

ARTICLE

The Epistemological Asymmetry of Framing “Woman” via US Women’s Rights Pioneers

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Abstract

Nineteenth-century US social activist contemporaries Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth are memorialized as women’s rights pioneers. White activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony cemented a generational canon. Black activist Sojourner Truth anticipated the eventual crystallization of intersectionality. These figures’ historical proximity underscores the high epistemological and political stakes of claiming gendered categories, namely via “woman” as a mark of grievement. I link concepts of intersectionality, epistemic agency, epistemic resources, and social movement framing to examine how “woman” is asymmetrically categorized. To this end, I perform a textual analysis of memorialized documents: “Declaration of Sentiments” (1848) by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” (1876) by Susan B. Anthony, and “Ain’t I a Woman?” (1851) by Sojourner Truth. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony frame “woman” as a *single-axis* and *vertical* category, ultimately deferring to the seeming preeminence of the US nation-state. By contrast, Sojourner Truth frames “woman” as a *multi-axis* and *horizontal* category by synthesizing her feminist consciousness, lived experience of enslavement, and personal religiosity. This article revisits key memorialized events by utilizing a conceptual toolkit that interlaces feminist and social epistemology with social movement theory.

Asymmetrical Pioneers

On August 26, 2020, the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, the *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument* became publicly viewable in Central Park in New York City, New York. This monument, the first commemoration of historical women placed in Central Park, features bronze figures of nineteenth-century US social activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth depicted in fervent conversation at a round table.¹ The *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument* was originally intended only to depict Stanton and Anthony, a choice spurring public criticism and the subsequent redesign to include Truth.² Its premise does not identify Stanton and Anthony as white feminists nor Truth as a Black

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feminist. Public criticism by scholars and media writers contends that the monument is an ahistorical retrospective and insensitive to the racism perpetrated by US white feminisms.

The *Women's Rights Pioneers Monument* implies a larger scene that I intend to unspool: epistemological and political cohesion not only among its depicted interlocutors but also among nineteenth-century US historical feminisms. Stanton, Anthony, and Truth—the titular pioneers—are suggested to articulate compatible understandings of gendered grievance. Taken at face value, nineteenth-century US women's rights included symmetrical actors and natural categories of gender. This implication minimizes persistent epistemological fractures, including divergence between single-axis claims that exclusively privilege gender and multi-axis claims that link gender, race, class, citizenship status, and related social categories. For example, Stanton and Anthony crafted an archival record that is often critiqued for its isolation of gender as a site of subordination (Ware 2019). By contrast, Truth is highlighted in intellectual genealogies of intersectionality (e.g., Collins and Bilge 2016; Hancock 2016).

A foundational question emerges: what epistemological and political stakes underpin such divergent knowledge claims about gendered grievance? To explore this question, I perform a textual analysis of three historical documents: “Declaration of Sentiments” by Elizabeth Cady Stanton ([1848] 2023); (2) “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” by Susan B. Anthony (1876); and (3) “Ain't I a Woman?” by Sojourner Truth ([1851] 2023).³ Importantly, “woman” surfaces as a salient category across all three documents.⁴ In my analysis, categories of “woman” are often premised on experiences of grievance, manifested through claims-making directed toward changing the “practices, policies, or phenomena” that structure extant conditions (Simmons 2014, 515). As such, this article pursues the ever-urgent task of interrogating claims to “woman” as an “experientially based category” (Mohanty 1995, 70) and its numerous contestations (Scott 1986; Butler 1990).

I selected Stanton's “Declaration of Sentiments,” Anthony's “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States,” and Truth's “Ain't I a Woman?” for their imprint on not only the speakers' individual legacies but also on US women's rights memorialization. These documents are not wholly representative of the figures, but rather, formative to their memorialization, as elaborated throughout the forthcoming “Historiographical Background” section. This article is not an exhaustive analysis of the corpora of Stanton, Anthony, and Truth nor does it conclude that their politics were fixed in time and space. Rather, its empirical scope highlights key historical microcosms of nineteenth-century US women's rights via three contemporaneous and oft-memorialized figures. I purposely foreground these documents and figures in order to consolidate a comparative-historical series of memorialized events (Armstrong and Crago 2006).

Throughout my analysis, I conceptualize Stanton, Anthony, and Truth as *both* epistemic agents *and* social movement actors. First, I identify Stanton, Anthony, and Truth as epistemic agents, defined not as mere consumers, but active knowledge producers within a given context (Palermos and Pritchard 2016). Stanton, Anthony, and Truth perceive conditions of grievance and formulate their claims using epistemic or knowledge resources. Second, in sociological parlance, Stanton, Anthony, and Truth are social movement actors, that is, strategic participants in a collective mobilization who utilize resources to remedy “structural crisis” (Munck 1995, 672). More precisely, they perform tasks of *framing*—platforming and orienting—their knowledges in the context of a larger US women's rights movement. Ultimately, the figures'

claims-making intertwines epistemological and social movement stakes of meaning-generation. Social movement studies largely emphasize how meaning-making and political strategy underlie framing rather than identifying the epistemic character of frames. As such, I synthesize a connection between social epistemology and social movement framing in order to augment theorization of the latter and (re)narrate key memorialized events of nineteenth-century US women's rights.

My fusion of social epistemology and social movement theory pinpoints how frames of "woman" take on asymmetry according to social location and epistemological orientation. Social location shapes how agents employ resources to make epistemological claims (Toole 2019). Relatedly, social movement actors' framing techniques are often mediated by power (Ferree 2003; Luna 2020). I find that the figures' claims to "woman" reflect an axial (single or multiple) and directional (vertical or horizontal) framing strategy. Canonical white feminists Stanton and Anthony utilize epistemic resources to advance a *single-axis* and *vertical* orientation to "woman." Here, *verticality* refers to appeals that privilege the epistemic resources of perpetrators of aggrievement (Lugones 2003; Pohlhaus 2020). Stanton and Anthony revise dominant political and legal categories, ultimately deferring to the seeming preeminence of the US nation-state. In their diagnoses of gender inequality, Stanton and Anthony characterize "man" as universal perpetrator and "woman" as universal victim. By contrast, Black feminist Truth synthesizes her feminist consciousness, lived experience of enslavement, and personal religiosity. Truth utilizes experiential epistemic resources that foster both a *multi-axis* and *horizontal* orientation to "woman." Here, *horizontality* refers to appeals that engender coalition by traversing numerous contexts of marginalization (Lugones 2003; Pohlhaus 2020).

In the following, I provide brief historiographical background to spotlight the figures, documents, and relevant implications for feminist epistemologies. Then, I outline my theoretical architecture of intersectionality, epistemic agency, epistemic resources, and social movement framing. Next, in my textual analysis, I describe how the figures' frames of "woman" reflect their social location and corresponding axial and directional epistemological claims. Finally, I revisit the cases at hand and consider how their asymmetry contours narrations of US women's rights. I propose that a conceptual linkage of intersectionality, feminist epistemology, and social movement theory is fruitful for reimagining pivotal memorialized events of US women's rights.

