

**“Yet, to their senses, are women made slaves”:  
The Embodied Politics of Slavery in *The History of Mary Prince* (1831)**

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**Abstract**

*The History of Mary Prince* (1831) was the first slave narrative published in English by a West-Indian slave woman, yet Mary Prince and her *History* were not studied critically until Moira Ferguson republished Prince’s narrative at the end of the second-wave feminist movement. Given Mary Wollstonecraft’s description of white middle-class wives as slaves in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Prince successfully achieves Wollstonecraft’s goal “to speak the simple language of truth” through Prince’s use of sensory imagery to describe the horrors of slavery, which Prince downplays through her use of litotes. By undercutting her description of the harsh physicality of slavery, Prince demonstrates that she has normalized the horrors of slavery, thereby proving that the psychological abuse which Prince endures is far worse than the physical abuse which she describes. This paper employs a feminist and a postcolonial critical lens to examine how colonialism influenced Prince’s and Wollstonecraft’s definitions of slavery and, subsequently, each woman’s representation of slavery. Furthermore, this paper uses a New Formalist approach to examine—in reverse chronological order—the events that caused Prince to define slavery in the West Indies in opposition to Wollstonecraft’s definition of slavery within marriage. Prince’s achievement lies in her resistance to the systematic silencing of black female voices, as Prince’s decision to tell the truth about slavery to the English people set the precedent for other marginalized voices to speak their personal truths, during the second-wave feminist movement and beyond.

**Keywords:** Mary Prince, Mary Wollstonecraft, Second-Wave Feminist Movement

**1. Introduction**

*The History of Mary Prince, A West-Indian Slave: Related by Herself* (1831) was the first narrative published in English by a West-Indian slave woman, yet Mary Prince and her *History* were not studied critically until Moira Ferguson republished Prince’s narrative at the end of the second-wave feminist movement in 1987,<sup>1</sup> more than 150 years after the publication of Prince’s *History* in 1831. Throughout her *History*, Prince utilizes litotes to undercut her description of the harsh physicality of slavery. By normalizing the physical abuse that she describes in her narrative, Prince indicates that the psychological abuse which she experienced has also left deep scars. Prince’s narrative chronicles her mental journey within the institution of slavery, as her mind is enshrouded from the horrors of slavery until Prince realizes the embodied nature of the institution. I have discovered that Prince’s *History* contains a rhetoric of embodiment, as Prince has “felt what a slave feels”<sup>2</sup> and “know[s] what a slave knows,”<sup>3</sup> which allows Prince to “know what slaves feel.”<sup>4</sup> Prince learns about the horrors of slavery and the sweetness of freedom through her embodied experiences as a slave and a free woman, respectively. On the other hand, Mary Wollstonecraft describes white middle-class wives as slaves in her 1792 publication, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, even though these

wives experience the freedom that Prince desires. Therefore, I assert that Wollstonecraft's endeavor "to speak the simple language of truth"<sup>5</sup> is achieved by Prince, through Prince's appeal to the heart, rather than through Wollstonecraft's attempt "to address the head."<sup>6</sup> Prince's achievement lies in her effective resistance to the systematic silencing of black female voices, as Prince established the precedent for other marginalized voices to speak their personal truths, during the second-wave feminist movement and beyond.

## 2. The History Of Mary Prince's *History*

Prince ends her *History* by examining the lives of the English in the West Indies instead of examining her own experience of slavery. However, as a former slave enumerating the actions of slave-owners, Prince positions herself as a slave in the master-slave dichotomy, as her masters' behavior dictated the events of her life and, by extension, the events of her narrative:

Since I have been here I have often wondered how English people can go out into the West Indies and act in such a beastly manner. But when they go to the West Indies, they forget God and all feeling of shame, I think, since they can see and do such things. They tie up slaves like hogs – moor them up like cattle, and they lick them, so as hogs, or cattle, or horses never were flogged, – and yet they come home and say, and make some good people believe, that slaves don't want to get out of slavery. But they put a cloak about the truth. It is not so.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Pringle, the secretary for the British Anti-Slavery Society and the editor of *The History of Mary Prince*,<sup>8</sup> notes that "The whole of this paragraph especially, is given as nearly as was possible in Mary's precise words."<sup>9</sup> In order to ensure that Prince's *History* induced a tidal wave of antislavery sentiment, Pringle describes the production of the pamphlet containing Prince's narrative, thereby giving credibility to Prince's *History*. Pringle begins his preface by declaring "The idea of writing Mary Prince's history was first suggested by herself. She wished it to be done, she said, that good people of England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered."<sup>10</sup> In her book, *The Intimate Empire: Reading Women's Autobiography*, Gillian Whitlock describes the two oppositional agendas which shape the production of Prince's narrative:

