

## CHAPTER 2

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# First Wave Feminism: Fighting for the Vote

IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE A WHITE, middle-class woman living in the United States two hundred years ago, well before members of the first wave of the women's movement started agitating for women's rights. What would your life have been like?

For starters, you would have had a limited education, more than likely attending school for only a handful of years. At school, you would have learned to read, write, and do arithmetic; you would also have studied needlework and other domestic arts since one of the purposes of education for your sex was to teach you to be a good homemaker. Unless you attended an exclusive northeastern seminary, such as those run by Sarah Pierce, Emma Willard, Catharine Beecher, or Mary Lyon, you would not have studied subjects such as history, geography, classics, French, mathematics, or the natural or physical sciences. If you were lucky enough to attend such an academy, your schooling would have ended once you graduated; no colleges were open to females until Oberlin admitted women in 1837.

If you desired more education, you were viewed with suspicion and called a "bluestocking," a derisive term for an intellectual woman who wanted freedoms beyond those her role as wife and mother permitted her. Brainy women faced ostracism because, according to prevailing beliefs, their intellectual efforts sapped them of the energy their uteruses would need to function. Proper women were expected to adhere to the four tenets of what the historian Barbara Welter has referred to as the "cult of true womanhood": piety, purity, domesticity,

and submissiveness. According to this code of conduct, your virtue was measured in terms of your religious devotion, your sexual purity, your excellence as a homemaker, and your willingness to defer to the men in your life. If you deviated from the norms of this cult of domesticity, you were considered an outcast.

Although you were deemed more spiritual than your fathers, husbands, and brothers, your sex made you ineligible not just for the ministry but for virtually all public work in the church. You were expected to live a quiet, domestic life away from the corrupting influence of the public realm. Indeed, since your education was minimal, you would not be able to find much lucrative work in any field, and careers not just in ministry but in medicine and law would be closed to you. If your husband died and you did need to earn money, you might be able to find low-paying work as a teacher, housekeeper, or seamstress.

Once you were married, you would lose your legal identity, as you gave up your “maiden” name to become Mrs. John Doe. Under what is referred to as coverture, your civil identity would vanish, and you would no longer be able to own property, including any wages you earned. You would not be able to sue or to enter into contracts, either. If you were a single woman, you had more legal rights than a married one, but society looked down on unattached women, scorning them as “spinsters.”

After your marriage, you would relinquish your virginity, formerly your most prized possession, and your body would no longer belong to you. You would be expected to respond to your husband’s sexual desires; you were thought to have no sexual appetites of your own. Because reliable birth control did not exist, you would be pregnant often: The average woman in 1800 had around seven children.

As a married woman, you would be expected to submit to your husband’s rules, obeying his commands and accepting his punishments. Even if your husband beat you, it would be extremely difficult to secure a divorce; if you were lucky enough to end an abusive marriage, very likely your husband would gain custody of your children.

And if you disagreed with any of the preceding customs and rules,

you wouldn't be able to do much to change them since you would not be able to vote. As a result of having no representation in the legislature, you would have to obey laws whose creators you had no role in electing.

If you were a white woman of lesser economic means, you were expected to work, and the ideals of the cult of domesticity had less applicability to you. If you lived on a farm, for instance, you spent most of your waking hours performing outdoor tasks, such as working in vegetable gardens, tending dairies, and caring for poultry, and completing endless domestic chores, such as spinning, weaving, and sewing; making butter and cheese; and salting, smoking, and drying meat. Because such work usually led only to subsistence, not income, when textile factories sprang up in towns such as Lowell, Massachusetts, they attracted you away from the farm with the promise of earning money to send back to your cash-poor family.

If you were a working-class woman living in one of the growing cities on the East Coast, you had few ways to earn money. If you were married, you might take in lodgers to make ends meet. If you were a single woman, you might enter domestic service; many Irish women followed this route when they immigrated to the United States. If you were a free woman of color, you had few other employment opportunities besides domestic labor.

If you were a female member of a matrilineal Indian tribe—and approximately two-thirds of Native American tribes were—the work you did, and not the virtues you displayed, gained you respect in your community. In charge of food production, you made decisions about planting, harvesting, and food processing; because your culture was matrilineal, you lived with your parents' family after you married. Yet, your status in this female-centered society was to be short-lived: As disease decimated indigenous populations and as remaining native peoples moved away from the eastern seaboard, fewer and fewer Native American women survived to experience such equality.

While opportunities were constrained for white and indigenous women, things were markedly worse for their black sisters. If you

were a black woman in the early nineteenth century, chances are you were a slave. As a slave, you were not educated since you were valued principally as a body that performed manual labor and produced offspring. In fact, in many places, the law forbade teaching slaves to read. Also illegal were slave marriages: Even if male and female slaves joined together in matrimony, the law did not recognize these unions, and slave owners could—and did—separate wives from their husbands and children when estates were sold and property was dispersed.

Although some white people sympathized with your condition as a slave, to many whites, you did not qualify as a “true” woman because of your alleged lack of sexual purity. If your white master impregnated you, the stigma of illegitimacy adhered not to him but to you; as a black woman, you were seen as sexually available and promiscuous.

Although we might expect all women to chafe against such limited opportunities, many white, middle-class women felt empowered through their rule in their homes; many gained status as arbiters of their family’s piety, morality, and purity and earned their loved ones’ respect through their skills as nurses and domestic managers. Others felt that, because women did not participate in the “dirty” world of commerce that was taking hold in the early nineteenth century, they were morally and spiritually elevated, even exalted. Yet, some people—usually women with advanced education and sometimes with economic and social privilege—did question women’s status in society. One such person was Englishwoman Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published in 1792. A witness to the French Revolution and a believer in Enlightenment ideals such as democracy and the rights of man, Wollstonecraft questioned not just the tyranny of monarchy but men’s tyranny within the family, desiring women to have power over themselves. In her *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft urged her white, middle-class readers, both male and female, to provide identical educations for boys and girls. Wollstonecraft blamed women’s lack of social status on their inferior schooling; instead of being educated to be the equals of men, women were taught to use their beauty and feminine charms to entrap men in marriage. In contrast, Wollstonecraft believed that women

should learn how to support themselves. Although Wollstonecraft suggested that women might “be physicians as well as nurses” or “study politics,” her principal aim was to correct an educational system that created a class of frivolous women. Perhaps as much as anything else, she wanted to see women trained to be responsible mothers and thoughtful wives. Although some freethinking men and women admired her views, the public attacked Wollstonecraft for her radical ideas, referring to her as a “hyena in petticoats.”

Women such as Wollstonecraft and the American transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, whose *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1844) also advocated women’s access to education and jobs, used their writing to convince the public of the constrained social roles available to women. Other women, however, took a different approach, working to reform social institutions through organized activist work. As a result of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century, white, middle-class women began to gain more public acceptance in the church. Because this religious movement emphasized emotional conversion experiences as opposed to the doctrine promoted by highly educated ministers, women gained power in churches and decided to act on their moral feelings by creating benevolent and missionary societies that would help the poor. Some women moved from benevolent organizations to temperance and antislavery work. This was particularly true of the women who were involved in the abolition movement, who, fueled by their religious beliefs, saw their work as a way to save the souls of white slave owners and their black slaves. Because of their sex and their roles as mothers, female members of the antislavery movement also felt great sympathy with black female slaves, whose lives were frequently violated by the white men who raped them and separated them from their husbands and children.

