant. Farnham edited *The Rationale of Crime* by English phrenologist Marmaduke Sampson, who, like most phrenologists, believed that crime could be attributed to the size of different organs within the brain.⁷⁰ However, Sampson argued that imbalances in the brain could be treated with proper re-education.⁷¹ Farnham contributed to *The Rationale of Crime* by discussing her experiences working with women at Mount Pleasant. Some of her descriptions of prisoners relied entirely on phrenological understandings of criminality. She described one woman as “a half-breed Indian and negro woman, under confinement for the fourth time,” who had attacked a keeper with a knife and exhibited “uncontrollable fury.” Farnham linked this behavior to the development of the organ of “destructiveness” in the woman’s brain as well as “large secretiveness and caution, and very defective benevolence and moral organs generally.”⁷² Sampson argued that such imbalances within the brain could be treated.⁷³ Farnham agreed, and acknowledged the complexities and irregularities amongst prisoners. She believed the prison was a space in which some prisoners could learn to regulate their behavior.

Although Farnham’s writings about phrenology insisted upon the possibility of re-educating criminals, Farnham and her assistant matrons did not view or treat prisoners

⁷⁰ Thompson, *An Organ of Murder*, 83, Janet Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 2 (Aug., 2006), 313. Sampson believed that the brain was divided into thirty-seven distinct areas, each associated with different “faculty,” “propensity,” or “sentiment.” However, different phrenologists came up with their own ideas about the number of organs within the brain. However, for the study of criminals the organ of “destructiveness” was particularly important. See Thompson, *An Organ of Murder*, 18-29.

⁷¹ Janet Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” 314.

⁷² M.B. Sampson, *Rationale of Crime and Its Appropriate Treatment; Being a Treatise on Criminal Jurisprudence Considered in relation to Cerebral Organization*, edited by E. W. Farnham (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 200 Broadway. Philadelphia: Geo. S. Appleton, 148 Chesnut-Street. 1846), 158.

⁷³ Janet Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” 314.

equally at Mount Pleasant. Farnham considered some female prisoners capable of rehabilitation, but treated others as irredeemable. In particular, racism was critical to how Farnham and her assistant matrons viewed prisoners.⁷⁴ In many ways, race served as an insurmountable difference that re-education and rehabilitation could not resolve. Georgiana Bruce Kirby, who worked as an assistant matron to Farnham, wrote about several Black female prisoners in her memoir.⁷⁵ Kirby's description of two Black women within Mount Pleasant exemplifies how racism influenced the judgment and treatment of incarcerated women. Kirby told the story of two sisters who she described as animal-like "Amazons," whose "portentous bronzed countenance seemed to breathe a satanic atmosphere." Kirby insisted that, prior to Farnham's arrival, these sisters had caused riots and countless other problems. They had even, she reported, joined a murderess within the prison to conduct a ceremony to sell themselves to the devil. For Kirby, these women could not be redeemed due to their "treachery."⁷⁶ Kirby took no issue with deciding who amongst the female prisoners was guilty or innocent, who was evil or good, and who was deserving of her help or hostility.⁷⁷ Her care for the prisoners of Mount Pleasant hinged

⁷⁴ White supremacy and racism were key to the development of the criminal justice system and the different prison systems of the antebellum period. This is evident in newspaper reports that reinforced beliefs about Black people and immigrants, their treatment in court trials, as well as their conviction rates. See Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 18-21. For further discussion of disparities see Roger Lane, *Roots of Violence in Black Philadelphia, 1860-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). For further discussion of the treatment and experiences of Black women see Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006). See also, Kali Nicole Gross, "African American Women, Mass Incarceration, and the Politics of Protection," *Journal of American History* Vol, 102, No.1 (June 2015): 25-33.

⁷⁵ Kirby worked as an assistant matron to Eliza Farnham along with three other women. She lists the three women in her memoir as Mrs. Mary Ann Johnson, Sarah Mallory, and an unnamed "evangelical sister." See Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 191.

⁷⁶ Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 201-202.

⁷⁷ Notably, Kirby does not detail the punishments inflicted upon the two Black sisters who she devoted a section of her memoir to. However, she does detail the ongoing punishment of the "murderess" Kane who allegedly aided the two women in their satanic ritual. Kirby highlights these punishments because she claims that Kane responded properly to solitary confinement and eventually showed her some respect. See Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 215-217.

on her feelings toward the prisoners as individuals, and these feelings were clearly influenced by racial prejudice. Matrons were part of the larger carceral system in the United States, and this system—whether reformed, modified, or not—was racist.

Farnham intended to reform the women of Mount Pleasant, and instituted immediate changes in their daily lives. She modified the women’s education—using phrenology texts, novels by Charles Dickens, and biographies and magazines, rather than strictly emphasizing religious teachings.⁷⁸ The women were allowed to read *Oliver Twist*—as opposed to *Call to the Unconverted Sinner*, which was the only book in the prison’s library before Farnham’s arrival—and to take books back to their cells.⁷⁹ Farnham also abolished the silent system; in late 1845, Farnham allowed the women to whisper to one another while working, or to earn conversation as a reward. By early 1846, she allowed the women to talk at all times.⁸⁰ Farnham brought practices of middle-class domesticity into the prison; she re-decorated communal spaces with maps, plants, and glass cabinets to display the women’s needlework. Her assistant matron also rented a piano for the space.⁸¹ Farnham’s approach to reform followed Marmaduke Sampson’s argument that re-education, rather than punishment, could rehabilitate criminals.⁸² She believed re-education through domesticating practices was the key to rehabilitation.

⁷⁸ Janet Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” 311. See also, Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 193-194. See also, James Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 135.

⁷⁹ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 18. See also Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 193.

⁸⁰ Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” 314. For information on the silent system, also called the Auburn system, see W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965).

⁸¹ Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” 318. According to the *Documents of the State Senate of New York, 70th Session (1847)*, Vol. IV, No. 153, 3, Farnham was employed as the head matron and she had four assistant matrons.

⁸² Floyd, “Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison,” 313-314.

However, Farnham's vision of re-education still involved violent punishments as well as the threat of violent punishments.⁸³

Farnham's rejection of well-established means of prisoner reformation set her apart from other matrons, which earned her both praise and criticism. Although she initially had support from notable figures such as Horace Greeley, Farnham was also met with harsh criticism for changing too much within the prison. In 1847, the Senate Prison Committee inspecting Sing Sing reported that Mount Pleasant had fallen into disarray due to incompetent management that had created an institution with "nothing *masculine* in its composition." They claimed that only thirty-two of the ninety-one incarcerated women were "profitably employed," and complained that the prison lacked discipline. They noted that the "law of silence" was not being enforced, and the women were talking, laughing, and being generally noisy.⁸⁴ The domesticating practices Farnham used to re-educate prisoners did not fit expectations of punishment in the silent system. The women were not profitable enough, nor docile enough, to be considered good prisoners.⁸⁵ State officials agreed, and forced Farnham to abolish her programs and reinstate imposed silence, hard work, and stricter discipline. By 1848, Farnham left her position at Mount Pleasant.⁸⁶

The scrutiny Farnham faced at Mount Pleasant Female Prison was not unique.

Prison employees were often the focus of investigations and reports as debates continued

⁸³ Farnham continued to issue punishments for the women at Mount Pleasant such as solitary confinement, cropping women's hair, using a gag and straitjacket, withholding food and water, chaining, and shower baths. This will be further discussed in Chapter Five. See, Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control* 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990) 20.

⁸⁴ *Documents of the State Senate of New York, 70th Session (1847)*, Vol. IV, No. 153, 3-4.

⁸⁵ The women were performing labor similar to women at other prisons. They made buttons, performed hat binding, mended clothing for the male prisoners, and cooked and did washing. However, the women's department had a yearly deficit of approximately \$7,000 at this time. See *Documents of the State Senate of New York, 70th Session (1847)*, Vol. IV, No. 153, 3.

⁸⁶ Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 48.

about the proper management of prisons. Just as Farnham's predecessor, Isabella Bard, was considered "incompetent," wardens faced similar forms of criticism.⁸⁷ Sing Sing prison serves as an excellent example as to how debates about prison reform, and the care of prisoners, had a direct impact on prison officials. Elam Lynds helped developed the Auburn system and served as a warden at Auburn Prison as well as the first warden of Sing Sing Prison. In 1830, a report from a commissioner of prisons in New York claimed Lynds was guilty of maladministration and cruel behavior.⁸⁸ The commissioner, Samuel M. Hopkins, wrote that Lynds had committed "unanswerable instances of cruelty to prisoners."⁸⁹ Hopkins was not critical of Lynds because of his support for the Auburn system, which Hopkins too had long supported.⁹⁰ Indeed, Hopkins had initially praised Lynds and was a vocal supporter of stringent practices within prisons. However, he articulated a clear difference between strict discipline and cruel despotism. He harshly criticized Lynds and called for his removal.⁹¹

Despite this report, Elam Lynds was not removed from his position at Sing Sing Prison. Hopkins quickly discovered that his fellow prison commissioners disagreed about Lynds's practices at Sing Sing, and they soon resigned from their positions. Hopkins

⁸⁷ Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 190.

⁸⁸ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 147. The assistant keeper at Sing Sing provided testimony claiming that Lynds had starved prisoners, appropriated penitentiary supplies for his own use, defrauded the state on stone contracts, and made personal trips at the state's expense.

⁸⁹ *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society* (Boston: Stereotyped at the Boston Type and Stereotype Foundry, 1830), 13. The statements presented in the *Fifth Annual Report* came from a series of letters written by Samuel M. Hopkins of Albany. Hopkins was one of the three commissioners, along with George Tibbits of Troy and Stephen Allen of New York, who had been appointed by the legislature. See *Fifth Annual Report*, 10.

