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INTERPOSITIONS: *HOPE LESLIE*,
WOMEN'S PETITIONS,
AND HISTORICAL FICTION IN JACKSONIAN
AMERICA

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Magawisca, springing from the precipitous side of the rock, screamed—"Forbear!" and interposed her arm. It was too late. The blow was leveled—force and direction given—the stroke aimed at Everell's neck, severed his defender's arm, and left him unharmed.

This heroic moment in Catharine Sedgwick's most popular novel, in which Magawisca "interposes" her arm to save young Everell Fletcher from death at the hands of her father, the Pequot chief Mononotto, has often been interpreted as a rewriting of Pocahontas's intervention on behalf of John Smith.¹ While there are parallels between the two, such an interpretation overlooks the scene's significance as one of many instances of interposition or intervention on behalf of the innocent in *Hope Leslie* (1827). Magawisca's heroism here is part of a pattern of intercessions on behalf of the Fletcher family, in which she "interposes" herself emotionally, rhetorically, or, as above, physically between the Fletchers and her father. In fact, the novel is framed by reciprocal acts of interposition, since, in its second volume, Everell Fletcher and Hope Leslie interpose on behalf of Magawisca. *Interpose* is Sedgwick's term, one that she uses no fewer than twenty times in the course of *Hope Leslie* to suggest an act of intercession between the powerful and powerless to bring about a higher justice.² Through the novel's repeated configurations of victims, intercessors, and authority figures, Sedgwick explores the overarching theme of "interpositions," a broad category embracing a range of emotional, rhetorical, or physical intercessory acts with inherently political content, raising questions about the legitimate resistance to authority.³ Foundational to Sedgwick's concept of interposition is the petition—a specific form for her heroines' rhetorical interpositions, using a religiously-resonant posture to make palatable requests for justice that challenged prevailing power structures. Throughout *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick reiterates synonyms for *petition*—supplication, entreaty, appeal, and prayer—and underscores the centrality of the petition's persuasive means of

interposing by accentuating her heroines' deferent physical stance in making petitions. Moreover, in using such a deferent posture, Sedgwick's protagonists employ elements of the petition that antebellum American women would adopt. *Hope Leslie* imagines forms for women's political interpositions, particularly the petition, and participates discursively in the white women's petitioning campaigns of the antebellum era, illuminating this context for today's scholars.

In their unprecedented efforts to petition collectively in 1830, white women applied an awareness of petitioning as a request "for our fellow creatures" to their political interpositions on behalf of Native American Indians. From an antebellum theological perspective, the term *petition* was in fact often understood as a kind of interposition, albeit more moderate and rhetorical (whether written or spoken) than Magawisca's dramatic bodily interposition. Frequently called *intercession*, a petition was a part of prayer including "a desire of deliverance from evil, and a request of good things to be bestowed . . . *not only for ourselves but for our fellow creatures also.*"⁴ What *Hope Leslie* imagines as individual, spoken intercessions, white women would take up in collective, written form in their 1830s petitions to Congress on behalf of Native Americans. While there is no direct historical link between *Hope Leslie* and women's actual petitions, they share remarkable rhetorical similarities. Both fundamentally announced themselves as interpositions on behalf of others' natural rights, initially made use of a supplicating stance and humble tone, and ultimately challenged patriarchal structures through their articulation of political opinion, moving women an important step toward citizenship.⁵ Their similarities as rhetorical interpositions give them an imaginative continuity worth closely considering.

Indeed, the implicit political content of women's petitions is foregrounded by Sedgwick's use of the form in scenes that reverberated with the rhetorical postures and with the political, gendered, and racialized issues that would animate women's petitions in her own era. In Sedgwick's depiction of the verbal petitions that precede Magawisca's interposition of her arm, she links the deferent postures and powerful pleas for mercy which supply the form and content of women's petitioning. Magawisca is described as "sinking down at her father's feet and clasping her hands," begging Mononotto to save the Fletchers in a kneeling posture that submissively disguises the radical content of her grammatical imperative to "save them—save them" (63). Sedgwick emphasizes how Magawisca's stance is an utter formality, a "token" with its own signifying power: "Magawisca must feel, or feign submission; and she laid her hand on her heart, and bowed her head, in

token of obedience" (75). She repeats this posture when she "clasped her hands in mute and agonizing supplication" (84), offering another "silent entreaty" (84) for Everell's life, and, later, "threw herself on her knees . . . entreated . . . wept—but in vain . . . again she appealed to her determined keeper, and again he denied her petition" (91). Only after she has gone through the "formality" of petitioning does Magawisca escape from her guard to rescue Everell on the sacrifice rock—an interposition appropriate to the moment only because her previous efforts have failed.⁶ Sedgwick's attention to the deferent physical posture—the form—of Magawisca's and Hope's individual, spoken petitions accentuates the significance of the submissive rhetorical stance later amplified in antebellum women's collective, written petitions. As reflected in *Hope Leslie*, petitioning provided a relatively moderate form of interposing, appealing to women of Sedgwick's day, one that drew on historical and religious precedents and attempted to work within existing legal structures to change them.

Despite its role in key scenes and throughout the novel, the subject of petitioning in Sedgwick's fiction and nineteenth-century American literature has received little scholarly consideration. However, it is an important window into both Sedgwick's work and early nineteenth-century American literature and culture. Sedgwick's fiction, in turn, gives us insights into the form and context of antebellum women's petitioning that we cannot glean from studies of petitioning alone.⁷ Much critical attention has been given to Magawisca's heroic "interposition" as a retelling of the Pocahontas story and to *Hope Leslie* as historical romance, as recasting Puritan histories and looking back to events such as the trial of Ann Hutchinson or the multiple Indian removals in early American history. Karen Woods Weierman authoritatively describes how *Hope Leslie* registers Sedgwick's experience of three major Indian removals: the 1637 Pequot War; the eighteenth-century removal of Indians from Stockbridge, Massachusetts, in which her own family played a part; and nineteenth-century Cherokee Indian removal, nationally debated as Sedgwick was writing *Hope Leslie*.⁸ As Woods Weierman's work begins to suggest, criticism on *Hope Leslie* has overlooked the way in which Sedgwick's novelistic commentary on the Indian question looks both backward and forward. I aim here to extend Woods Weierman's work, to examine how the novel's rhetorical interpositions in the form of petitions discursively anticipate scenes of women's anti-removal petitioning just a few years after *Hope Leslie*'s publication. *Hope Leslie* imagines many of the dynamics surrounding these historical petitions—their possibilities and limits, the tension between the petition's liberal, sympathetic content and

deferential, conservative form, and the responses to them—so that focusing on the figure of petitioning in *Hope Leslie* helps us not only to understand the dynamics of women's political discourse in Jacksonian America but also to re-read Sedgwick's historical fiction. My method is to couple a historicist's attention to biographical, historical, and cultural contexts with a literary critic's close awareness of language in order to reinvigorate the way we read Sedgwick's work and to strengthen the connections between her fiction and its context. Positioning petitioning at the heart of *Hope Leslie* in this way compels us to re-read the political in Sedgwick, to see Sedgwick as intervening formally, with the possibilities and limits for gender and racial politics that this entailed.⁹

For Sedgwick, the possibility of the petition as a form for women's political intervention was pertinent not only in the 1600s, the period in which she imagined *Hope Leslie's* protagonists petitioning Indian and Puritan authorities for others' liberties against the backdrop of the English Civil War, in which both men and women had petitioned.¹⁰ The possibility of the petition had significance as well in Sedgwick's family history and personal life: the Stockbridge Indians had repeatedly petitioned the General Court against the seizing of their land by, among others, Sedgwick's own ancestors, particularly her great-uncle.¹¹ More immediately central to Sedgwick's imagination of petitioning would have been the case of her beloved childhood nurse, Elizabeth Freeman, affectionately called Mammy Bet, Mum-Bett, or Mumbet. In 1781, with the help of Catharine's father Theodore Sedgwick—prominent Berkshire lawyer, U. S. Senator, and Speaker of the House of Representatives under George Washington's presidency—Freeman appealed for and gained her freedom, an event that Catharine celebrated in "Slavery in New England" (1853) and that her brother Henry Dwight Sedgwick recounted in *The Practicability of the Abolition of Slavery: A Lecture Delivered at the Lyceum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, February 1831*.¹² While an individual appeal like Freeman's is distinct from a joint petition on behalf of a group, women's collective petitions on behalf of others were also realized in Sedgwick's lifetime, when American women joined their male counterparts in petitioning Congress *en masse* on the controversial national issue of Indian removal, magnifying and making explicit, collective written use of the supplicating rhetorical stance that Sedgwick imaginatively engages through the individual, spoken petitions of *Hope Leslie's* female protagonists.

Hope Leslie was published just on the verge of U. S. women's progression from a personal to national, and from an individual to collective use of the petition for others. In 1827, American women had not yet together petitioned Congress on behalf of others on a national

issue. By 1830, they began using the petition to protest removal of the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws from the state of Georgia. Within a decade more, they had petitioned in large numbers against slavery. Although women in America had submitted petitions prior to this point, they had typically done so on a small scale and on personal or familial matters, such as pensions, compensation for war losses, or divorce, or on local benevolent activities, such as the legal incorporation of female charitable societies. While women had signed temperance petitions as early as 1818, the predominantly white, middle-class, Northern women who participated in the anti-removal campaign departed from previous efforts by abandoning male intermediaries and by joining together from various states to petition Congress directly in opposition to national policies.¹³ That is, rather than have others intercede on behalf of them, these women interposed on behalf of others through their petitions. While not always successful in effecting their aims—the women's anti-removal petitioning campaign did not prevent the removal of the Cherokees from Georgia, nor do Magawisca's petitions sway Mononotto's purpose or Hope's petitions effect Magawisca's freedom—petitions nevertheless established an initial form through which women and Indians, as well as white men, could gain a hearing by speaking deferentially yet no less politically on topics of national moment.¹⁴ Such "unsuccessful" collective anti-removal petitions are a compelling presence in American history, just as "failed" individual petitions are a significant presence in Sedgwick's novel. Yet ultimately, how these petitions were received is not as important as how they were made. Through them, women began to exercise the political voice foundational to claiming democratic citizenship. The fictional and historical petitioning woman—truly a figure of speech and a speaking figure¹⁵—demonstrated women's use of political discourse in a way that destabilized power structures and posited their citizenship based on natural rights.

