# Slavery, Temperance, and Abortion In America: A Historical Examination Of Their Arguments and Justifications

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Before I allow my paper to explode onto the scene, it is necessary to first clarify and explain my goals and intentions. Abortion is a hotly debated issue in the United States as we approach the twenty-first century. To better understand this issue, and the opinions and values which so strongly fuel the debate, I will resurrect two different hotly contested issues from America's historical past in order to draw correlating information. The abolitionist movement in response to slavery in the Southern region of the United States in the middle of the 1800's, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which fought for the abolishment of liquor traffic in the middle to late nineteenth century, are such past issues which share much in common with the abortion debate today. This paper explores in detail the two debates mentioned above, in order to develop a formula for such debates in American society; a formula which can then be applied to today's abortion issue in an attempt to better understand the controversy and rigid ideologies surrounding in this debate.

Before I begin to explore these controversial, emotional, and seemingly unresolvable issues, it is imperative that I briefly explain my biases towards the issues so that they do not cloud the understanding of the paper. Most importantly, it is certainly not my intention to defend slavery. Rather, in the paper I assert the assumption that slavery was wrong. On the other hand, I try not to assert my opinion on the abortion debate; instead, I merely

present the opposing camps and how the two camps relate to the proponents and opponents of slavery. Furthermore, I do not intend to draw any specific correlations between camps on either side. In other words, I will not pair the slave abolitionists with today's pro-lifers, for instance. I simply present these issues to shed a helpful ray of light on moral argumentation.

American Slavery as it Compares to Other Nations

It may be easy to look back at the issue of slavery two-hundred years later and condemn its practice. At the time, however, the American economy was prospering from the slave-labor industry, most obviously in the South. Slavery was a powerful and enduring institution that survived through many significant changes during the early development of America.

For instance, as the American colonies were first settling, Africans were being imported. Then, as the American Revolution occurred, slavery continued. Perhaps most significant and ironic, the institution of slavery held strong even during the founding of our republic and the drafting of our constitution. Obviously, a simple declaration that all men are created equal did not have a tremendous impact. And finally, slavery somehow persisted through thirty years of the abolitionist movement in the North.

It is important to remember, however, that the African slave-trade was not exclusive to America; indeed slavery

existed throughout the world. Furthermore, America was not the largest importer of slaves. In fact, only six percent of the distribution of slave imports in the New World from 1500-1870 was to the United States. Brazil claimed 38%, while the British Caribbean, French Caribbean, and Spanish America each had 17% of the distribution (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 14). These statistics are not provided as an attempt to belittle the strength of the slavery institution in the United States, but rather, they are provided merely to place America's slave-trade in a world-wide perspective.

But, as the United States accounted for only a small percentage of the imported slave distribution, so did it maintain the institution longer than many other nations. While slavery was slowly abolished in other areas of the world, it survived in America. Many slave-holding countries emancipated slaves long before the United States did in 1865. For example, Central America, the Dutch, Danish, French, and British Colonies all abolished slavery before America (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 34). Why, then, did slavery persist in the United States for such a long time and through such a tumultuous struggle? It is likely that the main reason it endured for so many years is that, as many experts and historians assert, the institution of slavery in the United States was, quite simply, extremely profitable.

Economic Implications of American Slavery in The South

Economically, many areas of the Southern region of the United

States flourished under slavery; it was not the extreme and poverty-stricken land that is so often portrayed. In fact, had the South been an independent country in 1860, it would have been the fourth wealthiest nation in the world (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 249). By 1820, the South had become the largest cotton producer in the entire world. Sixty percent of American export was cotton.

The implementation of the cotton gin in 1793 served only to boost the South's economy. The invention allowed for cotton seeds to be removed fifty times more efficiently than by manual labor. It seems that such an invention would have improved the arduous condition of slave-labor, but actually it proved to have quite the opposite effect. In fact, the machine tightly tied the South to the cotton industry. As a result of the increased efficiency, cotton production was free to expand throughout the country, especially towards the Southwest region, subsequently further entrenching slave labor in the South.

Nation-Wide Economic Implications of American Slavery

The further entrenchment of slavery in the South had a cyclical national effect. As more slaves were put to work in the South, and forced to work harder, the amounts of cotton produced increased dramatically. Then, the South's increased output of cotton combined with the North's textile industry and advanced shipping technology led to a mutually beneficial relationship between the two regions of the United States.

The North's ability to manufacture and export the cotton forced increased demand. Furthermore, the South's huge output of cotton allowed the North to utilize its strong textile and shipping industries. In other words, while the North was stronger in the manufacturing industry and the South stronger in the agricultural industry, both regions gained immensely from the slave-labor in the South.

The mutually beneficial relationship the two regions shared, however, was not completely satisfactory to both parties. Despite its higher per capita rate, the North envied greatly the economic opportunities of the South--opportunities which the North no longer had after it intially began to abolish slavery--the abolishment began in 1776 and continued gradually until 1784. That is, the North envied the South's slave-market, on which an investment could be quickly tripled during the cotton-boom. At that time, the price of slaves rose from $600 to $1800, allowing a trader to sell a slave for triple the cost he paid for it. The North, of course, had no such market. In this way, though both regions benefited from the institution of slavery, the South was clearly the economic envy.

Anticipated Effects of Total Southern Emancipation

Although the North prided itself on its supposed moral superiority, many Northerners feared emancipation in the South for economic reasons. This fear was based on more than the impact that sudden emancipation would have on the textile

and shipping industries in the North. Indeed, a greater problem existed. The possibility that four million slaves might be freed in the South raised the question of how so many people could be integrated into the work-force. Freed slaves, of course, threatened the jobs and incomes of the Northerners. Also, Northerners involved in the cotton industry foresaw that the future of the cotton trade would be greatly jeopardized without the slave labor that had made the market so exorbanately profitable. Thus, although the combination of the cotton industry and the institution of slavery did not, as it did for the South, triple the investments of the Northerners, they nevertheless feared Southern emancipation.

One way to alleviate the impending glut of unemployment in the economy upon sudden emancipation, was the idea of gradual emancipation, which was proposed, and in some cases, implemented, especially in the North. This plan of emancipation involved the gradual freeing of slaves to avoid burdening the existing working community, as well as slaveholders who may have been at high economic risk in the event of total emancipation. This was done by a grandfathering method. For example, a slave born during or prior to the emancipation would be freed only at his or her twenty-first birthday. This plan was also intended to be helpful to the emancipated slaves who, it was thought, may have needed time, free of pressure, to adjust to free society and the responsible behavior which comes with freedom.