⁹⁰ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 76, 83. Hopkins, a former federal congressman and influential member of the state legislature, had taken part in an intensive investigation of the penitentiary system in 1822. He strongly supported the development of the Auburn system and encouraged a strict and severe penal system.

⁹¹ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 148.

attempted to remain in order to continue his fight to remove Lynds, but he was pressured to retire, and Sing Sing Prison was soon placed under the care of a new board whose members all supported Lynds. Lynds eventually left his position in October 1830, and his successor Robert Wiltse followed the “Lyndsian” methods of discipline and punishment at Sing Sing.⁹² Wiltse served as warden for several years before facing an onslaught of public criticism. In 1838, the *Hudson River Chronicle* reported that punishment in Sing Sing had devolved into torture and barbarism.⁹³ After an official investigation into Wiltse’s conduct at Sing Sing, he was able to retain his position. However, as controversies mounted, Wiltse was replaced.

In April 1840, foundry operator and stover manufacturer, David L. Seymour was appointed as the new warden of Sing Sing. Unlike his predecessors, Seymour focused on rehabilitation. He became more personally involved in the prisoners’ lives by taking part in religious services, delivering tracts to the convicts each Sunday, and taking responsibility of the Sabbath school. Seymour prioritized education, and he established an institutional library for the inmates. He also reduced the isolation of inmates by allowing convicts limited visitations with relatives.⁹⁴ But Seymour’s administration was short-lived. After an investigation into his administration, Seymour faced criticism for operating the prison at a deficit and for being too lenient with the prisoners. He was replaced by none other than Elam Lynds.⁹⁵

⁹² Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 101, 149.

⁹³ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 204. Lewis cites *Hudson River Chronicle*, Vol. I and II (1837-1839), particularly issues from May 29, June 19, and Oct. 2 1838.

⁹⁴ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 206-210.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 215.

Prison commissioners continued to investigate, criticize, and replace prison officials throughout the antebellum period in order to address ongoing concerns about the management of prisons. Prison reform societies and local newspapers also reported on conditions within prisons, and prison employees and officials experienced both praise and criticism. The employment of prison officials was largely based on fluctuating committees who were chosen by the current dominant political party. This gave political parties direct influence over the appointments of prison officials, and, in turn, influence over the care of prisoners. Prison officials like Farnham, Lynds, and Seymour had clear visions as to how to discipline and treat prisoners. However, the wavering support they received demonstrates how uneven prison management and prison reform was during this period.

Caroline Woods believed the solution to prison reform was to make prison operations transparent to the public. She believed if people could examine prisons, then they “would soon be managed upon principles which would tend to the elevation of the wretched beings who now come out of them more degraded and hardened in the commission of crime than they go in.”⁹⁶ Outside observation and intervention were key to Woods’s vision of reform. Yet Woods failed to acknowledge the decades of reform efforts that had already taken place by the time *Woman in Prison* was published in 1869. Visitations were normal practices for benevolent organizations, and prison reform societies had already spent decades trying to aid incarcerated women. Reformers’ efforts are evident in *Woman in Prison*—the women were separated from men and the prison

⁹⁶ Woods, *Woman in Prison*, 192-193.

had hired matrons. However, Woods still found the material conditions within the prison unacceptable.

Women's prison reformers' efforts to promote their vision of prison discipline during the antebellum period had mixed results. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, matrons appeared as an ideal solution for prison reform. Reformers proposed hiring matrons to care for female prisoners who were often neglected, and in many cases administrative and supervisory boards agreed. Despite uneven success and uneven hiring, matrons were employed in prisons throughout the nineteenth century. Yet, there was always a contradiction present in the labor of prison matrons. Their roles were simultaneously defined by their care for prisoners and their ability to, and expectation to, surveil and punish the prisoners under their care. For Woods, the burden was too great to bear. For reformers, matrons alone would eventually prove insufficient for reformers' vision of prison discipline.

Chapter Five:

“The Representative and Guardian of Her Sex”: Prison Matrons and Violence

“The peculiar relation in which a prison matron stands towards the objects of her care, ought to inspire her with no ordinary share of interest and compassion. In the exercise of her duties she is at once the representative and guardian of her sex, and she ought to be a bright example of its purity, disinterestedness, and love.”¹ This declaration exemplifies the sentimentalized discourse found in prison reform publications. Reformers held up matrons as benevolent women, who would care for, and aid in the reformation of, female prisoners in order to help them return to society. Prison reformers thus placed massive burden on prison matrons. Yet the envisioned roles and labor of prison matrons presents a contradiction. Prison matrons’ work required surveillance and punishment that ultimately rested on violence. Reformers believed that the rehabilitation of criminals required punishment, and they were well aware of the violence that took place within prisons.² Different states allowed for various punishments to be employed within prisons, and there were publicized investigations and scandals in various prisons.³ Despite this reality, reformers focused on the aspects of rehabilitation that appeared less forceful. I argue that reformers used the language of benevolence as a veil to obscure the violent realities of prisons and prison reform, and that this rhetoric was crucial to promoting their vision of prison discipline.

¹ “Prison Discipline: Acknowledgement of the Importance of the Influence of Ladies Committees and Prison Matrons,” *Boston Recorder and Religious Telegraph* (Boston, MA), Aug. 22, 1828, p. 133.

² Reformers beliefs in the need for punishment is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter One.

³ Examples of publicized scandals during this period include the 1834 Eastern State Penitentiary legislative investigation and the Rachel Welch Scandal.

Analyzing the function of punishment is key to understanding prison reform and the roles of prison matrons. Scholars have repeatedly turned to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* to analyze punishment within prisons.⁴ However, Foucault's work does not fully consider how female prisoners fit into the history of the modern prison.⁵ Foucault does point to a group of female prisoners at the women's workshop at Clairvaux as the example of "the perfect image of prison labor." He describes these women as "human machinery," who silently work in halls where "the very air breathes penitence and expiation."⁶ Foucault did not analyze the gendered aspects of the women's labor, nor did he question why women fit his vision of docile prisoners so perfectly. Thus, he ignored the ways in which incarcerated women's labor and penal education—the fundamental aspects of penal reformation—differed from that of men. Foucault's argument focuses on discipline, but not gendered discipline. Foucault also assumes that penal institutions always functioned as he envisioned. The prisoners in Foucault's argument are part of the "total institution" of the prison. However, prisons could not function as the total and austere institutions Foucault imagined because women were not always fully incorporated into the systems of discipline at these institutions. And female prisoners often resisted the mechanisms of discipline and control within prisons. Rather than becoming "docile bodies" many of these women acted out, attacked and harassed prison employees, and, in some cases, attempted to commit suicide.

⁴ For a summary of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* please refer to the Introductory chapter.

⁵ It should also be noted that Foucault does not analyze the ways in which race or ethnicity affect the prison and prisoners either. He tends to treat the prisoner as a neutral subject, and ignores factors like race, gender, religion, sexuality, and class. See Sandra Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988).

⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc., 1995), 243.

Foucault never claims that the prison functioned or succeeded as reformers claimed it would—in fact he argues that prisons were designed to fail and create delinquents.⁷ Yet his view of the prison as a “microcosm of a perfect society” is a useful means of understanding how reformers approached prison reform. Women’s prison reformers attempted to transform female prisoners into “respectable” women.⁸ They emphasized Protestant religious teachings, labor practices, and domestic behaviors that replicated their own middle-class values in the context of working-class women’s lives. These reformers encouraged discipline and education meant to forge specific, gendered identities for incarcerated women. Female prisoners who met the standards of reformers became “success stories” while others were explained away. Reformers could blame the individual prison for failing to properly provide enough discipline or education to allow for reform. Or reformers could blame the individual woman for her own moral failures. Regardless of these individual cases, prisons would continue to exist as institutions of punishment, and reformers could continue their work to influence and exert power.

Prison matrons were crucial to women reformers’ attempts to exert power within the prison. These reformers believed that female prisoners required female supervision.

⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 24, 234, 276-277.

⁸ Nineteenth-century contemporaries used the terms respectable and respectability as a means of differentiating moral and socially acceptable behaviors and people from those deemed immoral or criminal. It is difficult to find an exact definition of respectability that contemporaries uniformly used. However, in historical accounts from the United States, white, middle-class, Christian women who appeared domestic and moral were typically used as the primary examples of respectability. These women who served as the standard-bearers of respectability were also able to determine who was not respectable. Respectability was not necessarily an obtainable goal or standard, but served instead as a tool for judging, shaming, and excluding. For discussions on respectability and criminality see Kali Gross, *Colored Amazons: Crime, Violence, and Black Women in the City of Brotherly Love, 1880-1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006) and L. Mara Dodge, *“Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind”: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835-2000* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002.) For a study that addresses respectability and sex work, see Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

As the “representatives and guardians” of their sex, these matrons were expected to fill several roles simultaneously. Reformers expected them to serve as role models that prisoners would respect and emulate, to have an air of authority that would compel prisoners to obey rules, to be educated enough to instruct prisoners, and to be dedicated to Protestant religious beliefs. Most prison matrons were forced to take on multiple roles due to the fact that prisons typically only hired one matron to oversee all female prisoners. Yet, among all their duties, surveillance and punishment remained paramount. Prison matrons played a key role in the violence of the carceral system. Defining the boundaries of violence within this system is difficult due to the complexity of violence—physical, sexual, mental, emotional, symbolic, discursive, and more—that took place. Scholars from multiple disciplines have attempted to create a precise definition of violence. One study examining multiple definitions of violence argued that violence includes four key elements: behavior that is intentional, unwanted, nonessential, and harmful.⁹ While this definition encompasses many aspects of the violence that took place in prisons, the boundaries of intent are difficult to define. I argue that prison matrons, regardless of their personal motivations or the choices they made while working, could not, and often did not want to, undo the violence of the prison.