The centrality of the figure of petitioning in *Hope Leslie* thus derives from the novel's reflection of and participation in the shifting contours of women's political discourse and the cultural dimensions of their petitions as rhetorical interpositions, both spoken and written. A close reading of the novel in light of Sedgwick's life and the sociopolitical landscape of the 1820s and 1830s reveals how *Hope Leslie* becomes Sedgwick's own form of interposing in early nineteenth-century debates over republican citizenship, so that *Hope Leslie's* scenes of women's petitioning appear to partake in, and perhaps contribute to, a larger cultural shift in women's political activity. Likewise referring to this broader historical context are the tensions in Sedgwick's presentation of petition-

ing both *by* and *for* her Native American heroine—a presentation in which petitioning’s more problematic implications for race, gender, and republican citizenship are excised from the stage through Magawisca’s exit from the novel “to the far western forest” and to “the deep voiceless obscurity of those unknown regions” (339).

Interpositions

Sedgwick viewed justified interpositions as sympathetic, mediatory acts on behalf of the “rights of innocence”—acts that in turn challenged power hierarchies in the defense of natural rights, that touched on questions of republican citizenship, and that finally found particularly persuasive expression in the form of the petition. *Hope Leslie*’s self-conscious exploration of women’s petitions is an aspect of the novel’s theme of interposition, the broader category of other-centered activism in which I locate the petition and from which women’s petitions derived their moral authority. In addition to Magawisca’s interposition on behalf of Everell in Book I, Sedgwick stages various kinds of interpositions throughout the novel, drawing on interlocking conversational (and “domestic”) interpositions to contemplate more political (and “national”) ones, ultimately exploring the dynamics of interposition and offering her readers both ethical and unethical models. This theme of interposition can be seen not only as a concern of Sedgwick’s life but also as a sign of the times—a biographical and historical context that enriches a close reading of *Hope Leslie* and situates an understanding of women’s petitioning in the novel and beyond.

“Interposing,” or intervening in defense of the rights of others, featured strongly in Sedgwick’s own imagination, particularly in her writings about Elizabeth Freeman (“Mumbet”), who played a strong maternal role in Sedgwick’s life and who, as Mary Kelley writes, appears in Sedgwick’s autobiography and journal as “the most exceptional individual, regardless of sex,” as well as “the woman with whom Sedgwick most deeply identified,” to the extent that Sedgwick almost erased the racial difference between herself and the former slave.¹⁶ In “Slavery in New England,” a story of interposition strikingly similar to Magawisca’s interposition of her arm to save Everell, “Bet,” in Sedgwick’s words, “interposed” her own arm between her slave mistress’s “large iron shovel red hot from clearing the oven” and her innocent “sister in servitude,” Lizzy. Sedgwick’s interest in Freeman’s interposition appears again in her unfinished antislavery manuscript, “Some pages of a Slave story I began and abandoned.” Here, once

more, the fictional slave Meta “interposed her arm in time to receive” a blow aimed by her mistress at a weaker slave named Izzy.¹⁷ Sedgwick specifically uses the term *interposed* in both slave pieces. Clearly, Freeman’s interpositions on behalf of her sister Lizzy/Izzy exercised strong imaginative hold over Sedgwick and others in the Sedgwick family—her brother recounts the same event, featuring “Mum Bett” and invoking the same language of interposition, in his lecture on the abolition of slavery.¹⁸

Beyond Sedgwick, the concept of “interposing”—interceding or meddling on behalf of others—informed the antebellum imagination in terms of Christian consciousness and women’s charity and reform work. While “interposing” would seem to be a weak and overly abstract term for interventions on behalf of others, it drew on powerful ideologies of Christian salvation, in which, as the eighteenth-century lyrics to one hymn put it, “Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God; he, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.”¹⁹ Through such a Christian model of interposition to bring about redemption, early nineteenth-century American women—particularly white, middle- and upper-class, Protestant women like Sedgwick—could perform benevolent work in hospitals, orphanages, and prisons, or other charity work calculated to bring both earthly and eternal salvation to the sick, poor, orphaned, or socially deviant, without stepping outside prevailing religious and gender norms. This idea that women’s virtue could cause moral uplift in society is brought home in *Hope Leslie* by Esther Downing’s prison ministry to Magawisca, which aims at saving the soul of the “heathen” and provides a dutiful model of socially acceptable interposition for women (279). As Jenifer Banks has discussed, Sedgwick herself was deeply involved in benevolent work from 1835 to 1863, years spanning the bulk of her publishing career (1822–1858).²⁰ Sedgwick’s benevolent work certainly had religious dimensions that she touches on in a letter to her niece: “I think the favored class of society owe an immense debt to Providence, which can only be discharged by attempting to rescue the vicious and ignorant from misery and degradation. But it seems to me they must be saved, and *can not* be *rescued*, and we remain as if there were a palsy on us.”²¹ For Sedgwick, benevolent interposition was a dutiful entailment of Christian faith and *noblesse oblige*. As Sedgwick goes on to suggest in this letter, such work additionally had economic and political dimensions, representing, as Banks argues, a first step outside the confining gender norms of the era and into activity that went beyond the solely religious to interpose in the socioeconomic realities of others.

Beyond exclusively religious motivations, as Sedgwick illustrates in *Hope Leslie*, it is a broad, generous sympathy for others that must supply the content of justified, ethical interpositions.²² In *Hope Leslie*'s ideal model of interposition, one who intercedes must be willing to act boldly on behalf of the "rights of innocence," to follow "sympathy" to its ultimate ends, as did Elizabeth Freeman; to uphold a more fundamental "law of nature," a higher level of justice than religious law or "the letter of the law." Sedgwick thus aligns sympathy with the more political defense of natural rights as the fundamental motivating substance of acts of interposition. For instance, when the Indian woman Nelema is imprisoned on charges of witchcraft, it is Hope's sympathy for Nelema that prompts her escalating acts of "meddling" on Nelema's behalf. Hope writes to Everell, "Poor Nelema!—such a harmless, helpless, lonely being—my tears fall so fast on my paper, that I can scarcely write!" (108). Hope first speaks in Nelema's defense, then acts to set her free (to become, as Sedgwick puts it, "Nelema's deliverer" [112]) on the basis of her rights. When Hope

observed the key of her [Nelema's] prison deposited in an accessible place, (no one dreaming of any interference in behalf of the condemned) she was inspired with a sudden resolution to set her free. This was a bold, dangerous, and unlawful interposition; but Hope Leslie took counsel only from her own heart, and that told her that the rights of innocence were paramount to all other rights, and as to danger to herself, she did not weigh it—she did not think of it. (120)

Hope's interposition is a means of defending natural rights, in contrast to the benevolent interposition of Esther, who visits Magawisca in an attempt to convert her to Christianity. Esther—who is guided by "the strictest letter of her religious duty," rather than her heart—deems it "not right" to undertake in Magawisca's escape because "she thought they had not scripture warrant for interfering between the prisoners and the magistrates," to which Everell responds:

"Scripture warrant! . . . And are you to do no act of mercy, or compassion, or justice, for which you cannot quote a text from scripture? . . ."

"But surely, Esther, there must be warrant, as you call it, for sometimes resisting legitimate authority, or all our friends in England would not be at open war with their king. With such a precedent, I should think the sternest conscience would permit you to obey the generous impulses of nature, rather than to render this slavish obedience to the letter of the law." (278)

The driving force of ethical interposition, for Sedgwick, is a higher law aligned with sympathy—the “general impulses of nature”—that lies above both religious duty and “the letter of the law.” Thus, unlike Esther, Everell is willing to push interposition to its limits: “he had left no means untried, either of open intercession, or clandestine effort” (280). Like Magawisca, who interposes her arm to obtain Everell’s release after first petitioning her father, and Hope, who interposes to engineer Nelema’s escape after speaking in her defense before the Puritan triumvirate, Everell also acts, following “the generous impulses of nature” to their ends, not only by “openly interceding,” but also, with Hope’s help, eventually effecting Magawisca’s escape. Although his first rescue attempt fails, it is his attempt that makes all the difference: “Magawisca could scarcely have been made happier if Everell had achieved her freedom, than she was by the certain knowledge of his interposition for her” (263). And from the perspective of one of the Puritan patriarchs himself, Sedgwick tells us that, although disagreeable, the interposition is warranted; for Governor Winthrop perceives that “though Everell Fletcher’s interposition had been unlawful and indecorous, yet, as Providence had made him the instrument of certain good, he thought his offence might be pardoned by his associates in authority” (342). Again, Sedgwick emphasizes here the justification for what she sees as Everell’s ideal interposition: Providential higher law lies above both religious law and man’s law.²³

Moreover, through Governor Winthrop’s and Mr. Pynchon’s censures of Everell’s and especially Hope’s interpositions—responses that largely pivot on concerns about deference, propriety, and lawlessness—Sedgwick highlights how interpositions on behalf of others, because of their interventionary structure, could upset hierarchical power relations and bear political effects. Winthrop characterizes Everell’s “interposition” on behalf of Magawisca as “unlawful” and “indecorous,” and Everell receives public censure for it (343). Likewise, Hope’s “meddling” in the “matter” of Nelema (108) elicits a dismissive censure from the Puritan magistrate Mr. Pynchon, a censure strengthened by Hope’s simultaneous challenge to gender roles: “what [Hope] would fain call courage, Mr. Pynchon thought necessary to rebuke as presumption:—‘Thou art somewhat forward, maiden,’ he said, ‘in giving thy opinion; but thou must know, that we regard it but as the whistle of a bird; withdraw, and leave judgment to thy elders’” (109). While Pynchon “easily reconciled himself to the loss of the prisoner, he felt the necessity of taking instant and efficient measures to subdue to becoming deference and obedience, the rash and lawless

girl, who had dared to interpose between justice and its victim" (121). Winthrop, too, sees Hope as a "lawless girl" who "hath not . . . that passiveness that, next to godliness, is a woman's best virtue"; he designs a plan to "to put jesses on this wild bird" by marrying her off (155). From their mediatory positions, Everell and particularly Hope assume some measure of exceptional authority to speak to their elders, if not their "betters," on behalf of individuals' "rights of innocence"—"an almost unparalleled presumption, in those times, when youth was accounted inferiority" (119). Those authorities who censure their irregular interference as "presumptuous" respond, in part, to the power structure necessarily disturbed by the act of interposition. Winthrop's and Pynchon's concerns about Hope's and Everell's lack of decorum and deference are thus, at root, concerns about maintaining social difference; in their hierarchical world, one who presumes the authority to speak with her superiors on behalf of another must signal her inferior status within the social hierarchy—issues of socio-political propriety of which Sedgwick is all too aware throughout the novel and that become even more acute in light of gender dynamics.