Historiographical Background

Creation of the Stanton-Anthony Canon

The recent historiography of US women's rights movements (e.g., Tetrault 2014; Ware 2019; Jones 2020) highlights and problematizes how memory paradigms often canonize Stanton and Anthony. Stanton—and Anthony as an ahistorical companion—are associated with the Seneca Falls Convention, the oft-cited time and place of US women's rights' origins.⁵ Dominant memory paradigms frequently posit a periodization of US feminisms that begins in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention and culminates in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (see, e.g., Hewitt 2010, 2012; Laughlin et al. 2010; Tetrault 2014; Thomas 2016; Ware 2019). This periodization may be attributed to the chronology first outlined in the *History of Woman Suffrage* book series, a purportedly exhaustive historical narration and documentary undertaking by Stanton, Anthony, and their white suffragist contemporary Matilda Joselyn Gage (Ware 2019, 37). The historiographical arc evidences how

History of Woman Suffrage has been absorbed into the canon (Isenberg 1998; Jones 2020).

Stanton was instrumental in drafting the “Declaration of Sentiments,” the rhetorical centerpiece of the Seneca Falls Convention. Historian Lori Ginzberg speculates that the Seneca Falls Convention propelled Stanton to make her then-nascent political convictions a lifelong pursuit (2009, 53). The “Declaration of Sentiments” accompanies two profound moments of origination: (1) the public genesis of Stanton’s women’s rights activism and (2) the developing string of US women’s rights conventions. In its contents, the “Declaration of Sentiments” features a compilation of grievances and appropriates the rhetorical model of the US Declaration of Independence (1776).⁶ The original source introduces a list of grievances against the British crown, while Stanton’s reformulation compiles a list of grievances against patriarchal subjugation. In conjunction with the Seneca Falls Convention, the “Declaration of Sentiments” was later memorialized in the first *History of Woman Suffrage* volume, published in 1881.

Historiographical and biographical sources often describe Stanton as a philosophical giant (Griffith 1984; Davis 2008; Ginzberg 2009; Tetrault 2014; Thomas 2016). In addition, analyses center how Stanton produced a prolific corpus that spanned multiple political-philosophical traditions (Davis 2008). For example, her “Declaration of Sentiments” seemingly encapsulated “the articulated consciousness of women’s rights at midcentury” (Davis 1983, 53). Early US gender historians characterize Stanton and her declaration as prescient, reflective of anticipatory insight (Isenberg 1998). Such interpretations have emphasized her political philosophy but not its epistemological underpinnings. My analysis extends these interpretations by considering how Stanton orients to knowledge and meaning-making in her earliest political grievances, evidenced by the “Declaration of Sentiments.” Stanton’s intellectual prowess is assumed as a conclusion or near truism rather than treated as a striking case of epistemic agency. I consider what the descriptor of Stanton as a philosophical giant suggests about her epistemic agency and proximity to power. By taking seriously these historiographical claims about Stanton, my article posits a novel descriptive and critical framework in which to situate her emergent philosophy of women’s rights.

Stanton is revered by some as the philosophical matriarch of nineteenth-century US women’s rights, yet her long-time collaborator Anthony garners more popular remembrance in comparison (Tetrault 2014).⁷ Although Stanton and Anthony diverged at various junctures throughout their lives, their legacies are often associated, and memorial iconography commonly depicts the pair together. Throughout their collaboration, Stanton adopted the role of philosopher and Anthony complemented her as a pragmatic organizer (Tetrault 2014; Thomas 2016).

Reconstruction-era politics indelibly shaped the US women’s rights movement, including its ongoing fractures vis-à-vis race, and the political trajectories of Stanton and Anthony (Tetrault 2014; Ware 2019). During the early Reconstruction era, Stanton and Anthony participated in the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), activating in support of universal suffrage across raced and gendered lines. Soon, strategy for suffrage legislation weighed the seemingly competing exigencies of race and gender, juxtaposing constituencies of Black men and white women. Stanton and Anthony vehemently opposed the Fifteenth Amendment and its purported privileging of race—the enfranchisement of Black men—over suffrage for women. As I explicate in my analysis, Stanton and Anthony premised their arguments for US citizenship, in part, on racist, elitist, and nativist reactionism prior to and succeeding the American

Civil War respectively. Catalyzed by contentious Reconstruction-era politics, Stanton and Anthony founded the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in 1869. In the endeavor to organize for a federal amendment, US women's rights and suffrage as a single-issue demand were often conflated.

Intended as an act of protest against ongoing suffrage disenfranchisement, Anthony presented "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" on behalf of the NWSA during centennial celebrations of the US republic on July 4, 1876, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. According to historian Lisa Tetrault, Stanton and Anthony recognized the US centennial as an opportunity for "disrupting historical narratives" and cementing their legacies as social movement leaders (2014, 99). Thus, "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" reflects an act of self-memorialization, ultimately linking US women's rights to particular social movement leaders and tracing its origins to the Seneca Falls Convention. Although "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" occurred nearly thirty years after the Seneca Falls Convention, its inspiration foreshadows the impending canonization of Stanton and Anthony (Tetrault 2014). The "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" is cited in the opening of the third volume of *History of Woman Suffrage*, published in 1886.

The "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" recalls the "Declaration of Sentiments" in both organization and content. Although there is a chronological gap between the two documents, their close relationship prompts a worthwhile comparison. Both the "Declaration of Sentiments" and the "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" similarly rely on the US Declaration of Independence for their rhetorical and philosophical structure. Akin to the "Declaration of Sentiments," the "Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States" outlines a compilation of grievances against patriarchal subjugation. Across both documents, "woman" encapsulates a near parallel experience of aggrievement and reflects shared epistemic resources.

Contemporaneous Alternative to the Stanton-Anthony Canon: The Case of Sojourner Truth

Historian Louise Michele Newman illustrates how "elite white women's analysis of the woman question did not go unchallenged" as Black women "successfully articulated alternative discourses of womanhood" prior to and concurrent with the Seneca Falls Convention (1999, 35). Early volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage* were critiqued by the editors' contemporaries for whitewashing suffragist social movement participation and centering gender as a primary or isolated site of aggrievement (Ware 2019; Jones 2020). In other words, the *History of Woman Suffrage* is critiqued for its single-axis orientation to gendered subordination. What Newman (1999) refers to as "the woman question" captures the contested boundaries of gendered categories, including the participation of women in US public life. In the 1830s, Black women mobilized in institutions such as churches and abolitionist societies, engaging race and gender simultaneously and complicating clean demarcations of public and private (Jones 2007). According to historian Martha S. Jones (2007, 2020), path-breaking nineteenth-century US Black feminist lecturer and activist Maria Stewart produced public speeches with content typifying the interplay of race and gender.⁸ Stewart began public speaking in 1832—well over a decade before the Seneca Falls Convention—and her influence extended to contemporaneous and future US Black feminists including Sojourner

Truth (Davis 1983; Jones 2007, 2020).⁹ In sum, US Black feminisms elongate periodization of US women's rights, and their historical iterations refute single-axis epistemologies of social categories.

As I explore in this article, Truth presented a contemporaneous epistemological and political alternative to Stanton and Anthony. Importantly, Truth is frequently cited in US Black feminist thought (Collins 2000), interpreted as an architect of multi-axis frameworks, and described as a historical precursor to the crystallization of intersectionality. Although Truth participated in US women's rights forums proximate to Stanton and Anthony, their positions were not unanimously aligned. Truth challenged the analogy of US white feminist grievance to conditions of slavery (Jones 2020). The first *History of Woman Suffrage* volume opens with such an analogy, contending that "the prolonged slavery of woman is the darkest page in human history" (Stanton, Anthony, and Gage [1881] 1889, 13, emphasis added). According to Jones, Truth's conception of women's rights concerned materiality, highlighted the lived experience of enslavement, and was "no mere metaphor" (2020, 82).