Reformers grappled with the power held by prison workers over actual women’s bodies. Just as they envisioned the ideal prison matron, reformers expected wardens and keepers to be honest, industrious, and respectable. And yet many prison officials failed to live up to these expectations. Despite appearing to be “excellent men,” their work in the

⁹ Sherry Hamby, “On Defining Violence, and Why it Matters,” *Psychology of Violence* vol. 7, no. 2 (04, 2017): 167-180.

prison placed them in a position of power they could easily abuse.¹⁰ Reformers were aware of the many “horrible abuses, and the bloody atrocities,” that had taken place in prisons.¹¹ However, they maintained that prisons could function properly with the right men and women employed to run the institution. Micol Seigel’s framework for “violence work” and “violence workers” is useful for understanding how prison workers, particularly prison matrons, functioned within prisons and perpetuated violence. These violence workers not only have the power to harm actual bodies, but are authorized to become “channels for violence condoned by the state.”¹² While some prison matrons may have never taken part in administering physical punishments, they helped to maintain and legitimize the system of violence within prisons.

Prisons are punitive by design. However, the nature and effectiveness of punishment within prisons has been subject to debate. As discussed in Chapter One, efforts to reform criminal codes, improve the material conditions in jails, and create and develop prisons shaped the methods of punishment throughout the United States. Reformers promoted the idea that prisoners could be rehabilitated while in prison. Rather than focusing on corporal punishments that aimed to control criminal behavior through “pain and shame,” reformers focused on modifying the behavior of prisoners through “continual labor and reeducation.”¹³ In theory, prison sentences, rather than public,

¹⁰ Dorothea Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, Second edition from the First Boston Edition (Philadelphia: Joseph Kite & Co., Printers, 1845), 8.

¹¹ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 7. Well known scandals discussed thus far include the legislative investigation into Eastern State Penitentiary as well as the abuse of the Auburn prisoner Rachel Welch.

¹² Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 11-12.

¹³ Meranze, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760-1835* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 176.

physical punishments, would provide a better chance of allowing criminals to reflect on their actions and behavior; the prison sentence provided a form of retribution for criminals, and ideally, this period of unfreedom would result in a permanent change in behavior. Reformers believed the prison had the potential to transform criminals into law-abiding citizens. Although reformers did not agree as to the exact methods of achieving these results, their broadly shared beliefs about punishment and rehabilitation shaped prison development and reform throughout the nineteenth century.

Prison reformers presented contradictory views on corporal punishment. Prison keepers, wardens, and matrons used punishments as means of coercion and control.¹⁴ Many prison workers relied on punishments such as whipping and chaining even as some reformers objected to the use of corporal punishment.¹⁵ However, some reformers made a case for the use of corporal punishment even as they critiqued its violence. In *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline*, Dorothea Dix detailed several forms of punishment including those she found abhorrent. Dix recognized that some reformers opposed all corporal punishment, but she argued those who maintained this position were “either reckless of consequences, or ignorant of human nature,” as there were some “ignorant” and “long-abused convicts” who could not be controlled without such force. Dix emphasized her personal horror and disgust with corporal punishment and stressed that she would “never order, witness, or permit its application,” yet she also argued it was sometimes the only means of controlling prisoners.¹⁶ Thus, Dix simultaneously

¹⁴ Note on terminology: the position of warden referred to title given to the person in charge of the prison, whereas the position of keeper typically referred to a prison officer or guard. When referring to matrons, some records explain their positions as being female officers or female keepers.

¹⁵ David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic*, Revised Edition (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2008), 92.

¹⁶ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 13.

condemned the violence of corporal punishment while conceding its utility in select cases.¹⁷ These contradictory beliefs are indicative of how reformers attempted to justify the violent punishments used within prisons. Reformers like Dix insisted prisoners should not be ruled with fear but encouraged with hope, but such sentiments did not and, she believed, could not put an end to corporal punishment.¹⁸

Reformers and the general public judged the fairness and extent of punishment and violence. Some punishments were deemed acceptable, while the violence used against other prisoners was unacceptable. This is evident in the infamous death of Rachel Welch in 1826.¹⁹ The reports of violence used against a white, pregnant, female prisoner sparked public outrage. The public considered Welch a prisoner who was worthy of public pity, but this sympathy did not extend to all female prisoners. Female inmates made up a significantly smaller prison population compared to male inmates throughout the nineteenth century, and, as several scholars have discussed, women's small numbers in prisons had dangerous consequences.²⁰ Despite numerous prison reform societies working to influence prisons and penal legislation throughout the antebellum era, many people still believed that female prisoners were unredeemable. Some reformers and officials routinely argued that, "only a miracle" could restore a female criminal to a

¹⁷ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 13-14.

¹⁸ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 25.

¹⁹ In 1826, multiple newspapers reported that Ebenezer B. Cobb, a keeper at Auburn Prison in New York, faced charges of assault and battery against the prisoner, Rachel Welch, who had been imprisoned a year earlier due to a larceny charge. Welch, an Irish immigrant, became pregnant and was flogged by Cobb during her sixth or seventh month of pregnancy. She died shortly after giving birth. See W. David Lewis, "The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845," *New York History* Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 1961), 220-222.

²⁰ See Mark Kann, *Punishment, Prisons, and Patriarchy: Liberty and Power in the Early American Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 15, 194. See Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women in State Prisons, 1800-1935* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 145, xxix-xxxii. See also, L. Mara Dodge, "One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males': Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896," *Journal of Social History* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Summer, 1999): 907-930.

“virtuous life.”²¹ The lack of sympathy for female prisoners made it easier to justify the use of punishments against disobedient women. Thus, Welch’s infamous case did not lead to an end to the use of corporal punishment against female prisoners.

Neglect was also a form of violence, and it took many forms. The first female prisoners at Eastern State Penitentiary were not treated like male prisoners. The 1834 legislative investigation into the management and treatment of prisoners there revealed that the four incarcerated women housed at the prison were not forced to remain in their cells, and were frequently called upon by prison officials to perform tasks and labor that went directly against the mandate of the separate system. The separate system had been put in place for men, but prison officials ignored the women’s rehabilitation. This was an active form of neglect.²² In the early 1830s, the women of Auburn Prison were sequestered in an attic space above the kitchen that was insufficient and unsanitary. Prison officials left these women in the attic, under the care of the head of the kitchen.²³ Women experienced inequality and neglect in prisons. Women’s prison reformers believed they could address these issues through visitations and encouraging the hiring of prison matrons. Implementing equal treatment within these prison systems would not have guaranteed rehabilitation or protection from harm. Male prisoners were also subjected to violence in nineteenth-century prisons, and many of these men never met

²¹ W. David Lewis, “The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845,” *New York History* Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 1961): 217. Lewis discusses prison officials in New York as well as writings by Francis Lieber.

²² Erica Rhodes Hayden, *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2019), 116-120. Hayden discusses how the women were let out of their individual cells, interacted with prison officials socially, were permitted to have alcohol, and wore different clothing outside of the official prison clothing. Hayden argues that prison officials actively ignored the women’s rehabilitation due both to the women’s gender and race.

²³ Rafter, “Prisons for Women, 1790-1980,” 134-135. Info taken from the New York Committee on State Prisons, 1832.

reformers' standards for rehabilitation. These prison systems were designed to punish, and, as many scholars have noted, prison officials frequently subjected male prisoners to corporal punishment in order to enforce prison discipline.²⁴

Some physical punishments were allowed within prisons, and even deemed acceptable by reformers, but controversial and banned practices of punishment persisted despite protest and legislation.²⁵ Even with New York's legal ban on whipping within prisons in 1847, prison employees found other means of punishing prisoners.²⁶ Evidence shows male convicts were "kicked, caned, or struck with fists despite all legislation to the contrary." Officers also continued to use torture against prisoners. Torture could include the use of the pulley, in which a convict would be "forced to stand with all of his weight upon one leg while his other limbs were raised by ropes." Prisoners could also be tortured with "yoking" in which a heavy bar was placed on the prisoner's shoulders with "staples at both ends to encircle his wrists and a larger one in the middle to fit around his neck." Prisoners could also be punished with "bucking" where the convict was forced to sit with

²⁴ For more information on the treatment of male prisoners see W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965). Lewis provides detailed information about the development of prisons in New York, and devotes substantial space to the discussion to the use of corporal punishment, and instances of prison officials disregarding laws to use corporal punishment against male prisoners. See also, Scott Christianson, *With Liberty for Some: 500 Years of Imprisonment in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998.)

²⁵ For a broader history of corporal punishment see Myra C. Glenn, *Campaigns Against Corporal Punishment: Prisoners, Sailors, Women, and Children in Antebellum America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

²⁶ The state of New York had multiple laws addressing the whipping of convicts. New York had previously passed a law in 1819 that forbid the whipping of all female convicts. See *Laws of the State of New-York, Passed at the Forty-Second, Forty-Third, and Forty-Fourth Sessions of the Legislature. From January 1819 to April 1821*, volume 5 (Albany: William Gould & Co. and Gould Banks), 87. However, whipping was subsequently addressed in 1847, when the NY state legislature ruled that "no keeper in any state prison shall inflict any blows whatever upon any convict, unless in self defence [sic] or to suppress a revolt or insurrection." This ruling insisted that prison officials should use short periods of solitary confinement in lieu of corporal punishment whenever possible. However, prison officials did not strictly obey this law. See *Laws of the State of New-York, Passed at the Second Meeting of the Seventieth Session of Legislature, Begun and Held the Eighth Day of September, 1847, at the City of Albany. Also The Constitution*, Vol. II (Albany: Charles Van Benthuyzen, Gould, Banks and Gould, and Banks, Gould and Co., 1847), 620.

his knees pulled up against his chest and his arms fastened around his elbows. Once in this position, a stick would be inserted between the prisoner's knee-joints and elbows.²⁷ Legislative reform did not necessarily mean prison workers would follow along with reform efforts. Even with whipping banned, there were plenty of alternative forms of punishment to keep prisoners under control.