Though the plan of gradual emancipation, a plan implemented by many other nations around the world, appeared the best option for slaves, slaveholders, and Northern industry workers alike, it did meet with considerable resistance. The abolitionists from the North felt strongly that the slaves should be freed immediately; they deemed it inappropriate that slave-children were to be held in bondage until early adulthood. On the other hand, the slaveholders of the South and the industry workers of the North feared that sudden and direct emancipation would lead the country into economic ruin. This clash of ideologies suggests an explanation for the fact that the United States was one of only very few countries to shed blood over the issue of abolishing slavery (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 35).

Accusations of Hypocrisy

In discussing the ideological clashes which led to the Civil War, it is absolutely essential to explore the hypocrisy displayed by the Northern abolitionists. The cotton boom that began in 1864 was the result of an increased demand for cotton products world-wide (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 94). In other words, the boom in production followed the demand, illustrating that Southern slaveholders were not simply over-producing with the intent to be cruel to the slave work-force, as they were accused of by their opponents, the Northern abolitionists (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 88). These same opponents did not make an issue of the fact that,

between 1822 and 1827, the production of cloth tripled and the price dropped by 35 percent, allowing the Northern textile manufacturers to reap great profits. The hypocrisy of the abolitionists, then, can be derived from their haste to accuse Southern slaveholders of cruel exploitation of slaves to increase overproduction, while refusing to acknowledge the fact that Northerners were realizing similarly huge economic benefits from the same slave exploitation. "No one has ever accused these Northern cloth manufacturers of an irresistible tendency to overproduction" (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 91).

The study of such economic aspects of slavery, like the one detailed above, is an intricate endeavor. Much of what has been published on the matter, including publications as recent as the 1960's, can be scrutinized and questioned as inaccurate or labeled as racist.

Racist Research of Slavery

One researcher, Cassius Marcellus Clay, whose openly expressed opinions have left him and his ideas to be scrutinized, held an abolitionist stance on slavery that publicly impressed many abolitionists. He contended that slavery was responsible for the South's supposed economic inefficiency. In 1843, he published a letter in the *New York Tribune* stating his reasons for his slavery-rooted economic theory: "Slavery impoverishes the soil," because, in comparison with whites, slaves were "not so skillful, so

energetic, and above all, have not the stimulus of self-interest" (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 160). He further detailed how slavery "degraded" labor, making agricultural work seem horrible. Also, he added that much toil in the field greatly hampered the slaves' education of mechanical skills which could be used in industry, which, according to Clay, was a far more progressive field than agriculture (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 160).

During the slavery era, the expression of opinions like Clay's, as well as many much more radical opinions, was the norm. Indeed, slavery was an extremely volatile issue; and, not surprisingly, each side of the debate generated much public rally for its cause. What is interesting, at least in a general sense, is how people became so divided and why these people so strongly maintained their stands to the extent that dialogue between the groups was absolutely impossible. The two opposing sides refused to meet. Neither party was willing to compromise a belief in what they felt was right.

In slavery, as with many other debated issues, the solutions to differing opinions could come about only in the form of a fight--a very literal fight in which one side physically overtakes the other. This is not meant to imply that one side was absolutely right and the other side absolutely wrong (for if that were the case, than everything believed in by the wrong side would be necessarily negated.) Instead it implies that people reach a point in their beliefs

where they realize that one way of thinking is so "wrong" to them that they can in no way be any part of it, and must therefore make a distinction and divide. When opinions become this strong, it is easy to understand how dialogue can break down, and how two such severely opposed ideologies can emerge.

Pro-Slavery Religious Arguments

Much of the pro-slavery rhetoric came from religious doctrine, the Bible, for example, and was further perpetuated by many clergy. Samuel B. How, a pastor at the First Reformed Dutch Church in New Brunswick, New Jersey, was one clergy who did perpetuate slavery. In October of 1855, How addressed the general synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church on the issue of slavery. His argument, which was published in Slaveholding Not Sinful , was titled "Slavery, the punishment of man's sins, its remedy, the Gospel of Christ."

The thesis of How's argument is that slavery is justified in scripture and that, therefore, to exclude slaveholders from the Christian community is itself a sin. He draws on Biblical verses, such as 1 Timothy 6: 1-2, to prove his argument:

> Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit.

How's interpretation of these verses reads:

> . . . and does he, with apostolic authority and in the name of Jesus Christ, command the masters to give them their freedom? He does nothing of the kind. He not only does not require these Christian masters to set their slaves at liberty, but he speaks of them as "faithful and beloved" brethren (How 1971, 11).

It is important to recognize that How is including both Christians and non-Christians in his Biblical argument. That is, he makes no distinction in his writing between Christians and non-Christians. It is unclear whether How believes that all slaveholders can be applied to his argument or whether he simply means to address only Christians. Regardless, he apparently assumes that all slaveholders adhere to Christian standards.

Another man who used scripture to defend the institution of slavery was Howell Cobb. He asserted that Africans were being punished for their "wickedness" by being sold into slavery. And, according to Cobb, it was through slavery that Africa would be rescued from "deep degradation" (Cobb 1856, 3). In his argument, Cobb also mentions God's chosen people:

> Why should any one be astonished at slavery? . . . God's chosen and peculiar people . . . they of whom the prophets were . . . enslaved in as hard, perhaps in much harder bondage, than has ever been experienced by the Africans (Cobb 1856, 4).

It is clearly evident that Cobb judged people on the basis of his own religious standards. He asserts that Africans had no virtues anyway, and could therefore have probably benefitted from slavery. He goes on to say that the Africans could actually be freemen while still enslaved. He offers the freedom the slaves had to learn the Gospel as proof (Cobb 1856, 8). Cobb further asserts that the slavery

established by the church was an example to be followed. He believed that the church was able to maintain control over the cruelty of the masters. As support, he again provides Scripture, "And if a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished" (Cobb 1864, 9).

Cobb's main source for support in his argument, the Bible, does comment on slavery. However, it does so in a historical context, which Cobb fails to take into consideration. His interpretation of the Bible is extremely literal, and despite the fact that he may be completely misinterpreting the source, he nevertheless offers it as an attempt to strengthen his argument. Cobb comments on abolitionism, "It is a religious delusion . . . it sprang from misguided religious teachers" (Cobb 1864, 12). He continues:

> There is nothing more disgusting than abolitionism--nothing, we consider, more wicked and mischievous; yet we confess that we don't fear it . . . We cannot, at present, be induced to believe that God, whose hand is so signally seen in every step of our progress, will allow deluded men, no matter what their numbers may be, or how intemperate their zeal, to consummate such great wickedness (Cobb 1864, 13).