The first is the most obvious: the editor, Pringle, who wishes to put before the public a slave narrative which will have the marks of authenticity, but not the signs of what would be construed as depravity. The second is the concern of the narrator, Mary Prince, who desires that the good people of England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered.<sup>11</sup>

In order to further establish the text's authenticity, Pringle declares that the words on the page are the same words that were "taken down from Mary's own lips by a lady who happened to be at the time residing in my family as a visitor."<sup>12</sup> This lady was Susanna Strickland, who wrote a letter to James Bird, a poet in Yoxford, and his wife, Emma, to describe her latest project:

I have been writing Mr. Pringle's black Mary's life from her own dictation and for her benefit adhering to her own simple story and language without deviating to the paths of flourish or romance. It is a pathetic little history and is now printing in the form of a pamphlet to be laid before the Houses of Parliament. Of course my name does not appear. Mr. Pringle has added a very interesting appendix and I hope the work will do much good.<sup>13</sup>

Although the pamphlet was a bestseller, as it "went through three editions in 1831, its first year of publication,"<sup>14</sup> little is known about the existence or location of Strickland's original manuscript. Although Strickland and Pringle proclaim that the published *History* records Prince's words as closely as possible, it is questionable to what extent "Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology"<sup>15</sup> remained intact after Strickland transcribed her words and Pringle "pruned [the narrative] into its present shape."<sup>16</sup> Although Strickland hopes that the publication "will do much good,"<sup>17</sup> the question is whether the publication will do the most good for Prince or the most good for the Anti-Slavery Society. Pringle declares in his preface "I have published the tract not as their Secretary, but in my private capacity; and any profits that may arise from the sale will be exclusively appropriated to the benefit of Mary Prince herself."<sup>18</sup> We do not know much about Prince's life after the publication of her narrative,<sup>19</sup> yet her words were owned by the antislavery

cause, as the Anti-Slavery Society lost “all feeling of shame”<sup>20</sup> associated with utilizing Prince’s words to achieve their purpose: the abolition of slavery in the British Empire.

Without Susanna Strickland’s original manuscript, which recorded Prince’s dictation, we cannot be completely sure that Prince’s *History* is “essentially her own.”<sup>21</sup> Because Prince was unable to record her narrative, Prince’s *History* is only “essentially” her own, even though Prince owned the narrative that she dictated. Furthermore, Strickland could not have possibly recorded every word that Prince said, which resulted in a narrative which is “essentially” Prince’s. As Gillian Whitlock asserts, “Strickland is the conduit through which the *History* is written down, and the beginning of that process by which the text is shaped for its political and polemical purpose. But, more than this, she is also in every sense Prince’s foil.”<sup>22</sup> By submitting “in a servile manner to the . . . dictation of another,”<sup>23</sup> Strickland became a slave to Prince’s words, as Prince transferred her status as a slave to her amanuensis, thereby becoming the master in the master-slave dichotomy. Whitlock declares “By convention an amanuensis remains unnamed, appropriately so in that the appearance of a proper name on the title page suggests authorship, the cohering of identity and style of narration.”<sup>24</sup> Through the act of transcription, Strickland lost her identity as Prince gained her identity. Although Prince had more to gain by associating herself with her narrative, Prince also had more to lose, as Prince’s moral character became the subject of public debate whereas Strickland’s moral character went unquestioned. Furthermore, Prince is enslaved to her senses, as Wollstonecraft declares “Yet, to their senses, are women made slaves.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Prince’s “sensitivity”<sup>26</sup> allows her to “obtain present power,”<sup>27</sup> as Prince’s description of what she had “seen, felt, and suffered”<sup>28</sup> shaped antislavery sentiment. However, Prince could not obtain the power to be free in the West Indies, as her last master, Mr. Wood, would not grant her manumission.