Punishments for infractions within prisons sometimes differed based on gender. For example, the 1844 warden report from Sing Sing stated the gag was only used on female prisoners when "rendered *absolutely* necessary." The warden further stressed that no officers within the prison used the lash against female prisoners. Instead, female prisoners faced punishments such as confinement to their cells or separated cells, reduction of food, and the gag. However, during this same period, the Maryland Penitentiary allowed the use of the lash on female prisoners.²⁸ Although some prison wardens drew clear lines between the punishments of men and women, treatment differed depending on the prison. And women were subjected to one of the most common, and controversial punishments of the antebellum period—the shower bath.²⁹

²⁷ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 268-269. Lewis notes that yoking could result in prisoners experiencing pain, soreness, and headaches. It is also important to note that many of these punishments were used in the armed forces. Lewis notes that citizens who knew about the use of whipping administered to soldiers and sailors caused them to believe that these punishments were suitable for convicts. See page 97.

²⁸ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 14.

²⁹ The shower bath is also sometimes referred to as a cold head-bath. For example, see the *Memorandum of a Late Visit to the Auburn Penitentiary; Prepared for the Philadelphia Society for the Alleviation of the Miseries of Public Prisons* (Philadelphia: J. Hardin, Printer, 1842.)

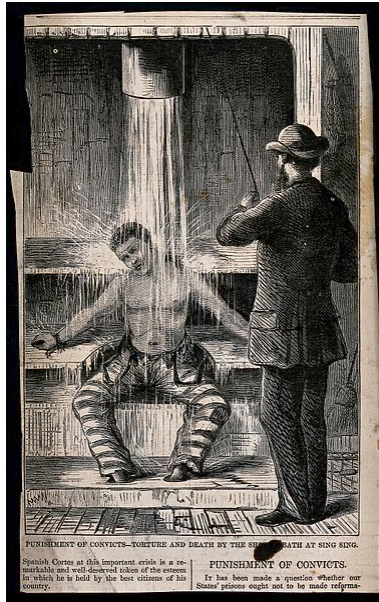


Figure 3. A prisoner in Sing Sing Prison, New York, having water poured over him by a guard as a punishment, while restrained at the ankles and wrists: he dies. Wood engraving; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1869.

As illustrated in Figure 3, this punishment typically involved setting a tank of water “above a booth or open stall in which a chair was placed.” Once installed, the water in the tank could fall directly onto the head and face of the prisoner with intense force. The tank could also be modified to allow the water to fall through “a perforated sheet of metal” to adjust the flow. In some cases, prison workers added ice to the water to make the shower bath more miserable. The shower bath could also be made more torturous by surrounding the prisoner’s neck with a “bowl-like apparatus” that caught the water falling from the tank, and drained slowly.³⁰ Reformers like Dorothea Dix believed the shower bath was preferable to other forms of punishment. She argued the shower bath “is a very

³⁰ Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 269-271. Lewis notes that the shower bath was originally introduced as a punishment at Auburn in the early 1840s.

effectual means of procuring submission to proper rules and regulations.”³¹ Dix was not alone in this belief. Many wardens and prison matrons used shower baths as a form of punishment for men and women.³²

Despite some reformers’ support, the use of shower baths was controversial. An issue of *The Prisoners’ Friend* criticized the practice. The volume noted that prison officers could not be trusted to accurately account for their own misconduct. Therefore, they focused on accounts from medical officers and medical inspectors who weighed in on the use of the shower bath.³³ Dr. Fosgate of Auburn Prison compared the use of the shower bath to the methods of the Spanish Inquisition. He argued that keepers within the prison used the shower bath as a means of torture to obtain confessions and information. He concluded that discipline at Auburn prison “is a system of absolute physical force, in which enters no idea of moral government at all.”³⁴ Auburn prison, the namesake of the Auburn system or silent system, was meant to serve as a more humane system of punishment, one that would, ideally, lead to the rehabilitation of prisoners.³⁵ Yet Dr. Fosgate’s critique indicated that people working within that system saw serious problems with the methods of punishment used to control prisoners. Beyond Auburn, other doctors confirmed the danger of the shower bath. Dr. William N. Belcher from Sing Sing Prison argued it was more dangerous than other modes of punishment due to its misuse and

³¹ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 24-25.

³² Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora*, 270-271.

³³ Several of the doctors consulted for the volume agreed with this opinion. Dr. Darius Clark from Clinton Prison stated that keepers were “very poor judges” of the shower bath. Dr. D. A. Raymond agreed and referred to keepers as “ignorant.” See *The Prisoners’ Friend: A Monthly Magazine Devoted to Criminal Reform, Philosophy, Literature, Science, and Art*, Vol. IV (1852) (Boston: Charles Spear, 124, Washington Street. New York: Fowlers & Wells. London: Charles Gilpin. Paris: H. Bossange), 365.

³⁴ *The Prisoners’ Friend* Vol. IV, 365.

³⁵ For full discussion of the Auburn system and the competing Pennsylvania system see Chapter One.

abuse. "The bath is more likely to injure the health of a convict than the cat," he declared, in reference to the use of whipping. "Have no doubt but that the minds of convicts have been impaired, and in some cases ruined, by the bath."³⁶ Yet prison officials and some reformers deemed the shower bath acceptable, and it was used on men and women in prisons throughout the antebellum period.³⁷

Despite conflicting ideas about punishment, reformers agreed that employing the "right" people in prisons was crucial. The doctors consulted in *The Prisoners' Friend* believed that ignorant and malicious prison keepers were dangerous. Dr. Belcher, who insisted that the shower bath punishment could harm prisoners' mental states, still noted that he had "no objection to a proper use of the bath." His primary concern was that the shower bath was being used by "improper hands." Others agreed, as Dr. Darius Clark and Dr. D. A. Raymond both emphasized that "ignorant keepers" and untrained prisoner workers were ill-equipped to handle such treatment.³⁸ Punishment done by the right punishers was deemed acceptable. Similarly, reformers stressed the need to employ moral and capable men and women to serve as wardens, keepers, and matrons. Elizabeth Fry had a lengthy list of desired qualities for prison matrons, and other reformers weighed in on the necessary traits for prison employees. Yet, as Dorothea Dix pointed out, being an upright person was not enough. Many workers entered the prison with little or no experience with the work required of them. "Many of them are excellent men," Dix noted, "But, as rulers of other men, placed in a situation of authority to restrain, to

³⁶ *The Prisoners' Friend* Vol. IV, 365. Note, the terms "the cat" and "cat o'nine tails" refer to whips. The cat was a type of whip with multiple tails used for physical punishment.

³⁷ Use of the shower bath depended on the prison and prison officials. As Nicole Hahn Rafter notes, Eliza Farnham punished some women at Mount Pleasant Female Prison for "noise and violence in her room." See Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 20.

³⁸ *The Prisoners' Friend* Vol. IV, 365.

command, and to direct, they lack knowledge and experience of human nature.”³⁹ These men entered the prison with little knowledge as to how to govern the prisoners, which could explain why they so often resorted to violence to maintain control. Similarly, prison matrons were not necessarily prepared to handle the women put under their supervision. The prison designs put in place at these institutions did not fully account for prisoners who disobeyed, lashed out, or rejected aspects of their rehabilitation.

Corporal punishment was used to various degrees in different prisons.

Punishments varied from prison to prison, but women deemed disruptive, or unworthy of sympathy, were its targets.⁴⁰ This was particularly true for county prisons, where convicts served shorter sentences. For example, the Philadelphia County Prison was designed to follow the Pennsylvanian plan and reformers frequently visited the prison, but this institution saw the frequent use of violent punishments. The Philadelphia County Prison officials claimed corporal punishment was necessary to keep order. County prisons housed offenders of lesser crimes, individuals awaiting sentencing, and vagrants; this meant that county prisons tended to deal with more transient populations of prisoners compared to larger state institutions.⁴¹

³⁹ Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States*, 8.

⁴⁰ Punishments for women were also racialized. As Dodge discusses in, “‘One Female Prisoner Is of More Trouble than Twenty Males’: Women Convicts in Illinois Prisons, 1835-1896,” 914. In Illinois, the 1827 Revised Law Code explicitly banned the whipping or pillorying of white women, but allowed these punishments to be used when disciplining African American women.

⁴¹ Contemporaries recognized that county prisons served different purposes, and that these prisons did not always meet the same standards as larger institutions. William Parker Foulke noted that county prisons housed people of every age, sex, race, rank, fortune, education, and character. Some people in county prisons had not been formally charged but were being held as witnesses, while others were already convicted. This demonstrated a total lack of classification. See Foulke, *Remarks on the Penal System of Pennsylvania: Particularly with Reference to County Prisons* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, 1855), 12.

Ensuring order within the county prison was more important for the day-to-day work of prison employees than were efforts to rehabilitate individual prisoners. Some reformers, such as William Parker Foulke, criticized county prisons for not meeting the same standards as larger institutions that he believed were more focused on rehabilitation. Foulke argued that the “discipline and general efficiency of the large penitentiaries,” was “to a serious extent neutralized” by the poor influences of smaller jails and county prisons. County prisons were inspected, built, and rebuilt throughout the 1830s and 1840s to improve their quality, but many reformers felt these institutions were still lacking. The Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons (PSAMPP) requested that the Pennsylvania legislature force each county to produce annual reports on their prisons in order to monitor conditions. However, few counties complied, and reformers continued to find conditions poor.⁴² Reformers had hoped to create “mini-penitentiaries” in each county, but instead they found facilities that did not meet their standards.⁴³ Despite decades of reformers emphasizing the need for classification, separation of men and women, and careful monitoring of prisoners—these conditions were still not being met in all county prisons in the early 1850s.