Ultimately, because they disturb such power hierarchies, the interpositions of *Hope Leslie's* heroines on behalf of less powerful individuals by intervening to more powerful patriarchal authority figures call for a particular strategy of interposition. Petitioning provides that strategy. Petitions are an initially persuasive form of "open intercession," bearing a deference lacking in other means of interposition like Hope's "somewhat forward" defense of Nelema before the Puritan triumvirate, which occasions not a sympathetic hearing but stern rebuke (108–9). Throughout *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick explores the petition as a strategic rhetorical form of interposing, one that she marks through the religiously informed posture of genuflection and that allows her female intercessors to couch their sympathetically motivated and politically charged requests in more acceptable terms.

Women's Petitions

Sedgwick frames *Hope Leslie* with acts of physical interposition: Magawisca's interposition on Everell's behalf memorably begins the novel, and Everell's and Hope's later interpositions on Magawisca's behalf reciprocate it. What is more, these acts are preceded by key scenes of rhetorical interposition, in which Magawisca and Hope adopt a supplicating stance that persuasively acknowledges their inferiority in the power hierarchy, yet that also communicates a powerful argument for natural

rights. In depicting the physically modest elements of her heroines' petitions, Sedgwick presents a humble form of political discourse particularly persuasive for women, a form that unites the religious discourse of prayer with the secular Anglo-American discourse of justified resistance to authority based on natural rights. While petitions *per se* were not always humble, antebellum women's anti-removal petitions adopted just such a supplicating stance and combined petitioning's religious and secular senses, joining notions of God-given rights with notions of political rights and Biblical heroines with American heroes. In *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick self-consciously casts the petition as a figure for a religio-political discourse of tempered dissent, thus proposing a form for women's interpositions that pushed the bounds of propriety in her day. Yet, while *Hope Leslie* imagines exceptional, individual Indian and Anglo women characters petitioning, it stops short of imagining collective activism for them. It took the actual historical events of 1830—Sedgwick's readers and the women's anti-removal petitioning campaign—to supply this impulse to collective action, not only to mirror the ethic and form of interposition in the novel, but to amplify it.

Sedgwick and her antebellum contemporaries would have been familiar with the religious resonance of petitioning within the Judeo-Christian tradition, as based on the covenant between believers and their God, and with Biblical women who petitioned on behalf of those less powerful. One of the earliest senses of the word *petition* is prayer or supplication: the Old Testament describes petitioning as an act resembling a prayer from an individual to God, and the New Testament reinforces this sense. Likewise, in his *Compendious Dictionary* (1806), Noah Webster defines *petition* in its noun form as "a prayer, request, entreaty, article," and Buck's *Theological Dictionary* (1818) defines *prayer* as "a request or petition for mercies."²⁴ Petitioning in this sense also possessed an element of Puritan conversion, affirming the residually reciprocal relationship between the most powerless supplicants and their sovereign. *Hope Leslie* certainly reveals Sedgwick's awareness of petitions as a kind of prayer to the divine for divine intervention in human affairs; Sedgwick distinctly notes this kind of petition, for instance, when Everell prostrates himself on the sacrifice rock (92). Sedgwick further draws upon Biblical history in conveying the sense of petition as a paradoxically prayerful form of interposition by heroic women, like the Old Testament's Queen Esther, to whom Mrs. Fletcher compares Magawisca early in the novel (32). Esther is a prime example of the heroic petitioning woman: Esther petitioned on behalf of the Jewish people, who were threatened by plans for their annihilation, courageously saying, "Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I

perish, I perish.”²⁵ While aware of the religious importance of such spoken petitioning, Sedgwick and her readers would also have been familiar with the more secular sense of the petition as a formal, often written, supplication to a body in authority, requesting some right or the redress of wrongs. For early nineteenth-century Americans like Sedgwick, who possessed a still-lively sense of the Revolutionary era, such an understanding of petitioning was in fact at the heart of the founding of the nation and, in the Anglo-American history of petitioning, represented the most basic access to political speech.

With the English Civil War as its backdrop—a setting in which petitions played a key role—*Hope Leslie* indicates Sedgwick’s keen awareness of how the English history of petitioning is interwoven with “American” history. In England, as Pauline Maier explains, petitions gave subjects “a way of seeking redress of wrongs done under the authority of the King, whom they could not sue in the regular courts.”²⁶ In colonial America as well as England, the right to petition was a foundational expressive right, involving a kind of dialogic contract between the governed and their governors, and entailing the obligation of a hearing and response. In 1642, the one hundred laws resembling the Magna Carta in the Body of Liberties adopted by the Massachusetts Bay Colony Assembly gave individuals the right to voice their grievances and to have those grievances addressed in return. The earliest colonial petition laws relieved some of the strain of restricted colonial suffrage by granting at least minimal access to political discourse even to unenfranchised individual citizens, which included women, felons, Indians, and in some cases, slaves. In addition, colonial petitions were the foundation for legislative, judicial, and executive action: they often called for legislative responses in tax policy, land distribution, monopoly grants, and trade and licensing privileges; brought about debt actions, estate distributions, divorce proceedings, and criminal cases; or asked for the enforcement of existing laws.²⁷ As the American Revolution approached, colonial assemblies directed petitions to both parliament and the king against the Stamp and Molasses Acts, among other colonial laws. The failure of redress for these petitions sparked the American Revolution, grounding the creation of the United States in failed petitions to the British people, the British Parliament, and King George III.²⁸ After the Revolutionary War, the right to petition was guaranteed as a separate and fundamental right in the Bill of Rights, not substitutable but supporting other freedoms of expression, such as the right to assemble, as seen in the First Amendment’s petition clause: “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to

assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."²⁹ In the first few decades of Congress, petitions dealing with contested election results, the National Bank, the expulsion of Cherokees from Georgia, land distribution, the abolition of dueling, the government in the territories, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the slave trade were received, read aloud, considered, and usually referred to committees at the opening of each session.³⁰ Literally, then, petitioners' words were heard and responded to at the national level in the first decades of Congress.

Sedgwick was interested in mirroring the revolutionary political action of the nation's founders in individuals' petitions for liberty, an interest she pursues through her protagonists' petitions in *Hope Leslie*. Specifically, Sedgwick's awareness of the wider history of petitioning surfaced in the personal case of Elizabeth Freeman's post-Revolutionary appeal for freedom. In "Slavery in New England," Sedgwick links Freeman's attainment of freedom with that of the founding fathers:

It was soon after the close of the revolutionary war that she [Freeman] chanced at the village "meeting house" in Sheffield, to hear the Declaration of Independence read. She went the next day to the office of Mr. Theodore Sedgwick, then in the beginning of his honourable political and legal career. "Sir," said she, "I heard that paper read yesterday, that says, all men are born equal, and that every man has a right to freedom. I am not a dumb *critter*; won't the law give me my freedom?" I can imagine her upright form, as she stood dilating with her fresh hope based on the declaration of an intrinsic, inalienable right. Such a resolve as hers is like God's messengers—wind, snow, and hail—irresistible.³¹

This passage draws direct parallels between the colonists' Declaration of Independence and "Mumbet's" individual application for freedom. In *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick explores a range of just such individual petitions, by both male and female protagonists, that likewise had natural rights arguments at their core, and she makes the petitions of her female characters central to the novel, demonstrating how women could use the petition to interpose politically alongside their male counterparts' slightly less humble interpositions. Everell "beseeches" Puritan authorities, but he does not do so on fallen knees or with clasped hands. Magawisca and Hope, on the other hand, draw consistently on the common posture of kneeling in petitioning their respective patriarchs, a prayerful posture that worked deferentially within the power hierarchy to make essentially radical requests on behalf of less powerful others. Similarly, Jacksonian women made petitions on behalf of Indians

and slaves, on issues presumably not directly affecting themselves—in contrast to early national petitions which, prior to the 1830s, were made on behalf of one's own grievances and made primarily by men.

Thus while Sedgwick's characters do not actually sign written petitions, as antebellum women would, Sedgwick manipulates physical and oral signs to integrate petitioning into the novel and to present women's petitioning as akin to the petitioning of both the women heroes of the Bible and the founding fathers. We witness Sedgwick's heroines using the supplicating, religiously-resonant stance of petitioning, discernible by their postures of genuflection or clasped hands and their entreating voices. Exemplifying several formal aspects of the petition, Hope's petition to Governor Winthrop on behalf of Magawisca, who has been jailed on conspiracy charges, is worth quoting at length:

When the door was closed, and he had seated himself, and placed a large arm-chair for her, all the tranquility which she had just before so well sustained, forsook her; she sunk, trembling, on her knees, and was compelled to rest her forehead on the Governor's knee: he laid his hand kindly on her head, "what does this mean?" he asked; "I like not, and it is not fitting, that any one should kneel in my house, but for a holy purpose,—rise, Hope Leslie, and explain yourself—rise, my child," he added in a softened tone, for his heart was touched with her distress; "tyrants are knelt to—and I trust I am none."