The name *Sojourner Truth* and words "Ain't I a woman?" spark a close and nearly synonymous relationship in public memory.¹⁰ Truth was more prolific than is popularly known; "Ain't I a Woman?" comprises one of a number of addresses she delivered to public audiences. My choice to analyze "Ain't I a Woman?" is not intended to assume this mythology of Truth nor reinforce the naturalization of her story. Rather, its assimilation in public memory warrants thorough interrogation of the conditions under which Truth lived and intervened in US abolitionism and women's rights.

There are competing transcriptions of "Ain't I a Woman?" and "everything we know of" Truth "comes through other people, mostly educated white women" (Painter 1996, 174).¹¹ "Ain't I a Woman?" is archived in the first *History of Woman Suffrage* volume and attributed to US white feminist Frances Dana Gage, whose transcription fictionalizes and dramatizes Truth's statements. Gage originally published her transcription in 1863, more than a decade after Truth's reported recitation at the Ohio Woman's Rights Convention. Gage's transcription is the most popularly recognized version, despite being a mythological story (Painter 1996). In this article, I utilize the transcription of Marius Robinson, a contemporaneous abolitionist and editor of the newspaper *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. Robinson attended the Ohio Woman's Rights Convention, documented the proceedings, and published his transcription in June 1851, one month after Truth's reported delivery of the speech.¹² Historians including Susan Ware (2019) and Martha S. Jones (2020) favor his transcription. According to Robinson's transcription, Truth does not once pose the question, "Ain't I a woman?"¹³

Truth is one of few Black feminists alluded to in the first *History of Woman Suffrage* volume. Throughout this volume, Truth is mentioned in a handful of pages, including a reiteration of "Ain't I a Woman?" as transcribed by Gage:

Sojourner combined in herself, as an individual, the two most hated elements of humanity. She was black, and she was a woman and all the insults that could be cast upon color and sex were together hurled at her; but there she stood, calm and dignified, a grand, wise woman, who could neither read nor write, and yet with deep insight could penetrate the very soul of the universe about her. (Stanton, Anthony, and Gage [1881] 1889, 567)

This excerpt contains a rather tokenizing image of Truth and suggests that she was admirable to overcome the burdens of her embodied social location. These descriptions

are evidence of historian Nell Irvin Painter's (1996) argument that Truth became a source of symbolism for US white feminists to conveniently employ. According to Painter, Stanton and Anthony included Truth in their *History of Woman Suffrage* series because she was seemingly inoffensive in comparison to her Black feminist contemporaries (1996, 233). In this reading, Truth is simultaneously a selective inclusion—still insidious and marginal—and elision, similarly replicated by the contemporary *Women's Rights Pioneers Monument*.

Relating Historical Significance of the Documents

In total, these historical events build an instructive study to explore the epistemological and political stakes of claiming “woman” as a category of grievance. I selected each of the documents because of their eventual assimilation in public and scholarly memorialization. The “Declaration of Sentiments” coincided with the Seneca Falls Convention and the related public emergence of Stanton, both of which imprint memorialization of US women's rights (Tetrault 2014). “Ain't I a Woman?” is closely linked to Truth's legacy and is frequently invoked in foundational scholarship on intersectionality. In addition, “Ain't I a Woman?” is a relatively contemporaneous document to the “Declaration of Sentiments” and was similarly delivered in the forum of an early US women's rights convention. The “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” reflects an act of self-memorialization; its text revises the “Declaration of Sentiments” and traces the US women's rights movement's origins to the Seneca Falls Convention. As a result, the “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” suggests a potential trajectory and motif of canonical nineteenth-century US white feminisms. Finally, each document appears in the *History of Woman Suffrage* series, a criterion for its inclusion in this article. The *History of Woman Suffrage* series presents a curation of US women's rights mobilization beginning at its purported mid-nineteenth-century inception. I organize the aforementioned documents and their respective speakers akin to a comparative-historical analysis punctuated by memorialized events (Armstrong and Cragg 2006).

Connecting the Dots: The Intersectionality and Epistemology of Social Movement Framing

I introduce a theoretical toolkit that situates in conversation the concepts of intersectionality, epistemic agency, epistemic resources, and social movement framing. Social movement framing highlights an experiential imperative, often perceived conditions of grievance or plight, and attempts to attach meaning(s) to a mobilization. Its meaning-making vehicle is strikingly akin to the dynamics of epistemic agency. In tandem with their social movement milieu, frames contain epistemic resources and are organized by epistemic agents. In the context of my analysis, claims to “woman” reflect a foundational knowledge of grievance that is tied to the urgency of collective mobilization.

Intersectionality: Epistemological Intervention and Historical Genealogy

The concept of intersectionality exists in the interplay of experiential and structural, coheres the personal and political, and centers race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, citizenship status, and numerous other social locations as inextricable forces of inequality (May 2015). By identifying the simultaneity of social locations, intersectionality

envisions a multi- rather than single-axis framework for conceptualizing power differences and their effects. Through its reconfiguration of social categories, intersectionality encourages a paradigmatic shift in epistemology (Hemmings 2011; May 2014, 2015). For example, related genealogies of Black feminist thought profoundly validate the epistemological insights of experience, a formative principle for frameworks of intersectionality (May 2015; Collins 2019).

The original theorization of intersectionality is commonly attributed to legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, and there are extended and nuanced intellectual histories of its genesis (e.g., Collins and Bilge 2016; Hancock 2016). In her foundational overview of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) uses employment discrimination cases to illustrate how the experiences of Black women—their joint social locations of race and gender—are rendered illegible. Crenshaw (1989) references Sojourner Truth and Black feminist Anna Julia Cooper to contextualize a larger epistemological and social-justice genealogy that finds roots in the nineteenth-century US. Truth's lifetime and her delivery of "Ain't I a Woman?" predate the attribution of the term *intersectionality* to Crenshaw by nearly 150 years. I repurpose the descriptor "intersectionality-like thought" from political scientist Ange-Marie Hancock (2016) when considering the genealogical placement of Truth. "Intersectionality-like thought" names examples of multi-axis frameworks that predate the formal crystallization of "intersectionality" as a term.

Stanton, Anthony, and Truth as Epistemic Agents Mobilizing Epistemic Resources

How Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth claim "woman" reflects an epistemological orientation to experience. Black feminist philosopher Kristie Dotson defines *epistemic agency* as "the ability" to mobilize and potentially "revise" shared knowledge resources (2014, 115–16). *Epistemic resources* include "language, concepts, and criteria" that facilitate "making sense of and evaluating our experiences" (Pohlhaus 2012, 718). Epistemic agency and epistemic resources cannot be divorced from the realm of the experiential (Pohlhaus 2012, 718). In my analysis, the figures' experiences of aggrievement underlie their epistemological claims, including their divergent syntheses of epistemic resources.