The Prison Diary from the Philadelphia County Prison’s Female Department from the 1850s confirms that rehabilitation was not the primary focus within the county prison. Reports show female prison staff focusing a great deal of their attention on punishing female prisoners for minor infractions.⁴⁴ Reports noted female prisoners were

⁴² Foulke, *Remarks on the Penal System of Pennsylvania*, 14, 21-27.

⁴³ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 135. Hayden also discusses William Parker Foulke’s critiques of the county institutions.

⁴⁴ The matron during this time was Elizabeth McDaniel, usually referred to as Mrs. McDaniel. Her assistants are listed as Ellen L. Spencer, Ann G. Ryan, and Ann Slover. See *The First Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Philadelphia County Prison, Made to the Legislature, February, 1848* (Harrisburg, Pa.: J. M. G. Lescure,

often “straped [sic]”, which referred to the use of restraints to hold down inmates.⁴⁵ If the matron, Mrs. McDaniel, or a guard caught a prisoner breaking rules, talking too loudly, using abusive or profane language, or behaving in a “disorderly” manner the prisoner could be punished with the strap.⁴⁶ Prisoners could also be sent to the “Dark cell,” if they attempted to “abuse” any of the officers or staff. For example, Catherine Jordin, who went by the alias Sarah Smith, was “put in the Dark cell for striking at the Keeper and abusing the Matron and the assistant and threatening them.” Jordin was kept in her cell for several days, “not taken from there as no kind treatment can subdue this prisoner.” She was only released on the order of a visiting inspector.⁴⁷ Records do not reveal how or why Catherine Jordan acted out, but her actions resulted in swift punishment.

Female prisoners challenged penal discipline with acts of resistance, but they faced punishment when caught showing signs of disobedience or disrespect.⁴⁸ Small acts, such as talking loudly or singing, made incarcerated women’s presence more noticeable in a prison. Rather than being left in a cell and forgotten, these women insisted on being seen

Printer to the State. 1848). It appears that Ellen L. Spencer eventually becomes the primary matron, see *Tenth Annual Report of the Inspectors of the Philadelphia County Prison Made to the Legislature February, 1857* (Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, Printers, Goldsmiths Hall, Library Street, 1857).

⁴⁵ “Register, Prisoners Punished, Female, 1873-1928,” RG 38.62 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives. This register is from a later period, but it notes women are punished by being strapped for a specific number of hours. For example, one female prisoner was “strapped in bed for 20 hours,” which suggests that strapping referred to restraints and not whipping. Other prison records from different institutions use the term strap to refer to a whip or weapon for corporal punishment.

⁴⁶ “Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850-1860,” RG 38.68 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives.

⁴⁷ “Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850-1860,” RG 38.68 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives. Emphasis included in original. Official punishments listed in the “Register, Prisoners Punished, Female, 1873-1928,” RG 38.62 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives, include handcuffs or irons, dark or punishment cells, meals stopped, meals limited to bread and water, and “other punishments.” The category of “other punishments” may have been expansive given that earlier records from the 1850s discuss the use of shower baths, which is not a listed punishment.

⁴⁸ Erica Rhodes Hayden argues that incarcerated women refused to be ignored and acted out to resist neglect and poor treatment. Hayden also notes that prisons began to respond to resistance more harshly in the 1850s compared to earlier periods. She argues this is due to county prisons emulating the discipline in larger penitentiaries. See Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 103, 143.

and heard. Women like Catherine Jordin presented problems for prison employees because they directly challenged and fought against authority figures. And, based on the reactions of Mrs. McDaniel, women who fought back were swiftly punished. Some, like Catherine Quigley, faced repeated punishments for “abusing the keepers” and was put in the “dark cell,” but she remained “obstinate” and faced further punishment. Eventually, the prison diary noted that “the shower bath had a very beneficial effect” on Quigley.⁴⁹ Quigley faced isolation and torture because she resisted penal authority.

Prison matrons played a key role in monitoring women and determining whether or not they deserved corporal punishment. According to the regulations within the Philadelphia County Prison, the matron was supposed to be a constant presence. She resided in the institution, and was not allowed to “absent herself for a night” without written permission from the superintendent as well as two inspectors. Matrons were required to visit every cell and apartment occupied by female prisoners, and to see each individual woman at least once per day; she would then report all pertinent information to the superintendent. Beyond such surveillance, the matron was also required to “direct the labor and occupations” of the women and to provide “instruction as may tend to their reformation and render them useful members of society.”⁵⁰ The system within the

⁴⁹ “Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850-1860,” RG 38.68 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives.
July 24th, 1852.

⁵⁰ *Digest of the Laws Relating to the Philadelphia County Prison with the Rules and Regulations made by the Board for the Government of the Board and the Prisons* (Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, Printers, Goldsmiths Hall, Library St. 1854), 7. This quote comes from Section 5 of “An Act To provide for the erection of a New Prison and Debtors’ Apartment within the City and County of Philadelphia, and for the sale of the County Prison in Walnut Street, in the said city.”

Philadelphia County Prison closely followed reformers' vision of prison matrons' labor.⁵¹ They believed a prison matron's presence would provide more protection than harm to female prisoners; if women followed the rules and embraced rehabilitation, then the matron could guide them through their sentence. However, the records of the county prison show that the matron and matron assistants were more focused on surveillance punishment than rehabilitation.

The desolate conditions of prisons could push incarcerated women to take drastic measures. Some women attempted to harm their bodies while incarcerated; some women "attempted suicide" or made attempts to "strangle" or "hang" themselves.⁵² Prison matrons were directly involved in disciplining women who acted out or attempted to harm themselves. In one instance, a matron and assistant at the Philadelphia County Prison went to check on the prisoner Ann O'Connor, who was having "a fit." When they arrived, they found O'Connor with a "purple" face and "they tried to resuscitate her, in so doing they found two cords one on each arm tied very tight also one around her waist stopping the circulation of the blood." The matron and assistant stripped O'Connor, and although she "fought manfully to prevent it," they overpowered her and sent her to a solitary cell.⁵³ O'Connor was not alone in her attempt to harm herself. Kate Murray attempted to kill herself twice while incarcerated at the Philadelphia County Prison.

⁵¹ For Elizabeth Fry's discussion of prison matrons see Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government of Female Prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill; Hatchard & Son, Piccadilly; and by S. Wilkin, Norwich, 1827). Refer also to Chapter Two.

⁵² "Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850-1860," RG 38.68 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives. Selected examples include, Oct. 29, 1851 "Elizabeth Young very outrageous last night, & made an attempt to strangle herself." Jan. 4, 1856. "Cath Murray attempted suicide by Hanging discovered and cut down by Keeper."

⁵³ "Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850-1860," RG 38.68 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives. Dec. 12, 1854.

Murray was “put in chains for insubordination” after attempting to hang herself and giving herself “a good choke.” A few days later, Murray “amused herself by choking herself by wrapping strips of blanket around her throat.” She was punished with a shower bath for her second suicide attempt.⁵⁴

The records of self-harm and suicide attempts at the Philadelphia County Prison reveal the despair many women felt while incarcerated. The conditions they faced in prison may have caused or exacerbated mental health crises which pushed them to attempt to end their lives. Erica Rhodes Hayden argues that cases of self-harm and suicide attempts by female prisoners represent “an extreme form of inmate resistance.”⁵⁵ She contends these acts represent the women’s attempts to take control over their bodies and lives. These women were clearly in need of support, but, within the prison, they were understood simply as insubordinate. The prison matrons and prison workers who discovered these women attempting to commit suicide immediately punished them for their attempts. The use of chaining, solitary confinement, and shower baths showed that discipline was more important than addressing the distress pushing these women to act out. Any resistance against the prison matrons, or the prison system more broadly, was a sign that the prisoner was rejecting rehabilitation, discipline, and control.

The use of punishments at county prisons could have been influenced by prison employees’ need to preserve order amongst a population of more transient prisoners. However, prisons housing convicts with longer sentences relied on the same forms of corporal punishment to keep prisoners under control. Critiques of county prisons from

⁵⁴ “Prison Diary, Female Department, 1850-1860,” RG 38.68 Philadelphia Prison System, Philadelphia City Archives. Aug. 26, 1856 and Aug. 28, 1856.

⁵⁵ Hayden, *Troublesome Women*, 142.

reformers like William Parker Foulke did not necessarily mean that larger institutions were actually meeting the expectations of reformers. For example, as prison matron at Mount Pleasant Female Prison in New York, Eliza Farnham focused more than most matrons on prisoner rehabilitation.⁵⁶ Farnham eliminated the rule of silence within the women's prison, modified the women's education, and improved spaces within the prison.⁵⁷ Thus she domesticated spaces within the prison to create a sense of comfort and home for the incarcerated women. Domestication was a form of control. Georgiana Bruce Kirby, an assistant matron to Farnham, summed up Farnham's goals as a matron quite simply; they aimed to "control without punishment."⁵⁸ However, control and punishment were never mutually exclusive, and Farnham's tenure as matron was marked by the use of violent punishments.

Even as Eliza Farnham aimed to control the women of Mount Pleasant without relying on corporal punishment, female prisoners still faced harsh punishments for breaking rules. Farnham was considered a kind matron; in fact, she faced criticism for being too lenient.⁵⁹ However, Farnham issued punishments such as solitary confinement,

⁵⁶ Farnham was appointed as matron at Mount Pleasant in 1844 after the previous matron left the position due to riots within the women's section of the prison. See Georgiana Bruce Kirby, *Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1887

⁵⁷ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 18. See also Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 193. See also, Floyd, "Dislocations of the Self: Eliza Farnham at Sing Sing Prison," 314, 318-319. For information on the silent system, also called the Auburn system, see W. David Lewis, *From Newgate to Dannemora: The Rise of the Penitentiary in New York, 1796-1848* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965). See also, Negely K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 263 for excerpts from Annual Reports of the Howard Institution. Farnham's changes to the décor at Mount Pleasant, as well as her other reform efforts, fall in line with reform efforts focused on domestic spaces and reformation during this period. The Howard Institution and the Isaac Hopper Home for Discharged Female Convicts created unique spaces for women to continue their reformation outside of prison. These institutions enforced domestic routines and labor to help women adjust to an orderly, respectable lifestyle.