Clearly, much contempt for the opponents of slavery can be detected in Cobb's literature. But the slavery issue, of course, has two sides, both religiously grounded and yet completely incompatible to each other. Both sides used Scripture for argumentative support, and each side interpreted the Scripture much differently. Yet, not surprisingly, Cobb, like many others involved in the slavery

debate, believed that Biblical interpretations contrary to his own were completely wrong.

> Men may and will question, controvert, and discuss everything of human origin, and agree or disagree with their authors, as they think proper; but when the Bible speaks there is an end to controversy and discussion: our duty then becomes very simple; it is--to be silent--to listen--to understand--to obey: for this authority no man may question or disregard (Cobb 1864, 4).

Pro-Slavery Non-Religious Arguments

Of course, not every justification of slavery was religious in nature. Support of slavery was grounded in the secular world, as well. For instance, some opponents of slavery offered prosperity as a justification. Thorton Stringfellow, a pro-slavery writer, argued that since slave states were economically more prosperous than non-slave states during slavery, the institution was automatically justified (Stringfellow 1856, 111). And even John Locke, whose ideas were rooted in secularism, defended slavery in his writings on "the inalienable rights of man" (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 31). Locke's name is included in this brief list of non-religiously grounded supporters of slavery to further illustrate the widespread ideas offered in defense of the institution. After all, Locke was a great promoter of natural liberty, as well as of the idea that men should be prepared to take up arms in the defense of natural liberty, and yet even he found justification for slavery. The point finally is, then, that the institution of slavery found support in all areas of thought. Though many in favor of

slavery offered Biblical passages and Christian tradition as support, many others furnished completely secular reasoning for the condoning of slavery.

Anti-Slavery Religious Arguments

Of course, Biblical passages and Christian tradition were also used in support of the abolishment of slavery. As mentioned earlier, both parties on the issue submitted Scripture for argumentative support, though in each case the Scripture was necessarily interpreted differently. A Biblical passage which clearly denounces slavery is seen in Jeremiah 34: 16-17, which reads

> But then you turned around and profaned my name when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves. Therefore, thus says the Lord, You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine, says the Lord. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

This passage, like the passage from 1 Timothy included earlier, lends credible Biblical support in favor of the arguer's ideology. In this case, the argument is towards the abolishment of slavery.

As there were poeple during the slave era who used religion (not specifically the Bible) to support slavery, so were there people who offered religion as a means to support abolishment. William Hosmer, for instance, an abolitionist writer, offers the following passage:

> Human laws make work oppression instead of protection; but the law of God neither oppresses any,

> nor allows any to be oppressed. It protects the rights of all, and this too in all respects. By banishing every sin, and demanding universal holiness, it ensures to each and all equal and exact justice. This law leaves nothing to human caprice--it knows neither high nor low, but places all on a level, and requires every one to do according to his ability . . . Whatever oppresses or injures, is at war with God and his creatures (Hosmer 1852, 32).

Clearly, Hosmer has strong notions regarding the position of slavery in a religious community. *Whatever oppresses or injures, is at war with God and his creatures* is a rigid conclusion which suggests that all slaveholders and proponents of slavery are at war with God.

George B. Cheever is another opponent to slavery who offers religious reasoning for abolishment. Like Hosmer, he asserts that God is at war with any and all who oppress. He writes

> You can not in any thing do to others as you would they should do to you, if in this fundamental thing you take their children, and claim and use them as your property. You could not rightfully use your own children as your property; much less the children of others.
>
> I might rest the whole argument here; but I pass to a second demonstration of the sinfulness of slavery in the various laws enacted against *oppression* , which are indeed necessary conclusions from the law of love. If slavery is *not* oppression, nothing under heaven can be. It is the violation, in every particular, of every one of the statutes of God against that wickedness. When God says, Cursed be he that oppresseth his neighbor, in whatever respect: *that* curse comes, in every possible shape, upon the man who claims property in man; because that claim gathers up into itself every conceivable exaction and exasperation of tyranny, either as essence or result. When God says, Thou shalt not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, the widow, the servant, the hireling; and when he teaches us to pray, Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will keep thy precepts; every one of these statutes and instructions demonstrates the system of slavery to be sinful; because its fundamental claim of property in man is the sum of all these oppressions, and God could never sanction in a general system as right, that which He

> forbids, in every particular, as wrong. All the laws against oppression, all the manifestations of God's abhorrence of it, go to show the divine sentiment and sentence in reprobation of slavery, God's hatred of it, God's intense feeling and judgement against it (Cheever 1857, 96-7).

Cheever, it is obvious, adamantly believes that the institution of slavery is absolutely wrong in God's eyes. His opinion regarding the issue of the abolishment of slavery is as firm and unbending as Hosmer's. But it must be realized that together, Cheever's and Hosmer's opinions on behalf of the abolishment of slavery are no stronger than are the opinions of Cobb and How on behalf of the continuance of slavery. In other words, as mentioned much earlier in this paper, ideologies can become rigidly divided, to the point where communication on the subject reaches impossibility.

Placing Both Sides in a Historical Context

Of course, the controversial, emotional, and seemingly unresolvable issue of slavery in the United States finally ended in war, as the Northern and Southern states fought for their beliefs in the American Civil War. If we allow only the literature included in the above sections to help form our opinions about slavery it is understandable that the controversy led to war. After all, the opinions and argumentation asserted by both sides appears credible. It is even conceivable, perhaps, that the Bible could be interpreted to support either side. However, the literature, argumentation, and support offered thusfar has been nothing

more than a completely unbiased historical survey of opposing ideologies. In other words, placed in the context of the era in which this debate was fueled, both sides seem somehow appropriate. But, today we are obviously not in the context of the slave era, and, with 200 years of history behind us, it is certainly nearly impossible to justify slavery any longer. But why, from a contemporary standpoint, are we so almost universally willing to condemn the institution of slavery when only a short time ago our forefathers went to war over the issue? The answer to this question may lie simply in the testimonies of those directly involved within the institution of slavery. That is, the slaveholders and slaves.