Social epistemologist Gaile Pohlhaus (2020) furthers the directional metaphor employed by feminist philosopher María Lugones (2003) to contend that the use of epistemic resources may be either *vertical* or *horizontal* in its orientation. Adapted from Lugones (2003), Pohlhaus suggests that a vertical use of epistemic resources "fixes attention on those privileged by systems of oppression" whereas horizontality is coalitional and enables movement from one marginalized mode of meaning-making to another (2020, 245). When an actor utilizes epistemic resources under conditions of oppression, their stance may be deferential or solidaristic (Pohlhaus 2020). In my analysis, I recycle the metaphor to identify asymmetrical categorizations of "woman."

Previous literature highlights how intersectionality and "intersectionality-like thought" have long confronted and anticipated erasure, early evidenced by the work of nineteenth-century US Black feminists including Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Frances Watkins Harper, Anna Julia Cooper, and countless others (May 2014, 2015; Collins and Bilge 2016; Hancock 2016). Here, intersectionality and "intersectionality-like thought" anticipate epistemic injustice, a term later formalized by white feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007). As Fricker (2007) theorizes, epistemic injustice is broadly defined as asymmetry in contribution and access to credible and legitimate frameworks for communicating social experiences. In feminist epistemological projects,

it remains increasingly exigent to renounce gender primacy and conceive of inequalities as compounding and multiple (Alcoff and Potter 1993). Building on Vivian M. May (2015), I posit a revision of epistemic injustice that recognizes intersectionality, antecedent multi-axis and/or triadic frameworks for inequality (e.g., Combahee River Collective [1977] 1982), and genealogies of Black feminisms and women of color feminisms that have historically highlighted incidence of erasure throughout their theorizing. As I will soon examine, “Ain’t I a Woman?” is interpreted by some as an illumination of epistemic injustice.

Social Movement Framing: Communicating Meaning(s) of Aggrievement

Stanton, Anthony, and Truth are *both* epistemic agents *and* social movement actors. The latter descriptor locates their agency in a sociological context of social movements. Given the nascence of US women’s rights throughout the historical period at hand, the figures’ orientations to aggrievement are significant—*what are the communicable grievances of “woman”*? I propose that these stakes bridge epistemology and the meaning-generation of social movements.

Previous literature explores how social movement actors interpret and attach meaning (s) to “experiences and events” (Gamson et al. 1992, 384). Of chief pertinence to this article, the concept of *framing* includes the “signifying” or meaning-making work performed by both social movement actors and their opponents (Snow 2013, 1). Early theorization of framing takes inspiration from the symbolic interactionist tradition of sociologist Erving Goffman, namely his interest in how individuals utilize “schemata” to interpret and evaluate the day-to-day (Gamson et al. 1992; Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Framing is characterized by discursive or communicative actions, which may include textual documents produced by movement members (Benford and Snow 2000; Ferree 2003).

Framing begins with the “articulation” of a coherent message and, second, the “amplification” of particular values, events, or experiences that are deemed more “salient” than others (Benford and Snow 2000). According to sociologist David A. Snow and colleagues (1986), framing is an “interpretive” and agentic component of social movements. I propose that framing entails social movement actors’ exercise of epistemic agency and selection of epistemic resources. As follows, framing relies on epistemic resources in order to center key values, events, or experiences, potentially producing asymmetries and omissions in the process. I now draw upon documents produced by Stanton, Anthony, and Truth to explore how social location and epistemological orientation inform the curation of frames.

Stanton and Anthony: Single-Axis Orientation to “Woman”

Stanton and Anthony construct frames that are single-axis, and, as I will later explicate, vertical in their appeal to power. First, Stanton and Anthony revise dominant political and legal categories of natural rights and citizenship. Second, they dichotomize “man” and “woman” as universal singulars. In total, I suggest that their infrastructure for claims-making is antithetical to “intersectionality-like thought.”

Epistemic Resources: Dominant Categories of Political and Legal Subjectivity

Stanton and Anthony consolidate their frames of “woman” by utilizing natural rights and citizenship claims as epistemic resources. Political scientist Sue Davis (2008)

describes natural rights as an iteration of liberal political philosophy that inheres fundamental and inviolable rights in individuals. The US Declaration of Independence seemingly encapsulated natural rights and provided the model for Stanton to envision her corrective “Declaration of Sentiments” (Davis 2008) and Anthony to later emulate. When setting the stage for her grievances, Stanton recalls the preamble of the US Declaration of Independence, her sole revision being the incorporation of “women” under the promise of natural rights: “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men *and women* are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed” ([1848] 2023, emphasis added).

In this opening stanza of her declaration, Stanton contends that “women” share equal stature with “men” on the basis of natural rights. Furthermore, Stanton pictures universalism vis-à-vis natural rights; the collective “all” achieve personhood by attaining rights that are preserved but not overridden by a governmental body. As further justification for her grievances, Stanton asserts that existing US political authority over its populace is illegitimate, since “women” have been denied opportunity to affirm “consent” to governance. Her construction of “men” and “women” is ostensibly grand, possessing a veneer of universalism, yet tends toward insularity as she continues her address.

In addition to mobilizing natural rights as an epistemic resource, Stanton engages a boundary-setting of citizenship. A category deeply tied to nation-state, citizenship is a second form of political and legal subjectivity that Stanton designates to “woman.” To start, Stanton continues her argument for natural rights when introducing the first grievance of the “Declaration of Sentiments,” claiming that suffrage—“the elective franchise”—is fundamental: “He has never permitted her to exercise her *inalienable* right to the elective franchise” ([1848] 2023, emphasis added). A slippage occurs as Stanton first implies that suffrage is “inalienable” or natural but then deems it the “first right of a citizen” ([1848] 2023). Under her interpretation, the denial of suffrage equates to exclusion from incorporation under US citizenship. In the twentieth stanza of her address, Stanton concludes her grievances, transitioning to argue that “women” are “citizens” and consequently deserving of rights:

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation, - in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as *citizens* of these United States. ([1848] 2023, emphasis added)

Stanton asserts that an aggregate “women” have channeled aggrievement to claim their rightful citizenship. “The rights and privileges” first attributed to natural endowment are now deemed by Stanton the jurisdiction of national citizenship. Stanton characterizes “woman” as “citizen,” a choice that is particularly obtuse to race and nation in view of US naturalization law and related boundaries governing citizenship.¹⁴

Throughout “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States,” Anthony echoes claims to natural rights and citizenship articulated earlier by Stanton. Although not a uniform replication of Stanton, Anthony similarly utilizes the concept of natural rights as an epistemic resource and appeals to citizenship as a form of

political and legal subjectivity. Anthony sets the stage for her grievances by first acknowledging the time and place of her protest—the centennial celebration of the US republic, July 4, 1876, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The preamble of “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” foregrounds nation and American exceptionalism before concluding that the subjugation of “all women” is the remaining blemish in US history:

May not our hearts, in unison with all, swell with pride at our great achievements as a people; our free speech, free press, free schools, free church, and the rapid progress we have made in material wealth, trade, commerce, and the inventive arts? . . . Yet, we cannot forget, even in this glad hour, that while all men of every race, and clime, and condition, have been invested with the full rights of citizenship, under our hospitable flag, all women still suffer the degradation of disfranchisement. (1876)

By first outlining the purported triumphs of US social institutions, Anthony proffers a belief in American exceptionalism. Paralleling Stanton, Anthony concludes her preamble by claiming that a collective category of “women” is aggrieved. Anthony contends that “all women” remain subjugated and equally unincorporated as citizens in comparison to “all men.”

