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Sylvia D. Hoffert. *When Hens Crow: The Women's Rights Movement in Antebellum America.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. x + 153 pp. $25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-32880-9.

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When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America reminds readers that the current treatment of feminism in the mass media is part of a long tradition of interaction between feminists and the media. Using speeches, letters, printed discussions and illustrations from the large circulation newspapers, penny presses, and reform journals, Hoffert focuses her analysis on the linguistic strategies used by both sides of the woman's rights movement. Hoffert uses antebellum American newspapers' editorials, cartoons, advertisements, headlines, and coverage related to woman's rights activities to establish the crucial influence of the press on the movement. Newspaper editors, writes Hoffert, "lifted a movement with little money, no permanent organization, and no official newspaper of its own out of obscurity by bringing it to the attention of a national audience and thereby inadvertently helped to incorporate women more completely into public life" (94). Hoffert's book focuses not on the events surrounding the Woman Question in antebellum America, but instead on the language of both supporters and opponents of the woman's movement to show that both positive and negative attention gave momentum to the movement.

The book's title offers an example of how negative press may not have had an entirely negative influence on the movement. The title alludes to James Gordon Bennett's comment in *The New York Herald* that female woman's rights activists were "hens that crow," a comment with which he undoubtedly meant to "insult and publicly humiliate them as women and to belittle their efforts to expand woman's rights to participate more fully in public life" (116). Hoffert's analysis of this statement suggests that he did not achieve his desired effect: "He did not write that women were *trying* to crow and were failing. He wrote that women *were* crowing. . . He admitted that at least some women were competent to participate more fully in public life and suggested that when women started crowing like roosters they could not be ignored" (117).

An examination of the language surrounding the Woman Question leads Hoffert to argue that woman's rights activists created their own rhetoric within a dominant cultural rhetoric. She describes a carefully crafted system which attempted to challenge from within, intricately blending the seemingly disparate metaphors of war and gardening, metaphors which threatened to destroy while offering to create: "The combination of metaphors and analogies used by woman's rights activists liberated women linguistically from the restrictions placed on them by the ideologies of republicanism, domesticity, and benevolence" (72).

Hoffert offers her readers insight into the words and strategies of the antebellum activists, many of whom are often neglected in accounts of the movement. Her arguments, however, downplay the complexities of class and overlook the issues of race within the movement. Absent from this book are discussions of women of color and their fights to be recognized in a sexist and racist world. Acknowledging these aspects of antebellum society would complicate and strengthen Hoffert's argument. As an examination of a certain section of the woman's rights movement in antebellum America, Hoffert's book is a fascinating look at its rhetorical structures and strategies.

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