

Maria Miller Stewart

WHO SHALL GO FORWARD and take off the reproach that is cast upon people of color? Shall it be a woman?

I have heard much respecting the horrors of slavery. Yet methinks there are no chains so galling as the chains of ignorance-no fetters so binding as those that bind the soul, and exclude it from the vast field of usefulness and knowledge.

Yet methinks were the free people of color to turn their attention to moral worth and intellectual improvements, prejudice would gradually diminish, and unloose those fetters!

Few white persons are willing to bury their talents in mean servile labor, confined by the chains of ignorance and poverty to a life of continual drudgery and toil. I know none who have enriched themselves as house domestics, washing windows, shaking carpets, brushing boots, or tending gentlemen's tables.

Continual hard labor deadens the soul and benumbs the mind; ideas become confined, the mind barren, and, like the scorching sands of Arabia, produces nothing; or, like the uncultivated soil, brings forth thorns and thistles.

What useful knowledge is derived from maps or books by those who continually drudge from Monday morning until Sunday noon?

Have pity on us. Owing to the disadvantages under which we labor, there are many flowers among us that bloom unseen, and waste their fragrance on desert air.

It is upon you that woman depends; she can do but little beside using her influence. What keeps us so? Prejudice, ignorance, and poverty.

Excerpts from an address by Maria Miller Stewart presented in Boston, 1861.

Figure 1

‘Am I not a Woman and a Sister?’



Maria W. Stewart

Figure 2

Activities

Viewing/Creative Thinking

- Study the picture that accompanies the speech written by Maria Miller Stewart. This was the picture that illustrated Stewart's articles in *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper before the Civil War. Describe the picture in detail. What are the messages the picture communicates? What do you think the picture's caption means?

Viewing/Creative Thinking

- Newspaper editors often use pictures to help readers understand the meaning of the articles published in newspapers. Read Maria Miller Stewart's speech carefully. Draw a picture that illustrates the speech.

Problem Solving/Creative Thinking

- In the 1800s, Maria Miller Stewart gave speeches about the evils of slavery in front of audiences that included both women and men, black and white people. No one before her had the courage to address a mixed audience, and there were Americans who criticized her for doing that.
 - a. On a piece of paper, describe how you think Maria Miller Stewart may have felt when she delivered her speech. Write a story describing how you felt when you had to do something courageous in front of a group of people.
 - b. Working in a small group, design a poster to advertise Maria Miller Stewart's public speech. Your goal is to convince people to attend the speech.