Her observation that “all men of every race, and clime, and condition” have been conferred citizenship should be contextualized in light of the Reconstruction-era Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution. The Fourteenth Amendment defined citizenship to encompass: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof”—with the qualifying language of “male” in a subsequent section (National Constitution Center 2022). The Fifteenth Amendment prohibited voting discrimination “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (National Constitution Center 2022). Both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments ostensibly enfranchised Black men. In the 1870s, Anthony and her NWSA counterparts mobilized a strategy to reinterpret the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments as evidence that women should be considered citizens. In three instances throughout her address, Anthony contends that judiciary hostility toward “woman,” including the denial of suffrage, is unconstitutional, suggesting that constitutionality is an epistemic resource for her claims-making.

After acknowledging the centennial occasion and making a collective claim to citizenship, Anthony introduces an assertion of natural rights. In the second stanza of her address, she enumerates a natural-rights argument as justification for her claims-making:

Our history, the past hundred years, has been a series of assumptions and usurpations of power over woman, in direct opposition to the principles of just government, acknowledged by the United States at its foundation, which are:

First. The natural rights of each individual to self-government.

Second. The exact equality of these rights.

Third. That these rights, when not delegated by the individual, are retained by the individual.

Fourth. That no person can exercise the rights of others without delegated authority.

Fifth. That the non-use of these rights does not destroy them. (1876)

In this excerpt, Anthony uses the collective, first-person “our” when specifying that the aggrievement of “woman” is a historical injustice. Anthony chronologizes this aggrievement in a shared US national “history,” a pattern of her address that I will later problematize. Akin to Stanton, Anthony suggests that the primary aggrievement of “woman” stems from the violation of “her” natural rights. Anthony emphasizes that “rights” inhere in individuals and have immutable properties. By appealing to seemingly foundational principles of US political culture, Anthony revises dominant epistemic resources.

Making a subtle departure from Stanton, Anthony leads first with citizenship and then collapses various categories of “rights.” In a single instance of her address, Anthony alludes to “human rights” when setting the stage for her grievances: “Our faith is firm and unwavering in the broad principles of *human rights*, proclaimed in 1776, not only as abstract truths, but as the corner stones of a republic” (1876, emphasis added). This isolated instance seemingly conflates human rights and natural rights while attributing both to the US Declaration of Independence. Slippages emerge as Anthony uses the language of citizenship, natural rights, suffrage, and human rights to similar effect and with similar intent. The gaps between these categories of “rights” reveal her assumptions about political and legal personhood and who or what are relegated in their wake. I interpret these slippages as a false universalism, further evidenced when Anthony dichotomizes “man” and “woman” as perpetrator and victim respectively. In addition, her claims-making was not necessarily a coherent or consistent political philosophy; this observation corroborates more recent historiographical interpretations that Stanton and Anthony adapted their arguments according to political expediency.

Dichotomizing Gender: “Man” and “Woman” as Universal Singulars

Second, Stanton and Anthony highlight gender as a single axis of subordination by dichotomizing “man” as universal perpetrator and “woman” as universal victim. Stanton and Anthony starkly contrast gendered categories, including numerous juxtapositions of “he” versus “her,” “woman” versus “man,” and “woman” versus the presumed masculine “citizen.” The entirety of the “Declaration of Sentiments” diagnoses aggrievement in a rhetorical series of “he” as perpetrator versus “her” as victim, excerpted here:

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes, with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master - the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement. ([1848] 2023)

Stanton indicts the institution of marriage for its economic and legal subjugation of “woman.” More precisely, Stanton alludes to the practice of coverture, a legal doctrine

wherein a married woman's property ownership and status were absorbed by those of her husband. Furthermore, she contends that marriage deprives "woman" of moral agency as a consequence of legal subjugation. Throughout the "Declaration of Sentiments," the theme of marital subjugation coincides with related economic and legal subjugations.

Anthony denounces masculine social institutions in her compilation of grievances, which similarly range from denial of moral agency to economic subjugation. Anthony juxtaposes a universal "man" to a universal "woman" and attributes "her" aggrievement to a gendered hierarchy: "UNIVERSAL MANHOOD SUFFRAGE, by establishing an *aristocracy of sex* imposes upon the women of this nation a more absolute and cruel despotism than monarchy; in that, woman finds a political master in her father, husband, brother, son" (1876, emphasis added). Constructing multiple metaphors for hierarchical relations, Anthony observes that a binary configuration of "sex" disempowers "woman" in political representation and the institution of the family. Stanton similarly invokes metaphors for hierarchical relations of governance by implicating the "supremacy of man" and analogizing the subjugation of "woman" by "man" to "absolute tyranny" ([1848] 2023). Both Stanton and Anthony dichotomize gendered categories and suggest that the aggrievement of "woman" occurs on the singular plane of gendered subordination.

Stanton and Anthony seemingly indict "man" as a universal singular, but their statements also reflect asymmetries of race, class, and citizenship status. For example, Anthony rejects that "woman" has been denied educational opportunity whereas groups such as Chinese and Japanese male migrants of the mid-nineteenth century and formerly enslaved Black African men have been afforded access to higher education:

In some States women may enter the law schools and practice in the courts; in others they are forbidden. In some universities, girls enjoy equal educational advantages with boys, while many of the proudest institutions in the land deny them admittance, *though the sons of China, Japan and Africa are welcomed there.* (1876, emphasis added)

Although Stanton and Anthony mostly construct gender-exclusive grievances, they decry the seeming enfranchisement of nonwhite, nonelite, and/or migrant men on three occasions combined. Anthony is situated in the Reconstruction-era political context, while Stanton provides a precedent nearly thirty years earlier: "He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men - both natives and foreigners" ([1848] 2023). According to Stanton and Anthony, inferior social locations of race, class, and citizenship status are simultaneously subsumed under "his" gender domination *yet* cause for indignation in themselves. In these instances, the veneer of universalism dissipates, and Stanton and Anthony demonstrate that their constructions of gendered categories are insular.

Stanton and Anthony suggest that their interventions are motivated by obligation and nation respectively. According to Stanton, claims-making is obligatory, a necessary act of defiance to fulfill the promise of natural rights:

Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles,

and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. ([1848] 2023)

Again, Stanton's language is taken directly from the preamble of the US Declaration of Independence. For Anthony, nationalism is a primary impetus: ". . . demanding the right of suffrage In making our just demands, a higher motive than the pride of sex inspires us; we feel that national safety and stability depend on the complete recognition of the broad principles of our government" (1876). Anthony suggests that a belief in nationalism confers virtue and righteousness to "her" cause. Although Anthony includes a more blatant vocabulary of nation and American exceptionalism, it is difficult to disentangle Stanton from similar justifications and beliefs.

Single Axis Reflects Vertical Framing

Both Stanton and Anthony utilize natural rights and citizenship as epistemic resources to undergird a universal "woman" writ large. Stanton and Anthony frame "woman" vis-à-vis political and legal categories that are inextricably linked to the nation-state. I propose that their single-axis orientation to "woman" also reflects verticality. To reiterate, *verticality* includes claims that repurpose the epistemic resources of perpetrators of grievement (Lugones 2003; Pohlhaus 2020). By attributing US origins to their political and legal frameworks, Stanton and Anthony defer to the primacy of the nation-state, laden with contradiction. Paradoxically, Stanton and Anthony are both deferential to and revisionist of the scope of these resources.