Composition of Slaveholders in the South

Before delving into this exploration of the lives of those involved in slavery, it is necessary to first make some clarifications regarding *who was* actually involved. Clearly, not every white person in the South owned slaves. The white population was diverse and the time of the Civil War, 76.1% owned **no** slaves. This population group was sometimes referred to as the hired laborers, or "white trash." Since the threshold of entry into slaveholding was high, these people could not afford slaves, who could cost as much as $1800 each. Slightly more than 17% of the Southern population owned between one and nine slaves. These were white farming families who worked *with* their slaves,

side by side, out of necessity. Every able body was utilized in order to maintain production of crops. A smaller percent of the population, or 6.9%, owned between ten and 99 slaves. And finally, only .1% of the Southern population owned 100 or more slaves, and this group was known as the planter aristocracy, which was made up of about 3000 families. Clearly, then, not all Southerners were involved in slavery to the extent that we think of today (Wittenstein 1991).

Descriptions of Slave Experience

In the American history of slavery, millions of people were unjustly at the mercy of others. No matter how "well" some slaves may have been treated, they were all still in bondage, longing for their freedom. Indeed, the life of a slave was typically arduous, filled with continuous heartbreak and loss. After disembarking the slave ships, many Africans were forced to witness, experience, and suffer the immediate selling of parents, spouses, and children. From that time forward, the slaves were constantly reminded of their worthlessness and instability as slave masters would buy and sell slaves, often in the heat of the moment or if the price seemed appropriate at the time. Undoubtedly, the slaves were at the utter mercy of their earthly masters; the degrees of cruelty practiced by the masters were various and unpredictable. Freedom from this horrendous bondage was a dream--though a dream too often unattainable.

Because contemporary depictions of slave life are filled

with so much horror, it is often assumed that all slaves were exploited cruelly and mercilessly by their masters. In fact, there is no room left for the possibility that there may have existed positive aspects of slave lives. Today, we think that the harsh environment the slaves were forced to endure must have squelched, diminished, or even totally obliterated the creativity, spirituality, culture, and familial relations, of the slaves. However, this is not at all true. Rather, slaves had a heritage rich in culture and history, as many slave narratives reflect. The following passage is an excerpt from the narrative of Venture Smith, born in Guinea in about 1729. He recalls his homeland:

> A large river runs through this country in a westerly course. The land for a great way on each side is flat and level, hedged in by a considerable rise in the country at a great distance from it. It scarce ever rains there, yet the land is fertile; great dews fall in the night which refresh the soil. About the latter end of June or first of July, the river begins to rise, and gradually increases until it has inundated the country for a great distance, to the height of seven or eight feet. This brings on a slime which enriches the land surprisingly (Frazier 1970, 6).

The great detail expressed in the preceding passage suggests that Smith vividly remembers, and likely longs for, his homeland. The institution of slavery may have worn him physically, but like so many other slaves, his memory and spirit never wavered.

Memories of family and homeland were not the only aspects of slave-life which helped to maintain a spirit among the slaves. Indeed, there was a strong sense of religion among the African slaves in America. The following anecdote

illustrates slave religion:

> We was scared of Solomon and his whip, though, and he didn't like frolicking. He didn't like for us niggers to pray, either. We never heard of no church, but us have praying in the cabins. We'd set on the floor and pray with our heals down low and sing low, but if Solomon heared he'd come and beat on the wall with the stock of his whip. He'd say, "I'll come in there and tear the hide off you backs." But some the old niggers tell us we got to pray to God that He don't think different of the blacks and the whites. I know that Solomon is burning in hell today, and it pleasures me to know it (Botkin 1945, 192).

This anecdotal account of a slave's view of religion shows the slaves' sincere adherence to religious beliefs. Despite the fact that the slaves feared extremely cruel punishment at the hands of their masters for practicing religion, they nevertheless found the time and the courage to pray. It was through this prayer that the slaves found solace, hope, and unity with each other.

According to Fogel and Engerman, co-authors of _Time on the Cross_ , most slaveholders were not brutal and sadistic. Nevertheless, there are many accounts that illustrate difficult life circumstances and incidents inflicted by the master. The following passage is an excerpt from Linda Brent's slave narrative, _Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl_ . She would probably disagree with the analyses of Fogel and Engerman.

> I could tell of more slaveholders as cruel as those I have described. They are not exceptions to the general rule. I do not say there are no humane slaveholders. Such characters do exist, notwithstanding the hardening influences around them. But they are 'like angels' visits--few and far between' (Gates 1987, 380).

(While touring a women's prison in southern Minnesota, I

was shown a ward where well-behaved prisoners, who could get wok passes for the "outside," were contained. The ward was structured as multiple apartments, or condominium-styled living quarters. Each of the fully furnished "condos" housed four prisoners who enjoyed such amenities as private bedrooms and bathrooms, televisions, and kitchens. Others with me on the tour were astonished to see that such a comfortable living arrangement was provided for prisoners. After all, they said, this does not seem at all like a prison. Responding to this reaction, one prisoner said, "Yeah, but you don't have your freedom. You know you can't just leave. That's what makes it a prison." I mention this story only to suggest that, no matter how comfortable and cordial an environment may appear, it certainly does not explain the entire story. Those who are oppressed in such a setting know they are not free and they are not at their own mercy.)

Cruelty and compassion varied from master to master. Although masters oppressed fellow humans in order to attain wealth and status, some masters were better or worse than others. According to some slaves, there were masters one would be lucky to have, and masters whose slaves prayed for short lives. Frederick Douglass, the acclaimed writer and abolitionist, expressed in his slave narrative his fear of and contempt for religious slaveholders. "For all slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all

others" (Grant 1987, 302).

Religion of the Slaveholders

Evangelical Protestantism, a religious view of conservative Protestantism which stresses the importance of leading a holy and disciplined life, was the religion which attracted the most religious slaveholders. This form of religion proved to be very significant in that it provided both peace and turmoil in the soul of the slaveholder. This turmoil generated from the church's teaching of egalitarianism and its reflection of materialism. This seems to be an ironic choice of faith for those who obviously disregarded the equality of man, as displayed by their livelihood. Furthermore, they conformed to society's demand for material wealth. Basically, slaveholders lived in daily violation of their faith's most fundamental tenet (Oakes 1982, 97-8).

The question of man's equality did indeed prove to be troublesome to some slaveholders. But even more troubling than the bondage issue was the issue of materialism. Material prosperity was a driving force for slaveholders in the South. Yet, the church preached that covetous and the love of money was evil. Here is where the slaveholder's livelihood caught him in between his religious beliefs and society. Many slaveholders feared they were unworthy recipients of their wealth since it was derived from slavery, and subsequently freed their slaves (Oakes 1982, 104). Other

slaveholders who subscribed to the same religious beliefs, however, lived with the conflict between materialism and evangelicalism and carried the burden of contradiction (Oakes 1982, 95).