"No, indeed, you are not," she replied, rising and clasping her hands with earnest supplication; "and therefore, I hope—nay, I believe, you will grant my petition for our poor Indian friend."

.....

"Well, what would you have, young lady?" asked the Governor, in a quiet manner, that damped our heroine's hopes, though it did not abate her ardour.

"I would have your warrant, sir," she replied boldly, "for her release; her free passage to her poor old father, if indeed he lives."

"You speak unadvisedly, Miss Leslie. I am no king; and I trust the Lord will never send one in wrath on his chosen people of the new world, as he did on those of old. No, in truth, I am no king. I have but one voice in the commonwealth, and I cannot grant pardons at pleasure; and besides, on what do you found your plea?"

"On what?" exclaimed Hope. "On her merits, and rights."

"Methinks, my young friend, you have lost right suddenly that humble tone, that but now in the parlour graced you so well. I trusted that your light afflictions, and short sickness, had tended to the edification of your spirit."

"I spoke then of myself and humility became me; but surely you will permit me to speak courageously of the noble Magawisca."

"There is some touch of reason in thy speech, Hope Leslie," replied the Governor, his lips almost relaxing to a smile. (273-74)

Hope's "petition for our poor Indian friend" clearly draws on a religiously-resonant, humble posture (Hope "sunk, trembling, on her knees," and "clasp[ed] her hands with earnest supplication" in a stance that Winthrop himself aligns with "holy purpose") and is thus an effective way for her, as a young woman in a patriarchal, hierarchical culture, to gain a hearing for her request to her superior (he "laid his hand kindly on her head . . . for his heart was touched with her distress"). The fact that Winthrop's rebuke ("you have lost right suddenly that humble tone") immediately follows Hope's natural rights argument for Magawisca (grounding her plea in "her merits, and rights") reveals Winthrop's desire to diminish the political substance of the petition by deflecting it onto Hope's "tone." Nevertheless, in finally portraying Hope's own selfless justification of her boldness in speaking ("I spoke then of myself and humility became me; but surely you will permit me to speak courageously of the noble Magawisca") as at least somewhat acceptable to Winthrop ("There is some touch of reason in thy speech"), Sedgwick depicts the form of the petition as a hopeful one for rhetorically interposing for others.

The form of the petition, Sedgwick suggests, creates the possibility that the patriarchal authority just may "relax his lips to a smile," so that this particular form of "open intercession" must be exhausted before pursuing other forms of interposition. This "possibility of a smile" comes partly because the petition works conservatively within the power structure to attempt change. As we see in Hope's petition to Winthrop, petitioning's posture of genuflection physically recognizes the power differential between Hope and Winthrop, lending the form of humility to the natural-rights content of her request on behalf of Magawisca—a form especially appropriate for Hope, as a young woman, in seeking to gain a hearing on an issue of "national" moment. Hope's posture of genuflection helps to temper her politically radical request by deflecting attention away from the petitioner to the authority figure; when Hope kneels, her posture leads Winthrop to respond to his own position of authority ("tyrants are knelt to—and I trust I am none"). Indeed, this genuflected posture calls attention to the deflected form of petitioning; sharing the same root (flectere "to bend"), *deflection* signifies a turning aside, change in direction of, or deviation from a straight course.³² This form is strategic, allowing female petitioners to gain a hearing—as in Sedgwick's words, Hope's "graceful humility enabled her to start with her story from vantage ground" (270). Sedgwick includes Hope's petition, even lingers upon it, to explore the

potential of the petition as a still-deferential form for interposing and effecting change.

While *Hope Leslie* does not depict collective petitioning action for women, it does dwell upon the heroic, individual petitions of its female characters; it is not unreasonable to suggest that, in appealing to the sympathies of a wide-ranging group of readers, *Hope Leslie* may have imaginatively helped to pave the way for women's collective petitions. As her peers attested, Sedgwick's writing certainly possessed the power of galvanizing the country's sympathies: in Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney's words, Sedgwick "moved her country's heart" with *Hope Leslie*, whose popularity Sigourney memorialized in the last stanza of her poem "The Stockbridge Bowl." Sigourney's tribute not only commemorates Sedgwick's reputation, but also documents the connection between her fiction and the women, like Sigourney, who read and were "moved" by her.³³ Within three years after *Hope Leslie*'s publication, Lydia Maria Child and Angelina Grimké had opposed Jacksonian Indian removal, and together with Catharine Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and other women of Hartford, Sigourney had generated a host of women's anti-removal petitions to Congress. Based on available evidence at the National Archives, it does not appear that Sedgwick herself signed an anti-removal petition.³⁴ Yet Sigourney had apparently read Sedgwick's widely-acclaimed novel, and all of these women were variously associated with Sedgwick.³⁵ Moreover, the religiously-resonant yet politically-geared rhetoric of women's actual petitions expanded the individual fictional petitions that Sedgwick imagined in *Hope Leslie*, suggesting that *Hope Leslie*'s theme of justified interposition through petitioning proposed the sympathetic content and the discursive form that would enable predominantly white, middle-class Jacksonian women to imagine petitioning on behalf of Indians within a few years.

Sedgwick's fictional exploration soon resounded in the supplicating rhetoric of women's historical petitions. On December 1, 1829, with Lydia Sigourney and other women of Hartford, Catharine Beecher outlined the plight of the southern Indians in an anonymous "Circular, Addressed to benevolent ladies of the U. States," printed on the first page of the December 25, 1829 *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald*, a publication of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Beecher appeals to women's moral position and calls for their prompt, widespread petitions to Congress against Jacksonian removal. In its heavy reliance on the prayerful posture of the petition, Beecher's call rhetorically echoes the form that *Hope Leslie* proposes:

Have not then the females of this country some duties devolving

upon them in relation to this helpless race? . . . They have nothing to do with any struggle for power, nor any right to dictate the decisions of those that rule over them.—But they may *feel* for the distressed; they may stretch out the supplicating hand for them, and by their prayers strive to avert the calamities that are impending over them. It may be, that female petitioners can lawfully be heard, even by the highest rulers of our land. Why may we not approach and supplicate that we and our dearest friends may be saved from the awful curses denounced on all who oppress the poor and needy, by Him whose anger is to be dreaded more than the wrath of man; who can “blast us with the breath of his nostrils” and scatter our hopes like chaff before the storm. It may be this will be *forbidden*; yet still we remember the Jewish princess [Esther] who, being sent to supplicate for a nation’s life, was thus reproved for hesitating even when *death* stared her in the way: “If thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then shall deliverance arise from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a cause as this?”³⁶

Here, Beecher justifies women’s intervention in the “Indian Question” as a sympathetically motivated interposition on behalf of another “helpless race” rather than as a bid for women’s own rights. Carefully negotiating women’s position by emphasizing that they have no interest in the “struggle for power,” nor the right to “dictate” political decisions themselves, Beecher claims that it is precisely women’s extra-political position that grants them the right to intervene on behalf of others in this exceptional situation—as Beecher later emphasizes, to “*sway the empire of affection*”—or, as Sigourney put it in her poetic tribute to Sedgwick, to “move [the] country’s heart.” By repeating the word *supplicate* three times within six sentences, Beecher moreover highlights the humble stance of the petition as an appropriate form for women’s interposition on behalf of the Indians—as we have seen, a deflected form of appeal. Invoking the inspirational Queen Esther, Beecher’s words furthermore have Biblical reverberations, couching a politically fraught issue within a religious allusion and emphasizing the element of divine intervention in women’s involvement. Yet Beecher’s heightened attention to the religious roots of women’s petitions and her apparent anxiety over their “lawfulness” also belies the politically sensitive nature of these petitions; Beecher is well aware that women’s requests “may be . . . *forbidden*” by those in positions of political authority, and she is aware of the time-sensitive nature of the issue itself.

As they had responded to Sedgwick’s novel, readers responded warmly to Beecher’s appeal: in a major change in the history of U. S.

petitioning, hundreds of women's anti-removal petitions began arriving in Congress just weeks after the circular.³⁷ Just as Hope had entered a political discussion about Puritan-Pequot relations by following the dictates of her heart, when women like Sigourney and Stowe began, in Beecher's words, to "*feel* for the distressed" and to "stretch out the supplicating hand for them" by petitioning against Indian removal, they interposed in a national political debate.³⁸ In their echo of the supplicating stance of Beecher's "Circular," these petitions rhetorically magnified the posture of genuflection physically depicted in *Hope Leslie*. For instance, in the first petition submitted to the House of Representatives on February 15, 1830, by sixty-three women from Steubenville, Ohio, women cast themselves in the "humble character of suppliants," claiming that moral obligation and the dictates of the heart require "*all* who can feel for the woes of humanity, to solicit, with earnestness, your honorable body," and that the exceptionalism of the case excused what might otherwise be perceived as women's "presumptuous interference" or "unbecoming" decorum.³⁹ These petitioners accentuate their own position as "the feeblest of the feeble": they "implore," "appeal," and "pray" to those who "should be the representatives of national virtues as they are the depositaries of national powers." One can almost see them kneeling, "stretching out the supplicating hand," as Magawisca and Hope did. Yet embedded within this humble form lay a much less unassuming natural rights argument, one that stressed "the *undoubted natural right* which the Indians have to the land of their forefathers," an argument implying a censure of "the peculiar guardians of our national character."⁴⁰ Such petitions provided women the opportunity to voice their political and philosophical as well as religious arguments.⁴¹ One might, then, consider the petition as a transitional vehicle that helped women integrate a private, religious stance with a public, political one.

