

Striking for Wages, Not Marriage: How Middle-Class Ideologies of Gender and Whiteness Shaped the Plight of Tailoress Activists

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Abstract

This paper focuses on The United Tailoresses Society movement in New York during the 1820's-1830's and the white working-class women who led them. White tailoress activists successfully organized unions and labor organizations in response to meager wages, inhumane work conditions, and labor exploitation. The middle-class benevolent society became sympathetic toward the struggles of the tailoress activists but rather than advocating for the demands of the labor movement, they reinforced white, middle-class ideals of femininity onto the working-class women activists. The discourse was centered around solutions that sought to place the labor activist back into the private sphere, such as finding a husband that could financially support them rather than becoming independent women earning fair wages. In this paper, I conduct a textual analysis on historical documents, such as U.S. based newspapers, to examine how the public reinforced middle-class ideologies of gender and whiteness around the plight and demands of the tailoress activists. I argue that the discourse regarding the tailoress activists reinforces white supremacy and evade any progress toward economic liberation across gender and racial lines. I conclude that middle-class ideologies of gender are usually centered around whiteness, which work to uphold white supremacy and capitalism.

Keywords: Textual Analysis; U.S. Labor movements; United Tailoresses Society; White Supremacy; Women's Labor movements

1. Introduction

In the early 19th century, working-class women organized and formed The United Tailoresses Society in New York. This movement arose in response to unfair wages, bad working conditions, and labor exploitation. The tailoress were holding meetings as early as April 1825 and went on strike starting June 1831. Through labor strikes and protests, white working-class women demonstrated their ability to advocate for themselves economically, politically and socially in public places. While white, working-class labor activists strived for economic independence, benevolent middle-class members of society grew sympathetic toward the plights of the tailoress. Instead of advocating for solutions that would alter the struggling tailoresses' material conditions, benevolent middle-class reformers constructed solutions centered around heteronormative ideals of marriage and domesticity that would place women laborers from the public sphere into the private sphere. I argue the notion behind

marriage and domesticity as solutions to white tailoress activists' economic struggles stem from middle-class ideologies of whiteness, which work to place white women from the public sphere to private sphere, diminishing chances of class solidarity across racial lines.

Scholars such as David Roediger and Christine Stansell have written around issues of labor, race, whiteness, class, and gender. David Roediger is a historian and professor at the University of Kansas. He has written on U.S. labor movements, the history of radicalism, and on the racial identities of white workers and immigrants. Christine Stansell is a historian in women's and gender history, focusing on antebellum U.S. social and political theory. She recently retired from teaching history at the University of Chicago. Roediger (2007) argues that the construction of whiteness "was a way in which white workers responded to a fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline" (p. 13) thus resulting in white laborers racial contempt for Black laborers rather than class solidarity. Stansell (1986) approaches the subject of women's labor movements through a gender and class lens, arguing that women labor activists were reduced to their relation to men in terms of marriage and protectionism as the solution to women's economic struggles. Stansell fills in the lack of gender analysis in Roediger's approach to race and labor but Roediger provides a racial analysis by emphasizing the ideology of whiteness, which Stansell lacks. With these scholars' work in mind, I seek to investigate how middle-class gender ideology centered around whiteness shaped the plight of women labor activists, particularly for tailoress activists.

2. Discussion

A majority of my primary sources come from newspaper periodicals such as *The Working Man's Advocate*, *New York Daily Sentinel*, and the *New York Herald*. There is one primary source from *Mother's Magazine & Family Monitor* mostly aimed at wealthy moral reformers, particularly middle-class white women. In these sources, I investigated the language and gender ideology behind the texts to see how middle-class ideas of femininity shaped the way struggling tailoresses and their movement were perceived and portrayed. I identify how tailoress activists resisted these ideologies or reinforced them through their rhetoric. I analyze how sources perceived working-class women's activism in the public sphere and middle-class reformer activists in the private sphere. The word "prostitution" is mentioned numerous times across primary sources and although society is gradually moving away from using "prostitution" to "sex work" as way to dismantle stigma around sexual labor, I use these terms interchangeably in this paper. I use the word "female" as an adjective as well to emphasize the material conditions pertaining to women such as "female poverty," though the word "female" should be used carefully depending on the historical contexts.