Although the main concern of these slaveholders was materialism, they also wrestled with the problem of egalitarianism. In explaining the slaveholders' uneasiness with this problem, it is helpful to understand that they feared a divine punishment of death (Oakes 1982, 112). Yet, some slaveholders justified themselves by the claim that they were not directly responsible for the unequal treatment of slaves. Instead, the blame, they said, should be placed on their fathers, for they were the ones who had sinned by actually buying and selling the slaves.

Specifically, what attracted slaveholders to evangelicalism? One way in which this religious view attracted perspective believers was through camp meetings and revivals. Reciprocally, prominent slaveholders attracted big audiences to such events. It was at these events that the religious conversion experience was made an impressive spectacle--a central experience in the religious slaveholder's life. Once converted, a slaveholder thought it to be the most important means of acquiring the proper Christian behavior. His family and friends would be his next pursuit to add to the converted list (Oakes 1982, 97-8).

Religious slaveholding parents, particularly the father, tended to be very strict with their children. Virtues were

taught to be of utmost importance. Also, achieving success through honorable positions in the military and clergy was encouraged. Often times, as a result of this upbringing, the children of these slaveholders grew to be very religious themselves (Oakes 1982, 69-70). However, it appears that these children would grow up only to find themselves in difficult predicaments. On one hand, they had been trained to be devoutly religious, yet had simultaneously also been groomed to strive for society's standard of success.

Conclusion of Aspects of Slaves and Slaveholding

As discussed, both sides of the issue use Scripture, religion, and secularism to lend support to their beliefs and ideas. And, as the beliefs and values of these opposite groups spread to others, most people will place themselves in one or the other of the ideological camps. As more and more people gather in one camp, the rigidity of the beliefs increase, to the point that the members of one party can no longer even tolerate the ideas and opinions of the other party. Thus, a nation of people can quickly become split ideologically. This is clearly what happened with the debate over slavery in the middle nineteenth century, as the abolition controversy created the formula by which future hotly contested American issues would follow.

Introduction to the Women's Christian Temperance Union

As we began the discussion of slavery in this paper with an examination of it's historical past in order to shed light on the past and present implications of the institution, so too will it be necessary to begin the discussion of the Women's Christian Temperance Union with a brief exploration of the history of temperance in America.

The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a reform movement, which was founded in 1874; it was comprised of mostly white Christian women. The goal of the movement was to protect and advocate women's purity, which they believed was threatened by men--especially men who consumed alcohol. One of the Union's major targets for reform was saloons. For these reformers, saloons represented a den of sin in which corruption, obscenity, and violence were bred by the consumption of alcohol and the exposure to such vices as prostitution. Patronage of such establishments, they believed, only promoted the degradation of women in the home, and hence, an attack on beer halls was waged.

A main thrust of the WCTU was for women to be heard--women who demanded a socially pure environment. Having a voice gave these women the opportunity to exercise equality. In 1872, Abigail S. Duniway, a temperance leader, addressed the Oregon State Temperance Alliance:

> Give women the legal power to combat intemperance and they will soon be able to prove that they do not like drunken husbands any better than men like drunken wives. Make women *free*. Give them the power the ballot gives to you, and the control of their own earnings which rightfully belong to them, and every women will be able to settle this prohibition business in her own home and on her own account. men will not tolerate in their

> wives; and women will not tolerate it in husbands unless compelled to (Duniway 1886).

The preceding excerpt demonstrates that the temperance movement not only meant the abolishment of beer halls. In fact, it went much deeper than prohibition. Women crusading for temperance felt a strong need for control within society--a society dominated by men. Women lacked a say in pertinent public issues (of course, they still could not vote), and they had little influence in their personal lives, as well. The attack on the liquor establishment, an exclusive men's club, was a cry for change and reform concerning the role of women in society.

Religious Justifications for Sexual Inequality

As women reformers and female activists paved the way for a feminist ideology, they were attacked by opponents who used Scripture as a justification for oppressing women (much as Scripture had been offered only a few years earlier to defend the oppression of blacks.) Genesis was a popular Biblical book of the opponents of the women's movement. It describes the "fallen women" who could not resist temptation and subsequently ensnared all of humanity into a doomed trap.

However, many reformers turned to the Bible as their justification for their deserved equality. Most of what they cited was in the Gospel of the New Testament--focusing on the words of Jesus. What Jesus said convinced them of their equality with men, because He said nothing to contradict gender equality (Behnke 1982, 123). Feminist Lucinda B.

Chandler, commented on the Gospel:

> Jesus is not recorded as having uttered any similar claim that woman should be subject to man, or that in teaching she would be a usurper. The dominion of woman over man or of man over woman makes no part of the saying of the Nazarene. He spoke of the individual soul, not recognizing sex as a quality of spiritual life, or as determining the sphere of action of either man or woman (Chandler 1895-8, 164-165.)

As much as proponents of women's equality to men found favorable evidence in the Bible to support their claims, so did the opponents of women's equality find Biblical evidence to argue their stand (in addition to the very general usage of Genesis, mentioned above.) For example, 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." This passage lays out a hierarchical order, with women beneath man, man beneath Christ, and Christ beneath God. Verses eight through nine suggest even more subordinance of women to men. "(For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.)"

Interpretations of the Bible flew back and forth. With Scripture taken out of context, both sides could make convincing cases. Incidentally, further along into the 1 Corinthians passage, it says in verses 11-12, "(Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is born of woman. And all things are from God.)"

Of course not all women's rights activists believed the Bible to be evidence of equality between the sexes. Pioneer

of women's rights, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was one such person. She said of the Bible:

> The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgement seat of Heaven, tried, condemned, and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all material wants . . . Here is the Bible position of woman briefly summed up (Stanton 1895-98, 7).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered a speech in 1860 to the American Anti-Slavery Society, entitled "Speech to the Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society." In the speech, she drew parallels between the enslavement of Africans and the oppression of women in America. Blacks and women deserved the right to their freedom from bondage, making them similar. For instance, the two groups shared, as all of humanity shares, the love of justice (DuBois 1981, 79). The justice of which she speaks is not merely a legality, but rather an unperverted morality. Morality, she recognized, is not always legislated and often can be absent from law, as well as perverted and molded into law. It is important to distinguish between morality and law in order to examine justice.

Justice is also not an absolutely clear idea. It may not be legislated in some circumstances. Usually it is perceived as the correct course. One tool to determine "rightness" which has been used again and again, is the Holy Scripture. However, as with any "truth" or proof, the Bible can be perverted and therefore misinterpreted. It must be

noted that what is moral is not necessarily legal and what is legal is not always moral. This is perfectly illustrated by the legalization of slavery and the illegalization of women's voting practices (prior to 1920).

