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### **The Intimately Oppressed**

Throughout his book, *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn highlights several groups of people within the United States that experienced some form of subjugation. It is not surprising then, that Zinn devotes an entire chapter to reveal the unique challenges that women experienced. Out of the several women Zinn discusses, there are five that symbolize specific arenas of oppression in the United States.

The influence of Abigail Adams's political contribution is forever engrained in the minds of most women who pursue a political career. Even though she did not hold an official political position, she did have a significant influence on her husband, John Adams who eventually became president. Her letter to her husband during the rumblings of establishing independence expresses her devotion to the rights of women when she wrote, "I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous to them than your ancestors" (Zinn 110).

Emma Willard not only made her beliefs known regarding the literacy of women, which contradicted the opinion of many men who felt women should avoid reading excessively, but she also founded the first recognized educational institution for women in 1812. She paved the way for women to explore educational opportunities and assert themselves as, "primary existences...not the satellites of men" (Zinn118).

Religious oppression of women was often a characteristic of the Christian faith. Anne Hutchinson was one of the few women who challenged the clergy. She held meetings where women spoke freely about their beliefs and how ordinary people like themselves could interpret the bible for themselves. Even though she was eventually banished from her colony for “heresy” and later murdered by Indians, she was one of the trail blazers for religious freedom for women. Had Anne lived to see women having open discussions in bible studies and female ministers, she could have seen the fruit of her sacrifice.

During the American industrial revolution, the general public was not entirely aware of the conditions in which women and even children worked. Catharine Beecher wrote about the harsh environment where women’s lives were dictated and their health endangered. Beecher helped ensure that women were included in the labor movement. The condition of factories today (whatever factories are left in the U.S.) are far better than they were in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Margaret Fuller, who was one of the early feminists of her time, wrote about the need for women to be given equality. She exposed what she felt were the outdated perceptions of women by men in society. Fuller presented the image of women as being both feminine and strong. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the civil rights movements for women shared the same ideas that Fuller wrote about in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Zinn presents the oppression women experienced in the United States and also introduces women who confronted that oppression. These women contributed greatly to the freedoms women enjoy today.