Stanton demonstrates vertical framing by appropriating the US Declaration of Independence for her address the "Declaration of Sentiments." Anthony reproduces Stanton's orientation by venerating the Seneca Falls Convention as the first public articulation of US women's rights: "until now, woman's discontent has been steadily increasing, *culminating nearly thirty years ago* in a simultaneous movement among the women of the nation, demanding the right of suffrage" (1876, emphasis added). Throughout her address, Anthony defers to the US Declaration of Independence as an exemplary infrastructure for "rights."

Historiographical sources have suggested that Stanton utilized the US Declaration of Independence for political expediency and legibility (Kerber 1977; Davis 2008). To use the language of framing, Stanton amplified existing political and legal understandings already deemed resonant. Sociologists Lyndi Hewitt and Holly McCammon observe how some early suffragists cultivated a "justice frame" that both borrowed language from and subverted "the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, and other sources of democratic ideals" (2004, 151). Interpretations that center political expediency minimize, if not ignore, epistemic agency. Whether their motivations were political expediency, deference, or some combination thereof, Stanton and Anthony make a vertical appeal that assumes the primacy of the nation-state (see Figure 1).

As a result, Stanton and Anthony consolidate an epistemological and political framework that is hostile to "intersectionality-like thought." Given their social locations as white women with class mobility, it is pertinent to consider how proximate Stanton and Anthony are to the dominant epistemic resources they favor. I propose that their vertical appeals engender an epistemological and political insularity that is deeply tied to whiteness and US national origins. US white women's rights activists often appealed to national citizenship to demonstrate their deservingness and similarity in social position to propertied white men (Cohen 1996; Newman 1999). US national

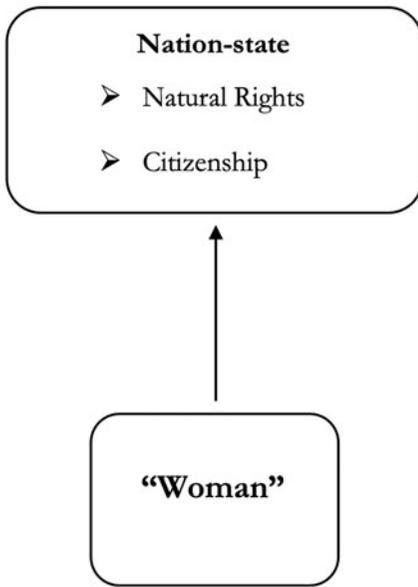


Figure 1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Single-Axis and Vertical Frame

“citizenship” was a presumed masculine category and associated with whiteness and property (Isenberg 1998; Newman 1999). Although Stanton and Anthony purport to argue for a universal personhood of “woman,” their justifications are not detached from the interests of their social location. Stanton and Anthony devote their rhetorical space to achieving leverage within an existing landscape. By setting the stage using epistemic resources tied to the inception of nation, Stanton and Anthony reproduce a dominant hermeneutical or interpretive infrastructure. The by-product is insularity under the guise of universalism.

Sojourner Truth: Multi-Axis Orientation to “Woman”

By contrast, my analysis finds that Sojourner Truth orients to “woman” by utilizing experiential epistemic resources rather than political and legal abstractions. Namely, Truth frames “woman” by weaving together her feminist consciousness, lived experience of enslavement, and personal religiosity. In total, Truth offers a multi-axis and horizontal orientation to “woman” that may be situated in conversation with “intersectionality-like thought.”

Physical Embodiment: Lived Experience of Enslavement

First, Truth argues for *her* personhood vis-à-vis the experience of physical embodiment. Truth’s language of embodiment derives from her lived experience of enslavement and manifests through allusions to physical labor and US abolitionism. The institution of chattel slavery in the modern transatlantic indelibly structured her embodiment. Propelled by logics of dehumanization and quantification, enslavement simultaneously unraveled and imposed racialized gender on Black and African women to extract their physical and reproductive labor (Spillers 1987; Morgan 1997, 2021; Snorton 2017).

Enslaved Black women experienced tenuous association to categories of “woman” when not deprived of gender altogether. By centering her claims-making on embodiment, Truth suggests an interdependent configuration of race and gender categories, a gesture to “intersectionality-like thought” that I will elaborate in a forthcoming section.

To begin, the first six out of ten total stanzas in “Ain’t I a Woman?” feature first-person “I” descriptions, including Truth’s opening statement that she wishes “to say a few words about this matter” of women’s rights ([1851] 2023). In arguably the most profound stanza of her address, Truth asserts, “I am a woman’s rights” ([1851] 2023, emphasis added). By making this proclamation, Truth intervenes in categories of “woman” and “rights.” She clarifies the capaciousness of “woman” and “rights” and who and what are included in their scope. As a rhetorical statement, her assertion implies a grievance of exclusion or unintelligibility. Unlike Stanton and Anthony, Truth does not project her aggrievement to a universal “woman” and instead centers her individual personhood for most of her address. Stanton and Anthony never use the first-person “I” throughout their addresses and instead employ the collective, first-person pronoun “we.” Although Stanton and Anthony both orate on behalf of groups, the Seneca Falls Convention organizers and the NWSA respectively, their language transcends the scope of these contexts and takes on universalism.

I propose that Truth orients to “woman” by first utilizing physical embodiment as an epistemic resource. Upon claiming “woman” and “rights,” Truth proceeds to highlight her lived experience as a formerly enslaved person. She makes a series of comparisons that equate her capacity for physical labor, performed in the context of enslavement, to “man” and his faculties:

I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. ([1851] 2023)

Rather than contend that she is deserving of personhood due to the endowment of nature, Truth suggests that her physical embodiment commands rights. Her equal stature to “man” is based on physical capacity, not natural rights. Notably, her first-person descriptions synthesize her feminist consciousness and conditions of enslavement. Here, Truth posits an experiential epistemology that is deeply tied to her material conditions.

Truth transitions from comparing her physical embodiment to “man” to a single stanza on intellect, described by Painter as a humorous metaphor that “knowledge and rights are not a zero-sum game” (1996, 27): “As for intellect, all I can say is, if women have a pint and man a quart - why can’t she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much, for we cant take more than our pint’ll hold” ([1851] 2023). Truth then observes that “the poor men seem to be all in confusion” and “woman’s rights” should be a relief rather than an imposition ([1851] 2023). In two subsequent instances, Truth diagnoses a more overt gendered conflict between “woman” and “man” when referencing the Biblical character Eve and noting the contemporaneous mobilizations of US abolitionism and women’s rights. Prior to these examples, her claims to “woman” as a category of aggrievement juxtapose the first-person pronoun “I” and “man.”

Truth acknowledges an aggregate “man” as perpetrator who has withheld rights from “woman,” but her construction of gendered categories strongly differs from those of Stanton and Anthony. For example, her portrait of “man” as perpetrator denotes primarily the social position of propertied white men, those most threatened by the mobilizations of both “the poor slave” and “woman” ([1851] 2023). By contrast, Stanton and Anthony deplore how gendered domination seemingly empowers inferior positions of race, class, and citizenship status.