Various primary sources I obtained reinforce middle-class ideologies of gender, upholding the idea that marriage is the solution to the struggles of the tailoress and overall female poverty. Before the United Tailoress Society was formed, economic reports regarding labor and poor wage, detailing the impoverished conditions of working-class women were printed and distributed prior to the tailoress strike of 1831 ("Low Rates of Females' Wages," 1829). An essay on a committee's report regarding labor and low wages written by Mathew Carey, a benevolent ally of the tailoress, also reiterates the anxieties around female poverty, which makes it sound like female poverty is caused by alcoholic, idle husbands. "Although it

is freely admitted that great distress and poverty arise from habits of dissipation and intemperance of husbands...we feel satisfied that those deplorable and pernicious habits do not produce half of the wretchedness to which meritorious females are subjected to in this city...begging, stealing...We might add another—but we forbear” (Carey, 1829). There was awareness about how poverty affected men which was tied to the impoverished conditions of women. Instead of addressing the systemic issues around gender and class, working-class women’s economic struggles were seen as a result of alcoholic husbands who fail to provide for their families. While briefly condemning men’s alcoholism, the author seems more disgusted by the consequences of female poverty that lead to begging and stealing, but more importantly, prostitution.

Working women’s economic struggles were not new issues within the market economy. In response to reports regarding women and labor, *The New York Daily Sentinel*, published an article about women’s labor and low wages, showing sympathy but still expressing middle-class ideologies around gender and class. “That some, maddened to despair by the utter hopelessness of living respectably in comfort should stoop to the last, most degrading of resorts for support, and fit themselves to become inmates of the Magdalen Asylum,” writes the author (“Remuneration for Female Labor,” 1830). The Magdalen Asylum, created by New York’s Magdalen Society, was an institution for poor women who resorted to sex work due to economic necessity (Stansell, 1986, p. 172). Gender and class anxieties about poverty were evident around destitute, laboring women even before the existence of the United Tailoresses Society.

As noted before the United Tailoresses Society were holding meetings as early as April 1825 (United States., & Charles Patrick Neill, 1910, p. 21). The tailoresses’ ability to announce their meetings and present their demands to the public in the new dailies explain why their efforts drew more attention than their 1825 strike (Julie Myers-Mushkin & Diane Pecknold, 2018). On February 25, 1831, the *Salem Gazette* published a report leading up to The United Tailoresses Society labor strike stating that the tailoresses had a meeting regarding the betterment of their economic conditions. The editorial followed up by saying, “That would have been done perhaps, more readily if they had invited the tailors and ‘justice of the peace’ or ‘minister’ (“Tailoresses.” 1831). This brief report suggests that the economic struggles of the tailoress activists would be alleviated if they simply had a husband to financially depend on. Rather than having conversations about organizing toward economic independence, the tailoress should center their goals toward marriage. Framing marriage as a solution to women’s poor economic conditions stems from middle-class ideals of femininity and domesticity centered around whiteness that sought to place women, particularly white women, into the private sphere.

On June 1831, the United Tailoresses Society went on strike, publicizing their list of price demands. Around 1,600 women were involved and their strike went on for four weeks or possibly even longer (United States., & Charles Patrick Neill, 1910). The *Working Man’s Advocate* was one of the primary mediums which reported content regarding labor movements, including the movement of the United Tailoresses Society. In a letter to the editor, someone who signed themselves as a “Friend of Justice” calls for men to aid the tailoresses movement, while applying to middle-class ideologies around gender and femininity. “...without the aid of

some charitable hand; how much, then, will the same means fall short of paying for house rent, fuel...Is it to be wondered at, then, that circumstances would like these should produce *crime* and disgrace?" (A Friend of Justice, 1831). The author implies if those from the middle and upper class do not grant charity toward the struggling tailoresses, then the women will turn to crime, specifically prostitution. This reflects middle-class ideologies around femininity and anxieties around "deviant" female sexuality. In times of stressful financial struggles, women may turn to sex work to support themselves. However, sex work is a type of labor that is technically performed outside of the private sphere, which goes against white, feminine ideals of gender.

Another untitled piece from the *Working Man's Advocate* reflects similar anxieties around sex work and female sexuality regarding the tailoress activists' struggles. The excerpt calls out middle-class reformers seeking to resolve the economic struggles of the tailoress through moral reform and charity rather than solutions that would better the material conditions of working-class women. "With the infamy of the latter they have been already too generally branded by the infamous Report of the Magdalen Society, which seems designed rather to CREATE objects for its charity than to think of their PREVENTION (Untitled, 1831). The excerpt sounds like they are sympathetic toward the economic struggles of the tailoress but agrees "to give them the means of making them useful members of society, happy wives for our industrious mechanics..." (Untitled, 1831). This source shows how moral reformers were afraid of female poverty leading to sex worker, not because it reflects the poor conditions created by a capitalist system that exploits women's labor but because women who labor through sex work are working outside of the public sphere.