However, in spite of their passionate commitment to the cause, women were typically excluded from antislavery groups; as a result, they formed associations of their own, such as the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Doubly excluded were free black women, who were generally barred from groups run by both

## Outlawing “Demon Rum”

Even before they got involved in the antislavery movement, many women’s rights activists fought for temperance, the movement to outlaw the sale of alcohol. It seemed like a natural cause for women—after all, under the influence of alcohol, men could squander an entire paycheck and, worse, physically abuse their wives and children. It was thus certainly in the interest of women to limit men’s access to intoxicating spirits. The women who did temperance work were usually white; some were middle class, while others were poor or working class.

Although people had been working for liquor reform since the 1820s, women became more involved in the temperance movement in the 1870s, when an evangelical “crusade” against alcohol emerged in the Midwest and caught on in towns and villages throughout the country. Women banded together, marched to local taverns, and knelt down in prayer, asking saloon owners to close their doors. Perhaps the most famous of these crusaders was Carrie Nation, who used her imposing stature—she was reportedly six feet tall—to her advantage, bursting into bars and smashing windows, mirrors, and liquor bottles to communicate her distaste for “demon rum.”

While barkeepers often complied with the crusaders’ requests, saloons quickly reopened, and women wanted a more permanent organization devoted to temperance. To fill this need, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was organized in 1874, with Annie Wittenmyer as

white women and black men; in response, black women created their own antislavery organizations, such as the Manhattan Abolition Society and the Colored Female Anti-Slavery Society. From all of these groups, black and white women learned a great deal about activism: They developed strategies for organizing, they learned to persuade people about the righteousness of their cause, they asked people to sign petitions, and they raised funds. They also learned more about women’s unequal social status than they might have expected to.

The experience of the Grimké sisters illustrates the convergence of activism on behalf of slaves and women. Born into a prominent slaveholding family from South Carolina, Sarah Grimké and her

its president and Frances Willard as its corresponding secretary. Willard, who led the organization from the late 1870s to the late 1890s, had a particular genius for involving women in all kinds of activism; by establishing “departments” in the WCTU, she created a way for women to perform everything from educational and prison reform to public health and suffrage work. In this way, women who ordinarily would not have been suffrage workers became part of the movement. As the largest women’s organization in the nation, the WCTU did a great deal to teach women about the need for a voice in public affairs.

In spite of Willard’s organizational talents, the WCTU, like many women’s groups of the time, excluded people whose ethnic or religious affiliations were judged as suspect. Members of the WCTU often manifested nativist views, critiquing first Irish and German immigrants and later southern and eastern European ones, people whose cultural and religious backgrounds accepted alcohol consumption. When African Americans and immigrants joined the WCTU, they tended to affiliate with separate branches designated for people of their racial and ethnic groups.

Although many women became part of the suffrage campaign as a result of the WCTU, some women’s rights activists were hesitant to welcome temperance reformers, who had created much antagonism among liquor companies. Suffragists were worried that their cause would be linked with temperance and that men who might have considered enfranchising women would oppose the idea if they believed that women would vote for prohibition.

younger sister, Angelina, struggled to reconcile their Christian faith with their family’s ownership of slaves. Believers from an early age in the immorality of the South’s “peculiar institution,” the sisters ultimately joined the Society of Friends in Charleston before moving to Philadelphia in the 1820s. In their new home, the sisters became actively involved in the antislavery movement after a letter Angelina sent to the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison appeared in his newspaper, *The Liberator*. Because of the public’s enthusiastic response to this letter and because of the sisters’ potential value to the abolition movement as firsthand witnesses to slavery, the American Anti-Slavery Society brought the Grimké sisters to New York to speak in early 1837. By



lecturing in public, the Grimké sisters violated an unspoken rule of the cult of domesticity: Respectable women did not exit the private sphere of the home to put themselves forward and speak out in mixed company. The reaction to the Grimkés was hostile; the press referred to Angelina as “Devileena,” and the prominent educator Catharine Beecher criticized the sisters for indecorous behavior. Perhaps most seriously, the Council of Congregationalist Ministers of Massachusetts issued a pastoral letter condemning the Grimkés, stating: “The power of woman is her dependence. . . . But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer . . . she yields the power which God has given her for her protection, and her character becomes unnatural.” Such reactions enabled the Grimkés to see the connection between the oppression of slaves and women. Sarah Grimké developed her ideas on women’s rights in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, published in 1838; challenging the idea of female inferiority and dependence, Grimké used the Bible to assert the equality of men and women. She wrote: “I ask no favors for my sex. . . . All I ask our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy.”

The Grimké sisters did not have a long activist career: After marrying the abolitionist Theodore Weld in 1838, Angelina raised a family with help from Sarah, who came to live with the Weld family. But other women in the abolitionist movement echoed their critique of the treatment of women. One such woman, Emily Collins, remembered: “All through the Anti-Slavery struggle, every word of denunciation of the wrongs of the Southern slave, was, I felt, equally applicable to the wrongs of my own sex. Every argument for the emancipation of the colored man, was equally one for that of woman; and I was surprised that all Abolitionists did not see the similarity in the condition of the two classes.” In their *History of Woman Suffrage*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony asserted that “above all other causes of the ‘Woman Suffrage Movement’ was the Anti-Slavery Struggle. . . . In the early Anti-Slavery conventions, the broad principles of human rights were so exhaustively discussed, justice, liberty, and



equality, so clearly taught, that the women who crowded to listen, readily learned the lesson of freedom for themselves, and early began to take part in the debates and business affairs of all associations.”

By midcentury it even became somewhat more common for women to speak in public. The work of abolition prepared future women’s rights activists for agitating for an unpopular cause, one that would not be received well by the majority. Unlike more mainstream temperance reform, which also gave women experience in activism, antislavery work readied women for the hostile reactions of a public unprepared for a new way of thinking about women and their rights.

Traditionally recognized as the beginning of the organized women’s movement in the United States, the Seneca Falls Convention of July 1848 was put together on the spur of the moment by a handful of dedicated women. When Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister and antislavery activist, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a young newlywed twenty-two years her junior, renewed their friendship in upstate New York, the two women decided to fulfill a goal they had set eight years before at the World Anti-Slavery Society convention in London, where they had met. Both active in the abolition movement, Mott and Stanton were outraged at the decision of the convention’s organizers not to allow elected female delegates to sit with their male peers. This exclusion rankled; it clearly revealed women’s marginal status within the antislavery movement. An elected delegate, Mott watched the conference proceedings with Stanton from an upstairs gallery; together they decided to redress the wrongs of women at a future convention, which they would lead.

