

Influential African American Women

Melissa Worbis

The day before the inauguration was Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and I happened to go to the Freedom Center where entrance was free for the day. I had been there once before with AAUW, but this time I noticed some additional facts that I thought would be interesting to point out. For example, it was written into the Constitution that the legislation could not deal with slavery for at least 20 years. Then in 1808 a law was passed to ban external slave trade, so slave traders started an internal slave trade which resulted in the selling of children and other members of African American slave families, thus separating slave families, many of whom would never find each other again. This really antagonized people of both races, so they began working hard to end slavery in general. Slowly northern states became free states and then people started working to help free black slaves. Some families gave their own slaves freedom, while others helped with the Underground Railroad to provide access to northern states where slaves could be free. Then the Fugitive Slave Law (1850) said all citizens were compelled to help capture the fugitive slaves, and if they saw any of their neighbors helping to free slaves, then those citizens were to be imprisoned. This caused an even larger uproar from the abolitionists' newspapers. Many abolitionists were tortured, imprisoned, even killed, and their homes and businesses were burnt down, but that didn't stop the overall cause. The individuals listed below are just a few of the females who were very involved with this change.

Lydia Maria Child (1802-1880) In 1833, Child wrote "An Appeal to that Class of Americans Called Africans," an anti-slavery tract in which she declared her willingness to battle for emancipation. From 1841-43, Child was the editor of the National Anti-Slavery Standard, the American Anti-Slavery Society's newspaper. She stopped for a while but then got involved again after The Fugitive Slave Law was passed. She continued publishing letters, edited Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and wrote primers and anti-slavery tracts to combat racial injustice.

Sojourner Truth (1797 - 1883) Born a New York slave and given the name Isabella Baumfree, Sojourner Truth gained her freedom when New York abolished slavery in 1827 and changed her name at that time. Sojourner Truth was an abolitionist and feminist who, after being freed as a slave, traveled the United States speaking at various conventions for the equality of blacks and women. Her most famous speech was entitled "Ain't I a Woman?" and it was delivered at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Sojourner came to believe that the liberation of blacks and that of women were closely related, and her antislavery lectures became infused with arguments for women's rights. In 1850 she published her autobiography. During the Civil War she visited and spoke with Union troops; after the war she spent her time finding jobs for and helping newly freed slaves.

Angelina (1803 - 1879) and Sarah Grimke (1792 - 1873) These two sisters traveled from their home in South Carolina to the north to lecture to women about their firsthand knowledge of the life of slaves in order to fight for the freedom of slaves. Soon the sisters saw how their lectures were seen as absurd because they were women, so they began to campaign for the rights of women and slaves alike. Sarah became a major theoretician of the women's rights movement, challenging all the conventional beliefs about a woman's place.

Frances Harper (1825 - 1911) Harper's novel about the Reconstructed South, *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), was the first book published by a black American. She was born of free parents and self-educated. Advocating women's rights as well as abolition, Harper lectured at the 1869 meeting of the Equal Rights Association, but when the schism occurred between abolitionists and feminists, she sided with Fredrick Douglass, who believed that the issue of race had priority over that of gender. Harper continued her work on behalf of black women, founding the National Association of Colored Women and serving as its vice president until her death.

Harriet Tubman (1826 - 1913) ex-slave Harriet Tubman led over 300 people to freedom, including her parents. Her dangerous work was so successful that Southerners placed a \$40,000 bounty on her head. During the Civil War, she worked as a spy, scout, nurse, and commander of both black and white troops in the Union Army. Tubman expressed her beliefs in freedom and liberty by lecturing, organizing, and inspiring others. In her later years, she linked her work in the black community with feminist activities, attending women's suffrage conventions and helping to organize the National Federation of Afro-American Women (1895).

AAUW Applauds President Obama for Signing Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into Law

Wage Discrimination Measure becomes First Bill Signed into Law by New President

WASHINGTON - AAUW applauds President Barack Obama for signing the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which restores the long-standing interpretation of civil rights laws and EEOC policies that allow employees to challenge any discriminatory paycheck they receive.

"President Obama has put pay discrimination at the top of the agenda, right where it belongs. The wage gap doesn't just hurt working women, it hurts families as well," said AAUW Executive Director Linda D. Hallman, CAE, who attended the signing ceremony. "We are especially pleased that this measure is the first bill moved by Congress and signed by our new president, sending a strong message that economic issues and pay equity are a top priority."

Statistics on women in the workplace speak to the need for action. The average woman earns just 78 cents of every dollar earned by her male counterparts, and disparities appear just one year out of college—even for those with the same job and the same major. Women of color make even less.

"AAUW is hopeful that the swift action on this important law is a harbinger of what we can expect from both the new Congress and the new administration," said Lisa Maatz, AAUW director of public policy and government relations. "Thanks to the remarkable Lilly Ledbetter, who stood up to injustice despite great personal sacrifice, women and others in her shoes will be able to seek a fair day in court."

Lilly Ledbetter is perhaps the best-known face of pay equity. She worked for nearly two decades at the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in Gadsden, AL. Despite receiving top performance awards, Ledbetter discovered that she had been paid significantly less than male co-workers with the same job. After her November 1998 retirement, she filed suit under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and was awarded back pay and other remedies in a jury trial. The U.S. Supreme Court's 5-4 decision not only erased Ledbetter's award, but also left women, minorities, and others in Ledbetter's situation with virtually no recourse to pay discrimination.

"The wage gap not only affects a woman's paycheck, it can eventually reduce retirement and social security income. That could mean the loss of \$1 million or more over one woman's lifespan," Hallman said.

"This victory has energized us," said Maatz. "President Obama and Congress have made a good down payment on their promise to close the wage gap, but we're not resting on our laurels. The House also passed the Paycheck Fairness Act, a bill which would close loopholes in the Equal Pay Act, and AAUW and our allies are determined to see the Senate do the same."

Mason-Lebanon Branch Invitation

The Mason-Lebanon AAUW book group is inviting ALL members to join them Thursday April 2 for dinner and to hear a wonderful local author Marcelete Blackwell Elter speak on her book *Singing the Moon in the Sky*, a historical mystery (fiction) set at Fort Ancient Ohio about family roots and ancient promises made to "the old ones" of Fort Ancient. Marcy is very knowledgeable about the Fort Ancient site and what the museum there tells us about the early Indian history of this part of Ohio. She will also tell us about her second book (which she is currently writing) and exciting new archaeological discoveries at Fort Ancient.

We will meet at 5:30 PM at Otterbein for dinner (\$6.75 - you can choose meal of choice for immediate grilling) and the speaker will be at 7. If you are coming for dinner, please RSVP to Ginny Stiver by phone or email (stivervh@aol.com or 513-933-4982)

If you can't make the dinner please come at 7 to enjoy our speaker. We will be in the Phillipi room.

If you wish to read Marcee's book it is available on Amazon (type in "Singing the Moon into the Sky"). I think it is also available at the Fort Ancient Museum at the Fort Ancient State Memorial, which is seven miles southeast of Lebanon. Marcy also said she donated a copy of her book to the Otterbein Library (her mother was at Otterbein for ten years).

Mission

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.

Vision

AAUW will be a powerful advocate and visible leader in equity and education through research, philanthropy and measurable change in critical areas impacting the lives of women and girls.

Value Promise

As a member of AAUW, you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance

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