Working as a prostitute reduces the likelihood that a woman gets married, which goes against white, middle-class ideals of femininity and gender. These ideologies reinforce the idea that white women should be in a monogamous, heterosexual marriage and placed back into the private sphere and kept out of "crime." In a different newspaper clipping, the anonymous author condemns the exploitative behavior of the tailoresses' employers which leads to female prostitution, explaining that the "cause of the wives and daughters of workingmen cannot be a matter of indifference with you...Under such a state of things, prostitution must decrease with a vengeance!" ("An Abuse," 1839). The unidentified author reduces women to their relationship to men while expressing gender and economic fears regarding prostitution.

Despite the continuous reinforcement of middle-class ideologies pertaining to gender, femininity and domesticity, white tailoress activists challenged these ideologies through periodical protests, labor organization and union meetings. *The Long Island Star*, a weekly Brooklyn newspaper, published an excerpt by an unidentified tailoress, highlighting the gender oppression and economic struggles tailoresses endure under a capitalist, patriarchal society. She explains the gendered division of labor between tailors and tailoresses. "A great number of these pantaloons are made for customers, and the tailor, who does nothing but cut them out, gets a dollar or a dollar and a quarter for making them: as the customers think he, or some his journeymen makes them," writes the tailoress ("Messrs. Conway and Phillips," 1831). She articulates how tailors exploit women's labor and take all the credit for making a clothing garment. This shows how impoverished tailoress were driven into public labor due to poverty yet are invisible in this "private sphere" of labor. The excerpt goes on to say, "And the tailors

scold us when we bring home the work, and some of them say the work is done ill, and then take one half of the price, or give us nothing..." ("Messrs. Conway and Phillips, 1831). The tailoress discloses that their working conditions are so demanding that they sometimes need to take their work home, demonstrating the contradictions of the economic demands of capitalism and the gender expectations around domesticity. Tailoresses were burdened with the expectations of producing perfect garments for their boss, both in the public and hidden back into the private sphere. If they failed to meet the demands of the tailors, they would receive a low payment or no payment at all as punishment.

An excerpt from the *Working Man's Advocate* emphasizes the seriousness of the political realm the tailoress activists are entering and "if they were but novices in the art of legislation, they might soon become adepts...if they proceed in all their meetings the same prudence...we should most certainly augur their success" ("Meeting of the Tailoresses," 1831). After a United Tailoresses Society meeting, *The New York Daily Sentinel* published an article that outlined resolutions, addressed by tailoress activist Sarah Monroe, agreed upon between the tailoress activists. Most of these resolutions pertained to the demand of higher wages. The article reads, "Because when such fund is raised in this city, it will excite the oppressed of our sex in other places to similar salutary extortions...we will work for no person refusing to give the prices adopted" (Monroe, 1831). The United Tailoresses Society were practicing self-advocacy economically and politically in public spaces, an activity that defies middle-class ideals of femininity and domesticity. The following then reads, "...That although we obtain our prices, we will not relax in our efforts to support and increase this Society" (Monroe, 1831) implying that the tailoress activists are interested in growing their movement even if their employer's increase their wages. The United Tailoresses Society were not only demanding for fair wages but for their political voices to be heard and published so "that those of our sex and situation in life, in other places be requested to take them into serious consideration" (Monroe, 1831). The tailoress activists were aware of various opinions and philosophies being imposed on them by benevolence activists, labor movements, and the general public.

The *Working Man's Advocate* published an excerpt, detailing an address by tailoress activist and President of the United Tailoresses Society Sarah Monroe. It reads, "We have been told, my friends that we should coolly and calmly consider our present undertaking...It needs no small share of courage for us, who have been used to impositions and oppression from our youth up to present day, to come before the public in defense of our own rights..." (Untitled, 1831). Monroe is aware of the gendered expectations and oppression as well as the scrutiny that comes with public activism. In an address by tailoress activist Louise Mitchell, published in the *New York Daily Sentinel*, she addresses gender oppression and resists the idea that women should bear their suffering in silence and instead express themselves publicly. The excerpt reads, "Undoubtedly a great number (from their hitherto secluded lives) feel a reluctance to come forward, fearful of having their names made public" (Mitchell, 1831). Mitchell explains that since women have been expected to be silent and be restricted to the private sphere, most women feel hesitant to come forward about their struggles that result in gender and economic oppression in public. She stands her ground and resists middle-class ideology pertaining to women and the private sphere.