Although eight years intervened before such a conference occurred, when the two women met again in the summer of 1848 they found their desire for a meeting on “the social, civil, and religious rights of woman” had not diminished. With the help of three other women, Jane Hunt, Martha Wright, and Mary Ann McClintock, Mott and Stanton organized the conference in less than a week, finding a suitable location in a nearby chapel and announcing the event in an area newspaper. To give the meeting a focus, Stanton drafted a Declaration of Sentiments,

which articulated the wrongs done to women. Using the Declaration of Independence as a rhetorical model, Stanton's document announced women's equality with men and outlined the grievances women had with their treatment in American society. Chief among these grievances were women's inability to vote, their consequent lack of representation in government, and their invisibility before the law. To accompany the Declaration of Sentiments, Stanton wrote a set of resolutions, which provided matter for debate and discussion at the convention. Although the three hundred attendees—among them, forty men—agreed on resolutions pertaining to women's exclusion from higher education, the professions, and the ministry as well as married women's constrained legal status under coverture, the resolution demanding woman suffrage, as it was referred to in the nineteenth century, proved to be divisive. Stanton and the abolitionist Frederick Douglass argued in favor of suffrage, and they ultimately convinced the conference's attendees of its importance in securing many of the other resolutions.

The majority's discomfort with the idea of woman suffrage at the first women's rights convention indicates Stanton's status as a revolutionary, but it also foreshadows that suffrage would not be the main issue discussed at the antebellum women's rights conferences that were held virtually every year between 1850 and 1860; indeed, these meetings had multifaceted agendas, promoting suffrage along with a host of other reforms, including property rights and greater access to education and employment for women. As this list of goals would suggest, those who sought rights for women typically envisioned the concerns of white, middle-class, married women. For instance, the Married Women's Property Act, which Stanton and social activists Ernestine Rose and Paulina Wright Davis lobbied for in the 1840s and which passed the New York State legislature in 1848, secured ownership only of the property that married women had had before their marriages and inherited afterward; it did not allow women to keep the wages they earned during marriage.

Just as the class affiliation of early women's rights activists limited their point of view, so did their racial attitudes. When the former slave

## Radical Rags

Bloomers: It's hard to believe that a word we associate now with undergarments would have anything to do with the nineteenth-century women's movement, but it does. In fact, one of the most practical undertakings by women's rights activists in the midnineteenth century was to seek to change women's clothing. Women at the time wore corsets, petticoats, and long dresses, all of which constrained their movement. Stiff corsets, often made of bone, gave women the wasp waists then in vogue but often led to breathing difficulties, poor digestion, and, most seriously, the permanent shifting of internal organs. As Elizabeth Smith Miller, the creator of a new costume for women, stated, "Working in my garden—weeding & transplanting in bedraggled skirts that clung in fettered folds about my feet & ankles, I became desperate and resolved on immediate release."

In late 1850, Miller's costume—a loose, "short" skirt extending four inches below the knees that was worn over ballooning, "Turkish" trousers—caught on among such women's rights activists as Miller's cousin Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the latter's friend, Amelia Bloomer, the publisher of a temperance newspaper called *The Lily*. Because Bloomer promoted the new style of dress in her paper, writing about it and printing pictures and patterns, people started to refer to the new mode of dress as "bloomerettes," the "bloomer costume," and finally "bloomers."

As strange as it may seem to us now, some women's rights activists believed that a change in their style of dress could give women more status in society. Gerrit Smith, Miller's father and Stanton's cousin, stated that by donning more practical clothing, women could ensure that men would no longer treat them like "playthings, idols, or dolls." Smith was more ready for sartorial change than most other men—or women, for that matter; those who wore "bloomers" during their heyday in the early 1850s were roundly derided. Most people thought that the new costume was indecent since it showed the outline of women's legs. Stanton wore bloomers for several years but returned to long dresses in 1854, convinced that the "mental bondage" caused by public ostracism far outweighed the "physical freedom" afforded by the new clothing style. She convinced other activists to return to conventional attire so that the public would concentrate on their ideas and message rather than their clothes and appearance.

Sojourner Truth spoke at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, she was met with great hostility from an audience of allegedly enlightened white people. Truth was at the convention to sell her recently published autobiography, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*. Truth's life certainly warranted a retelling: Born around 1797 in the Hudson River Valley of New York, Truth was the daughter of Dutch-speaking parents, who named her Isabella. After gaining freedom in 1827, when slavery was abolished in New York, Truth underwent a religious conversion when Jesus appeared to her in a vision; she began to attend a Methodist church, first in Kingston, New York, and later in New York City, where she moved in 1829. In New York, Truth started to preach at camp meetings, joined a commune, and worked as a domestic servant and laundress. Although religion was central to her life, it wasn't until 1843, when God commanded her to leave the city and rename herself, that Truth became an itinerant evangelist. During her travels, Truth met abolitionists and started to speak at antislavery meetings more than she did at religious revivals. In fact, she became such a popular speaker that she joined the antislavery circuit in the late 1840s.

As a result of her connection with abolition, the people present at the Akron conference were worried that Truth would speak out against slavery and thus detract from the event's focus on women's rights; to show their disapproval, the audience verbally harassed her when she moved to the podium to speak. Not to be silenced, Truth spoke eloquently about her condition as a woman to a gathered crowd who, like society at large, saw her in terms of her race instead of her sex. Truth demanded to be acknowledged for who she was: a black woman who, because of her color, was never treated with delicacy or deference. As she stated,

*That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me. And ain't I a woman?*

*I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well. And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain't I a woman?*

After insisting on her importance in spite of her despised status, Truth matched wits with the male clerics who had already spoken at the conference, outlining biblical arguments for women's inferiority. By refuting their reasoning, she gained the respect of the assembled crowd. In her recollection of the event, Frances Dana Gage, the presiding member of the conference, wrote that Truth "had taken us up in her strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty, turning the whole tide in our favor. I have never in my life seen anything like the magical influence that subdued the snobbish spirit of the day and turned the sneers and jeers of an excited crowd into notes of respect and admiration."

As a charismatic, larger-than-life figure, Sojourner Truth grew to be recognized, symbolically at least, as the nineteenth century's most prominent black women's rights leader. However, other black women were involved in activism in the antebellum period, although most of these women focused their work on abolition as opposed to women's rights. Most of these women were free middle-class black women from the North. For example, when men excluded women from Philadelphia's American Anti-Slavery Society, the African American women Charlotte, Margaretta, and Sarah Forten and Sarah and Grace Douglass joined with Lucretia Mott to create a female abolitionist group. Another black female activist was Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. The daughter of free blacks, Harper grew up in Baltimore and worked as a teacher in Pennsylvania and Ohio, where she became



*Sojourner Truth, photographed in Detroit in 1864.*

Library of Congress

involved with the Underground Railroad. Harper's public work on behalf of abolition took several forms: working in antislavery societies, delivering speeches, and writing poetry about the cruelties of slavery. Harriet Jacobs also chronicled the brutality of slavery; in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, her autobiographical account of her years in servitude, Jacobs openly discussed the sexual exploitation and abuse she and other slave women experienced. Although her book's publication coincided with the start of the Civil War, Jacobs worked to abolish slavery and to help slave refugees during the war.

The 1850s marked a fruitful period in women's rights activism, mainly because of the activity and leadership of three women: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone. Stanton had long felt outraged by the injustices done to her sex. Born in 1815 to a wealthy and well-connected family in upstate New York, Stanton was educated at local schools and attended Emma Willard's Troy Female Seminary in the early 1830s. Perhaps just as important as her formal education was the time she spent in the offices of her father, a judge; there, she read his law books and heard his counsel to the many people who came to see him. In particular, she remembered one occasion when her father could do nothing to help a woman whose husband had squandered her inheritance; she had no legal recourse because the law did not protect wives against the profligate behavior of their husbands. Witnessing her father's inability to help this woman convinced the young Stanton of the need to change unjust laws that could ruin women's lives.