While women's petitions exploited the rhetorical potential of a humble form, this religious posture was inherently politicized in its use before human beings. When relatively powerless women petitioned those who sought to preserve their authority, their petitions were ultimately secular, with material consequences, as seen in the danger of death that Esther faces when she petitions the king without first being summoned. Such petitions took place in an identifiably political space—for Esther, at the royal throne in the king's hall, for Hope, before the Puritan patriarchs, and for Jacksonian women, before Congress. Thus, though the petition used tempered dissent to reframe rather than to replace consent, it expressed dissent nonetheless; while the petition was an ultimately conservative form, working within political structures, it still contained a hint at more disruptive, forceful kinds of inter-

position, the seed of radical political action.

This decidedly political realm of women's petitions on behalf of others—in Hope's words, "speaking courageously on behalf of the noble Magawisca"—raises the question of whether such petitions implied women's own, more generalized political participation. Because petitioning still possessed a fundamentally political kernel at its core—as seen in the natural rights argument that Sedgwick subtly drops into each scene—women's petitioning was objectionable to *Hope Leslie's* magistrates and to most antebellum congressmen. In claiming the right to political expression, women petitioners moved outside the clear bounds of culturally sanctioned gender roles, calling attention to yet another controversial issue of the era: the Woman Question. If women's petitions were to be given a hearing every Monday, the designated day for reading petitions in the 1830s Congress, then women were given a voice in the national legislature, which was implicitly and explicitly gendered male and raced white, and their petitions could validate their political participation. At a minimal level, that is, their petitions on behalf of others' natural rights implied their own political rights, such that they demanded, if not enfranchisement *per se*, then at least representation of their political voices by the officials their fathers, brothers, husbands had elected. If Congress were obligated to listen and to respond to women's petitions, as was historically the case with Anglo-American petitioning, it meant that both these women and those for whom they presumed to speak, were accessing political discourse, participating in a dialogic, national political process, and possibly effecting widespread change. Thus, if Winthrop responds to Hope's petition to grant Magawisca personhood—based on Hope's egalitarian argument for Magawisca's "merits, and rights"—then Winthrop by extension grants Hope a "voice" in the "commonwealth," a slippery slope for patriarchal authorities in that it implies that other young women, as well Indian Others, just may have a similar "voice," an implication that is managed through Magawisca's elimination from the novel.

It is in Magawisca's trial scene, when Magawisca petitions on her own behalf, that Sedgwick depicts this perceived political "threat" within women's petitions and effectively contains it. While the novel's preceding petitions work within the power structure, Magawisca's petition for liberty is substantially different. While she "prays" to the magistrates for her freedom, she "prays" for such rights without acknowledging her place in the Puritan chain of authority. Moreover, her performance of a supplicating posture when her words deny such deference makes her act of petitioning one of pure form, unreflective of hierarchies of authority. In the dramatic courtroom moment:

She paused—passed unresisted without the little railing that encompassed her, mounted the steps of the platform, and advancing to the feet of the Governor, threw back her mantle, and knelt before him. Her mutilated person, unveiled by this action, appealed to the senses of the spectators. Everell involuntarily closed his eyes, and uttered a cry of agony, lost indeed in the murmurs of the crowd. She spoke, and all again were as hushed as death. “Thou didst promise,” she said, addressing herself to Governor Winthrop, “to my dying mother, thou didst promise, kindness to her children. In her name, I demand of thee death or liberty.”

Everell sprang forward, and clasping his hands exclaimed, “In the name of God, liberty!”

The feeling was contagious, and every voice, save her judges, shouted “liberty!—liberty! grant the prisoner liberty!”

The Governor rose, waved his hand to command silence, and would have spoken, but his voice failed him; his heart was touched with the general emotion, and he was fain to turn away to hide tears more becoming to the man, than the magistrate. (293)

Preceded by forceful actions—she “passed unresisted,” “mounted,” “advanced,” and “threw back her mantle”—Magawisca’s petition is not a humble request couched in selfless religious language, but a political “demand” referring to her own nation. For Magawisca, then, the petition is an “unveiled” form refusing to cloak a radical request in the garb of humility on behalf of others and insisting on fulfillment of past promises. Moreover, when Magawisca throws back her mantle in this petition, she unveils and cites the absent presence that is the corporeal marker of her radical interposition to save Everell’s life. Even the audience’s response echoes the scene two hundred pages earlier when “The voice of nature rose from every heart, and responding to the justice of Magawisca’s claim, bade [Everell] ‘God speed!’” (93). Magawisca’s revolutionary plea for herself, like the speech of the most practiced Revolutionary orator, provokes a “contagious” sympathy, “touching” even the Governor’s heart, moving him to tears, and causing most of those who hear her to rally to her defense; Sedgwick writes that Magawisca’s words leave “in the breasts of a great majority of the audience, a strange contrariety of opinion and feelings. Their reason, guided by the best lights they possessed, deciding against her—the voice of nature crying out for her” (294). Here again allying sympathy with a kind of “true” voice, “the voice of nature,” Sedgwick makes a natural rights argument for Magawisca that she casts in “strange contrariety” to the Puritan “rational” legal system.⁴² Magawisca’s cry of

“death or liberty,” validated by the very political rhetoric of Patrick Henry, but rooted in a maternal promise and directed against the Puritan forefathers, destabilizes the white, patriarchal authority of the courtroom.

It is fascinating that Sedgwick caps the novel with an Indian woman’s petition for her own rights, rather than an interposition on behalf of others’ rights. Magawisca’s petition is a direct request for the redress of her own grievances, one made on Anglo-American principles of revolutionary rhetoric, insisting upon her own sovereignty and invoking a past contract; and it represents the threat for patriarchy of all women’s petitions, that they may one day move to speaking for themselves, obtaining political representation, if not self-representation. In this final scene, though, Sedgwick averts the revolutionary potential of women’s petitions by placing it within an impossible imaginary—an Indian woman, called unrealistic by some of the novel’s first reviewers, directly petitioning for her rights.⁴³ Magawisca’s exceptional otherness here diffuses anxieties about women’s political rights. And if othering Magawisca’s petition were not enough to dispel its implications, Sedgwick ultimately “adjourns” the potential attainment of these rights for both women and Indians. Just as Hope’s petition for Magawisca’s liberty is refused, Magawisca’s petition is shut down: the new ethical consensus set in motion by Magawisca’s speech is effectively arrested when “a man of metal to resist any fire” exploits a rhetoric of brotherhood and shouts: “I call upon you, my brethren . . . to put a sudden end to this confusion by the formal adjournment of our court” (293–94). The crowd’s potential collective action on Magawisca’s behalf is constrained by Puritan legal process. The confusion produced by an Indian woman’s revolutionary plea is contained. And the perceived “threat” of women’s voices to patriarchal authority, rendered both exceptional and transitory, is effectively eliminated. Magawisca is removed from the courtroom and taken to jail.

In proposing the submissive, apparently acceptable form of the petition for women’s political interposition, Sedgwick ran into its uncomfortable implications, that granting credence to women’s petitions by extension granted wider political rights to women and displaced Others, implications about which many of Sedgwick’s readers were also ambivalent and that perhaps required Sedgwick imaginatively to “adjourn” Magawisca’s petition in the novel. It is well known that Sedgwick, who recognized distinct roles for men and women and saw women chiefly as social and cultural arbiters, was uncomfortable about women’s full political rights and wary of overenthusiastic women’s rights activists.⁴⁴ Yet although Sedgwick does not depict the full col-

lective potential of Magawisca's petition, she does envision some transformative power for it. She also portrays how this power could be arrested—by authorities, in Hope's words, tending to "lose the matter in the manner" (147), and by patriarchs calling upon their "brethren" to adjourn court proceedings. In Magawisca's case, Sedgwick imagines a successful, if momentary, petition for a natural rights argument: it may not sway all of the elders, but it does affect Governor Winthrop and the rest of the courtroom, who are convinced of a "higher law" and larger good than that of the "letter of the law"—so much so that Gardiner and the magistrates must "gag" the discussion of Magawisca's "merits, and rights." Indeed, Magawisca's "gagged" petition becomes the necessary prelude, as in responses to the novel's preceding petitions, to more material action by Everell and Hope, who engineer her escape from prison. That is, Sedgwick indicates the importance of the petition as a preliminary form for defending the "rights of innocence." Through the failure of her protagonists' petitions, Sedgwick seems implicitly to censure patriarchal authority that silences petitions to preserve power for itself and that denies the higher justice of universal law, and in turn seems to endorse further, more strenuous interpositions—"lawless" but "successful" interpositions that look back to Magawisca's thrusting of her arm between her father's knife and Everell's neck. It is ultimately, however, in pushing these implications of petitioning—in placing the novel's most actualized petition in Magawisca's mouth and in writing the novel's most radical form of interposition into Magawisca's very limbs—that Sedgwick reveals both the expanse and the bounds of her own, and perhaps her era's, imagination.

Hope Leslie thus helps us understand the historical limitations to women's political discourse that would be articulated on the floor of Congress. In the month prior to the passage of the Indian Removal Act, concerns with women's political participation explicitly entered congressional conversations on petitioning when congressmen commented on the unthinking, deluded cooperation of women anti-removal petitioners to discount their credibility and to defend the administration's position on Indian removal. As detailed in the Thursday, April 15, 1830 entry, "Removal of the Indians," in Benton's *Debates of Congress*, Senator John Forsyth of Georgia echoes Sir Philip Gardiner, who casts Magawisca's courtroom testimony as "uttered malignities" threatening scandal (*Hope Leslie*, 289). Forsyth declares that the "ladies," among other petitioners, "have been the unresisting instruments of the artful and designing, and ministered to political malignity, while they believed themselves laboring in the cause of justice and humanity."⁴⁵ As if in a nonfictional fulfillment of the court's adjournment of

Magawisca's petitions, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act on May 28, 1830, authorizing the federal government to exchange lands west of the Mississippi for land held by Indians living east of the great river, setting off a chain of treaty violations with the Indians, and removing them, as *Hope Leslie* anticipated, "to the far western forest" and "the deep voiceless obscurity of those unknown regions" (339).