### 3. Close Readings Of Mary Prince’s *History*

#### 3.1. Tension Between Mind And Spirit

Prince asserts that the English in the West Indies “forget God and all feeling of shame,”<sup>29</sup> yet Prince never knew God, and, once she learned about God, she gained a “feeling of shame.”<sup>30</sup>

I felt sorry for my sins also. I cried the whole night, but I was too much ashamed to speak. I prayed God to forgive me. This meeting had a great impression on my mind, and led my spirit to the Moravian church so that when I got back to town, I went and prayed to have my name put down in the Missionaries’ book; and I followed the church earnestly every opportunity. I did not then tell my mistress about it; for I knew that she would not give me leave to go. But I felt I *must* go. Whenever I carried the children their lunch at school, I ran round and went to hear the teachers.<sup>31</sup>

When Prince heard the word of God, she “felt and suffered,”<sup>32</sup> as Prince explains that she “was very sorely grieved, and very much frightened”<sup>33</sup> after she learned that she was a sinner. Prince demonstrates how deeply she felt her sorrows, as her use of hyperbole—“I cried the whole night”<sup>34</sup>—is contrasted with her use of litotes, as Prince states that she “felt sorry for my sins also,”<sup>35</sup> even though she did not treat other slaves cruelly like Henry, “a black driver.”<sup>36</sup> Prince experienced tension between her feelings of obligation to the Moravian church and her feelings of obligation to her mistress. Prince felt “too much ashamed to speak”<sup>37</sup> about her sins, even though she knew that the church required her to confess her sins. Like Henry, Prince is compelled to obey the orders of her master, even though she “felt and suffered”<sup>38</sup> at the hand of her master. Subsequently, Prince experienced tension between her spirit and her mind, as she asserts that the meeting “had a great impression on my mind”<sup>39</sup> yet, in her mind, she knew that her mistress “would not give me leave to go.”<sup>40</sup> Prince believes that “To be free is very sweet,”<sup>41</sup> because her spirit attains freedom from sin in the Moravian church after she “hear[s] the teachers.”<sup>42</sup> In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft takes on the role of a teacher, as she endeavors “to speak the simple language of truth, and rather to address the head than the heart.”<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Wood, the wife of Prince’s owner, wishes to achieve the same goal, as Mrs. Wood addresses the head, rather than the heart, when she asks Prince “who had put freedom into my head.”<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft defines liberty as “the mother of virtue,”<sup>45</sup> thereby reinforcing the morality of Prince’s quest to free her spirit from sin, even if her body is still enslaved.

### 3.2. Moral Aversion To Master's Actions And Authority

Prince's second master, Mr. D, forgot "God and all feeling of shame,"<sup>46</sup> as is seen through Prince's description of the physical and mental abuse that Mr. D inflicted:

He had an ugly fashion of stripping himself quite naked, and ordering me then to wash him in a tub of water. This was worse to me than all the licks. Sometimes when he called me to wash him I would not come, my eyes were so full of shame. He would then come to beat me. One time I had plates and knives in my hand, and I dropped both plates and knives, and some of the plates were broken. He struck me so severely for this, that at last I defended myself, for I thought it was high time to do so. I then told him I would not live longer with him, for he was a very indecent man – very spiteful, and too indecent; with no shame for his servants, no shame for his own flesh.<sup>47</sup>

