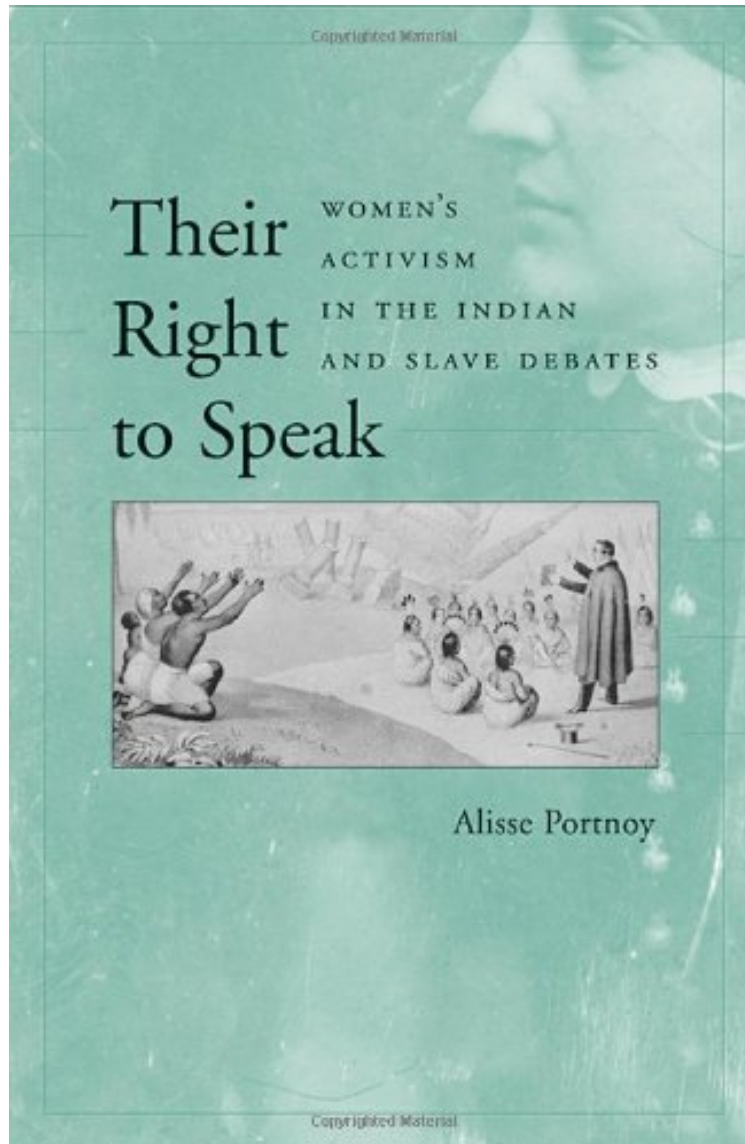


Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates

Alisse Portnoy

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Alisse Portnoy : Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in

the Indian and Slave Debates:

When Alisse Portnoy recovered petitions from the early 1830s that nearly 1,500 women sent to the U.S. Congress to protest the forced removal of Native Americans in the South, she found the first instance of women's national, collective political activism in American history. In this groundbreaking study, Portnoy links antebellum Indian removal debates with crucial, simultaneous debates about African Americans--abolition of slavery and African colonization--revealing ways European American women negotiated prohibitions to make their voices heard. Situating the debates within contemporary, competing ideas about race, religion, and nation, Portnoy examines the means by which women argued for a "right to speak" on national policy. Women's participation in the debates was constrained not only by gender but also by how these women--and the men with whom they lived and worshipped--imagined Native and African Americans as the objects of their advocacy and by what they believed were the most benevolent ways to aid the oppressed groups. Cogently argued and engagingly written, this is the first study to fully integrate women's, Native American, and African American rights debates.

In a delightfully written work, Alisse Portnoy examines the debates over women's petitioning in the larger context of Indian removal, colonization, and abolition politics. She provides a new and persuasive interpretation of the now classic debate between Catharine Beecher and Angelina Grimké over antislavery activism. In fine detail and with great sophistication, she combines close readings of particular texts -pamphlets, petitions, novels, slave ads -with a sweeping narrative of social movements and national policies regarding Indians and African Americans. *Their Right to Speak* is a tour de force. (Nancy A. Hewitt, Rutgers University) By situating women's collective activism in the context of the problematic public policy issues of Indian removal, colonization, and the emergence of abolitionism, *Their Right to Speak* is that rare book in which the whole is far more than the sum of its parts. This first-rate study makes significant contributions to the history of antebellum reform, political culture in the Jacksonian era, and rhetorical analysis. (Michael A. Morrison, Purdue University) Alisse Portnoy's excellent book developed as an attempt to resolve a contradiction. In 1830, Catharine Beecher quietly organized women to petition the federal government, protesting the removal of Native Americans in Georgia and Alabama. In 1837, she very prominently denounced women's involvement in antislavery petitioning. This apparent contradiction in Beecher's understanding of woman's appropriate role turns out to be a rich vein for scholarly analysis. Portnoy argues that only by studying the rhetoric of Indian removal, African colonization, and the immediate antislavery movement together can we fully understand the politics of the movements themselves. In addition, she argues that studies of women's political activism structured by gender are insufficient, since they exclude analysis of the rhetorical constructions available to women...Portnoy is particularly interested in how activists used different rhetorical constructions to serve different goals and justify different activities. However, her provocative arguments about reconnecting the study of Indian removal, colonization, and the immediate antislavery movement, and her recentering of debates about women's role in the broader political context of the era, make this an important book for historians as well. (Beth A. Salerno *American Historical* 2006-12-01) Alisse Portnoy's *Their Right to Speak* [is] an exemplary interdisciplinary analysis at the juncture of historical, rhetorical, and feminist studies...Engagingly written and persuasively argued, this is a valuable book for scholars in multiple fields. (Dalia Kandiyoti *American Literature*) *Their Right to Speak* marks a meaningful addition to the scholarship of the period. In persuasively positioning women's activism within the context of Indian removal, colonization efforts, and the antislavery movement, Portnoy enables readers to understand with even greater depth the national role of Beecher and Grimké--and how their use of gendered arguments can be seen in light of broader motivations and ongoing rhetorical strategies. (Bruce Mills *Women and Social Movements in the United States*) About the Author Alisse Portnoy is Associate Professor of English Language and Literature and Faculty Associate in the Program in American Culture, University of Michigan.