Such early efforts to dismiss women's petitions anticipated the gag rule, which attempted to silence their swelling tide.⁴⁶ In efforts to preserve unity in the context of debates over slavery, congressmen appealed to popular, forbidding attitudes about women's political participation, charged petitioners with intermeddling, and attempted to limit access to the political discourse that itself upheld the representative nature of the body politic, called into question by the petitions of women and those for whom they claimed to speak. Congress finally passed and renewed a gag rule at every congressional session between 1836 and 1844.⁴⁷ The gag rule ultimately transformed the right to petition to a diluted right to complain, without the reciprocal duty to respond; a "quiet" right without political efficacy; a right that was, to invoke Pynchon's response to Hope Leslie's petition on behalf of Nelema, "but the whistle of a bird." The focus in congressional debates on a particular "class of petitioners"—women—in both anti-removal and antislavery campaigns provided, in a very important respect, a smooth transition from one to another.⁴⁸ Women interposed in the form of petitions in both race-charged national issues, consequently eliciting a shift in attention from Indian removal and slavery to what congressmen attacked as women's "indecorous" political discourse.

While the gag rule, of course, legally transformed the right of petition and made it an increasingly diluted form of protest, the actual limit of women's petitions, as *Hope Leslie* had imagined, was not legal but ideological. It was the idea of women speaking for themselves that was difficult to imagine, not only for most congressmen, but also for many antebellum women. Catharine Beecher would express this notion when, during the escalation of the petitioning debates, she reconsidered her December 1829 "Circular," over which she had experienced a great deal of stress. In her "Essay on Slavery and Abolition with Reference to the Duty of American Females" (1837), Beecher writes:

If petitions from females will operate to exasperate; if they will be deemed obtrusive, indecorous, and unwise, by those to whom they are addressed; if they will increase, rather than diminish the evil which it is wished to remove; if they will be the opening wedge, that will tend eventually to bring females as petitioners and partisans into every political measure that may tend to injure and oppress their sex,

in various parts of the nation, and under the various public measures that may hereafter be enforced, then it is neither appropriate nor wise, nor right, for a woman to petition for the relief of oppressed females.⁴⁹

For Beecher, if women's petitions "will be the opening wedge" ushering women more fully into the political arena, then women should not petition. For Beecher, for Sedgwick, and for many of their contemporaries, the limits of petitioning were thus the limits of the imagination of revised gender roles. As such, concerns about gender would ultimately negotiate race-charged issues, from removal to slavery.

***Hope Leslie* as Historical Interposition**

While Sedgwick herself was not overtly political, *Hope Leslie's* engagement of petitioning had multiple implications for the Indian and Woman Questions. *Hope Leslie* proposed how women could use the petition to speak on behalf of racially-marked others and how a focus on their "presumptuous" and "indecorous" petitions could finally deflect the conversation away from the just treatment of Indians and to a concern with women's political speech. To be sure, the voicing or signing of a petition indicated the existence of a political subject with a voice, and women moved toward citizenship more through their petitions than through their congressional reception; they exercised their voices even if they fell on deaf ears, as evidenced by their continuing to submit petitions even after the gag rule was imposed. A gag can only be employed to silence a speaking subject; the invocation of the gag rule, like the adjournment of Magawisca's trial, evidences the destabilizing significance of these political subjects, despite their silencing. As imagined by *Hope Leslie*, women's petitions thus established an important preliminary, interventionary form of deferential yet destabilizing political discourse. What is more, Sedgwick's historical fiction itself is a mediatory form of women's writing, one couched in "humble" terms and drawing on the multiple discourses of history, religion, literature, and politics, helping us make sense of Sedgwick's complex position in American letters and early nineteenth-century American culture.

Hope Leslie itself highlights how fiction, occupying an intermediary position, was a form with its own possibilities and limits for women's interpositions in the nation's affairs. Aligning myself in this essay with Sedgwick's own stance in *Hope Leslie's* Preface that "we are confined not to the actual, but the possible," I would like to imagine that, in engaging the form of the petition for women's rhetorical interposi-

tions, Sedgwick herself “interposed” formally in not only American historiography but also American history, and that *Hope Leslie* both discursively reflected and helped to make possible the shift in women’s political activity over the decade (6). One of the most interesting things about *Hope Leslie* is how, in her Preface and throughout the novel, Sedgwick foregrounds history—even what she calls “genuine history”—as a representation of events from the writer’s point of view; Sedgwick herself self-consciously recasts traditional Puritan histories by “putting the chisel into the hands of truth [Magawisca’s], and giving it to whom it belonged” (53). As Sedgwick would have us believe, her historical fiction occupies a meta-historical space still rooted in historical events, yet transcends the particular consequences of these events; it not only reflects its historical context but also works across what we understand as historical periods to “stimulate” “our young countrymen . . . to investigate the early history of their native land” and to respond in perhaps unforeseeable ways—not only to re-make history, but also to help make history happen (6). “Chiseling” her own story, Sedgwick herself thereby “interposes” in her writing of *Hope Leslie*, merging historical and fictional forms of representation, and opening readers “not to the actual, but the possible.” Yet Sedgwick attempts to perform such a bold rewriting of history with humility, drawing on unassuming rhetoric to couch the politically radical act of writing historical fiction in humble terms: Sedgwick describes her literary form as “bound by all the laws of decorum” and as “humble history,” and she locates it between the “correctness” of “the compass and the rule,” and the “enchantments” of “the mighty master of fiction” (143–44). Sedgwick’s own form thus manipulates elements of the posture of petitioning as one means of “interposing”: an intervention that gained an audience through, but may have also been limited by, its deferential rhetorical stance. Accordingly, we might consider the sympathetic “content” of Sedgwick’s interposing form, like that of anti-removal petitions, as simultaneously constrained and released by her “form.” Sedgwick, like fictional and historical petitioners, occupied a position of mediation, merging religious and secular discourses, reconciling liberal ideals and early republican readers, and negotiating the authority of history and the license of fiction—a position that helps us to understand the tensions in Sedgwick’s work and that of other women writers of her era, yet a position that also allowed Sedgwick to deftly engage multiple discourses simultaneously.

A focus on the petition as one form among a constellation of interpositions in *Hope Leslie* finally helps us to “chisel” another new story. Because *Hope Leslie* creates a fictional world without legal constraint,

Sedgwick could “interpose” on the Indian Question—but without officially petitioning, without receiving the reprimand an actual petition would have engendered, without the need to render her “uttered malignities” as utterly apolitical as “the whistle of a bird.” To be sure, in the years following the gag rule, the petition became increasingly diluted as an effective means of protest. Yet, while the voices of petitioners would be dismissed as “but the whistle of a bird,” *Hope Leslie*’s “voice” can not be silenced. It is precisely from its rhetorically flexible *inter-position* on the boundary of petition and not-petition that *Hope Leslie* itself illuminates the ways in which fiction can blend discourses to gain imaginative and historical power.

Notes

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¹ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, *Hope Leslie; Or, Early Times in the Massachusetts*, ed. and intro. Mary Kelley (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987), 93, my emphasis. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

² This count multiplies when we cast the semantic net more widely to include Sedgwick’s analogous figurations such as *interceding*, *meddling*, *interfering*, *interpreting*, *interrupting*, or *stepping between*, terms that also recur throughout *Hope Leslie* and refer to a constellation of images for intervening between the innocent and Pequot or Puritan patriarchs. Noah Webster likewise defines *interpose* as “to place between, mediate” and lists separate entries for *interposal*, *interposition*, and *interposer*. *A Dictionary of the English Language* (Hartford: Goodwin, 1817), 176.

³ Several scholars have explored themes of republican citizenship and the legitimate resistance to authority in *Hope Leslie* and in Sedgwick’s work more broadly. See especially Susan Harris, “The Limits of Authority: Catharine Maria Sedgwick and the Politics of Resistance,” in *Catharine Maria Sedgwick: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Lucinda L. Damon-Bach and Victoria Clements (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press, 2003), 272–85. See also Gregory T. Garvey, “Risking Reprisal: Catharine Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* and the Legitimation of Public Action by Women,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 8 (1994), 287–98; Philip Gould, “Catharine Sedgwick’s ‘Recital’ of the Pequot War,” *American Literature* 66 (1994), 641–62; and Maria Karafilis, “Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*: The Crisis between Ethical Political Action and U. S. Literary Nationalism in the New Republic,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 12 (1998), 327–44.

⁴ Charles Buck, *Theological Dictionary, Containing Definitions of all Religious Terms, Etc.*, 5th American ed. (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1818), 383, my emphasis.

⁵ While Republican Motherhood and women's position as educators were, of course, other important grounds for women's citizenship, the significance of women's petitioning in attaining citizenship has been underestimated.

⁶ Gustavus Stadler, in "Magawisca's Body of Knowledge: Nation-Building in *Hope Leslie*," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 12 (1999), 41–56, reads Magawisca's lost arm as evidence of her position as a racialized figure mediating "public" and "private" spheres of individual and national identification, so that *Hope Leslie* "attempts to ensure a place for corporeality, for embodied struggle, in the history of the nation" (42). I aim to supplement Stadler's reading by locating Magawisca's "paternally administered amputation" (46) within the theme of "interposition," suggesting that Magawisca's body works in conjunction with other "forms" in *Hope Leslie* that convey a semiotics, and a politics, for what Sedgwick apparently viewed as justified intervention on behalf of others.

⁷ Most relevant to my interests are recent studies on U. S. women's petitioning in the fields of history and rhetoric: Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2003); Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle Against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999), 15–40; Alisse Suzanne Theodore, "A Right to Speak on the Subject": *The Development of Women's Political Expression in the United States* (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Maryland, 1999); and Zaeske, *Petitioning, Antislavery, and the Emergence of Women's Political Consciousness* (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997). While building on Theodore's and Zaeske's substantial rhetorical analyses, my work departs from theirs by bringing petitioning into the study of nineteenth-century American fiction.