Biblical Allegory: Personal Religiosity

Truth proposes “woman’s rights” as a fulfillment of Biblical allegory, a second epistemic resource for her framing, and diverges from how Stanton and Anthony engage religion in their speeches. Anthony briefly alludes to the “free church” as an example of American exceptionalism, while Stanton makes five total references to creationism and religious institutions. For example, Stanton attributes natural rights to a “Creator,” identifies religion as a social institution in which “woman” is disempowered, and argues that “her” autonomy should be unfettered, the terrain of solely “her conscience and her God” ([1848] 2023). However, I would not argue that Stanton is relying on religion or religious scripture as an epistemic resource; indeed, in her later years, Stanton became a vocal critic of Christianity and organized religion. By contrast, Truth was an itinerant preacher throughout her lifetime, and her religiosity was a transformative component of her eventual emancipation from enslavement (Painter 1996).¹⁵

When Truth transitions to discuss Biblical allegory as a justification for rights, she makes her final first-person claim. Truth contends that the Biblical allegory of Eve and her betrayal of “man” is valuable because *she* herself has heard it: “I cant read, but I can hear. I have heard the bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again” ([1851] 2023). Citing “Ain’t I a Woman?” as an example, Painter notes that Truth often infused her orations with “shrewd humor,” both emboldening and diluting her messages (1996, 128–29). Truth concludes that “woman’s rights” are an opportunity for redemption and enable correction of the Biblical flaw of “woman.” In addition, she later notes that “woman” gave birth to Jesus and “man” had no part in this origin story. Truth implies a rhetorical question—if “man” made no contribution to the birth of Jesus, would he also be invisible in the growing cause of US women’s rights?

Synthesizing US Abolitionism and Women’s Rights

Through her description of rights as redemptive, Truth mobilizes epistemic resources that are congruous with her personal experiences and subsequently solidifies a link between US abolitionism and women’s rights. She concludes that “man” is threatened by two causes, the dissolution of slavery *and* the mobilization of “woman,” and will meet an ill fate if absent from participation: “But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between-a hawk and a buzzard” ([1851] 2023). Truth imbues “the poor slave” and “woman” with agency and observes that their mobilizations portend the demise of “man.” Truth is idiomatic in her speech, claiming that “man” will succumb to birds of prey. She shares a colloquial analogy for dilemma that resembles the more contemporary idiom “caught between a rock and a hard place.” In total, her epistemology encourages an experiential framing of “woman” and juxtaposes the political and legal abstractions made by Stanton and Anthony.

Truth and “Intersectionality-like Thought”

Sojourner Truth and “Ain’t I a Woman?” find contemporary resonance within theorization of intersectionality, Black feminisms, and their related genealogies (see, e.g., Combahee River Collective [1977] 1982; Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2000; Collins and Bilge 2016; Hancock 2016; Bey 2022). What characteristics of “Ain’t I a Woman?” most reflect multi-axis frameworks and/or “intersectionality-like thought”? Does its resonance stem from how Truth seemed to anticipate erasure, as proposed by Crenshaw and social epistemologists? In this case, Truth’s grievance of exclusion or unintelligibility is significant, and the context of her delivery is key—she recited “Ain’t I a Woman?” primarily to an audience of white women. Accordingly, Truth was situated in an unjust hermeneutical context that obscured the simultaneity of race and gender (Crenshaw 1989; Medina 2013, 2017; Collins and Bilge 2016). Under these interpretations, Truth encounters conditions of epistemic injustice.

As Painter (1996) contends, is Truth’s sheer embodiment of social position—her interlocking locations of race, gender, and citizenship status—complicating a unitary picture of US women’s rights? In this case, how might one recognize the salience of Truth’s physical embodiment without essentializing her social locations? For example, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins interprets “Ain’t I a Woman?” as an act of “deconstruction” wherein Truth pinpoints the incongruity between her lived experience of enslavement and the dominant meanings attached to categories of “woman” (2000, 14–15). Extending Collins, Black trans feminist scholar Marquis Bey (2022) highlights the intervention of Truth beyond imposed strictures of embodiment and observes that she undermines, if not outright dissolves, categorizations of race and gender proper. Alternatively, as historians such as Tetrault (2014), Ware (2019), and Jones (2020) propose, does Truth resemble “intersectionality-like thought” because her politics coupled race, gender, abolitionism, and women’s rights? In this case, Truth proffers “intersectionality-like thought” by situating her activism in coalitions of US abolitionism and women’s rights.

My article does not resolve these debates nor intend to provide a definitive answer. Rather, I find that textual analysis supports all of the aforementioned interpretations, especially those that emphasize Truth’s coupling of abolitionism and women’s rights. Given the relative brevity of Truth’s speech and its delivery a decade prior to the American Civil War, her inclusion of abolitionism is notable. On two occasions throughout her address, Truth situates US abolitionism and women’s rights as parallel projects. First, Truth’s opening statements highlight her lived experience of enslavement, arguing for her equal stature to “man” based on physical capacity. Second, Truth concludes that US abolitionism and women’s rights are contemporaneous mobilizations that threaten the status quo of “man.” Thus, Truth makes an inextricable link between her feminist consciousness and her lived experience of enslavement.

I propose that Truth frames “woman” *horizontally* and juxtaposes the verticality of Stanton and Anthony. In contrast to verticality, horizontal orientations to conditions of oppression engender coalition (Pohlhaus 2020). By highlighting US abolitionism and women’s rights as proximate and contemporaneous causes, Truth suggests that their relationship is horizontal. Subsequently, Truth synthesizes nineteenth-century US abolitionist and women’s rights social movement contexts. I propose that her use of epistemic resources constitutes a *horizontal* frame and enhances coalitional potential. In tandem, Truth mobilizes an experiential epistemology (see Figure 2).

According to Collins (2019), relationality, the notion that social phenomena reinforce and interplay among another, is indispensable to intersectional frameworks.

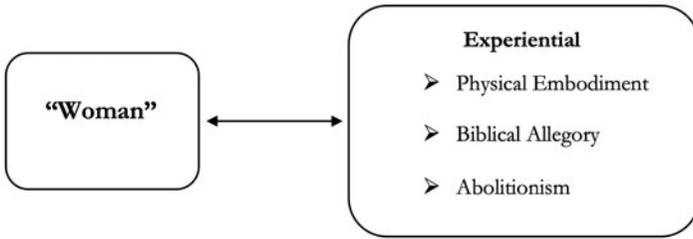


Figure 2. Sojourner Truth: Multi-Axis and Horizontal Frame

Collins observes that “there would be no intersectionality without relationality” (2019, 15). As a visual metaphor, intersectionality connotes a horizontal and relational map of converging phenomena. I propose that Truth’s coupling of abolitionism and women’s rights is both horizontal *and* relational, bolstering its resemblance to intersectionality. “Ain’t I a Woman?” suggests that US abolitionist and women’s rights causes are not in competition, but rather, parallel and proximate, a horizontal descriptor. In addition, US abolitionist and women’s rights consciousnesses are relational because of their symbiotic geneses.

Outro: Revisiting and Reflecting

I began this article by introducing the contemporary *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument*: a memorialized scene of nineteenth-century US social activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth situated in receptive dialogue. I establish this entry point to problematize the assumption that nineteenth-century US women’s rights were a unitary epistemological and political project. Highlighting a trio of formative memorialized events, my article explores the epistemological and political stakes of claiming “woman” as a category of grievement. I link concepts of intersectionality, epistemic agency, epistemic resources, and social movement framing to examine how “woman” is asymmetrically categorized. To this end, I feature a textual analysis of three historical documents: (1) “Declaration of Sentiments” ([1848] 2023) by Elizabeth Cady Stanton; (2) “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” (1876) by Susan B. Anthony; and (3) “Ain’t I a Woman?” ([1851] 2023) by Sojourner Truth.

