

**Ana Stevenson, *The Woman as Slave in Nineteenth Century American Social Movements*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2019; pp.384; RRP 79,00 € hardback.**

Ana Stevenson's 2019 book, *The Woman as Slave in Nineteenth Century American Social Movements*, has been published as part of the Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements series and is the first to historicise the analogy between women and enslaved people of African descent in nineteenth-century America. Stevenson opens her book by positing that the woman-slave analogy has a long history as both a rhetorical strategy and a literary device. However, she argues that the meanings, uses and implications of this analogy across the nineteenth century have been largely overlooked within historical scholarship. To address this gap in the historical record, Stevenson examines how the woman-slave analogy was mobilised by a variety of different social movements to further their causes in nineteenth century America.

Although the woman-slave analogy had been in use since the sixteenth century, Stevenson argues that it rose to prominence in the United States during the Antebellum era, the period prior to the Civil War. American culture during this period was dominated by the antislavery movement and antislavery discourse. As a result, Antebellum social movements produced 'a worldview premised on the idea that the position of women was no better nor any freer than that of enslaved people of African descent' (2). Among others, abolitionists and white women's rights reformers used the woman-slave analogy to articulate the subjugation of white women in a patriarchal society and criticised a variety of different concerns pertaining to white women.

One of the concerns that Stevenson examines in her book is marriage. She argues that 'the analogy between marriage and chattel slavery was the most common expression of the woman-slave analogy' (69). White women's rights reformers during the Antebellum era came to view the institution of marriage as another form of slavery and this sentiment manifested itself in the literary trope of the 'fugitive wife'. Following the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 which 'legalised the kidnapping of enslaved and free African Americans in the North and their return to chattel slavery in the South,' white women's rights print culture embraced stories about married women fleeing their husbands (99). Through an analysis of this print culture and the trope of the 'fugitive wife', Stevenson contends that 'white suffragists came to trivialise chattel slavery' and convinced 'themselves that the situation of women was worse than that of enslaved African Americans' (110; 114).

White reformers also used the woman-slave analogy to conceptualise the restrictions of women's fashionable dress during the Antebellum era. Stevenson argues that 'many commentators and reformers responded to changing fashion trends by embracing discourses of slavery' (118). These groups embraced the woman-slave analogy to promote two differing views. On one hand, the woman-slave analogy was used to show that women placed 'too great a devotion to fashionable dress' while on the other it was used as a way to express 'a deep dissatisfaction toward its demands'

(119). Through an analysis of how the bloomer costume was discussed in print culture during this period, Stevenson demonstrates how women's rights reformers used the woman-slave analogy to understand how fashion could operate as another form of oppression.

The woman-slave analogy was also used in the Antebellum era by women's reformers to draw attention to the nature of American women's labour both within and outside of the home. Through an analysis of print culture, Stevenson shows how white women reformers used discourses of slavery to draw attention to the exploitation of women in the workforce, particularly women working in the emerging textiles industry during the 1830s. However, Stevenson notes that as a result of their lived experiences of chattel slavery, it was 'African American reformers who most thoroughly explored the connections between chattel slavery and other forms of wage exploitation' (204).

Stevenson's, *The Woman as Slave in Nineteenth Century American Social Movements* provides an original and comprehensive account of how American social reformers mobilised the woman-slave analogy during the nineteenth century to further a variety of causes. White women's rights reformers used the woman-slave analogy to highlight their subjugation and oppression under patriarchy while African Americans activists used the analogy in more nuanced and culturally sensitive ways to explore connections between race, gender and class. Most importantly, however, this monograph acts as what Stevenson terms a 'cautionary tale' (310) for historians and activists alike that highlights the ease with which nineteenth century white reformers often overlooked the possibilities of intersectionality in favour of solely advocating for their own rights.

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