In spite of her passionate belief in the need for reform of women's inferior legal status, in many ways Stanton conformed to the cult of domesticity. In 1840, she married the abolitionist speaker Henry Stanton, whose reforming zeal did not fully extend to the struggle for women's rights. When they married, the couple struck the word "obey" from their wedding vows, thinking of their union as one of equals. Flouting convention, Stanton wished to be referred to as Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, instead of the more usual Mrs. Henry Stanton. Yet, after Stanton read her husband a draft of the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, he not only stated his disapproval of the resolution



that demanded women's suffrage but also left town to emphasize his opinion. In some ways, Stanton lived a life that resembled those of many wives and mothers at midcentury. Although she spent the early years of her marriage in Boston, where she had a circle of activist friends and attended lectures on the intellectual and reform topics she cared deeply about, her life changed in 1847 when her husband opened a law practice in Seneca Falls, New York. In this rural town and amid the responsibilities of her ever-growing family—she would ultimately have seven children—Stanton felt isolated and overwhelmed by her life of domestic drudgery. Her friendship with Susan B. Anthony, which facilitated her involvement in the women's rights movement, saved her from isolation and unhappiness.

Although her name may be more familiar than Stanton's, Susan B. Anthony was something of a latecomer to women's rights, focusing her early activist energies on the causes of abolition and temperance. Born in rural Massachusetts in 1820 to reform-loving parents, Anthony was educated locally and at a Quaker boarding school in Philadelphia. When her father went bankrupt in 1837, she was forced to leave school and seek employment as a teacher, a job at which she worked for more than ten years before moving to Rochester, New York, where her family had settled in the 1840s. Although her parents and younger sister told her about Elizabeth Cady Stanton after attending a women's rights meeting in 1848, Anthony was initially reluctant to introduce herself to Stanton and become involved in such activism; her interest at this time was in temperance work. However, when Anthony met Stanton after an antislavery lecture in 1851, a deep friendship was born. In fact, for the next fifty years, Anthony and Stanton were nearly inseparable, working together for temperance, women's rights, and, above all, suffrage.

Perhaps one factor in the long duration of the two women's friendship, apart from their like-minded thinking, was their complementary personalities and lives. On the surface, the two women could hardly have been more different: At this time the mother of several rambunctious boys, the ebullient Stanton was lively and talkative, while the unmarried Anthony was reserved, self-conscious, and serious.



In spite of these differences, the women worked together extremely well. While Stanton's many children and domestic duties inhibited her ability to travel, Anthony's singleness meant she could visit Stanton and go on extended speaking tours. In many ways, Anthony provided Stanton with the intellectual companionship and contact with the outside world that she craved while she was largely homebound in Seneca Falls. The following description indicates Stanton's fondness for her collaborator: "[W]henever I saw that stately Quaker girl coming across my lawn, I knew that some happy convocation of the sons of Adam were to be set by the ears, by one of our appeals or resolutions. The little portmanteau stuffed with facts was opened. . . . Then we would get out our pens and write articles for papers, or a petition to the Legislature, letters to the faithful. . . . We never met without issuing a pronunciamento on some question. . . ."



*Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony worked tirelessly for women's suffrage.*

Whereas Stanton was a great and fluent writer and thinker, Anthony felt clumsy as an author, leaving much of her speech writing to her older friend. Anthony, however, had considerable talents of her own: She was an excellent manager, organizer, and strategist, and her single-minded dedication to the cause of suffrage often served to check Stanton's impulsive tendency to involve herself in a multitude of women's issues. Stanton explained the friends' collaboration as follows: "In writing we did better work together than either could alone. While she is slow and analytical in composition, I am rapid and

synthetic. I am the better writer, she the better critic. She supplied the facts and statistics, I the philosophy and rhetoric, and together we have made arguments that have stood unshaken by the storms of thirty long years.”

Lucy Stone’s background was more humble than either Stanton’s or Anthony’s. Born in western Massachusetts in 1818, Stone grew up on her family’s farm. She had a difficult relationship with her father, who personified the parsimonious, withdrawn New Englander of the early nineteenth century. As Stone recalled, “There was only one will in our home, and that was my father’s.” Unlike Anthony, who was reared in a gentle and loving Quaker family, Stone experienced the repressive piety of her Congregationalist parents, who repeatedly reminded their children of the perils of eternal damnation. A sensitive child who reacted against the literal biblical teachings of her parents’ religion, Stone refused to see women’s subordination as divinely ordained. The remedy she sought was higher education: Stone wanted to go to college. Convincing her father to let her attend school until she could teach to support herself—at this time, schoolteachers merely had to demonstrate proficiency at reading, writing, and arithmetic but didn’t need any advanced training—Stone borrowed money from him to pay for her early education. For nine years, she worked as a teacher, saving money to attend high school and later one term at Oberlin College, where she paid her way by working as a housekeeper, laundress, and teacher. After she completed her degree, Stone began to work as a public speaker for the Anti-Slavery Society of Massachusetts, which soon reprimanded her for spending as much time outlining the plight of women as she did the error of slavery. Stone solved this ostensible conflict of interest by doing her antislavery lecturing on weekends and speaking about “the elevation of my sex” during the week. By all accounts, Stone was a gifted orator; even as she encountered the jeers of hostile crowds, she spoke out passionately but composedly in a melodious, penetrating voice. Although Stone ultimately married, her partnership with the reformer Henry Blackwell did not detract from her women’s rights work. Her

radical decision to keep her own name after her marriage led to the usage, even into the twentieth century, of the phrase “Lucy Stoner” to refer to a woman who made a similar choice.

Although Stanton, Anthony, Stone, and a host of other committed women worked diligently for women’s rights in the twenty years after the Seneca Falls convention, the movement remained decentralized, having instead of a permanent organization a steering committee made up of women from states with active campaigns. Because of the treatment many reformers had received within the hierarchical and sexist antislavery organizations, women’s rights activists remained skeptical of central organizations until after the Civil War. Until then, they communicated their ideas not just through local conventions but through the mainstream press when they could get its attention, the abolitionist newspapers, and journals that they created and edited. Among the most prominent of these publications dedicated to transmitting information about women’s rights were Jane Swisshelm’s *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*, a newspaper begun in 1847 that explored temperance, abolition, and women’s rights; Amelia Bloomer’s *The Lily*, a newspaper started in 1849 that focused on temperance; and Paulina Wright Davis’s *The Una*, a newspaper launched in 1853 that covered “the rights, sphere, duty, and destiny of woman, fully and fearlessly.”