Not all tailoress activists resisted the middle-class ideologies that reinforced gendered ideologies of whiteness. The following excerpt was published in 1836, a few years after the United Tailoresses Society strike, but it is worth noting that some tailoress activists may have even reproduced these ideals. The *New York Herald* published a letter from an anonymous tailoress, appealing to the protectionist attitudes of other laboring men, utilizing rhetoric that was different from the radical approach other tailoress activists embraced. She calls for the help of men in which she says, “Gentleman, sirs:...I have no earthly doubt but all laboring females are wishing, as well as myself...but probably knowing their inability as well as I know mine, they are compelled to suffer in silence” (“WORKING WOMEN,” 1836). The anonymous tailoress sounds unconfident and believes that the struggling tailoress need the assistance of other men to mobilize a movement for fair wages. The letter goes on to say, “My only motive in addressing these imperfect lines for your consideration, is to find out if there is not sympathy enough in a noble man yet to do something for suffering females” (“WORKING WOMEN,” 1836). The anonymous tailoress employs gender and paternalistic rhetoric to gain sympathy from the men. Assuming that the tailoress is a white woman, she is utilizing white, feminine ideals to garner sympathy. Typically, the construction of whiteness associates white women as “fragile,” “feminine” and “light.” Tailoress activists who abandoned the more radical, proto-feminist rhetoric in favor of appealing to men’s paternalistic attitudes, reproduced the same ideologies of gender and whiteness from middle-class and moral reformers.

A letter published in the *Working Man’s Advocate* from an unidentified correspondent expresses their positive impressions about the United Tailoress Society and the presentation of their meetings. “The society is certainly deserving of much praise, not only for their wise measures but the great decorum existing in their meetings...it is an excellent specimen of the powers of American women, contending for the only object for which contention in them would be amiable—Domestic comfort and welfare of their household” “For the Working Man’s Advocate,” (“For the Working Man’s Advocate,” 1831, p. 1). The author commends the tailoress activists for maintain an image of respectability during their meetings, while connecting the tailoress to notions of domesticity. They claim that the tailoresses’ causes are motivated by female domesticity rather than gender, political, and economic liberation.

An unidentified author, referring to himself as “Husband, father, and brother” was published in the *Working Man’s Advocate* newspaper. In this article, his goal was to appeal to middle-class through gender and paternalistic rhetoric, reproducing gendered ideologies pertaining to white women. “...suppose you should be deprived of your property and health, and your only dependence should be on the labor of your wife, or daughters, or sisters...” (“To Husbands, Fathers and Brothers,” 1831, p. 2). The author reinforces the idea that men should not be dependent on women’s labor and that it is men who should be out in the public laboring, not the women in their lives. Rather than empathizing with the tailoresses’ poor material conditions, this appeal centers the focus on men, their property, and their relation to women.

The author hints around the fear of loss in economic power through suggesting the idea of becoming dependent on women’s labor. The article further reads, “Tailoresses, whose prospects were once as far and as flattering as your wives, or daughters, or sisters now are, and yet by unexpected and uncontrolled events they have been brought to dire necessity of being menial slaves...” (“To Husbands, Fathers and Brothers,” 1831, p. 2). The author keeps

emphasizing the relationship men have to women, while reducing the tailoress to wives, sisters, and daughters. In order for the middle-class men to grow sympathetic toward the economic struggles of working-class woman, they had to be reminded of women and their familial roles, which is another of socially positioning white women back into the private sphere.

On July 30, 1831, a report from the *Working Man's Advocate* announces the end of the tailoress strike and hints at the possibility of the tailoress opening a cooperative shop. The excerpt reads, "The tailoresses met again last evening and agreed to resume their labors..." The end of the article then foreshadows the influence of middle-class benevolence on the plight of the tailoresses by mentioning assistance from "several benevolent individuals" who "believe that incalculably more good may be done with the same means by the prevention of poverty than by the establishment of societies for the cure of its certain consequences, crime and misery" (Untitled, 1831, p. 1). Although the benevolent individuals will be assisting the tailoress with creating a cooperative shop, this statement echoes the paternalistic and protectionist attitudes of middle-class men regarding poor, working-class women. Emphasizing crime and misery as consequences of poverty reinforces the gender and economic anxieties regarding female poverty.