In the service of Mr. D, Prince does not experience shame for her sinful actions but, rather, for the "indecent"<sup>48</sup> things that she has seen. Prince characterizes Mr. D's actions as immoral instead of ascribing immorality to his person, as she characterizes his stripping as "an ugly fashion"<sup>49</sup> and his ordering of Prince to wash him as "worse... than all the licks."<sup>50</sup> Prince tersely describes the actions of Mr. D without any extraneous, graphic details. Furthermore, Prince downplays the embodiment of Mr. D's cruelty, as she uses the qualifier "quite"<sup>51</sup> to describe his unclothed state. It is only after Mr. D physically abuses Prince that she blames Mr. D for his indecent actions, as Prince describes him as "a very indecent man – very spiteful, and too indecent."<sup>52</sup> Prince's repetition of the word "indecent"—which is preceded by the intensifiers "very"<sup>53</sup> and "too"<sup>54</sup>—exemplifies her moral aversion to Mr. D's actions without disrespecting the authority of her master, as Prince questions Mr. D's lack of decency instead of her punishment. In her essay "Pringle's Pruning of Prince: *The History of Mary Prince* and the Question of Repetition," Jessica Allen addresses "The possibility that Prince's repetition was motivated not only by linguistic and narrative habits, but also by the sense that she would not be heard or understood."<sup>55</sup> Prince repeats the adjective "indecent" not only to make sure that her audience understands how indecent Mr. D was, but that her audience understands how often Mr. D acted indecently. Nevertheless, Prince transfers the shame from her eyes onto the object that causes her shame, Mr. D, through parallel statements that dramatize the extent of his shame. Mr. D has "no shame for his servants,"<sup>56</sup> which enables him to maintain control over his slaves. Furthermore, he has "no shame for his own flesh,"<sup>57</sup> which God, rather than Prince, condemns. As Romans 8:5 states, "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the spirit."<sup>58</sup> Prince's spirit was led toward the Moravian church and spiritual things, despite going against the wishes of her earthly master, whereas Mr. D was led toward the things of the flesh that would, ultimately, gratify his own flesh. When Prince refused to come to Mr. D after he called her to wash him, Prince refused to gratify his flesh, as Mr. D would not be able to "cum"—which is a homonym of "come"—if Prince did not come to wash him. Furthermore, Prince refused to gratify her own flesh, as she refused to "come" to wash Mr. D and, subsequently, to "cum." Nevertheless, Mr. D gratified his own flesh, as he would "come to beat"<sup>59</sup> Prince and, more than likely, cum as he inflicted pain on Prince's flesh.

### 3.3. Educational Differences Between Female Slaves And Wives

Wollstonecraft argues that "the most perfect education"<sup>60</sup> allows "the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent."<sup>61</sup> Wollstonecraft further links virtue to independence, as she defines liberty as "the mother of virtue."<sup>62</sup> In this way, Wollstonecraft argues that virtue leads to liberty, through education; and that liberty leads to virtue, through one's ability to pursue "the most perfect education."<sup>63</sup> However, Prince's education is very different from the education prescribed by Wollstonecraft:

The next morning my mistress set about instructing me in my tasks. She taught me to do all sorts of household work; to wash and bake, pick cotton and wool, and wash floors, and cook. And she taught me (how can I ever forget it!) more things than these; she caused me to know the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin, when applied to my naked body by her own cruel hand. And there was scarcely any punishment more dreadful than the blows I received on my face and head from her hard heavy fist. She was a fearful woman, and a savage mistress to her slaves.<sup>64</sup>

Prince receives an education in the cruelties of slavery that she will never forget, which she notes in her parenthetical comment. Mrs. I teaches Prince not only "all sorts of household work"<sup>65</sup> but "more things than these."<sup>66</sup> Prince passes

her embodied knowledge onto her readers, as she describes the tasks undertaken by the English in the West Indies: “They tie up slaves like hogs – moor them up like cattle, and they lick them, so as hogs, or cattle, or horses never were flogged.”<sup>67</sup> The hard “C” and “K” consonant sounds—“bake...pick cotton...and cook”<sup>68</sup>—are contrasted with the soft “W” sound of “household work:”<sup>69</sup> “wash...and wool...and wash floors.”<sup>70</sup> The household tasks that Prince learned were hard tasks in a soft environment. Prince was sheltered from the harshness of field work, yet she experienced the harshness of physical and mental abuse at the “cruel hand”<sup>71</sup> of her mistress. Prince’s alliterative use of the hard “C” sound echoes the sound of “the cart-whip, and the cow-skin”<sup>72</sup> that was applied to Prince’s body by her mistress’s “cruel hand,”<sup>73</sup> which “caused”<sup>74</sup> Prince to “know the exact difference”<sup>75</sup> between the different instruments her mistress used to inflict pain on Prince’s body. Nevertheless, Prince undermines the harshness of these instruments, as she describes—through her alliterative use of the letter “H”—the blows that she received on her “head from her hard heavy fist.”<sup>76</sup> Prince receives the most “dreadful”<sup>77</sup> damage to the external structures that protect her brain—her “face and head”<sup>78</sup>—yet Prince is comforted by the fact that her mind was not damaged. Prince enshrouds her mind from the horrors of slavery by pitying those who are punished around her, as she does not understand the harshness of corporal punishment until Mrs. I physically punishes her. After Prince receives her education in the cruelties of slavery, Prince describes the punishments that Mrs. I inflicted upon “two little slave boys,”<sup>79</sup> as Prince develops her understanding of the physical suffering of slavery, and her place within the institution of slavery, through her embodied experiences: “My pity for these poor boys was soon transferred to myself; for I was licked, and flogged, and pinched by her pitiless fingers in the neck and arms, exactly as they were.”<sup>80</sup> Prince describes her mistress as “a fearful woman,”<sup>81</sup> as Mrs. I induced fear among her slaves. In this way, Prince projects her feelings of fear onto the body of Mrs. I, as her mistress would not be “fearful”<sup>82</sup> if she did not induce fear within Prince. Subsequently, Prince assumes that the other slaves in the household feel the same way, as she asserts “I can tell by myself what other slaves feel.”<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, Prince undermines Mrs. I’s power, as Mrs. I is “a savage mistress to her slaves,”<sup>84</sup> but Mrs. I may be “a fearful woman”<sup>85</sup> in relation to her husband, if Mrs. I fears her husband, as Wollstonecraft declares “the very men who are the slaves of their mistresses”<sup>86</sup> also are the men who “tyrannize over their sisters, wives, and daughters.”<sup>87</sup>

