

The Opportunity Fighters

Molly Wallace, Valedictory Oration (1792)

Freedom
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Representation
Equality

Notes

*** How does Molly Wallace see opportunity in America? ***

Many thought the Revolutionary spirit would extend to women and African Americans, creating a new start in multiple ways for the United States of America. However, little of that spirit actually transferred to changes in laws or cultural norms. Women were expected to serve their nation in a very limited role—to raise children to understand the values on which the nation was founded. This was called “Republican Motherhood.” Few young women were formally educated; those wealthy and lucky enough generally earned the achievements more as a mark of their social status than training for a career. Molly Wallace delivered this valedictory oration at the Young Ladies’ Academy in Philadelphia.

Annotations

For each fighter, annotate for their efforts to ensure that freedom is actually practiced in America as well as for their effective use of ethos, logos, or pathos which helped persuade change.

The silent and solemn attention of a respectable audience, has often, at the beginning of discourses intimidated, even veterans, in the art of public **elocution**. What then must my situation be, when my sex, my youth and inexperience all conspire to make me tremble at the talk which I have undertaken? . . . With some, however, it has been made a question, whether we ought ever to appear in so public a manner. Our natural **timidity**, the domestic situation to which by nature and custom we seem destined, are, urged as arguments against what I have now undertaken. Many sarcastic observations have been handed out against female **oratory**. But to what do they amount? Do they not plainly inform us, that, because we are females, we ought therefore to be **deprived** of what is perhaps the most effectual means of acquiring a just, natural and graceful delivery? No one will pretend to deny, that we should be taught to read in the best manner. And if to read, why not to speak? . . . But yet it might be asked, what has a female character to do with **declamation**? That she should **harangue** at the head of an Army, in the Senate, or before a popular Assembly, is not pretended, neither is it requested that she ought to be adept in the stormy and contentious **eloquence** of the **bar**, or in the abstract and subtle reasoning of the Senate. We look not for a female Pitt, Cicero, or Demosthenes.

There are more humble and milder scenes than those which I have mentioned, in which a woman may display her **elocution**. There are numerous topics, on which she may **discourse** without **impropriety**, in the discussion of which, she may instruct and please others, and in which she may exercise and improve her own understanding. After all, we do not expect women should become perfect orators. Why then should they be taught to speak in public? This question may possibly be answered by asking several others.

Why is a boy diligently and carefully taught the Latin, the Greek, or the Hebrew language, in which he will seldom have occasion, either to write or to **converse**? Why is he taught to demonstrate the **propositions** of Euclid, when during his whole life, he will not perhaps make use of one of them? Are we taught to dance merely for the sake of becoming dancers? No, certainly. These things are commonly studied, more on account of the habits, which the learning of them establishes, than on account of any important advantages which the mere knowledge of them can afford. So a young lady, from the exercise of speaking before a properly selected audience, may acquire some valuable habits, which, otherwise she can obtain from no examples, and that no **precept** can give. But, this exercise can with propriety be performed only before a select audience: a **promiscuous** and **indiscriminate** one, for obvious reasons, would be absolutely unsuitable, and should always be carefully avoided. . . .

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Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus" (1883)

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*** How does Emma Lazarus see opportunity in America? ***

A wealthy Jewish American, with roots dating back from before the Revolutionary War, Emma Lazarus wrote this poem to help raise money for the construction of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, a gift from the country of France. The title and first two lines refer to the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, a statue of nearly the same height that welcomed ships to the Greek Island of Rhodes. Initially, Lazarus decline when offered the opportunity to contribute an original manuscript for auction, but changed her mind after considering her volunteer work aiding Jewish immigrants escaping persecution in Europe and realizing a symbolic meaning in the statue that has been linked ever since by a nation and its citizens.

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Not like the **brazen** giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs **astride** from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of **Exiles**.