Stanton spoke of our country as a hypocrisy because of its grand claims of being like a den of equality which is overflowing with human rights (DuBois 1981, 82). Of course, during Stanton's time, the illusion of equality, which so eloquently lined our Constitution, was indeed a farce. It seems outrageous that such a double standard existed, but it nevertheless did, and still continues to haunt American history.

In her speech, Stanton clarifies that to grant or permit civil rights to any one person or group, does not jeopardize others with the same rights (DuBois 1981, 79). She challenged those in power who cowered in fear of speaking out for the rights of individuals. Those she called on were slaveholders and Northern politicians alike, to stand up for liberty (DuBois 1981, 80). Interestingly, throughout her speech she is vague in distinguishing between slaves and women, which by her philosophy should make no difference, since rights of one group should not threaten the rights of another.

Feminist Sarah Underwood also took Stanton's view. She thought the Bible to be no more uplifting to women than it had been to slaves. She said, it "left the slave in chains and the woman in fetters" (Behnke 1982, 126). (As can be

seen, it is almost impossible not to make comparisons between the abolitionist movement in the middle of the nineteenth century and the work of the WCTU. Also, it becomes difficult to separate the history of the WCTU and the history of abortion, as will be seen.)

American History of Abortion, Birth Control, and Sexuality

The American history of birth control is important to understand when discussing the abortion issue of today. Included in this history is American sexuality, which has direct bearing on reproductive practices and issues. Abortion is a topic with a lengthy history, which I will attempt to briefly summarize.

In colonial times, the community had great influence on its individual members. Neighbors kept close watch on each other simply because they *could* , since at the time, houses were constructed scantily--walls were thin, peepholes were uncovered. In addition to unsturdy living structures, many colonists took in boarders for extra income, crowding already cramped quarters.

> One woman got into bed with her children, and when a man joined them, her daughter recalled, the mother instructed the children to "lie further or else shee would kick us out of bed." Even couples who sought greater privacy had difficulty finding it, for loosely constructed houses allowed neighbors and kin to observe what happened behind closed doors (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 17).

Aside from sex being somewhat everybody's business, it had community expectations attached to it, as well. For instance, it was a woman's responsibility to utilize her

reproduction capabilities (within marriage) in order to increase the population. One reason for the desire to expand was for the growth of the church--the center of the villages which united the people and provided moral guidance. Survival for the community relied on high fertility rates, and therefore, birth control devices were not socially acceptable or available. However, there is some evidence that shows abortions were indeed performed.

In early colonial days, fertility rates soared. Communities needed to grow in numbers in order to sustain the population. Abortion and pregnancy prevention were seldom used during that time, except for in cases of extra-marital affairs, which resulted in illegitimate births. Illegitimate births were viewed as not only sinful and improper, but as an economic burden to the community (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 6).

Since records of abortions were not kept in this early era of American history, it is difficult to say what was actually happening. However, reformers estimated that for every twenty-five to thirty live births between 1800-1830, one abortion was performed. Later, in the 1850's it is estimated that for every five or six live births, there was one abortion. Also, these estimates do not include stillbirths that may have occurred due to the use of abortificients (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 65).

Demographic Changes in America

Demographically, America changed dramatically from the colonization to the westward expansion of urbanization of many states. Also, attitudes towards sexuality in the United States had shifted from the eighteenth century to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In other words, the societal attitudes regarding the function of sex as reproduction and as individual pleasure changed over this time. The reasoning for this may have involved factors such as population.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, population had evolved from being mostly rural to being significantly more urban. Capitalism was expanding and agriculture evolved from being strictly subsistence to predominantly a cash-crop industry. Fewer people owned farm land, and hence, children inherited less property from their parents. Children unable to depend on parental support sought opportunities for themselves in other areas. Growing industry in urban settings provided employment opportunities for young men and women. These opportunities separated children from parental supervision.

This geographic mobility available to children provided more (sexual) freedom for young people who left home to live and work in the urban centers. Once they physically left the family, they were free from communal ties and social constraints.

The Birth Control Movement

While this sort of migration to cities was occurring, the birth control movement began. Voluntary motherhood and female contraception emerged as serious topics. Women began to have opportunities for personal betterment as child-bearing was not as necessary--especially when children were no longer an economic asset. In other words, it no longer paid to have children.

During this period in American history, women were still generally viewed by society as second-class citizens. Women were not allowed to vote and were discouraged from pursuing a life path that deviated from the social norm. Rather, they were encouraged to remain submissive wives and nurturant mothers. When, occasionally, some women did venture out into the world in search of a another life plan, such as college and career, they were scorned and warned of the possible consequences of choosing such deviant courses. For instance, some, doctors included, thought that educated women would physically ruin their reproductive capabilities by going to college. Women were told that their wombs would literally shrink from indulging their minds in intellectual exercise (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 190).

Customarily, women were restricted to domestic roles and motherhood. But as women became more educated, they began questioning their traditional roles in society. As a result, many women became involved in political issues, and ideas of women's suffrage surfaced as fundamental agendas. At this

point, even the right to vote was still out of reach for American women, and suffrage became the forefront of the Women's Liberation Movement.

Pioneers, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, headed this movement. Included on Stanton's list of concerns for women was the right to say "no" to motherhood. Like many women leaders, Stanton took the stance that abortion catered to men's supposed sexual imposition on women, since sex without birth control inevitably led to motherhood. What her view entailed was the squelching of sexual activity and the women's right to refuse intercourse (DuBois, 1982, 96).

This changing notion of motherhood returns our discussion to abortion, and it becomes appropriate at this point to further explore the history of abortion and birth control. Abortion was not only sought by pregnant unmarried women but by pregnant married mothers, as well. Women attempted to control their fertility and would go to extraordinary lengths to do so. Some women, in fact, ingested abortificients, like aloe or iron to induce abortion. Others resorted to rubbing gun powder on their breasts, drinking rusty nail water, jumping from tall heights, taking hot baths, or eating concoctions of tansy tea-leaves soaked in solutions of whiskey and borax (D'Emilio and Freedman 1982, 63). All such methods were rumored to be effective, but w8re many times unsuccessful; often, when such remedies failed, more obtrusive procedures were sought--procedures such as the insertion of instruments into the

vagina which many times perforated the uterine lining, causing serious infection--which was usually fatal. It seems that women who went to such lengths were apparently quite desperate.