Through addresses, speeches, and articles, middle-class and moral reformers seemed to become interested in the dire economic conditions of the tailoresses. After the tailoress concluded their strike and resumed working out of sheer necessity, middle-class reformers formed the Tailoresses and Seamstresses' Benevolent Society, a charitable organization interested in helping poor tailoresses. On November 24, 1836, The *New York Herald* published an article, announcing a charitable event aimed at helping destitute tailoresses, appealing to notions of middle-class femininity when describing a poor tailoresses. "Such a quiet, tidy, clean looking, virtuous matron. She is the mother of three young daughters... Woman—beautiful, innocent and lovely woman—struggling with misfortunes, and in the dignity of despair, daring to hope that generosity can be found in this world, and among the sex to which they are a helper, a delight, an ornament..." ("Tailoresses and Seamstresses-A Real Dramatic Festival," 1836). The author highlights the feminine traits of the tailoress by describing her as "tidy," "quiet," and "virtuous," which was the complete opposite of how the United Tailoresses Society portrayed themselves through proto-feminist and revolutionary language. The tailoress is associated with white feminine traits such as "innocent" and "lovely" in order to appeal to the sympathies of middle-class and moral reformers. The association to feminine ideals furthers that notion that only innocent, beautiful, and virtuous women are deserving of charitable attention. The excerpt briefly mentions the past endeavors of the United Tailoress Society, and says that, "the tailoresses and seamstresses have only met a long melancholy series of failures in their attempt to better their condition..." ("Tailoresses and Seamstresses-A Real Dramatic Festival," 1836). The author individualizes the economic struggles of the tailoress activists instead of addressing the gender oppression of women and the conditions facilitated by a capitalist society benefiting from the exploitation of women's labor.

The main objective of the article is to propose a charitable event to help struggling tailoresses. "We appeal to the venerable mothers—to the accomplished wives—to the charming daughters... all the higher classes and circles in New York... Now is the time to come forth before the world and patronize a Dramatic Festival, for the benefit of the poor

tailoresses...” (“Tailoresses and Seamstresses-A Real Dramatic Festival,” 1836). Calling in middle-class women’s participation in the charitable event appeals to middle-class notions of domesticity and femininity. Emphasizing “respectable” and “accomplished” wives and daughters reinforces the class divide between middle-class women and working-class women, upholding benevolent, middle class ideals and diminishing the possibility for gender solidarity between the two classes of women.

Two days later, on November 26, 1836, the *New York Herald* published a brief report regarding the Dramatic Festival charity event for the benefit of the tailoresses. “We learn that a number of highly respected gentlemen, in different parts of the city, are concerting and consulting on measures necessary to bring forward one of the most splendid Dramatic Festivals for the benefit of many seamstresses and tailoresses...” Thinking back to the last report prioritizing the attendance of lovely, respectable, middle-class women, the Dramatic Festival may not only be a charity event but also a site for bachelors and bachelorettes to congregate, thus reinforcing the idea of marriage among middle-class societies. “All the fashion—all the respectability—all the wealth—all the beauty of New York will throng to the Park Theatre on that brilliant night,” mentions the report (“Dramatic Festival for the Benefit of the Seamstresses,” 1836). The author glamorizes the Dramatic Festival event to appeal to middle-class reformers, stressing the class divide between the middle-class and the working class. It may also be an indicator that poor tailoresses may not even be present in the event.

Middle-class reformers encouraged white, middle-class women to extend their benevolence and charity toward the struggling tailoresses. In Matthew Carey’s *Report on Female Wages* (1829) essay, he urges middle-class women to help poor tailoresses. “It is peculiarly incumbent on those wealthy ladies, who employ seamstresses or washerwoman, and who ought to feel sympathy for the sufferings of their sex, to give them such wages...” writes Carey. He alludes to gender commonality between middle-class women and working-class women in order to appeal to middle-class sympathies. In doing so, he universalizes the gendered experiences of middle-class women and working-class women. Although working class-women and middle-class women share the same gender, their experiences are still distinct due to class differences. Carey proposes the idea of wealthy women paying tailoresses as a solution to the tailoresses’ poor economic conditions instead of addressing gender and class oppression that operates under a capitalist, patriarchal society.

