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Deborah Logan

**Harriet Martineau and the Martyr  
Age of the United States**

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Deborah Logan

## Harriet Martineau and the Martyr Age of the United States

The accident of my arriving in America in the dawning hour of the great conflict accounts for the strange story I have had to tell about myself.<sup>1</sup>

She was born to be a destroyer of slavery, in whatever form, in whatever place, all over the world, wherever she saw or thought she saw it.<sup>2</sup>

As one of the most prolific writers of the nineteenth-century, Harriet Martineau observed with characteristic candour that there was a great deal to be said, and that she was more or less the person to say it. Included among her many literary and political interests is her lifelong fascination with the theory and practice of the American 'experiment' as outlined in its Declaration of Independence and its Constitution: individual freedom, social equality, and political representation. From the travel journals published as a result of her 1834–36 American tour to the hundreds of *Daily News* leaders and periodical articles about the Civil War and related issues written over a span of thirty years, Martineau's commitment to 'my dearly-beloved Americans' is central to her identity as a writer.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, her American experiences early established the ideological basis for a body of work guided by her desire to eradicate slavery in its various forms: racial slavery, seen in her abolition-themed writings; sexual slavery, illustrated by her focus on world-wide oppressions of women; and social slavery, demonstrated by her aim to educate the working classes about the forces creating and perpetuating their economic

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<sup>1</sup> *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, ed. Gaby Weiner, 2 vols (London: Virago, 1983) 2: 61. All quotations from the Autobiography are cited by volume and page, as are those from her *Retrospect of Western Travel* (London: Saunders and Ottley, 1838, three volumes) and *How to Observe Morals and Manners* (London: Knight, 1838).

<sup>2</sup> Florence Nightingale to John Chapman, September 29, 1876, quoted in Chapman, Maria Weston, *Memorials* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1877) 479.

<sup>3</sup> Harriet Martineau to unknown recipient, NLScot, ms 7261, f.58.