Although women’s rights activism was gaining momentum in the 1850s—for instance, because of the work of Stanton, Anthony, and others, New York state passed a revised Married Women’s Property Act in 1860, giving women joint custody of their children and allowing them to keep their wages, make wills, and inherit property—the onset of the Civil War interrupted this work. Women committed themselves to war work through organizations such as the Sanitary Commission and abandoned their crusade for women’s rights, believing that the time was not right for such activism. Stanton and Anthony did not make the transition to war work easily; at the start of the war, they were at a loss for what to do until Stanton’s husband suggested that they work to get signatures in support of a constitutional amendment to end slavery. In 1863, they formed the Women’s National Loyal League;

in the course of fifteen months, they succeeded in getting four hundred thousand signatures, thereby showing Congress the public's support of a measure to ban slavery. In undertaking and completing this work, Stanton, Anthony, and other women's rights activists thought that, at the end of the war, they would be rewarded with suffrage. Although such a view may now seem naive, they believed that, because their former abolitionist allies had close ties with the ruling Republican Party, these men would be in a position to reward all women for their service to the Union. What ended up happening, however, was a far cry from what they anticipated; instead, arguments over the citizenship and suffrage of freed black slaves led to a division in the women's rights community.

At the end of the war, abolitionists and women's rights activists formed the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), whose goal was to gain civil rights for both black people and women. However, when Congress began to discuss the Fourteenth Amendment in 1866, it became clear to women's rights activists that it would protect only the rights of men; for the first time in the Constitution, there would be a reference to "male" citizens. Instead of allying themselves with Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and the abolitionists who were the core members of the AERA, activists such as Stanton and Anthony challenged the exclusivity of the Fourteenth Amendment, seeking signatures to a petition that would halt the amendment's progress. Indeed, Anthony stated, "I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work for or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman." In spite of their work against it, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified in 1868; six months later, Republicans introduced the Fifteenth Amendment, which stated, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State, on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The Fifteenth Amendment angered radical women's rights leaders, who thought that it would have been quite simple to include the word "sex" along with "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The exclusion of women from these amendments highlighted the necessity for another

amendment extending the vote to women; Stanton predicted that such an amendment would take at least a century to achieve, and she wasn't too far off in her estimation.

Stanton and Anthony did not keep silent about their growing dissatisfaction with what they saw as the capitulation of the AERA to the Republican Party, which was less interested in gaining the vote for women than it was in securing a base of voters in the South, long a Democratic stronghold. The argument that it was the "Negro's hour" did not satisfy Stanton and Anthony, who had already been laboring almost twenty years for women's rights. In 1868, through an alliance with a racist millionaire named George Train, Stanton and Anthony were able to start *The Revolution*, a weekly publication devoted to women's rights; in its pages, Stanton in particular began to issue critiques of the federal amendments that bordered on racist. Whereas she had earlier fought for complete equality, she now took an elitist tone, highlighting the superiority of the female vote to that of the uneducated black Southern male. She stated that extending the vote to "ignorant" black and immigrant men was "to exalt ignorance above education, vice above virtue, brutality and barbarism above refinement and religion." Such comments antagonized members of the AERA who believed that women's patience was required as they worked to secure the black man's vote. Stanton and Anthony weren't the only leaders critical of the AERA: Sojourner Truth spoke out against the elevation of black men's rights, saying, "[I]f coloured men get their rights and not coloured women theirs . . . coloured men will be masters over the women . . . I wish woman to have her voice."

By the time the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in early 1870, the women's movement had already divided. Feeling great distance from members of the AERA who supported the Republicans' plan to secure the vote for black men, in May 1869 Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), a group intended for women only, since they thought men in the antislavery movement had consistently betrayed women's interests. In November 1869, Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, poet and social

activist Julia Ward Howe, and others formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). In spite of the division between the groups, one remarkable thing emerged out of the struggle over the enfranchisement of black men: The women's rights movement finally defined itself in terms of suffrage, something it had not done up to that point. Beyond this common self-definition, the two groups were very different. The NWSA, which derived its support from women in upstate New York and the Midwest, focused on the need for a federal amendment, whereas the AWSA, which was based in Boston, worked to get suffrage passed on the state level. The two groups also differed in their philosophies. AWSA was a conservative organization that wished to focus on the one issue of gaining suffrage for women: It was not concerned with the rights of working women, it did not try to challenge the power of churches, and it did not wish to reform marriage laws. In contrast, the NWSA tried to do all of these things; its goals were broader and more radical.

One of the ways the NWSA showed its more radical agenda was through its association with the flamboyant freethinker Victoria Woodhull. The daughter of a drifter father and a spiritualist mother, Woodhull was married at age fifteen to a middle-aged doctor. This marriage led to neither stability nor respectability, however; because her alcoholic husband did not support her or their two children, she continued to travel with her sister, Tennessee Claflin, making money by selling medical cures and spiritual advice. On the road, after meeting and marrying another man—while still married to her first husband, no less—Woodhull moved to New York City, where she and her sister made a fortune on Wall Street by following the stock tips of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. Woodhull came to the attention of the NWSA in early 1871 when she spoke before the House Judiciary Committee, arguing that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, because of their use of the words “person” and “citizen,” respectively, guaranteed women the right to vote. Impressed with her logic, members of the NWSA invited Woodhull to repeat her speech before their organization, which was holding its annual meeting in the nation's



## Liberating the Housewife

Not all women's rights activists at the end of the nineteenth century were fixated on securing the vote for women. Charlotte Perkins Gilman was more concerned with the ways economic dependence steered women into constrained, unfulfilled lives. For Gilman, women's lot could be improved only if societal structures shifted to allow women to develop meaningful work.

Gilman is perhaps best known now for her 1892 short story "The Yellow Wall-Paper," a fictionalized account of her mental breakdown after the birth of her only child. Prescribed the "rest cure" by the physician S. Weir Mitchell, Gilman was forbidden to write, read, or do any intellectual work; while the cure did not take, Gilman's separation and divorce from her husband helped her regain her health and strength. Although she ultimately enjoyed a lasting marriage to her second husband, Gilman defined herself through her work as a writer, critic, speaker, and sociologist rather than through her private role as wife and mother.

While *Herland*, a utopian novel about an all-female society, has become a feminist classic, *Women and Economics* is the book that made Gilman widely known in her time; published in 1898, by 1920 it had gone into nine printings and been translated into seven languages. A believer in evolutionary theory, Gilman argued that, as a result of their dependence on men, women had deteriorated physically, mentally, and morally. Confined to the domestic realm, women performed housework that could be done more efficiently by involving outside professionals, women who were trained to care for children or to cook for large numbers of people in a neighborhood. Gilman proposed that women get jobs and pay others to do their cooking, cleaning, and childcare; indeed, having time away from their children, she believed, would make women better mothers.

Some of Gilman's ideas are eerily prescient of the turn middle-class society has taken these days: Many people with enough money hire someone to clean their houses, cook their meals, and watch their children. Gilman is a significant thinker because of her focus on the economic side of middle-class white women's lives. In addition, she realized the urgency of speaking about the circumstances of married women with children, not just those of single working women or college women. After all, married women were the largest segment of the female population, and proposals for reform needed to take their lives into account.



capital. Although the NWSA invited Woodhull to speak the following year as well, by this point Susan B. Anthony, in particular, had grown wary of Woodhull's self-aggrandizing manner. Whereas Anthony would put into practice the right to vote claimed by Woodhull by casting a ballot in November's presidential election—and would be arrested for this action—Woodhull's goals were more ambitious and self-serving. After deciding to run for president, Woodhull urged the NWSA to support her by creating its own political party with her as its candidate; Anthony rejected this idea, seeing Woodhull as using the NWSA for her own purposes.