From her **beacon**-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The **wretched refuse** of your **teeming** shore.
Send these, the homeless, **tempest**-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

The Opportunity Fighters

Mary Elizabeth Lease, "Wall Street Owns the Country" (1890)

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*** How does Mary Elizabeth Lease see opportunity in America? ***

Mary Elizabeth Lease was an outspoken women of many causes, including the women's suffrage and temperance movements, but perhaps is most famous for her work with the Populist Party, which rose in popularity as a third party in the late 1800s. Angry farmers in the West and the South were highly critical of big Eastern banks and corporations. Eventually the party merges with the Democratic Party during the Progressive Era reforms of the early 1900s.

Notes

Annotations

This is a nation of inconsistencies. The Puritans fleeing from oppression became oppressors. We fought England for our liberty and put chains on four million of blacks. We wiped out slavery and our **tariff** laws and national banks began a system of white wage slavery worse than the first.

Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street.

The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The West and South are bound and **prostrate** before the manufacturing East. Money rules, and our Vice-President is a London banker. Our laws are the output of a system which clothes **rascals** in robes and honesty in rags. The [political] parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us.

We were told two years ago to go to work and raise a big crop, that was all we needed. We went to work and plowed and planted; the rains fell, the sun shone, nature smiled, and we raised the big crop that they told us to; and what came of it? Eight-cent corn, ten-cent oats, two-cent beef and no price at all for butter and eggs—that's what came of it. The politicians said we suffered from overproduction. Overproduction, when 10,000 little children, so statistics tell us, starve to death every year in the United States, and over 100,000 shopgirls in New York are forced to sell their **virtue** for the bread their **niggardly** wages deny them...

We want money, land, and transportation. We want the abolition of the National Banks, and we want the power to make loans direct from the government. We want the foreclosure system wiped out... We will stand by our homes and stay by our fireside by force if necessary, and we will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the government pays its debts to us. The people are at bay; let the bloodhounds of money who **dogged** us thus far beware.

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The Opportunity Fighters

Russell Conwell, from "Acres of Diamonds" (1915)

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*** How does Russell Conwell see opportunity in America? ***

A journalist, minister, lawyer, and founder of Temple University, Russell Conwell is most famous for this speech he gave over 6,000 times. The title comes from a tale of a Persian farmer who was lured away from home with promises of wealth in distant lands only to die alone and broke with "acres of diamonds" discovered on his own farm that he had abandoned. Conwell used this story to encourage people to take advantage of the opportunities around themselves to become rich.

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I say you ought to be rich; you have no right to be poor. To live in Philadelphia and not be rich is a misfortune, and it is doubly a misfortune, because you could have been rich just as well as be poor. Philadelphia furnishes so many opportunities. You ought to be rich. But persons with certain religious prejudice will ask, "How can you spend your time advising the rising generation to give their time to getting money—dollars and cents—the **commercial** spirit?"

Yet I must say that you ought to spend time getting rich. You and I know there are some things more valuable than money; of course, we do. Ah, yes! By a heart made unspeakably sad by a grave on which the autumn leaves now fall, I know there are some things higher and grander and **sublimier** than money. Well does the man know, who has suffered, that there are some things sweeter and holier and more sacred than gold. Nevertheless, the man of common sense also knows that there is not any one of those things that is not greatly enhanced by the use of money. Money is power.

Love is the grandest thing on God's earth, but fortunate the lover who has plenty of money. Money is power, money has powers; and for a man to say, "I do not want money," is to say, "I do not wish to do any good to my fellowmen." It is absurd thus to talk. It is absurd to disconnect them. This is a wonderfully great life, and you ought to spend your time getting money, because of the power there is in money. And yet this religious prejudice is so great that some people think it is a great honor to be one of God's poor. I am looking in the faces of people who think just that way.

I heard a man once say in a prayer-meeting that he was thankful that he was one of God's poor, and then I silently wondered what his wife would say to that speech, as she took in washing to support the man while he sat and smoked on the **veranda**. I don't want to see any more of that kind of God's poor. Now, when a man could have been rich just as well, and he is now weak because he is poor, he has done some great wrong; he has been untruthful to himself; he has been unkind to his fellowmen. We ought to get rich if we can by honorable and Christian methods, and these are the only methods that sweep us quickly toward the goal of riches.

Be a man, be independent, and then shall the laboring man find the road ever open from poverty to wealth.