Legislation of abortion was implemented in order that the practice would become regulated. Between 1820 and 1840 laws permitted abortion only before "quickening"--the stage at which a woman can actually feel the fetus moving inside of her. However, laws grew more strict between 1860-1890, when forty states and territories prohibited abortions performed by anyone other than a doctor. Also at that time, birth control information and distribution was becoming limited by legislation, such as the Comstock Act (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 66).

The Effects of the Comstock Act

In 1873, birth control and abortificients finally became illegal with the passing of the Comstoct Act. the act was named for its author, Anthony Comstock, and it prohibited all birth control literature and devices from being distributed via the United States Postal Service--previously a primary method of its transaction. Once information became unattainable through pamphlets, women were forced to rely on doctors who were willing to distribute contraception and offer information. Some women relied on one another, exchanging the common folk remedies for pregnancy prevention and, in some extreme cases, some women even relied on self-

induced abortions (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 61). The Comstock act quite dramatically changed the course of abortion and contraception, for only a few years earlier the market for such amenities seemed to be increasing steadily:

> Abortion, like contraception, found a growing commercial market due to the spread of both the patent-medicine industry and newspaper advertising. By the 1860's, over twenty-five different chemical abortificients--aloes, iron, and other cathartic powders--could be located through newspaper ads, postal circulars, and pharmacies (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 61).

The man responsible for so dramatically changing the course of abortion/contraception development was, of course, Anthony Comstock, a renowned sexual reformer. "Doctors and vice crusaders such as Anthony Comstock opposed abortion, contraception, and the public expression of sexuality in art and literature . . . [They} politicized sexuality by demanding . . . regulation of morality" (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 140). Comstock was persistent in detecting any one who talked publicly about birth control, distributed birth control, or performed abortion procedures. He would immediately have such persons harassed and arrested. It is even speculated that he had an influence in the suicide of Madame Restell, the famous abortionist. Her suicide note, in fact, mentions him:

> The American people may be shocked into investigating the dreadful state of affairs which permits unctuous sexual hypocrite, Anthony Comstock, to wax fat and arrogant, and to trample upon the liberties of the people, invading, in my own case, both my right to freedom of religion and to freedom of the press (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 161).

Efforts of the WCTU

The WCTU was also active in banning impure literature--pamphlets on birth-control methods, abortificients, location and names of abortionists, and other such important information. In this way, the work of the WCTU was very similar to the work of Comstock, though the Union did not at all appreciate being associated with Comstock and his crusade. The women felt Comstock employed vicious tactics in the enforcing of his ideas (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 160). As the Union grew stronger, though, the women were introduced to further political activism, and soon the Union had branched out into other purity reforms.

At the beginning of the Union's crusade against impurity, it took a stance against prostitution, focusing on the "fallen woman." With the development of the Social Purity Division within the WCTU, the focus was changed to and fixed on purifying *men*, instead of women. And thus the implementation of the White Ribbon Campaign--a program in which men pledged their sexual purity by donning a white ribbon--began. The ribbon was to be symbolic of the men's resistance to sexual temptation, as well as of their devotion to purity (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988, 153). It is important to note that, during this time in history, women were thought of as sexless, passionless creatures and that thus, a purity reform movement must have been focused on men and their sexual desires.

Since early colonial times, Americans have associated

sex with sin--much of which was influenced by Puritan clergy. "Be fruitful and multiply" seems to summarize the extent of the necessity of sexual relations according to the puritan view. The WCTU was perhaps influenced by this strong Puritan belief that was, and possibly still is, deeply rooted in American culture. In other words, taking into consideration our religious and sexual past, it is not surprising that a movement like the WCTU would emerge as an influence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Current Abortion Debate

Despite movements like the WCTU and political reformers like Anthony Comstock, the importance of abortion and contraception, nevertheless persisted. Abortion has always occurred in America but the debate has not always been so fierce as it today.

Similarities can be found between past reform movements and current reform movements such as the abolition and abortion movements. The similarities are on the tactics and justifications used by parties on both sides of the issue. Generally, there are two major sides to an issue which seem to contrast or disagree with each other. However, the two "opposing" sides are not necessarily polar or opposite of one another. In fact, the sides may not even be arguing the same issues in the particular debate.

Of the current abortion debate in America, there are two main camps of opinions. Commonly, they are known as the Pro-

choice group and the Pro-life group. Basically, the Pro-choice position advocates reproductive rights for all women, including the right to safely and legally abort a pregnancy. Primarily the group focuses on women's well-being and reproductive freedom.

Pro-life is a position which concentrates on the unborn of society. They believe that the unborn are entitled to rights just as everyone else in society, especially the right to be born. Abortion, Pro-lifers feel, threatens the existence of the family unit and the nurturance of motherhood. Once these institutions are risked by abortion, pro-lifers see the decline of society's morality.

At first glance, the simple descriptions of the two positions on abortion seem to collide head-on with each other. Perhaps we perceive the two sides as opposites because that is how the media has portrayed the issue--as a two-sided issue. I contend, however, that the two sides do not thoroughly oppose each other or even directly address each other in their rhetoric.

It is difficult to categorize people as to which group they support. It is especially difficult to do when discussing *abortion* proponents and opponents because, unique to the abortion ideologies is that they cross cultural boundaries such as race, sex, class, and religion. It is difficult to peg why people side with the camps they do since the camps include diversity in all areas of life.

> Rescue those who are being taken to their death; and from those staggering toward slaughter will you withhold yourself? If you say, "See we did not know this," does not the One who weighs hearts perceive it? And He who watches over the soul, does He not know and shall He not repay each man for his deeds (Proverbs 24: 11-12)?

The preceding Bible verse was used at the North Dakota Right-to-Life convention in 1985. "Rescue and Restore," the theme of the publicity campaign, used the verse and interpreted "those" as being the unborn. The purpose of the convention was to gain converts to the Pro-life point of view (Ginsburg 1989, 104-105). The main instrument of persuasion came in the showing of the movie *The Silent Scream* , a movie of sonogramic pictures depicting an unborn fetus being aborted. The idea was to show an actual fetus, an unborn soul, being destroyed and to hope that the imagery would sway people to the truth as Pro-lifers see it (Ginsburg 1989, 104).