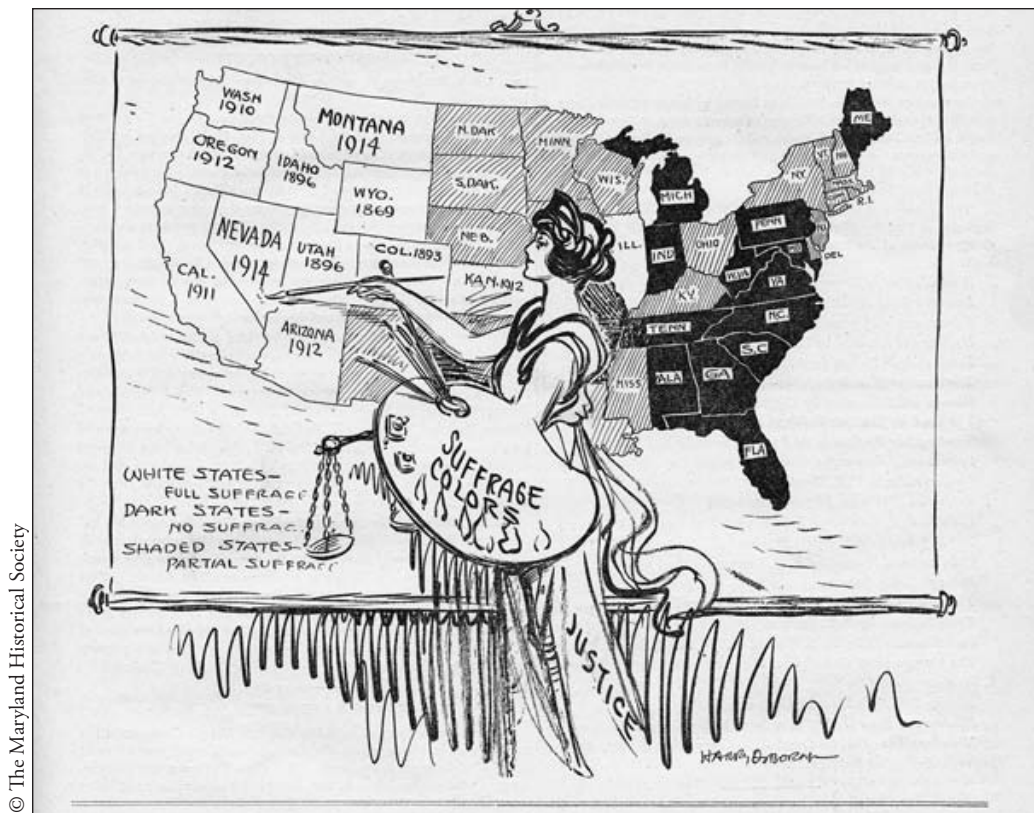
Another thing Anthony disliked about Woodhull was her promotion of “free love,” or the belief in sex outside of marriage. Woodhull was unabashed in her embrace of the idea, which challenged Victorian codes of sexuality and female passionlessness. In front of a crowd in New York City, she stated, “I have an inalienable, constitutional, and natural right to love whom I may love, to love as long, or as short a period as I can, to change that love every day if I please.” While Anthony and some of the more conservative members of the NWSA objected to free love, Elizabeth Cady Stanton supported it, saying, “We have already enough women sacrificed to this sentimental, hypocritical, practicing purity, without going out of our way to increase the number. This is one of man's most effective engines for our division and subjugation.” In spite of Stanton's support of a more open attitude toward sexuality, Anthony got the last word, ousting Woodhull from the NWSA so that the organization could concentrate on women's suffrage and not be beholden to the charismatic iconoclast.

Without Woodhull as a distraction, the NWSA and the AWSA both worked separately for suffrage in the 1870s and 1880s. During this time, the social landscape was changing for women. For one thing, around the time of the Civil War, women began to gain access to higher education: The University of Iowa admitted women in 1855 and the University of Wisconsin did the same in 1863. More institutions opened their doors to women after the war: Boston University accepted females at its opening in 1869 and Cornell University did so in 1872. Women's

colleges emerged as well, providing female students with a single-sex environment in which to pursue advanced education. Vassar College was founded in 1861, followed by Smith in 1871 and Wellesley in 1875.

Another thing changing by the end of the century was the settlement of the West and the greater freedoms this part of the country afforded to women. Women gained suffrage in the West earlier than they did anywhere else in the country. Although one might think that the “pioneering spirit” of the West led to a questioning of conventional attitudes toward women, in the cases of Wyoming and Utah, legislators extended the vote to women for practical reasons. In an effort to attract female settlers and encourage the development of families and communities, legislators in the Wyoming territory granted women suffrage in 1869, becoming the first place on the continent where women could vote. Because Congress wanted to disenfranchise any man who supported polygamy, leaders of the Mormon church in the Utah territory realized that, with the vote, women could help ward off such meddlesome attacks by outsiders. Interestingly, in approving the law that granted its women the vote in 1870, the territory’s governor, a non-Mormon, hoped that female members of the Mormon church would use the franchise for precisely the reverse reason: to stop polygamy. When Wyoming and Utah entered the union, in 1890 and 1896, respectively, they did so as states with female suffrage. By 1896, two other states had granted women the vote: Colorado in 1893 and Idaho in 1896.

By the time there were four woman suffrage states, the split between the two wings of the suffrage movement had been repaired, thanks to the tireless work of Alice Stone Blackwell, the daughter of Lucy Stone. After three years of negotiation between the NWSA and the AWSA, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was formed in 1890, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton was elected its first president. Although she served the organization for two years, Stanton was growing less interested in suffrage work and more involved in divorce reform and critiques of religion. In 1892, she resigned as president, and Susan B. Anthony took over this position.



*"Two More Bright Spots on the Map," by Harry Osborn, charted women's suffrage gains in the Western United States.*

The publication of Stanton's *Woman's Bible* in 1895 distanced her from most suffragists, who thought that her reinterpretation of passages from Genesis and Judges was far too extreme. In 1896, in spite of a protest from Anthony, the NAWSA publicly dissociated itself from Stanton's work, thereby severing its ties with the woman who had been among the first to fight for suffrage. Although Anthony would lead the NAWSA from 1892 to 1900, Stanton's departure ushered in a time known as the "Doldrums," a period lasting from 1896 to 1910, when no new suffrage states were gained. Anthony's passionate commitment to suffrage inspired a younger generation of women, some of whom were part of her inner circle. Yet, the thinking of Anthony, who sought a federal amendment, was out of sync with this circle of "nieces," who were more enthusiastic about state-by-state reform.

The suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century had very different ideological underpinnings than it had had throughout

much of the nineteenth century. Whereas early thinkers such as Wollstonecraft and the Grimké sisters believed that women deserved the vote because of their natural rights as citizens, women in the early twentieth century didn't make arguments about women's equality. Instead, they claimed that women were different from men and superior to them; as a result, they deserved the vote. This notion of the moral superiority of women conformed with popular late-Victorian views of women and contributed to the mainstreaming of the suffrage movement, which was no longer seen as a radical or fringe movement but as acceptable work for middle-class women to undertake.

