



Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists  
Paderborn University, Germany

## *Equality of the Races* in Lydia Maria Child (1802–1880)

Lydia L. Moland  
Colby College

The equality of the races was a cornerstone of Lydia Maria Child's abolitionist philosophy. In *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (Child 1833), she writes that "[t]he intellectual inferiority of the negroes is a common, though most absurd apology, for personal prejudice" (155). She devotes two chapters to proving black Americans to be the intellectual and moral equals of their white compatriots. She establishes her claims through African history and through examples of black American mathematicians, physicians, political theorists, and poets. Against arguments that those of African descent were indifferent to freedom and so deserving of enslavement, she writes: "By thousands and thousands, these poor people have died for freedom. They have stabbed themselves for freedom—jumped into the waves for freedom—starved for freedom—fought like very tigers for freedom!" (180).

Child was also a lifelong defender of Native Americans. In her novel *Hobomok* and in children's stories, she elicited sympathy for the abuse suffered by Native Americans. In "An Appeal for the Indians" (1860) she argues that in some respects, Native Americans are "decidedly superior to white men." "The Indians," she reports, "never broke a treaty, and the white man never kept one" (1997c: 91). She asserts their right to defend themselves. "How," she asks, "can we blame the Indians for fighting, when we ourselves should have fought with half the provocation?" (1997c: 86).

At a time when many white Americans easily justified both slavery and the genocide of Native Americans, Child's position was bracingly progressive. Nevertheless, her vision was assimilationist: the success of other races depends on their ability to become civilized by European standards. Native Americans, she for instance writes, are "simply younger members of the same great human family, who need to be protected, instructed and encouraged, till they are capable of appreciating and sharing all our advantages." This position limits the potential of her arguments.

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