⁵⁸ Georgiana Bruce Kirby, *Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, the Knickerbocker Press, 1887), 196.

⁵⁹ For criticism of Farnham see *Documents of the State Senate of New York, 70th Session (1847)*, Vol. IV, No. 153, 3-4. See also, Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers*, 48.

cropping women's hair, using a gag and straitjacket, withholding food and water, chaining, and shower baths.⁶⁰ Even if Farnham claimed to desire to control without punishment, she relied on the threat and use of punishments to maintain control. Any woman who created "disorder," broke a rule, or even attempted to break rules within the prison, would face "immediate and severe punishment."⁶¹ Farnham tried to enact reform measures that would encourage prisoners' rehabilitation, but, ultimately, she relied on violence and threats of violence just as other prison workers did.

Eliza Farnham was not alone in using violent punishments to keep order in prison. Prison matron A.M. Dodge referred to the use of punishments as the "difficult and unpleasant" duties required of her labor. However, she admitted that they were necessary at times. During one year, she imposed forty-three punishments for infractions of rules. These punishments included locking prisoners in their cells, locking prisoners in dark cells or solitary wards, withholding regular meals, and using a straightjacket when "the violence of the convict became dangerous to those around her."⁶² Dodge justified the use of punishments as a means of upholding discipline and safety within the prison. For Dodge, the prison could not function without discipline, and the control of the prisoners could not be ensured without strict enforcement of all rules. Dodge upheld this discipline at the expense of prisoners who faced violent punishments. In fact, she insisted that the enforcement of discipline and the use of punishments was only necessary because some prisoners did not comply voluntarily, thus blaming prisoners for the violence they faced.⁶³

⁶⁰ Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 20.

⁶¹ Kirby, *Years of Experience*, 192.

⁶² *Fourth Annual Report of the Inspectors of State Prison of the State of New York*, State of New York In Senate, Jan. 22, 1852, No. 35, 238. A.M. Dodge's "Matron's Report" begins on 236.

⁶³ *Fourth Annual Report of the Inspectors of State Prison of the State of New York*, 240.

The stories of women violently punished at the orders of prison matrons did not make the newspapers or accounts that the general public could judge. Instead, reformers and prison board members pushed the stories of women like Julia Moore. The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia (FPAFP) published “An Account of Julia Moore, A Penitent Female, Who Died in the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, in the Year 1843,” to provide a sympathetic story of a penitent female prisoner. The account claims Moore ended up at Eastern State Penitentiary after being “exposed to the temptations” of the world and indulging in vice; she “joined hands with the workers of iniquity and participating in a cruel robbery, was arrested, and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment,” all before she had turned twenty-eight.⁶⁴ The FPAFP portrayed Moore as a criminal who, due to the intervention of their visiting committee, saw the error of her ways. According to the reformers, Moore expressed tremendous gratitude for the benefits she found in prison, including finding religious salvation and experiencing the kindness of others. Moore represented the ideal female prisoner—a woman who made the choice to improve herself by abiding by the rules of the matron and the prison, and had therefore embraced rehabilitation. In fact, Moore’s account stated, “I want no better home upon earth than I have here, though the prison walls are around me and the doors fastened upon me.”⁶⁵

The highly-stylized account of Julia Moore suggests that she was happy living within the prison and that she appreciated the rehabilitation offered at Eastern State Penitentiary. But Julia Moore was not the real name of any prisoner. Moore served as an

⁶⁴ *An Account of Julia Moore, A Penitent Female, Who Died in the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania, in the Year 1843*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Joseph and William Kite, No. 50 North Fourth Street, 1844), 4.

⁶⁵ *An Account of Julia Moore*, 11.

alias for a real prisoner named Julia Wilt. Inmate 1109, Julia Wilt, was born in 1802 in Easton, PA. According to available records, she worked as a servant for some time, and first entered the criminal record in 1839 at the age of thirty-seven. An issue of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* reported that Wilt, along with two African American men had been charged with mutilating a man's arm to the point that it required amputation. According to the victim, Wilt had tricked him into entering a house to purchase oysters, but upon entering he was attacked and robbed. Wilt received a seven- year sentence at Eastern State Penitentiary for her role in the robbery.⁶⁶

Records show that Julia Wilt could not write, but the "Account of Julia Moore," included a letter that the members of the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia claimed was Julia's own language.⁶⁷ This letter, purportedly written after a visiting member was sick and unable to visit the prison as usual, states, "I long to hear your instructions once more. I feel thankful that I have been spared to express the sense of gratitude I feel for those benefits you have all be pleased to confer upon me. I thank Almighty God for all his kind mercies to me...I have reason to bless the day I entered this Prison."⁶⁸ It is impossible to know whether this letter reflects Julia's sentiments. She was unable to write when she entered prison, and any letter was likely either dictated to someone or written by someone else. However, it is clear that the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia believed Julia's story was important, and useful, for their cause.

⁶⁶ Erica Rhodes Hayden, "Letters from Inside," in *Incarcerated Women: A History of Struggles, Oppression, and Resistance in American Prisons*, ed. Erica Rhodes Hayden and Theresa R. Jach (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 39. Hayden cites the newspaper article "Court of Oyer and Terminer," *Public Ledger*, May 14, 1839.

⁶⁷ Hayden, "Letters from Inside," 40 and *An Account of Julia Moore*, 18.

⁶⁸ *An Account of Julia Moore*, 18.

The Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia portrayed Moore as an ideal female inmate. By their account, she had developed a close relationship with members of their organization and benefitted from their visits and instruction. While their account of Julia Moore focused on the good work of their organization, it is possible that Moore understood she could gain better conditions and support by embracing the Female Prison Association of Friends in Philadelphia. While we may not understand how and why Moore responded to these reformers, it is important to recognize the wide array of choices female prisoners made while incarcerated. Many of the female prisoners in Eastern State Penitentiary and other Pennsylvanian prisons refused to be docile, and they suffered punishments for their actions. However, acquiescing to reformers' demands and expectations could also prove beneficial to some women.

The insistence on the importance of voluntary submission to the discipline within prisons was a common theme. Convicts who obediently followed rules were praised for their willingness to embrace rehabilitation. Sarah W. Little, who was convicted of the murder of her husband, was praised in the *New York Herald* for conducting herself in “the most lady like manner” while incarcerated at Mount Pleasant Female Prison. The newspaper noted that Little was working hard within the prison, and she had even begun to act as a “sort of assistant to the matron about the prison.”⁶⁹ Despite being convicted of murder, the newspaper portrayed Little as a sympathetic woman who was diligently carrying out her sentence. She had accepted her fate, earned the trust of the prison

⁶⁹ “Sing Sing Prison,” *The New York Herald* (New York, NY) July 10, 1859. The section subtitle reads, “Visit to the Above Institution—It’s Present Condition—The Overflow of Male Convicts and Want of Accommodations—Noted Criminals Incarcerated, and their Employment—The Female Prison and its Inmates.”

matron, and worked hard to demonstrate her commitment to rehabilitation. Like Moore, Little represented an ideal prisoner. Her story proved that even a murderer was capable of being reformed if she embraced the discipline required in the prison.

Women's prison reformers acknowledged that many women left prison without being rehabilitated.⁷⁰ However, the stories of prisoners like Julia Moore and Sarah W. Little helped to prove female criminals were capable of being reformed. These women provided useful narratives to counter beliefs about female criminals. At the same time, these narratives concealed the violence involved in rehabilitation. The prison matrons present in both stories were women whose work focused on constant surveillance, discipline, and punishment. Their work necessitated violence. Yet the matrons in these cases fulfilled women's prison reformers' vision of the prison matron's purpose.

Violence was essential to prisons, and the matrons' sex did not insulate them from that. Prison matrons were sentimentalized in reform discourse despite their role in the violence used against female prisoners. Reformers claimed that matrons were supposed to serve as the "representative and guardian" of their sex. They were held up as benevolent women, who would mother and care for female prisoners in order to help them become better women who could return to society. Prison reformers expected prison matrons to watch over and protect female prisoners, but as prison workers, and as violence workers, these women served as the monitors and punishers of these women. This is not to say that prison matrons were entirely brutal and uncaring toward female

⁷⁰ As discussed in Chapter Three, women's prison reform societies worried about their ability to help reform female prisoners. They eventually decided to create the Howard Institution to help formerly incarcerated women because they believed many women left prison unreformed. See, "Female Convicts and the Efforts of females for their Relief and Reformation," *Journal of Prison Discipline and Philanthropy*, Vol. 1 no. 2 (Philadelphia: 1845), 112, and Negely K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 252.

prisoners, but their roles in the violence of surveillance and punishment cannot be ignored. Whether they intended to or not, these matrons served prisons not prisoners.