Just as Stanton, Anthony, and Stone were the main leaders of the women's rights movement at midcentury, two women—Carrie Chapman Catt and Alice Paul—played pivotal roles in the quest for suffrage in the early twentieth century. These women, however, did not work as partners; indeed, their ideas and tactics were very much at odds. Born in Wisconsin in 1859, Carrie Catt spent most of her formative years in Iowa, attending college at Iowa State University, where she graduated in 1880. After working first as a teacher and then as a principal, Catt became a school superintendent in Mason City, Iowa. Marrying in 1885, Catt quit her job and started editing a column on women's issues for her husband's newspaper. When her husband died suddenly of typhoid fever, Catt moved to California, where she worked in the newspaper business. Her return to Iowa in 1887 marked the beginning of her formal involvement in the women's rights movement; back in her home state, Catt made her living by lecturing on women's rights. She remarried in 1890, but only after securing her husband's promise that she be able to spend one-third of each year on suffrage work.

Catt's involvement in the campaign for suffrage in a number of Western states brought her to the attention of the NAWSA, and she eventually rose through the ranks of the organization to become its president in 1900. Before starting her ascent in the NAWSA, Catt participated in the campaign for a suffrage referendum in South Dakota in 1890; she led the successful campaign in Colorado three years later.

After speaking at the national meeting of the NAWSA in 1890, Catt became the chair of the national Organization Committee in 1895. Although she was not a member of Susan B. Anthony's close circle, the older woman recognized Catt's organizational talents; furthermore, Catt had no children, and Anthony saw this as a benefit since the younger woman could devote all of her energies to the suffrage cause. This was true until 1904, when Catt decided not to seek reelection but instead to take care of herself and her ailing husband, who died the following year. Catt's successor, Anna Howard Shaw, managed the NAWSA until Catt returned to the presidency in 1915.

More radical than Catt was the younger Alice Paul, who learned about activism from the militant suffrage activists she met in England at the turn of the twentieth century. Born to a Quaker family in 1885, Paul advocated nonviolent but militant action in pursuit of her goals. After getting a doctorate in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, Paul moved to England, where she became involved in suffrage activism, participating in public demonstrations and hunger strikes. When she returned to the United States, Paul, along with Lucy Burns, whom she met in jail in England, took over the NAWSA's Congressional Committee (later known as the Congressional Union), whose object it was to focus on the passage of a federal suffrage amendment, also known as the Anthony Amendment. This amendment had been introduced in Congress every year since 1878—to no avail. Paul, Burns, and the young women they recruited worked to lobby congressmen about the necessity for an amendment to the Constitution. Like many of the younger generation of suffragists, Paul was losing patience with the NAWSA's slow tactics. Instead of speaking to women who were already converted to the cause at annual conventions, Paul saw the need for direct action, advocating public demonstrations, parades, and picketing, tactics she learned in England. She also thought that the NAWSA had worked long enough to gain state support of suffrage; she felt the urgent need for the passage—and ratification—of a federal amendment.

One of the first things Paul and Burns did after taking over the



## What's in a Name?

Although people today might use the words interchangeably, to people in the early twentieth century the terms “suffragist” and “suffragette” meant different things. Most basically, suffragists were American and suffragettes were British. However, calling a mainstream American activist a suffragette would be more than a mistake; it would be an insult, since the term connoted a kind of militant activism that many American women wanted nothing to do with.

The most famous suffragettes were Englishwoman Emmeline Pankhurst, who founded the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903, and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. The Pankhursts and their followers were known for their bold actions; they heckled politicians and organized public demonstrations, processions, and mass marches. They even used vandalism to communicate their message; in the name of women’s suffrage they smashed store windows, burned public and private property, and slashed oil paintings. One suffragette even killed herself for the cause, throwing herself in front of the king’s horse on Derby Day in 1913.

The violence of the WSPU, which advocated “deeds, not words,” appalled many people, particularly the established American activists of the NAWSA, who did not believe in such militant tactics. However, because others—most notably Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and Harriot Stanton Blatch, the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton—were tired of the slow pace of American suffrage activity, they thought they could learn from the techniques of their British sisters and incorporated the suffragettes’ militance into their own activism.

Congressional Committee was to organize a suffrage parade to coincide with Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration in 1913. Following the lead of British women, American suffragists had been staging parades since 1908, but the Washington parade was different from these spectacles, which had been witnessed by respectful audiences. The parade organized by Paul gained attention because it was exceptionally large: Five thousand women marched in it, and three hundred thousand people reportedly watched it. Instead of passively observing the women’s processing through the streets, the crowd got out of control, insulting

the women and impeding their progress. Although Paul had secured a police permit for the parade, the police did little to assist the women when they were under attack. The mayhem that ensued because of the police's ineffectiveness brought publicity to the suffrage movement; the public learned about a cause it might have been unaware of and sympathized with the women who were rudely and roughly treated.

Using more dramatic modes of activism was not the only thing Paul and Burns learned in England, however. The Congressional Union adopted the English suffragettes' policy of holding the party in power responsible for women's inferior legal status. In 1914 and 1916, members of the Congressional Union, now referring to themselves as the National Woman's Party, campaigned against Democratic candidates in an effort to unseat the party of President Woodrow Wilson, who had been equivocal in his support of women's suffrage, famously claiming that the issue had never been brought to his attention. In designing this strategy, Paul hoped to speak to the four million women who could already vote and thereby influence the electoral college, one quarter of which was controlled by woman suffrage states. By having women withhold their votes for Democrats, Paul hoped to convey the significance of women's political power. The NAWSA disapproved of Paul's tactics, priding itself on its tradition of nonpartisanship in the fight for the vote. In spite of the intense campaigning of the National Woman's Party, however, Wilson was reelected and Democratic candidates were not defeated; the National Woman's Party's efforts seemed not to have yielded the results for which it had hoped.

Because of her militant tactics, Paul was expelled from the NAWSA in 1915 when Carrie Catt resumed her leadership of the organization. The distance between Paul and the NAWSA only grew when the young leader and her compatriots began to use picketing, a tactic they adopted from the labor movement. Members of the National Woman's Party began to picket the White House, holding banners that asked MR. PRESIDENT, HOW LONG MUST WOMEN WAIT FOR LIBERTY? and MR. PRESIDENT, WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE? The public protest of Paul's group was nonviolent and silent; instead of



speaking, the women let their sharply worded banners communicate for them. Members of the more staid and respectable NAWSA viewed the picketing as undignified and ultimately unhelpful, but the tactic succeeded in capturing the public's attention, particularly when members of Paul's group started to get arrested. When the National Woman's Party continued to picket the White House even after the United States entered into World War I in April 1917, many activists were arrested for obstructing traffic on the sidewalk. Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and journalist Dorothy Day, among others, were jailed in Occoquan, a workhouse in Virginia, where Paul underwent psychiatric testing and ultimately began a hunger strike, which lasted twenty-two days. When the news broke about the activists' treatment in jail—including the force-feeding of Alice Paul—the public was shocked and outraged, ultimately sympathizing with the women and their cause.