The influence of middle-class benevolence on the tailoresses’ situation was foreshadowed prior to the tailoress strike of 1831 and emboldened after the end of the 1831 United Tailoresses Society labor strike. Moral reformers encouraged middle-class women to provide destitute tailoresses with charitable acts, which was detached from the revolutionary and liberatory demands of the United Tailoresses Society. A story titled “THE SEAMSTRESS.,” published in a moral reform magazine called *Mother’s Magazine & Family Monitor*, reinforces the idea that the solution to the tailoresses’ poor conditions can be solved through the kindness and benevolence of the wealthy. The story involves a poor tailoress hired by a middle-class woman to create a garment for her husband. The wealthy woman pays the tailoress a low wage. As the depressed tailoress later encounters a different woman who enjoyed the garment created by the tailoress and asks her if she could hire her to make a dress. The woman finds out about the meager wage the other woman gave the tailoress and agrees to

pay her more for it and cheers the tailoress up ("THE SEAMSTRESS.," 1855). The text sounds innocent and heartwarming, but it reinforces class divides between women, highlighting the public and private sphere while hiding gender and class oppression that facilitates labor women's impoverished conditions. This story sends the message that middle-class women can participate in benevolent "activism" from the private sphere, which maintains middle-class ideologies of gender and whiteness. Properly compensating working women for their labor is essential, but the story individualizes solutions rather than addressing them at the systemic level.

In an address by the Benevolent Society on behalf of tailoresses, the members refer to the tailoress as "delicate," and "helpless," associating white women with ideals pertaining to white womanhood ("Address to the Tailoresses and Seamstresses' Benevolent Society," 1837, p. 102). Henry Clarke Wright, an anti-slavery campaigner and peace activist discussed the distinction between the treatment of oppressed white women and oppressed Black women. He addressed the hypocrisy of the middle-class reformers, who focus more on rescuing one specific type of woman: white women while disregarding the existence of Black women. During a meeting, he mentions how he witnessed a distressed Black mother in public, who's child was kidnapped by slave traders. "The Pulpit was silent. The Bar was silent. The poor, heart-stricken mother had a dark complexion, and no man heard her cries, except the noble band of abolitionists," says Wright ("A Great Meeting in New York on Behalf of the Oppressed," 1837, p. 2). The focus on marriage, female fragility, protectionism, and domestication were not ideals extended to Black women, demonstrating the difference in treatment and the valuation of one certain type of "womanhood," primarily white womanhood. There was no reason to rescue poor Black women from their oppression because ideologies of whiteness are built on the subjugation of Black women, who were expected to suffer and labor. The reinforcement of marriage and domestication of white women facilitate the grounds on which a capitalist, white supremacy society operates.

3. Conclusion

The United Tailoresses Society advocated for themselves politically, socially, and economically. Middle-class ideologies around gender and whiteness had a strong influence on their struggles, before, during, and after the tailoresses concluded their 1831 labor strike. Perhaps this is by design. Middle-class ideologies of gender are usually centered around whiteness work to uphold a capitalist system and white supremacy. A white supremacist, capitalist system benefits from white women being secluded into the private sphere while at the same time needing to keep poor women, both Black and white women, for labor exploitation. This is one of the many contradictions of capitalism. Middle-class and moral reformers were not only using marriage and domestication as a proposed solution to the tailoresses' poor economic conditions to evade discussions of gender and class oppression but to expand the boundaries of whiteness thus strengthening white supremacy. Expanding white supremacy diminishes any possibility of racial, gender, and class solidarity against a capitalist system.

Can gender and class solidarity be achieved across racial lines (not individually but en masse) when one particular racial group of women is pushed into the private sphere while other

groups of women are driven into the public sphere due to economic exploitation? Can white-working class women push against whiteness in order to achieve solidarity with other working-class women across racial lines? Dana Frank (1998) discusses the ways in which white-working class women not only accepted their racial privilege, but they labored to reproduce that privilege. It can be difficult to interpret whether the tailoress activists were explicit racists or conscious about their position as white women. However, white working-class women activists, especially the tailoresses activists of New York, should not be portrayed as passive to the underlying ideologies of whiteness. They had agency to advocate for themselves therefore having agency to claim solidarity with Black enslaved women as well. The tailoress activists found gender solidarity within their organization, but they nonetheless universalized their experiences with gender oppression by not claiming solidarity with Black enslaved women. Scholars dedicated to studying race, gender, social movements, and labor movements might consider furthering research pertaining to whiteness or white supremacy. This is not a call to center the experiences of white women, but to understand how whiteness is continuously reproduced through gender, race, and class hierarchies.

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