### 3.4. Sensory Awareness And Mental Enshrouding

Prince and Wollstonecraft employ contrasting definitions of the word “slave” in their respective works. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “slave” as “One who is the property of, and entirely subject to, another person, whether by capture, purchase, or birth; a servant completely divested of freedom and personal rights.”<sup>88</sup> Slaves and wives are “entirely subject to”<sup>89</sup> their master—their owner and their husband, respectively—and are “divested of freedom and personal rights.”<sup>90</sup> In her book *Rebel Writer: Mary Wollstonecraft and Enlightenment Politics*, Wendy Gunther-Canada draws attention to the political controversy surrounding Wollstonecraft’s comparison of married women to slaves, as Wollstonecraft believed that “both were recognized legally as property without political rights of their own.”<sup>91</sup> Wollstonecraft argues that women are “by their very constitution, slaves, and not allowed to breathe the sharp invigorating air of freedom.”<sup>92</sup> Prince, on the other hand, addresses the status of servants in England, as they “have their liberty,”<sup>93</sup> even though they may feel enslaved. The extent to which a slave is divested of their rights is based on the means through which they become enslaved. Wollstonecraft argues that women’s hearts are captured by their lovers, and that their lovers purchase their wives—their “property”<sup>94</sup>—through marriage vows. Although Prince was born a slave, she did not truly become a slave until she was purchased on the slave market:

The black morning at length came; it came too soon for my poor mother and us. Whilst she was putting on us the new osnaburges in which we were to be sold, she said, in a sorrowful voice, (I shall never forget it!) “See, I am *shrouding* my poor children; what a task for a mother!” – She then called Miss Betsey to take leave of us. “I am going to carry my little chickens to market,” (these were her very words,) “take your last look of them; may be you will see them no more.”<sup>95</sup>

Prince describes the morning that she was sold as “black,”<sup>96</sup> as the sunrise on that day ushered in the setting of the sun on her dream of living with her family. Prince personifies her mother’s voice as “sorrowful,”<sup>97</sup> and Prince utilizes parentheticals to reinforce the truth of her retelling—“these were her very words,”<sup>98</sup>—and to allude to the effect that her mother’s words has on her, as she declares “I shall never forget it!”<sup>99</sup> The “black morning”<sup>100</sup> is a homophone of the “black of mourning,”<sup>101</sup> which Prince’s mother experiences, as she declares that she is “*shrouding*”<sup>102</sup> her children, as if “for burial.”<sup>103</sup> The “new osnaburges”<sup>104</sup> that serve as shrouds are traveling clothes, as well as burial cloths. Prince must appear like a fresh chicken being taken to the market, and Prince’s mother tries to offer “protection”<sup>105</sup> to her daughter by clothing her in a “veil”<sup>106</sup> that allows her to put up a “screen”<sup>107</sup> between the outward sufferings of her body and the inward strivings of her mind. Wollstonecraft suggests that slavery controls slaves by “cramping their

understandings and sharpening their senses.”<sup>108</sup> However, Prince understands, on a sensory level, her enslavement, which enables her to craft a terse description of the embodied politics of slavery. Nevertheless, Prince downplays the harsh physicality of enslavement, in order to survive long enough to obtain her sweet freedom.