The following passage contains further pro-life rhetoric, and the problems it can cause for woman truly in need of a safe, legal abortion:

> Sherri Finkbine was a middle-class mother of four, host of a "Romper Room" television show in Arizona, and married to a history teacher. In 1962, while pregnant for the fifth time, she read a report that the tranquilizer thalidomide, which she had taken in Europe to ease tension caused by her impending pregnancy,

> was likely to produce extreme birth defects. Finkbine's physician advised and scheduled an abortion, although Arizona law allowed the procedure only to save the life of the mother. Out of concern for other pregnant women who might have been taking the drug, unaware of its potentially harmful effect, Mrs. Finkbine contacted a local medical reporter at the Arizona *Republic*. She asked that a warning be printed and that her name be withheld. On the morning of her scheduled abortion, the *Republic* reported the story on its front page. Fearing prosecution should anyone bring a complaint, the hospital canceled the abortion. The Finkbines' physician requested a court order to perform the operation, claiming it was necessary for preservation of the mother's life. Although the judge dismissed the case and recommended the abortion, the hospital still refused to oblige until the laws were clarified. The Finkbines eventually went to Sweden and received approval for and obtained an abortion there. The fetus was, in fact, grossly deformed.
>
> The Finkbines' story became an immediate cause for comment, from small-town papers to leaders of church and state. President Kennedy announced that drug regulations of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) would be increased and asked Americans to destroy thalidomide tablets. The Vatican issued a statement denouncing the abortion as murder (Ginsburg 1989, 35-36).

The Finkbine story illustrates for Pro-choice advocates the importance of the right to abort. Although many will disagree with the abortion of a fetus simply because it is deformed, the Pro-choice stance insists that the decision is up to the individual carrying the fetus. Whether she would elect to have an abortion or to carry the baby to full term, the choice should belong to her alone. Not everyone is equipped with parenting abilities, or financial resources and that may be a big factor in the mind of the woman. Women have many reasons for not wanting to carry pregnancies to term. Pro-choice proponents suggest that the individual woman should decide for herself what she thinks is best for

her to do and be legally permitted to carry out her decision. Pro-choicers feel that the restriction of reproductive rights will bring society to moral decline.

In what direction do we turn when searching for some resolve of the abortion issue? We have two seemingly polar sides claiming to be in a debate--a debate exploding from the fuel that each side has tossed into the media arena. It seems as though the two camps are at battle over who gets the victory. In this case, the "victory" is control of legislation. But how can either camp deny a voice to the millions of people on the opposing side?

An interesting example of dialogue took place in Fargo, North Dakota in 1986. Fargo is the only city in North Dakota in which abortion services are provided. Since the opening of the single abortion clinic, it has been surrounded by controversy, attracting Pro-life and Pro-choice activists who are often seen picketing and protecting the clinic. As tensions swelled over the controversy, some activists began to see the need for some kind of attempt at respectful dialogue. This need formed a group called Pro-Dialogue which was made up of abortion activists in Fargo who were willing to meet each other half-way. It was not easy for participants to open up because of the mistrust that had built up between the two sides, but eventually, some dialogue did occur:

> We began by having each person tell their reasons for coming to the meeting. The most frequent reason given was "I just want to get to know people on the other side of the issue--I've never really talked about abortion

who's on the other side."

> . . . Another said "We should be allies on most of women's issues--but our disagreement on one issue (abortion) has kept us from cooperating on all of the other issues that would insure a better life for all people."
> As we talked and listened that night, we discovered some very important common ground. We wished that women would not be faced with pregnancies
> --that they couldn't afford,
> --that at times they weren't ready for
> --by people they didn't love
> --or for any of the many reasons women have abortions (Ginsburg 1989, 224)

Actually, the first several meetings were successful--both sides came together to break down barriers of mistrust that had been up for a long time. Yet the group slowly disintegrated over time and no longer exists.

Although dialogue can be seen as a good, constructive process, it also can be viewed as unproductive. If dialogue ever reached a compromise of one group, for example, during slavery, where would the justice be had the abolitionists compromised and given into the pro-slavery side?

Once a social issue is spurred, it usually divides the people. While not everyone takes a side and pledges exclusive allegiance to it, there is usually a division or dissent. Dissension occurs for countless reasons, some economic, some religious, and some very personal. However, no matter the reasons, the sides take up players and each "team" plans a strategy. Privately they plan, discussing their opponent's weaknesses and strengths, and finally the planning focuses on their own vulnerability and power. As long as each side can cover their own weak points by

recognizing the other side's, and as long as their strong points are built up, each side believes they are sure to win the struggle. But, sometimes, winning the struggle becomes secondary. Sometimes, the players believe that no matter the outcome, they are absolutely right. The argument is then fueled by the belief in their "rightness." (Slavery's two sides had definite economic interests which provided their justifications for or against slavery. At the same time, religious beliefs also influenced justifications. Whether or not the religious argument was used strictly for the belief's sake or for underlying economic interests is difficult to discover. However, personal interests in financial gain should be investigated when argumentation uses religious justification.) Finally, then, self-righteousness enters the scene.

Self-Righteousness

What is self-righteousness? Simply defined, it perhaps is one's knowledge, or assertion, or position of something that one believes to be true. However, it may be more complex than that. It may go as far as to say that one is morally superior because he holds the truth, or the righteousness. The problem with this is one may then begin to equate oneself with God and this only reduces God, which ultimately reduces the person.

In real historical debates over social issues, it seems that religion becomes a recurring argument. This is true

especially when morality is on the verge of becoming legislated and when people's individual rights are at stake. Examples of such issues were, for America, slavery and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which cultivated and responded to the women's suffrage movement. Both issues had extremely strong and abundant religious argument and justification. Religion was an important justification because if something was shown as religious, it had a certain automatic air of morality.

Assuming that in every argument there is a "right" side and a "wrong" side, what role does self-righteousness play? What if, for example, the abolitionist movement contained no self-righteousness? If, during argumentation with the slaveholding South, the abolitionists doubted their rightness or position on the issue, they probably would not have prevailed in the end. Also, had the women in reform movements of the 1800's doubted that they deserved equality with men, they would probably still not have gained the right to vote. Self-righteousness provides a persistence that sustains an argument. However, when in the wrong hands, it can be detrimental--if it is unrelenting. Ideally, the more "wrong" side of an issue would lose to the more "right", but in reality this is not always the case. In sum, there is a degree to which self-righteousness is necessary in moral argumentation. Without it, wouldn't our moral values and ideas simpy collapse and finally cease to exist? Indeed self-righteousness, then, is necesary simply to maintain

moral order in our lives and in our world. Of course, we can never be sure if we *are* absolutely right, even though we may have convinced ourselves we are. After all, no-one can ever be sure of "rightness" until the debated issue is examined historically, by uninvolved parties, years and years later.

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