Conclusion:

Reform and Radical Change

In the winter of 1868, Quaker couple and social reformers Rhoda and Charles Coffin received a request from the Governor of Indiana to investigate the prisons in Jeffersonville and Michigan City. After conducting their visit at Jeffersonville, the couple realized that the women of the prison faced ongoing physical and sexual abuse. Prisoners revealed that guards entered the women's cells to "gratify their lusts," and abused their power by forcing the women to strip in front of others, whipping them publicly, and allowing men to view them as they bathed.¹ The Coffins were appalled, and reported the conditions to Governor Baker. A legislative investigation followed, confirming the "disgusting, lecherous and brutal" treatment of the female prisoners.² This scandal inspired the Coffins to advocate for the establishment of an entirely separate prison for women in Indianapolis. As a result, in 1873, the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls became the first completely independent women's prison in the United States as well as the first to be run by an entirely female staff.³

The abuse the women experienced at Jeffersonville was not unique, and prison reformers had long warned that male prison staff's access to female prisoners was dangerous decades before this scandal came to light. In fact, Elizabeth Fry had observed that male prison staff had too much power and access to women within prisons. She had

¹ *Rhoda M. Coffin: Her Reminiscences, Addresses, Papers, and Ancestry*, ed. By Mary Coffin Johnson (New York: The Grafton Press, 1910), 150-152.

² *Journal of the Indiana State Senate During the Forty-Sixth Session of the General Assembly, Commencing Thursday, January 7, 1869* (Indianapolis: Alexander H. Conner, State Printer, 1869), 653.

³ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 29-30.

met women who, after being committed for minor offences were “placed under the sole care of a man, whose key will at any time unlock their door, and afford him admission to their society.”⁴ Fry believed prison matrons could serve as a solution to this problem, as a prison matron would introduce female supervision into the prison. Women prison reformers contended that the matron was a necessary figure within prisons populated by female prisoners. However, there were matrons appointed to both the Jeffersonville and Michigan City prisons during the 1860s. An 1862 report from Mary A. Johnson, the matron of Jeffersonville Prison, claimed that the past year had been unremarkable and that the prison was functioning properly thanks to the “efficient Warden and worthy Moral Instructor.”⁵ Johnson’s report was short, and contained no mention of any possibilities of abuse. There was also at least one prison matron employed at the Michigan City Prison when the Coffins conducted their investigation. Elizabeth Gerber provided a report to the Indiana Legislature in December 1868, which failed to mention any instances of physical or sexual abuse the female prisoners might have faced. Instead, she focused on the failures of female prisoners claiming that the women had “sunk in infamy and disgrace,” and that most of the women left the prison without any hope of “permanent reformation.”⁶ The reports of the prison matrons at Jeffersonville and Michigan City suggest that prison matrons had failed to protect female prisoners. These matrons were either ignorant, unable, or unwilling to address the abuse female prisoners

⁴ Elizabeth Fry, *Observations on the Visiting, Superintendence, and Government, of Female Prisoners* (London: John and Arthur Arch, Cornhill; Hatchard & Son, Piccadilly, S. Wilkin, Norwich, 1827), 26-27. For full discussion of Fry’s thoughts on men’s access to women in prisons refer back to Chapter Two.

⁵ *Documents of the General Assembly of Indiana at the Forty-Second Regular Session, Begun on the Eight of January, A. D. 1863, Part 2* (Indianapolis: Joseph J. Bingham, 1863), 980.

⁶ *Documentary Journal of the General Assembly of the State of Indiana, Part I, For 1867-1868* (Indianapolis: Alexander H. Conner, 1869), 27-28. Note, Gerber is listed as the matron of “Indiana State Prison, South.” Records indicate that the Michigan City Prison was referred to as the Indiana State Prison, South.

faced in these prisons. As such, they failed in their roles to protect and guide the female prisoners.

The women's prison reform movement originally formed in response to female prisoners' neglect and mistreatment. Women who participated in prison reform in the northeast tended to come from middle-class and upper-middle-class Protestant, often Quaker, families.⁷ Drawing on the ideology of domesticity and the belief that women were more moral and virtuous than men, these women saw themselves as the ideal models and guides for female prisoners who had broken laws and transgressed social boundaries. While many male penologists and reformers expressed skepticism that female prisoners could be ever redeemed, women prison reformers maintained that they could aid female prisoners in reformation.⁸ During the antebellum period, inspired by Elizabeth Fry's model of prison reform, American reformers advocated for the creation of women's associations for visiting prisons, the separation and classification of female prisoners, and the hiring of prison matrons. Prison reform organizations focused on prison visitations, providing moral and religious education, and encouraging domestic labor. They also sought to implement changes within prisons by advocating for the hiring of prison matrons.

Women prison reformers saw prison matrons as an extension of their own authority and ideals. Matrons had symbolic value within discussions of prison reform, and they helped reformers bolster arguments about improving conditions for imprisoned

⁷ Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 24.

⁸ Notably Roberts Vaux wrote to reformer Mary Waln Wistar expressing his deep skepticism that female prisoners could be fully reformed. See Erica Rhodes Hayden, *Troublesome Women: Gender, Crime, and Punishment in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 166. See also, Francis Lieber's comments in Rafter, *Partial Justice*, 11.

women. However, prison matrons' primary purpose within prisons was surveillance. All of the matron's duties extended from her ability, and need, to monitor the female prisoners at all times. This surveillance was meant to serve multiple purposes; the matron needed to observe the women to ensure they obeyed rules and to subject the women to prison discipline, and she simultaneously needed to protect the women from male staff and male prisoners. Thus, matrons represented the key means by which reformers could implement women-centered prison discipline during this period.

The prison matron was at the center of women's prison discipline during the antebellum era. However, hiring a matron could not on its own address the neglect and mistreatment of female prisoners. In her own lifetime, Elizabeth Fry stated, "if I had a prison completely such as I should like it, it would be a prison quite apart from the men's prison, and into which neither turnkeys nor anyone else should enter but female attendants and the Inspecting Committee of Ladies."⁹ Prior to 1873, the only institution that came close to Fry's vision was Mount Pleasant Female Prison in New York. While it had a separate building and staff, the prison remained administratively dependent on Sing Sing Prison.¹⁰ Mount Pleasant was also unable to completely separate female prisoners from men. The institution was close enough to Sing Sing that male prisoners could easily pass near the building, which made communication between the male and female prisoners an ongoing problem for its staff. Male prisoners could also gain access to the women when the men were admitted to work on various equipment.¹¹ Thus, Mount

⁹ E. R. Pitman, *Elizabeth Fry* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1884), 87. Pitman cites the House of Commons.

¹⁰ Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Partial Justice: Women, Prisons, and Social Control*, Second Edition (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 16.

¹¹ W. David Lewis, "The Female Criminal and the Prisons of New York, 1825-1845," *New York History* Vol. 42, No. 3 (July 1961), 230. For a full discussion of Mount Pleasant Female Prison refer to Chapter Four.

Pleasant Female Prison failed to meet Fry's vision of an entirely separate female prison run by female staff.

The Coffins' investigation into the Jeffersonville and Michigan City prisons illuminated abuses so egregious that a state legislature finally established an entirely separate women's prison with female staff. Thus, the creation of the Indiana Reformatory Institution for Women and Girls represents a turning point for women's prison reform and prison discipline in the United States. However, just as prison matrons were not immediately hired despite reformers' demands, the reformatory movement was not met with immediate support. State legislatures were reluctant to fund costly new institutions, and they were hesitant to place women in positions of administrative authority. Thus, women's reformatories were established slowly over the remaining decades of the nineteenth century. However, reformatories did see success. Progressive reformers pushed for the creation of reformatories, and the Progressive Era saw the creation of seventeen new women's reformatories throughout the United States.¹² However, while reformers and legislators considered many of these institutions successful, reformatories eventually ended due to high costs and the end of the Progressive Era. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression led many states to decide that they could no longer afford to maintain these institutions. The high costs of reformatories, coupled with the decrease of support from Progressive reformers made it difficult to continue to justify the creation and maintenance of these institutions. By 1935, the reformatory movement had effectively ended, but the question of how to punish and rehabilitate female prisoners has persisted through the twenty-first century.

¹² Nicole Hahn Rafter, "Prisons for Women, 1790-1980," *Crime and Justice*, Vol. 5 (1983), 155, 55.

Matrons, and female officers more broadly, have remained present within discussion of prison reform and prison discipline through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While initially only hired in prisons, matrons' roles eventually expanded with the creation of the position of police matrons, also called jail matrons, in the late-nineteenth century. Originally conceived of as a new version of the prison matron, reform societies called for police stations to hire women to serve as matrons beginning in the early 1880s. In Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Prison Society, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Young Women's Christian Association, and multiple other organizations called for the hiring of police matrons.¹³ Similarly, progressive reformers in New York called upon the New York State Senate to hire police matrons. According to the Early Syracuse Police Department Regulations, the police matron was under the supervision of the "Captain of Uniformed Patrol," and had the charge of female inmates and lost children. She was required to search all female inmates and make itemized records of their property, she was prohibited from carrying messages for any inmates, and she was not allowed to admit any person to a cell or dormitory occupied by a female inmate unless ordered by a commanding officer. The police matron was responsible for the general safe-keeping of all female inmates, and she had to keep a record of all the female inmates under her care.¹⁴

The creation of the positions of police and jail matrons stemmed from ongoing concerns about the treatment and safety of female offenders. Although prison matrons had failed to protect female prisoners in several instances, reformers still believed the

¹³ Negely K. Teeters, *They Were in Prison: A History of the Pennsylvania Prison Society, 1787-1937* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1937), 271-273.

¹⁴ Jonathan Anderson, "Portrait of the Jail Matron," *American Jails* vol. 30, iss. 4 (Sep/Oct. 2016), 26.

female supervision and discipline were significant reform efforts. And, while ideas about prison designs and different prison systems shifted through the twentieth century, the position of matron proved to be more enduring. Prison matrons were hired throughout the twentieth century, although they eventually were referred to as female officers rather than matrons. However, the official title of jail matron persists today. Although their duties have shifted slightly, jails still hire jail matrons to monitor and care for female prisoners.

