

The First Female Public Speakers in America (1630-1840): Searching for Egalitarian Christian Primitivism.

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Abstract:

Overlooked female exhorters and preachers established a two-hundred-year-old tradition of female oratory by the late nineteenth century. As secular reformers emerged, this tradition of female public speaking was established in new ways. One, female preachers claimed to be prophets who received authority to speak directly from God. The practice undercut the traditional authority of male preachers that was based on ecclesiastical power. Second, they deferred to biblical precedents of women leaders and speakers. Third, they attacked the oppressive practices of slavery and racism. Fourth, they established a vernacular preaching that emphasized orality in contrast to literate preaching and rhetorical practices.

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