⁸ Karen Woods Weierman, "Reading and Writing *Hope Leslie*: Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Indian 'Connections,'" *The New England Quarterly* 75 (2002), 415–44. On the novel's implications for Puritan historiography and historical romance, see Nina Baym, "Imaginary Histories," in *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1750–1860* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1995); Gould, "Catharine Sedgwick's 'Recital'"; Stephen Carl Arch, "Romancing the Puritans: American Historical Fiction in the 1820s," *Emerson Society Quarterly* 39 (1993), 107–132; Michael Davitt Bell, "History and Romance Convention in Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*," *American Quarterly* 22 (1970), 213–221.

⁹ Women's petitions involved complex racial politics; both fictional and historical petitioners assumed a potentially problematic authority over the racial others for whom they interposed. While a complete consideration of the racial dynamics of *Hope Leslie* is beyond the purview of this essay, this essay works to reframe questions about racial politics in the novel. In efforts of feminist scholarship to recuperate *Hope Leslie*, it has frequently been read as a work about Indian and women's rights, leading scholars to ask why Sedgwick herself was not more politically involved in these issues. Taking up the broader theme of interposition and the particular form of the petition compels us to begin by reading *Hope Leslie* not as a novel directly about

the Indian or Woman Questions, but as a novel engaging the question of how best to intervene in and engage the body politic within the context of these issues. And, in answer to that question, as a novel proposing a “form” whose “content” “hopes” for radical change but is intrinsically conservative. Indeed, questions of *how* best to intervene in political issues interested, and perhaps limited, Sedgwick throughout her life—most notably on the issue of slavery, which she opposed but only moderately, expressing reservations about the “rash,” “intemperate,” and ultimately divisive tone of radical abolitionists. CMS to Susan Channing, March 10, 1860, *Life and Letters of Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, ed. Mary E. Dewey (New York: Harper, 1871), 377, cited in Woods Weierman, “‘A Slave Story I Began and Abandoned’: Sedgwick’s Antislavery Manuscript,” in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Damon-Bach and Clements, 125.

¹⁰ The Leveler women, seeking increased democracy in government, organized several petitioning campaigns in England between 1641 and 1655, setting a precedent for women’s political activism. Zaeske, *Signatures*, 14–15.

¹¹ Indian Memorial, May 27, 1762, Lynch Collection, Stockbridge Library Historical Room, Stockbridge, Mass., cited in Woods Weierman, “Reading and Writing,” n. 18.

¹² Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “Slavery in New England,” *Bentley’s Miscellany* 34 (1853), 421–22; Henry Dwight Sedgwick, *The Practicability of the Abolition of Slavery: A Lecture, Delivered at the Lyceum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, February 1831* (New York: J. Seymour, 1831), 13–18; Arthur Silversmit, “Quok Walker, Mumbet, and the Abolition of Slavery in Massachusetts,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 25 (1968), 614–24. As historians have shown, Freeman’s appeal was submitted within the context of the Massachusetts legislature’s consideration of several other petitions on slavery.

¹³ Zaeske, *Signatures*, 23; Hershberger, “Mobilizing Women,” 25; Theodore, “*A Right to Speak*,” 4. Zaeske provides a useful historical overview of women’s petitioning in her first chapter, “The Unfortunate Word ‘Petition,’” 11–28, as a prelude to her examination primarily of women’s antislavery petitions. Although, as Zaeske observes, the women’s anti-removal petitioning campaign was relatively short-lived and involved fewer numbers of women than the antislavery campaign, it established an important U. S. precedent. Theodore’s examination of women’s anti-removal petitions further extends our account of U. S. women’s activism. See also Hershberger for more on the import of the antiremoval campaign in the history of U. S. popular politics.

¹⁴ Although my focus here is on women’s anti-removal petitions, Indians themselves submitted petitions against their own removal; these were often published in denominational periodicals.

¹⁵ I thank Irwin Streight for this observation.

¹⁶ Mary Kelley, ed. and intro., *The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick* (Boston: The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 16–17, 125–26. It is worth noting that Sedgwick’s autobiographical erasure of racial difference can also be seen reflected in Hope’s fantasy of Magawisca’s dwell-

ing with them at the end of *Hope Leslie*, a fantasy that is complicated when Magawisca, stressing the racial difference between them, refuses to become part of this “family” and “chooses” her removal (*Hope Leslie*, 330–33).

¹⁷ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, “Slavery in New England,” 418; and “Some pages of a slave story I began and abandoned,” Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers I, Massachusetts Historical Society, excerpt repr. in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Damon-Bach and Clements, 121. For more on this manuscript and Sedgwick’s antislavery views, see Woods Weierman, “A Slave Story” in *Critical Perspectives*, 122–38.

¹⁸ Henry Dwight Sedgwick, *The Practicability of the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: J. Seymour, 1831), 15–16.

¹⁹ Lyrics by Robert Robinson (1735–1790) and music by Nettleton (melody from A Repository of Sacred Music, Part II, 1813), *The Hymnal 1982*, according to the use of the Episcopal Church (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), Hymn 686.

²⁰ Sedgwick’s service began with the “deserving poor” (impoverished Sunday school children, homeless orphans, or poor women seeking employment through the House of Industry) and ended with her position from 1848–1863 as First Directress of the Home for Discharged Female Convicts (later incorporated as the Women’s Prison Association and Home), service that involved Sedgwick’s taking “fallen” women into her own home. Jenifer Banks, “‘From Home to Home’: Sedgwick’s Study of Deviance,” in *Critical Perspectives*, ed. Damon-Bach and Clements, 234–47. See also Lori Ginsberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990) and Lonna M. Malsheimer, “Daughters of Zion: New England Roots of American Feminism,” *The New England Quarterly* 50 (1977), 484–504.

²¹ To Kate Minot, May 21, 1848, in *The Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick*, ed. Mary Dewey (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 306–7.

²² Sympathetic feeling motivates and upholds Everell’s, Magawisca’s, and Hope’s interpositions throughout the novel. On Sedgwick’s ambivalent use of sympathy in rewriting history in *Hope Leslie*, see Dana Nelson, “Sympathy as Strategy,” in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press), 191–202.

²³ For a full consideration of higher law jurisprudence in nineteenth-century American literature, see Gregg D. Crane, *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002).

²⁴ See Pss. 20, 34 and 1 John 5:15, Revised Standard and King James Versions. Zaeske, *Petitioning*, 4; Noah Webster, *A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language* (New Haven: Sidney’s Press for Hudson, and Goodwin of Hartford, 1806); Charles Buck, *Theological Dictionary*, 403. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., characterizes this sense of *petition* as “a supplication or prayer; an entreaty; *esp.* a

solemn and humble prayer to the Deity, or to a sovereign or superior."

²⁵ Esther 4:16, RSV. King *Ahasuerus* (in Hebrew) is also known as *Xerxes*, the transliteration of the Greek form of the Persian name *Khshayarshan* (*The NIV Study Bible*, New International Version, ed. Kenneth Barker [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985], 720). Through her petition, Esther's people were spared, and Ahasuerus/Xerxes issued an edict granting them the right to assemble and to defend themselves (Esther 8:11). Other important, but perhaps less familiar, Biblical women petitioners include the five daughters of Zelophehad, who collectively petitioned Moses for property after their father's death (Num. 27), and Hannah, who petitioned God for a son and is sometimes credited with originating silent prayer (1 Sam. 1); thanks to Alicia Ostriker for these observations.

²⁶ Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 51. Petitioning gained unprecedented popularity during the years surrounding the English Revolution, a transatlantic context to which Everell and Sir Philip refer when debating the question of "declar[ing] for King or Parliament," referring to Parliament's use of petitioning to gain popular rights from the king and the events that established the right of petition in British law (*Hope Leslie*, 125). For an account of the events affecting the right of petition in seventeenth-century England, see Norman B. Smith, "'Shall Make No Law Abridging . . .': An Analysis of the Neglected, but Nearly Absolute, Right of Petition," *University of Cincinnati Law Review* 54 (1986), 1153–96. See also Stephen A. Higginson, "A Short History of the Right to Petition Government for the Redress of Grievances," *Yale Law Journal* 96 (1986), 142–66; Zaeske, *Signatures*, 11–28.

²⁷ Higginson, "A Short History," 145–55; Smith, "'Shall Make No Law,'" 1171–73.

²⁸ Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1978); Maier, *American Scripture*. See also Smith, who notes that the founding fathers did not claim that petitioning itself had been punished, but that colonists' petitions had not been responded to favorably (1174).

²⁹ U. S. Constitution, Bill of Rights, art. 1.

³⁰ Higginson, "A Short History," 157–58.

³¹ Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Slavery in New England," 421.

³² These definitions are drawn from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed.

³³ "But one, who with a spirit-glance / Hath moved her country's heart, // And bade, from dim oblivion's trance / Poor Magawiska start, // Hath won a fame, whose blossom rare / Shall fear no blighting sky, // Whose lustrous leaf grow fresh and fair, / Though Stockbridge bowl be dry." Lydia H. Sigourney, "The Stockbridge Bowl," *Scenes In My Native Land* (Boston: James Munroe and Co., 1845), 201. In fact considered "the queen of American letters" in the first half of the nineteenth century, Sedgwick was extremely successful both popularly and criti-

cally, and by the 1830s most critics ranked her with Cooper, Irving, and Bryant. Seth Curtis Beach, *Daughters of the Puritans* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1905), 1. *Hope Leslie* received almost unanimously positive reviews at home and in England, where Jacksonian Americans looked for literary approval. For a singularly tepid review, see *Western Monthly Review* 1 (1828), 289–95. For warm reviews, see *The Athanaeum* 411 (London, September 1835), 693–94; *The North American Review* 26.59 (April 1828), 403–20; and *The Ladies' Magazine* 2 (1829), 238. As Sarah J. Hale's *Woman's Record* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855) put it, *Hope Leslie* “continued to be [Sedgwick's] most popular tale; and, indeed, no novel written by an American, except, perhaps, the early works of Cooper, ever met with such success” (777). While the bulk of early twentieth-century literary critics neglected Sedgwick's work, *Hope Leslie* has experienced a critical revival since Mary Kelley's 1987 edition of the novel and her 1993 publication of Sedgwick's autobiography and journal. For additional biographical materials, see Mary Kelley, *The Power of Her Sympathy*; Edward Halsey Foster, *Catharine Maria Sedgwick* (New York: Twayne, 1974); and Mary Dewey, *Life and Letters*.