While the NAWSA disapproved of the more radical tactics of the National Woman's Party, the younger and smaller organization—there were fifty thousand members of the National Woman's Party, compared to the two million members of the NAWSA—brought much publicity to the cause of women's suffrage. Even so, the NAWSA played a key role in strategizing for women's suffrage, especially after



*Members of the National Woman's Party picketing in front of the White House, February 1917.*

Carrie Catt unveiled her “Winning Plan” shortly after her return to the presidency in 1915. Catt’s plan included work on a select number of state campaigns but the devotion of most of the NAWSA’s energies to gaining a federal amendment. A skillful strategist, Catt wanted to gain suffrage by 1920, and she thought she could do so by building on the momentum that had begun in 1910, when Washington state passed a suffrage amendment, ending the “Doldrums” period. After this historic amendment, the first in fourteen years, California, Oregon, Arizona, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, and Illinois all passed woman suffrage. Catt wanted to gain a few more states, including one Southern one, and concentrate on gaining a federal amendment. She met with President Wilson repeatedly, working to convince him of the importance of suffrage; by the end of 1915, Wilson had endorsed women’s suffrage.

As had been the case in the abolition movement and the suffrage movement after the Civil War, activists in the early-twentieth-century women’s suffrage movement divided along racial and ethnic lines. Black women found that they were not welcomed within the mainstream suffrage movement. For instance, in spite of her Quaker background with its commitment to racial equality, Alice Paul did not want to risk alienating Southern supporters when she organized the Washington suffrage parade in 1913. As a result, when the black activist Ida Wells-Barnett, whose outspoken crusade against lynching in the 1890s first brought her to national prominence, wanted to march, Paul explained that she could do so at the back of the parade line with other black women. Wells-Barnett refused to comply with this racist distinction; watching the parade from the street, she joined and marched with the Chicago delegation when it passed by. Like Paul, the NAWSA worried that involving black suffragists in its work would upset Southern activists, who opposed granting suffrage to black women for both racist and political reasons: In some states, such as Louisiana, blacks outnumbered whites. Some suffragists espoused nativist sentiments as well, worried about allegedly “ignorant” immigrants of both sexes. For instance, such people claimed that, because there were more native-born women than immigrant men and women, the votes of native-born

## The Birth of Birth Control

To think that what we now refer to as “reproductive rights” was of no concern to women before the advent of the Pill, the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and *Roe v. Wade* would be a big mistake. In the nineteenth century, proponents of what was called “voluntary motherhood” argued that women had the right to choose when they wanted to be mothers; practically, this meant that they had the right to refuse their husband’s sexual advances—a remarkable feat given the fact that “true women” were expected to submit to their husbands’ desires in every way.

At the turn of the twentieth century, women such as the radical anarchist Emma Goldman began to demand sexual freedom for women. Goldman recognized that reliable contraceptives would help increase women’s sexual pleasure; instead of worrying about pregnancy, women could actually relax and enjoy sex. To educate women, Goldman distributed information about contraceptive methods and even went to jail for this activity.

Perhaps the most famous advocate for women’s sexual autonomy was Margaret Sanger, who learned about contraceptives from Goldman. One of eleven children, Sanger grew up in poverty and understood firsthand how too many children can affect the lives of poor families. After training as a nurse, Sanger worked on the Lower East Side of New York City, where she saw women who were already burdened with too many children getting pregnant and then trying to abort by themselves. The death of one of her patients after a self-induced abortion provided the inspiration Sanger

women would cancel the votes of the immigrant population. Although people such as activists Harriot Stanton Blatch and Jane Addams opposed such views, Carrie Catt was not above making expedient but bigoted arguments that would win her support among women with biases against immigrants.

Although Jane Addams was less central than Catt or Paul to the struggle to gain suffrage, she was significant for her ability to transcend class and ethnic divisions and ally herself with poor, working, and immigrant women. Born into an affluent family in Illinois in 1860, Addams graduated from Rockford Seminary unprepared for practical

needed to change her life's work, becoming a public advocate for "birth control," a term she coined in 1914.

Sanger wrote and distributed "Family Limitation," a pamphlet written in accessible English and aimed at working-class women. In it, Sanger explained various contraceptive methods, directing her message at women since, in her experience, men were not reliable practitioners of birth control. After learning about the diaphragm during a trip to Holland, Sanger returned to New York, where she opened a clinic. Although the pamphlet was confiscated and her clinic was closed, Sanger continued her work to provide women what they needed—both information and contraceptives themselves—to limit their families. Thanks to Sanger, organizations such as Planned Parenthood, which she founded, exist today.

Although many people recognize the important role Sanger played in educating women about birth control, some have criticized her for her belief in eugenics. A social view popular in the early twentieth century, eugenics is the study of the hereditary improvement of humans by controlled selective breeding. Proponents of eugenics argued that, through euthanasia, sterilization, and birth control, those who were seen as genetically "unfit" would not be permitted to reproduce. While Sanger did not believe that the state had a right to create a "master race," she did want women to learn about contraception so they could make reproductive choices for themselves. As she put it, an individual woman has the right to decide "whether she shall bear children or not, and how many children she shall bear if she chooses to become a mother."

work, uninterested in marriage, and unable to find a meaningful application for her education. After a long period of searching, Addams finally found a way to combat her "sense of futility and misdirected energy." Inspired by a visit to London's Toynbee Hall, a settlement house that improved the lives of the poor, Addams returned to the United States, where she and her friend Ellen Starr bought Hull House, an abandoned mansion in the Chicago slums. There, Addams started the first American settlement house and helped initiate and professionalize the field of social work. Initially, Addams was as determined to use Hull House as a source of satisfaction for other women in her situation

as she was to benefit the poor and working-class members of the community. Although she first saw the settlement house as a site for charity and philanthropy, Hull House grew to offer practical services, such as kindergartens and English classes, that improved the lives of immigrant communities in concrete ways.

As Addams attracted more and more people to Hull House, such as the labor reformer Florence Kelley, she started to see her work in terms of eradicating poverty instead of providing palliative care to the poor. Addams's association with the labor organizers Mary Kenny O'Sullivan and Mary Anderson, for example, introduced her to working women who needed trade unions to make their lives more bearable. Addams attended trade union meetings, and she was among the group of women who organized the Women's Trade Union League in 1903. Of a practical rather than theoretical turn of mind, Addams fought for improved housing, schools, and labor conditions for the nation's urban poor. Since she believed that these goals could be achieved legislatively, it is not surprising that Addams supported women's suffrage; working women deserved to be able to make their voices heard and, in so doing, create laws that would benefit and protect them. Addams spoke out actively on behalf of women and the vote; she served as first vice president of the NAWSA between 1911 and 1914.

Because of the work of committed people such as Addams, Catt, and Paul, the suffrage amendment made its way to Congress once again, this time poised for victory. In January 1918, Jeannette Rankin, a representative from Montana and the first female member of Congress, reintroduced the Anthony Amendment to the House floor. The amendment passed, with 274 people in favor of it and 136 against it. After much difficulty in the Senate, the amendment passed there one and a half years later. Once this happened, members of the NAWSA worked at the state level to ensure that the ratification process would succeed. On August 26, 1920, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth and final state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. The final and deciding vote in Tennessee belonged to twenty-four-year-old Harry Burns, who changed his vote after receiving a telegram from his mother reminding



him to “be a good boy” and “vote for suffrage.” After a long, hard battle, women finally had won the vote; because the struggle took so many years, most of the original activists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, were not alive to see this victory. Indeed, only one of the original signers of the Declaration of Sentiments from 1848 survived to see this day and to cast a ballot in a federal election.



*“The Sky Is Now Her Limit,” by Bushnell, appeared a few months after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920.*