Social location and epistemological orientation inform how frames of “woman” are articulated. I propose that white activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony adopt a *single-axis* framing strategy by revising dominant political and legal frameworks and starkly dichotomizing gendered categories. In addition, I contend that their use of epistemic resources constitutes a *vertical* frame by privileging the US nation-state—and, correspondingly, whiteness and nativism. In the purview of their documents, “woman” operates as a false universal. This article suggests that nineteenth-century US white feminisms construct an epistemological infrastructure that is antithetical to the proliferation of multi-axis frameworks including “intersectionality-like thought,” an ongoing pattern into the twentieth-century US and beyond. By contrast, Black activist Sojourner Truth utilizes experiential epistemic resources to bridge her individual personhood and the larger cause of US women’s rights. For example, Truth frames “woman” as an aggrieved category by synthesizing her feminist consciousness, lived experience of enslavement, and personal religiosity. Unlike Stanton and Anthony, Truth does not project her

aggravement to a universal condition of “woman.” Truth offers a *horizontal* orientation to “woman” and may be situated in conversation with the *multi-axis* foundations of “intersectionality-like thought.”

The contributions of this article are twofold. First, I make a novel contribution by theorizing Stanton, Anthony, and Truth as epistemic agents who mobilize their knowledges in a social movement milieu. My article utilizes a theoretical toolkit that consolidates literatures across philosophy and sociology, including an underexplored link between social epistemology and social movement framing. For example, I contribute to theorization of social movement framing by conceptualizing it as both a political *and* an epistemological phenomenon. Second, my exploration continues to reimagine key memorialized events of nineteenth-century US women’s rights, namely their power dynamics and orientations to categories of race, class, gender, and citizenship status.

Consequences of Asymmetry: Epistemic Power and Selective Inclusion

Broadly, my analysis implies an asymmetrical interaction between memorialization and power. The nineteenth-century *History of Woman Suffrage* series and the twenty-first-century *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument* contain similar curatorial choices despite their significant chronological gap. The *History of Woman Suffrage* series arguably establishes a precedent for the depiction later seen in the *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument*. In both instances, Stanton and Anthony have dominant presences, and the inclusion of alternative figures is either marginal or corrective. I suggest that both the *History of Woman Suffrage* series and the *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument* evidence an asymmetry wherein particular narratives are centered while alternatives are relegated. Stanton and Anthony demonstrate epistemic power by ultimately compiling the *History of Woman Suffrage*, the title alone a statement of history-writing.

Reflecting upon the textual analysis presented in this article, I consider the consequences of Truth’s inclusion in the *History of Woman Suffrage* series and the contemporary *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument*. Pohlhaus contends that “epistemic inclusions may be just as pernicious as epistemic exclusions” (2020, 233). To engage feminist historian Joan Scott (1986), a master category of gender corresponds with absence or elision. Indeed, my analysis finds that “woman” is laden with strictures and its capaciousness contested. I have noted that Truth was one of few Black feminists included in the first *History of Woman Suffrage* volume and a late addition to the *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument*. Historical documentation of Truth was not transcribed or archived by her. I propose that these inclusions of Truth are selective, an orientation to her personhood and legacy that undermines agency, and, more broadly, possibilities for robust epistemological and political alternatives. Under these selective inclusions, alternative categories of “woman” are rendered symbolic, and their testimonies obscured.

Supplementary Material. The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2023.84>.

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Notes

1 Statues in Central Park previously depicted only fictional women, such as literary characters. The *Portrait Monument* (1920) located in the US Capitol rotunda in Washington, DC was unveiled shortly after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution and features marble busts of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and long-standing Quaker reformer and social activist Lucretia Mott. In 2009, a bronze bust of Sojourner Truth was installed in Emancipation Hall of the US Capitol. Commemorative monuments of women are scarce in the US, and “fewer than 4 percent of the seventy thousand sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places are associated with women” (Doss 2010, 232).

2 For examples of criticism prior to the redesign, see op-eds by historian Martha S. Jones (2019) and writer Brent Staples (2019). For examples of criticism in response to the redesign and reveal, see an open letter signed by more than twenty scholars (Small 2019) and an op-ed by art historian Erin Thompson (2020).

3 I analyze reprint sources of “Declaration of Sentiments” ([1848] 2023) and “Ain’t I a Woman?” ([1851] 2023). I analyze an archival source of “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” (1876), digitized by the US Library of Congress. Unless otherwise noted, all source quotations contain the original spelling, punctuation, spacing, and emphases.

4 During analysis, I denote “woman” and its inflected forms using quotation marks. References to gendered language are taken directly from the figures and demonstrate how foundational gendered categories are to each document.

5 Anthony did not attend the Seneca Falls Convention, yet her presence is often popularly assumed (Tetrault 2014; Ware 2019). Anthony and Stanton would not meet until 1851, three years after the Convention.

6 Contemporaneous abolitionist organizations adopted their own “Declarations” and partly inspired Stanton’s choice of title (Davis 2008, 50). Furthermore, the rhetorical form of a declaration appeared transnationally among political revolutionary documents in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

7 The popular travels of Anthony include her historic feature as the first woman to appear on a “circulating coin” and her frequently mandated inclusion in US social studies curriculums (Lange 2020). For historical context, the prominent National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)—the eventual merger of two suffrage organizations—viewed Anthony favorably while “censuring” Stanton in her later years (Tetrault 2014).

8 Maria Stewart transitioned away from public speaking, largely due to the intense opposition she received from her counterparts when lecturing (Jones 2007, 2020).

9 My analysis explores Truth rather than Stewart, in part, because Truth participated in US women’s rights forums contemporaneously with and alongside Stanton and Anthony. Furthermore, the *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument*—the anecdotal entry point for my analysis—features a depiction of Truth. This curatorial choice is itself worth examining within the larger context of US Black feminist genealogies and their historical representations.

10 Monumental Women, the not-for-profit organization that spearheaded development of the *Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument*, refers to “Ain’t I a Woman?” as “one of the most famous abolitionist and women’s rights speeches in American history” (Monumental Women 2022).

11 Stanton and Anthony had the capacity to transcribe, but Truth did not. Their respective documents were delivered in divergent rhetorical contexts that are, in part, reflective of social location.

12 According to Nell Irvin Painter (1996), Sojourner Truth and Marius Robinson were friends.

13 Marius Robinson does not include a title in his transcription of Truth’s address and broadly introduces her as a compelling figure in attendance at the Ohio Woman’s Rights Convention (1851). For the sake of legibility, I use “Ain’t I a Woman?” as a loose title when referring to Truth’s address.

14 For example, the earliest iteration of US naturalization law, the Naturalization Act of 1792, conferred citizenship only to those considered a “free white person” (propertied white man). In addition, see *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), a US Supreme Court case concluding that neither free nor enslaved Black people could be considered citizens.

15 The final date of emancipation for enslaved peoples in the state of New York was July 4, 1827 (Painter 1996).

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