³⁴ Alisse Theodore, email to author, January 28, 2003. Given her ambivalent position on women's political activism, it might be surprising if Sedgwick had signed an anti-removal petition. Yet, interestingly, Sedgwick *did* sign a petition for international copyright law later in the decade, indicating that, at least by then, she did not altogether oppose the idea of women's petitioning and perhaps saw it as appropriate political action on certain issues (“Memorial of a Number of Citizens of New York, Praying the passage of an international copyright law,” April 24, 1838, *Cong. Rec.*, 25th Cong., 2nd sess., S. Doc. 399, S. Rept., vol. 5, serial 318, 1–4). I thank Melissa Homestead for calling this to my attention (email to author, January 17, 2003).

³⁵ Biographical materials reveal Sedgwick's various connections with women who opposed Indian removal. Mary E. Dewey, *Life and Letters of Catharine M. Sedgwick*, 187–88; Carolyn L. Karcher, Introduction to *Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians*, by Lydia Maria Child (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1998), xi; Annie Fields, ed., *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1897), 62; Foster, *Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, 20; Dewey, *Life and Letters*, 26, 114–15.

³⁶ [Catharine E. Beecher?], “Circular, Addressed to benevolent Ladies of the U. States,” *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion's Herald* (New York), no. 173 (Friday, December 25, 1829), emphasis in original. Beecher reflects in her *Educational Reminiscences and Suggestions* (New York: J. B. Ford and Co., 1874) on a conversation about saving the Indians with Jeremiah Evarts (commissioner of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) that prompted her and other women of Hartford, including Sigourney, to write the circular, distributed through a network of benevolent societies throughout the country (62–64). See also Hershberger, “Mobilizing Women,” 24–25; Jeremiah Evarts, *Cherokee Removal: The “William Penn” Essays and Other Writings*, ed. and intro. by Francis Paul Prucha (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1981).

³⁷ The “Memorial of Sundry Ladies of Hallowell, Maine, praying that certain Indian tribes may not be removed from their present places of abode” was the first women's petition on behalf of Indians, signed by 61 women, submitted to

Congress on January 8, 1830, and endorsed January 18, 1830. Theodore, "*A Right to Speak*," 8. Among those who participated was Harriet Beecher Stowe, a student and teacher at her sister's Hartford Female Seminary from 1824 to 1834. Joan D. Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), 58–60. Angelina Grimké and her sister Sarah Moore Grimké opposed Indian Removal, but it appears to be inconclusive whether they petitioned against it or not. "Mobilizing Women," par. 14; Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels against Slavery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 92.

³⁸ The Indian Question that culminated in the argument over Cherokee removal from Georgia had been intensely discussed in public from at least the mid-1820s, when Georgia began making claims to Indian Territory within the state, to 1838, when Cherokee removal officially began. See Jackson's defense of removing the Southeast Indians beyond the Mississippi River in his first Annual Message to Congress on December 8, 1829, in *Documents of United States Indian Policy*, 2nd ed., expanded, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1975, 1990), 47–48. Jackson's proposals to move the Southeast Indians in Alabama and Georgia were not new, but removal climaxed during his administration, as did anti-removal discourse, which particularly flourished in denominational periodicals of the 1820s and 1830s. For more on removal and its rhetorics, see Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women"; Lucy Maddox, *Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs* (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991); Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975).

³⁹ "Memorial of the Ladies of Steubenville, Ohio, Against the forcible removal of Indians without the limits of the United States," February 15, 1830, *Cong. Rec.*, 21st Cong., 1st sess., H. Doc. 209, H. Rept., vol. 2, no. 176–298, serial 200, 1–2. The Steubenville petition, though the second submitted to Congress from a group of women, was the first petition submitted to the House of Representatives, where, according to congressional records, the bulk of the debate over them occurred. In addition to the Steubenville petition, my analysis includes two more petitions signed solely by women, one signed by men, and one that is undistinguishable by gender: "Memorial of Certain Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, Praying that the Indians may be protected in their rights, &c.," January 7, 1830, *Cong. Rec.*, 21st Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 25, S. Docs., vol. 1, no. 1–40, serial 203, 1–4; "Memorial of the Ladies of Burlington, New Jersey, Praying that Congress would protect the Indians in their rights, and in the possession of their lands," February 23, 1830, *Cong. Rec.*, 21st Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 66, S. Docs., vol. 2., no. 50–146, serial 193, 1–2; "Memorial of Ladies, Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, Praying That the Indians may be protected in their rights, and in the possession of their lands," March 3, 1830, *Cong. Rec.*, 21st Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 76, S. Docs., vol. 2, no. 50–146, serial 193, 1–2; "Memorial of Inhabitants of Burlington County, New Jersey, Praying that the Indians may be protected in their rights by the Government," March 3, 1830, *Cong. Rec.* 21st Cong., 1st sess., S. Doc. 77, S. Docs., vol. 2, no. 50–146, serial 193, 1. Theodore ("*A Right to Speak*") examines numerous petitions submitted by women against Indian removal, many of which are available at the National Archives. Some of these petitions, however, such as the ones under discussion here, were ordered to be printed and were filed congres-

sional documents, available in the U.S. Serial Sets. The largest single petition came from Pittsburgh, where 670 women signed it and submitted it to the Senate (Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women," 27).

⁴⁰ From a similar position of respectful entreaty, but one that likewise contains the seed of a more radical argument, see "Memorial of the Ladies of Burlington County, New Jersey" (February 23, 1830), 2.

⁴¹ The bulk of the anti-removal petitions justified women's right to enter the discussion of Indian removal. Theodore makes the case that petitioning was the first civil right that American women collectively justified and achieved. While there were some similarities in men's and women's rhetorical strategies, women's early arguments, in focusing on their status, duties, and influence as women, largely differed from those of their male counterparts, which were mainly historical and legal. Not until after 1835 does women's rhetoric shift, taking on the more legalistic arguments of their male counterparts. Theodore, "*A Right to Speak*," 4, 52, 58–59, 82–83.

⁴² Crane's *Race, Citizenship, and Law in American Literature* is again apt here, as it recounts the higher law arguments made by nineteenth-century literary and cultural figures in an effort to sway the nation's "ethical consensus" and revise the nation's higher law jurisprudence. This court scene makes just such an argument in an attempt to sway the courtroom through Magawisca's access to ethical claims and revolutionary rhetoric.

⁴³ *Western Monthly Review* 1 (1828), 295.

⁴⁴ Kelley, *Power of Her Sympathy*, 4. Sedgwick was certainly ambivalent about women's political involvement, and her belief that literature has a moral purpose motivated her writing. As Nina Baym argues ("Imaginary Histories"), Sedgwick's ambivalence about political activism supports the notion that she did less to propose a subversive multicultural sensibility than to reinforce the aristocratic values she inherited; and certainly Sedgwick's elitism influenced her work. Yet it was also held in tension with an egalitarian impulse and a commitment to justice. For good discussions of these tensions in *Hope Leslie*, see especially Dana Nelson, "Sympathy as Strategy" and Judith Fetterley, "My sister! My sister!": The Rhetoric of Catharine Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*," *American Literature* 70 (1998), 491–516.

⁴⁵ Benton, *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856*, 10: 535.

⁴⁶ Just as women's anti-removal petitions preceded and overlapped their abolitionist activism, the congressional reception of anti-removal petitions forecasted that of antislavery petitions, which swelled in the mid-1830s. See Zaeske, *Signatures* and Theodore, "*A Right to Speak*."

⁴⁷ In May 1836, largely in response to massive numbers of antislavery petitions, the 25th Congress approved, by large margins, three resolutions to silence the petitions by "receiving" them but sending them to the table without consideration. These resolutions, effective through July 1836 and called the Pinckney gag, held that Congress had no power to interfere with slavery in the states, that Congress should

not interfere with slavery in the District of Columbia, and that all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers at all relating to the subject of slavery or the abolition of slavery would be tabled without any further action, without being printed or referred to committee. They culminated in the 1840 House Rule that prohibited petitions from being introduced at all; together, these resolutions and rules became known as the gag rule over the period from 1836–1844.

⁴⁸ As Representative John Quincy Adams (MA) suggested in his famous “Speech Upon the Right of the People, Men and Women, to Petition” (1838), occupying the mornings of House proceedings from June 16 to July 7, 1838, anti-removal and antislavery petitions were importantly linked in the House’s “systematic suppression” of both. Adams recognized the connections between the responses to anti-removal petitions and to other kinds of petitions, outlining how the “*encroaching character of this system of suppression . . . [was] gradually spreading and absorbing in its despotic interdict almost every subject of petition, and almost every class of petitioners [Adams’ emphasis].*” In the course of defending abolitionists’ right to petition in the debate over the annexation of Texas, Adams defended women’s right to petition and virtually proposed women’s suffrage, devoting the mornings between June 26 and 30 to addressing women as yet “another class” slighted by the gag rule. Other “classes” included slaves and Indians, but Adams was pronounced out of order when discussing slaves’ rights. John Quincy Adams, “Speech of John Quincy Adams, of Massachusetts, Upon the Right of the People, Men and Women, to Petition; on the Freedom of Speech and of Debate in the House of Representatives of the United States; on the Resolutions of Seven State Legislatures, and the Petitions of more than One Hundred Thousand Petitioners, Relating to the Annexation of Texas to this Union,” June 16–July 7, 1838 (Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1838), 55–56, 57, 64–65.

⁴⁹ Catharine E. Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (1837; Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 103–4. Taking an opposing position on women’s petitioning were Sigourney and Angelina Grimké, who publicly refuted Beecher, declaring that if women did not have the right to vote, they at least had the right to petition. Herschberger, “Mobilizing Women,” 34–35; Angelina Grimké, *Letters to Catherine E. Beecher, in Reply to an Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* (1838; New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 112.