### 3.5. Summary

By publishing her *History*, Prince pulls away the “cloak about the truth,”<sup>109</sup> which provides “shelter”<sup>110</sup> to the general public from the evils of slavery that the English created in the West Indies. This shelter provides a “defence”<sup>111</sup> against any attacks on the institution of slavery, as well as a “retreat”<sup>112</sup> from the horrors inherent in the institution. As Gunther-Canada asserts, Wollstonecraft sought to “disentangle the female body from the restrictive clothing of a political system of subjection and a culture of control.”<sup>113</sup> Wollstonecraft questions the “system of slavery”<sup>114</sup> that places a shroud over education for women, as women’s inferior education results in women who look pretty on the outside, but who lack a full interior mental life. Women have the appearance of educational opportunities, yet their unequal education leads to a “barren blooming”<sup>115</sup> of their individual talents. Prince, on the other hand, is forced to learn “the exact difference between the smart of the rope, the cart-whip, and the cow-skin.”<sup>116</sup> Because the concept of freedom cannot exist without the concept of slavery, the political writings of Wollstonecraft and Prince cannot exist without each other. Nevertheless, one term is privileged in this binary, as white, middle-class women experience substantially more liberty in the system of marriage, which produces enslavement as a byproduct, than poor black women experience in the institution of slavery, which is organized around the enslavement of black bodies.

## 4. The Effort To Authenticate Mary Prince’s *History*

Although Prince provided a powerful depiction of chattel slavery in the West Indies through the publication of her *History*, Gillian Whitlock describes why not all readers believed in the authenticity of Prince’s narrative:

*The History* invited disbelief on two levels: firstly, the narrator must describe behaviours which question the civility of white colonists, the English abroad, quite fundamentally. Secondly, as a black woman, Prince’s emergence as an autobiographer, where her life is invested with particular and individual meaning, is unlikely, and letters from her owner which label her base and depraved offer a quite different story, perhaps even a more feasible one.<sup>117</sup>

However, Prince’s narrative proves that the truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. Thomas Pringle provides a supplement to Prince’s *History*, through which Pringle hopes to suspend any disbelief concerning Prince as an autobiographer, as well as the actions of white British colonists in the West Indies that she chronicles. Toward the end of Pringle’s supplement, Pringle returns to the facts of Prince’s narrative:

I may here add a few words respecting the earlier portion of Mary Prince’s narrative. The facts there stated must necessarily rest entirely, – since we have no collateral evidence, – upon their intrinsic claims to probability, and upon the reliance the reader may feel disposed, after perusing the foregoing pages, to place on her veracity. To my judgment, the internal evidence of the truth of her narrative appears remarkably strong. The circumstances are related in a tone of natural sincerity, and are accompanied in almost every case with characteristic and minute details, which must, I conceive, carry with them full conviction to every candid mind that this negro woman has actually seen, felt, and suffered all that she so impressively describes; and that the picture she has been given of West Indian slavery is not less true than it is revolting.<sup>118</sup>

Pringle appeals to the audience’s rational sensibilities, as Pringle declares that Prince’s claims are probable because “the internal evidence of the truth of her narrative appears remarkably strong.”<sup>119</sup> In anticipation of those who do not believe that these claims are probable, as there is not any “collateral evidence”<sup>120</sup> to support these claims, Pringle appeals to the audience’s appreciation of sincerity, which is seen through the tone that Prince uses to describe the “characteristic and minute details”<sup>121</sup> of her *History*.

