Briefing Topic: Women's Rights in Victorian Britain
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This briefing will explore topics related to women’s rights in Victorian Britain. There are two main goals of this briefing. One is to inform the audience about who the Victorian woman was, and what challenges she faced. The second is to connect the issue of Victorian women’s rights to today’s world, specifically in the United States. The briefing will make contemporary connections throughout the presentation. Below are brief summaries of the topics which will be discussed this morning:

Women and Education:
- Many upper-class women were able to contribute to the education movement, despite the negative influences that they may have received from men in their childhood or adulthood.
- Women like Emily Davies and Elizabeth Wolstenholme spearheaded the education movement and used their different backgrounds to influence others through letters and public journals.

Women and Chartism:
- The history of Chartism is typically studied in a black and white manner with class acting as the prioritized identity factor. Despite this, Chartism played an incredible role in getting women involved in the political arena and many Chartist women went on to advocate for female suffrage.

Women and Literature:
- The portion of literature used for analysis mostly focuses on women’s periodicals and journals as these are the sources that most directly tie to women’s fight for equality in Victorian Britain.
- The advancement of women’s rights in Victorian Britain is therefore tied to, and in a way, a result of the periodicals that women of the time were producing.

Separate Spheres:
- The doctrine of separate spheres dominated notions of Victorian morality. The private sphere consisted of the home and was the woman’s domain while the public sphere included everything outside the home, such as business and politics, and was meant to be the man’s domain.

Aristocratic Women:
- Aristocratic women of the Victorian Era were not allowed to work, it was seen to be unladylike and the opposite of what a man would want in a wife.
- Once they got married, which was their highest goal in life, they were in charge of running the household and directing the education of their children to further their children's social standing in life.

Working-Class Women Workers:
- Working-class women worked in factories, in the home, on the streets, in agriculture, and even in mines. Their work was onerous, and many workplaces posed health risks.
- Men objected to women in the workforce because they they disliked the competition, and believed the women’s role was in the home, middle class moralists echoed these sentiments.
- Moralists Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth wrote extensively about working-class women and the challenges they faced.

Women in the Colonies:
- The position of women in British colonies was often used to justify imperial conquest
- In India, this conquest took the form of education, changing the lives of Indian women and their perspectives on agency

Women’s Suffrage:
- Since women were explicitly prohibited from voting in 1832 with the First Reform Act, female chartists and later suffragists formed influential organizations to lobby for female enfranchisement.
- Facing opposition from men as well as women, it was not until 1918, after the First World War, that women above the age of 30 were granted the vote.