Conversations about the role of women in discipline and punishment persist outside of prisons as well. Some advocates of police reform argue that the key to reforming policing in the United States is to hire more female police officers. While women served as prison matrons, and later jail matrons, throughout the nineteenth century, the first sworn female police officer in the United States was not hired by the Los Angeles Police Department until 1910. The hiring of female police officers was sporadic through the 1960s, and by 1972 the proportion of female police officers was approximately two-percent nationwide. After Congress enacted the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1972, the proportion of female police officers increased.¹⁵

Questions about the potential impact of female police officers have been raised as incidents of police brutality have gained increased public attention.¹⁶ News outlets have

¹⁵ Peter B. Hoffman and Edward R. Hickey, "Use of Force by Female Police Officers," *Journal of Criminal Justice* Vol. 33, No. 2 (March-April 2005), 145. Hoffman and Hickey note that many of these female officers were assigned to "non-patrol duties." These duties included secretarial and clerical work, working with delinquent youths, working as sex crime investigators, or serving as matrons. After 1972, the proportion of female police officers increased to twelve percent by 1990, and sixteen percent by 2000.

¹⁶ Questions about the performance of female police officers are not new. Studies from the 1970s such as Christina Jacqueline Johns 1976 thesis, "Effects of Female Presence on Male Police Officers' Shooting Behavior," provided early insight into how hiring of female police officers, particular those that served as in the same lines of work as men, could potentially change the police force. See Christina Jacqueline Johns,

claimed that hiring more women is the key to reforming police in the United States.¹⁷ Although their arguments do not mirror the nineteenth-century claims made by prison reformers, they tend to rely on similar assumptions that there are unique, gendered differences between men and women that result in a different kind of policing. Some police leaders and researchers argue that due to differences in socialization, women act differently when conducting police work. They contend that women tend to, “talk rather than shout, negotiate rather than bully and empathize rather than order.”¹⁸ Similar claims have been made about female police officers’ de-escalation skills and their abilities to talk people down in difficult situations. Thus, they believe female police officers are socialized to be more empathetic and less aggressive than their male counterparts.

Some researchers and advocates for reform have also argued that women view police work differently than men. Kathy Spillar, the executive director of the Feminist Majority, claims that women are more inclined to see policing as a public service, a means of helping their communities, whereas men see policing as means of “using force to gain compliance with the law.”¹⁹ Studies confirm that male and female police officers treat some cases differently. A study conducted in Washington, D.C. found that female police officers were less likely to dismiss or ignore victims who had made repeated calls to the

“Effects of Female Presence on Male Police Officers’ Shooting Behavior,” MS Thesis (Michigan State University, 1976.)

¹⁷ For examples see, Christina Asquith, “Why Aren’t U.S. Police Departments Recruiting More Women?” *The Atlantic* (Aug. 30 2016) <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/08/police-departments-women-officers/497963/>, Ashley Fantz and Casey Tolan, “Want to Reform the Police? Hire More Women,” *CNN* (June 23, 2020) <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/23/us/protests-police-reform-women-policing-invs/index.html>, Cari Shane, “The Hiring Practice That Could Dramatically Improve Policing,” *Slate* (Nov. 01, 2021) <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2021/11/police-reform-keeps-failing-is-it-time-to-hire-more-female-cops.html>, and Marlisa Goldsmith, “More Police Departments are Hiring Women, Here’s Why,” *THV11, CBS* (Feb. 14, 2022) <https://www.thv11.com/article/news/local/police-departments-more-women-recruits/91-ef6d1985-e10e-43bc-9f6d-b1c0cdf17575>.

¹⁸ Ashley Fantz and Casey Tolan, “Want to Reform the Police? Hire More Women.”

¹⁹ Cari Shane, “The Hiring Practice That Could Dramatically Improve Policing,”

police. Additionally, international studies show that women are more likely to seek help from female police officers due to fears of turning to men for aid, and in cases of domestic violence female police officers are more responsive and considered “more helpful” when rated by female victims.²⁰

There is a tremendous push to hire more women in police departments, and there is some evidence to suggest that women are less likely to use force and be involved in cases of police misconduct. While some reports find that women use less force than men, research findings remain mixed. Some studies have shown no gender differences in areas of police work, while other studies have contradicted stereotypes about the gendered differences between men and women. For example, one study found that “men officers used more ‘supportive’ behaviors than women officers.”²¹ Another study showed that stereotypes about women in the police force actually contradicted data about female police officers’ use of coercive force. This study argued that, compared to male officers, female police officers are not reluctant to use coercive force, and that they relied on both verbal and physical force.²² Thus, the research being cited in articles pushing for more female police officers shows mixed results.

Closing the gender gap in the police force has been touted as a step toward alleviating police brutality. However, the push for female officers is not a new phenomenon. Prison matrons were initially hired because prison reformers made arguments about the supposed differences between men and women. They called for the

²⁰ Christina Asquith, “Why Aren’t U.S. Police Departments Recruiting More Women?”

²¹ David B. Muhlhausen, “Women in Policing: Breaking barriers and Blazing a Path,” *National Institute of Justice* (July, 2019) <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/252963.pdf>, 10.

²² Eugene A. Paoline III and William Terrill, “Women Police Officers and the Use of Coercion,” *Women and Criminal Justice* 15, no. 3/4 (2004): 97-98.

hiring of prison matrons because they saw a need for a new form of women-centered prison discipline and reform. In many ways, prison matrons became a quick-fix solution to addressing the neglect and mistreatment of female prisoners. Similarly, female police officers are being pushed as a quick-fix solution to addressing police reform. However, as Angela Davis argues, focusing on individual police officers is not an effective means of addressing police reform.²³ Hiring women is not enough to promote systemic change. Yet the focus on the need to hire more female police officers persists. Police departments are comfortable promoting issues such as the “30 x 30 Initiative,” which would strengthen their claims about the effectiveness of the police force.²⁴ Focusing on hiring women also helps police departments take attention away from calls to defund the police.

While police reform has gained recent attention, prison reform remains a critical problem. The United States incarcerates more people per capita than any other nation. And, while many nineteenth-century reformers and penologists discussed how there were so few women incarcerated in prisons, today the US accounts for over thirty percent of the world’s incarcerated women. Women’s incarceration rates have grown rapidly, increasing 700 percent in the last four decades. Women have become the fastest-growing segment of the incarcerated population, and the rates of women’s incarceration are rising at double the rate of men’s in state prisons throughout the US.²⁵ One of the key reasons

²³ Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, edited by Frank Barat (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 137.

²⁴ The 30 x 30 Initiative refers to a coalition of researchers and police leaders aiming to increase the representation of women in the police recruit classes to thirty percent by 2030. For more information on the initiative see, <https://30x30initiative.org/about-30x30/>

²⁵ Nazish Dholakia, “Women’s Incarceration Rates are Skyrocketing. These Advocates Are trying to Change That,” *Vera* (May 17, 2021), <https://www.vera.org/news/womens-voices/womens-incarceration-rates-are-skyrocketing>.

for this drastic increase is due to the War on Drugs.²⁶ However, some reports note that, despite increased rates of incarceration, the criminal justice system is still failing to provide equitable treatment for female offenders. Some reports argue that jails and prisons are not adequately equipped for women and people who fall outside the category of cisgender men because they fail to provide appropriate health care.²⁷ Reports also show women do not have access to the same programs and aid as incarcerated men. This means that many incarcerated women cannot choose to attend a “boot camp” to shorten their prison sentences, they may not have access to the same educational or vocational programs, and, in some cases, women must travel further than men because there are not programs and facilities available in their state.²⁸

Multiple organizations are working to address mass incarceration in the United States. For example, organizations like the Sentencing Project and the Vera Institute of Justice have created multiple initiatives and programs in an attempt to reduce overcriminalization and mass incarceration. These organizations promote programs within prisons, including efforts to improve the material conditions in prisons and to ensure that incarcerated people have access to education. In this respect, some of the aspects of early prison reform societies are still considered useful today. However, the aims of the organizations are drastically different.

²⁶ “Facts About the Over-Incarceration of Women in the United States,” *ACLU*, <https://www.aclu.org/other/facts-about-over-incarceration-women-united-states>.

²⁷ Dholakia, “Women’s Incarceration Rates are Skyrocketing, These Advocates Are trying to Change That.” Dholakia notes that many institutions lack reproductive health care, prenatal care, and most institutions provide no form of gender-affirming care to incarcerated transgender people.

²⁸ Aleks Kajstura, “States of Women’s Incarceration: The Global Context 2018,” *Prison Policy Initiative* (June 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/global/women/2018.html>.

Feminists do not agree on how to reform police or prisons. There are ongoing debates about abolition and carceral feminism that remain unresolved. Some feminists argue that criminalization and incarceration are necessary for addressing gender violence. Others argue that this belief represents carceral feminism, that it does the work of the state and therefore promotes state violence.²⁹ In fact, many feminist abolitionists argue that the state perpetuates gender violence to such a degree that it is impossible for the state to solve issues of gender violence.³⁰ For abolitionists, systemic change is a long, ongoing process. Hiring female police officers is not the primary focus, and women-centered discipline will not yield systemic change. Instead, abolitionists focus on community accountability and transformative justice.³¹ This is a radical departure from previous kinds of prison reform, and it is an ongoing process of radical change.

²⁹ The term carceral feminism was first used by Elizabeth Bernstein in the article, "The Sexual Politics of the 'New Abolitionism'" *Differences* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Dec., 2007): 128-151. Angela Davis critiques carceral feminists and argues that they do the work of the state. See Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*, 139.

³⁰ For a discussion of fights to address violence against women and concerns about relying on state power and carceral systems see Nancy Whittier, "Carceral and Intersectional Feminism in Congress: The Violence Against Women Act, Discourse, and Policy," *Gender and Society* Vol. 30, No. 5 (Oct. 2016): 791-818.

³¹ For information on feminist abolitionism see Angela Y. Davis, Gina Dent, Erica R. Meiners, and Beth E. Richie, *Abolition. Feminism. Now.* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022).

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