## 5. Parallels To The Second-Wave Feminist Movement

### 5.1. Carol Hanisch and “The Personal Is Political”

Wollstonecraft’s endeavor “to speak the simple language of truth”<sup>122</sup> is achieved by Prince through Prince’s appeal to the heart, rather than through Wollstonecraft’s attempt “to address the head,”<sup>123</sup> which the second-wave feminist movement’s rallying cry of “the personal is political” suggests. Carol Hanisch’s famous 1969 essay was given the title “The Personal Is Political” by Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt, who were the editors for the *Notes from the Second Year* anthology.<sup>124</sup> Hanisch defines “personal problems”<sup>125</sup> as “political problems,”<sup>126</sup> which rely upon “collective action for a collective solution.”<sup>127</sup> In her *History*, Prince appears to merely describe a series of personal problems in her life as a slave. However, her narrative interacts with the debate over slavery taking place in England at the time of its publication. Prince’s *History* was published because of the social conditions of the time and place, and the publication, in turn, informed the social conditions, as Hanisch declares “We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them.”<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, Hanisch does not address the intersectionality between race and gender, as Hanisch discusses “the black movement”<sup>129</sup> as a model for the feminist movement but fails to discuss black feminists in her essay.

### 5.2. Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*

In 1949, twenty years before Hanisch’s essay was published, Simone de Beauvoir published *The Second Sex*, which defined woman as “man’s dependent, if not his slave,”<sup>130</sup> thereby utilizing the same simile that Wollstonecraft employed more than 150 years before in *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*. In her introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir declares “there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro,”<sup>131</sup> but Beauvoir does not discuss the situation of black females. Rather, Beauvoir calls attention to the differences between women and blacks, as she asserts “women are not a minority, like the American Negroes.”<sup>132</sup> In this way, Beauvoir fails to acknowledge that the reason why women are not a minority is because of the inclusion of black women in the female gender category. On the other hand, Beauvoir addresses the racial solidarity that prevents women from forming a cohesive group: “if they [women] are white, their allegiance is to white men, not to Negro women.”<sup>133</sup> Beauvoir emphasizes the differences between women and blacks through the similar constructions declaring equality but, nevertheless, difference from other gender and racial groups, respectively: “At most, they were willing to grant ‘equality in difference’ to the *other* sex. That profitable formula is most significant; it is precisely like the ‘equal but separate’ formula of the Jim Crow laws aimed at the North American Negroes.”<sup>134</sup> In this way, Beauvoir suggests that women and blacks are treated differently from men and whites, respectively. Nevertheless, these two treatments are “separate but equal” and cannot intersect with one another, thereby leaving an absence in the discussion regarding the treatment of black women.

### 5.3. Audre Lorde and “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”

At “‘*The Second Sex—Thirty Years Later*’” conference sponsored by the New York Institute for the Humanities in 1979,<sup>135</sup> the mainstream feminist focus on wealthier, white women went unquestioned until Audre Lorde addressed the lack of diversity at the conference. Lorde gave her famous “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” speech during the last panel on the last day of the conference, which was aptly named “‘The Personal and the Political’”<sup>136</sup> in an allusion to Carol Hanisch’s essay. Lorde declares “It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians.”<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, Lorde asserts “The absence of these considerations weakens any feminist discussion of the personal and the political.”<sup>138</sup> Audre Lorde did not dismiss the links that conference participants made between the personal and the political but, rather, suggested that the full range of different voices in the feminist movement were not present at the conference. Lester Olson defines Lorde’s speech as a “diatribe,”<sup>139</sup> as she did not intend to promote solidarity among the conference attendees. Instead, Lorde commented on the lack of diversity at the conference which helped to promote a limited type of solidarity among the conference participants. Lorde wanted to disrupt this solidarity and to promote difference as “a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic,”<sup>140</sup> as well as “that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged.”<sup>141</sup> Audre Lorde not only questioned the status quo of the conference but

also suggested the inclusion of different voices, in order to make the second-wave feminist movement more empowering for all women.

## 6. Conclusion

Prince, the first West Indian slave woman to publish her narrative, was a different voice in the British discourse about slavery during the 1830s. Thomas Pringle attests to Prince's initiative in his preface to her *History*, as he declares "The idea of writing Mary Prince's history was first suggested by herself. She wished it to be done, she said, that good people in England might hear from a slave what a slave had felt and suffered."<sup>142</sup> Prince did not merely want to narrate her personal history. Prince wanted to turn her personal history into a political narrative: "I tell it, to let English people know the truth; and I hope they will never leave off to pray God, and call loud to the great King of England, till all the poor blacks be given free, and slavery done up for evermore."<sup>143</sup> Prince's achievement lies in her resistance to the systematic silencing of black female voices, as Prince's decision to tell the truth about slavery to the English people set the precedent for other marginalized voices to speak their personal truths, during the second-wave feminist movement and beyond.

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