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## SECTION II

### Abolitionism in Black and White (1831-1840)

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#### Lesson 8

#### Abolitionist Sisterhood

**Grade Level:** High School

**Objectives:**

Students will

- Brainstorm gender expectations of women during the 19th century.
- Understand the role women played in the abolitionist movement.
- Participate in a simulated national women's anti-slavery organization.

**Time:** Two 50-minute class periods

**Materials:**

- Audio: Mary White Ovington
- Worksheet 1: First Person Account, Mary White Ovington
- Worksheet 2: Ladies' New-York Anti-Slavery Society Annual Report

**Background:**

A number of women across various northern cities gained prominence as abolitionists and women's rights activists. Lucretia Mott, Maria Stewart, Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Lydia Maria Child, and Susan Paul emerged as influential writers, educators, lecturers, activists, and moral reformers. These women, black and white, redefined the roles that society expected of them as mothers, wives, and daughters and became central to the anti-slavery movement.

Daughter of Brooklyn Heights resident and prominent abolitionist Lewis Tappan, 21-year-old Julianna Tappan was central to the women's abolition movement in Manhattan. She worked with the Ladies' New-York Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1835. Julianna regularly communicated with like-minded activists in New England and Philadelphia. She organized a highly sophisticated petition drive intended to collect over one-million signatures from women protesting slavery. She was also a central figure at the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women that met annually between 1837 and 1839. The conventions attracted women with anti-slavery ideals from all over the North.

"We succeeded in happily constituting the [Ladies' New-York Anti-Slavery] Society....and the influence of whose efforts, we trust, will be found continually increasing, till the last shackle falls from the last slave - till our country is free."

—First Annual Report of the Ladies' New-York Anti-Slavery Society, 1836

2 To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:

The undersigned, women of the city & county of New York in the State of New York Respectfully pray your honorable body, immediately to abolish SLAVERY, and the SLAVE TRADE, in those TERRITORIES of the United States, where they exist.

Mary Layton  
Jane Van Cleef  
Ann Van Cleef  
Mary Van Cleef  
Isabella Smith  
Elizabeth Glover  
Jane Clark  
Sally Cannon  
Mary Kane  
Thebe Clow  
Eliza D. Wilton  
Elizabeth Pinkney

L. Cooper  
Caroline Cannon  
Caroline Cannon  
Eliz Lockman  
Sarah Foulke  
Harriet Banta Sarah Banta  
Sarah B. Donaldson  
Sarah Bailey  
Daphnia J. Smith  
Hester Marks  
Mary Benedict

Anti-Slavery Petition/ 98 Women of the City of New York for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the Territories of the United States.  
HR25A-H1.8. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

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# LESSON PROCEDURES

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1. Ask students to work with a partner to brainstorm what life was like for women during the 19th century. What was expected of them? What were they restricted from doing?

2. Have students share their responses with the class. Students should point out that women were not permitted to vote or hold office. They had few property rights and few options for college. Refer to the title of this lesson and invite students to speculate about how women abolitionists would have been regarded by men during the early 19th century.

3. Set up the **Audio: Mary White Ovington** by explaining to students that Mary White Ovington (1865-1951) was a Brooklynite, suffragist, journalist, and one of the co-founders of the NAACP. Her grandmother, Emeline Franklin Ketcham, was a friend of William Lloyd Garrison and had formed her anti-slavery ideals by listening to the preaching of the minister and abolitionist Samuel J. May.

4. Distribute **Worksheet 1: First Person Account, Mary White Ovington**. Play the **Audio: Mary White Ovington** and ask students to follow along. Call on students to explain the risks involved in abolitionist work.

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5. Distribute **Worksheet 1: Ladies' New-York Anti-Slavery Society Annual Report**. Explain to students that the barring of women from becoming members in the American Anti-Slavery Society led to the creation of female anti-slavery societies. For many women, it was their first experience running an organization and they defied social norms with their anti-slavery activism. After students read the excerpt from the annual report, ask the following questions:

- Why were women who were subject to disenfranchisement, oppression, and segregation sympathetic to the cause of abolition?
- Why were they willing to risk their personal and social safety?
- Is there a connection between the abolition of slavery and women's struggle for equality?

6. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group create a women's anti-slavery society. Each society should have:

- A name
- A mission statement, which should include the society's goals
- A list of activities that the society will engage in to achieve their goals

7. Have each group present its organization to the rest of the class.

## Linking Past and Present

- Have students research activist organizations created by or run by women. What are the aims of these organizations? What obstacles do they face? How do these organizations impact American society today?