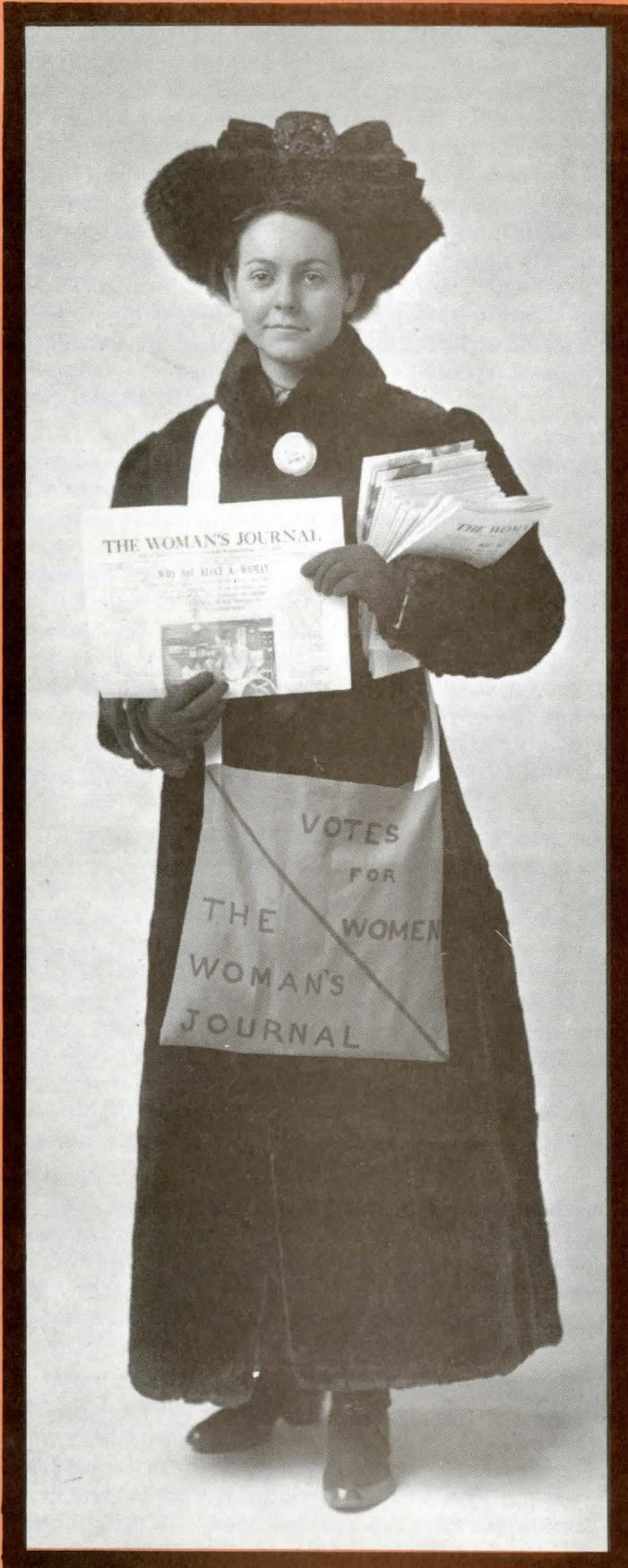


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# THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE FEMALE

**The Early  
Feminist Movement  
In The  
United States**

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**40¢**

Today's female liberation movement has its roots in a long struggle for women's rights. This struggle, one of the greatest for freedom the United States has ever known, has been largely ignored in the standard history books. A typical example is the Oxford History of the American People by Samuel Eliot Morison (New York, 1965), which devotes two sentences to the winning of woman suffrage in a section entitled "Bootlegging and Other Sports". A History of the American People, a widely used college text by Harry J. Carman, Harold C. Syrett, and Bernard W. Wishy (2 vols., New York, 1967) lists only 49 women. The history of the female is hidden, for historians have traditionally neglected and suppressed the subject of women's position, struggles, and contributions to society.

When the feminist movement is considered, it is often treated as one of history's jokes. The stereotype of the feminist is an ugly, embittered, sex-starved old maid, a neurotic victim of penis envy who wanted to be a man. This is a vicious perversion of the history of those early pioneers who fought so courageously against the network of ideas, prejudices, and emotionalism that degraded women and the institutions and vested interests upon which the ideas and prejudices were based. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan writes: "Is it so hard to understand that emancipation, the right to full humanity, was important enough to generations of women, still alive or only recently dead, that some fought with their fists, and went to jail and even died for it?"

Why has the history of the female been ignored and distorted? Much of the reason lies in the fact that women, considered synonymous with the domestic sphere, have been treated like the climate, geography, and other natural phenomena of a country, as part of the backdrop or stage upon which men act out their human drama. But women's history has also been suppressed because, like black history, it glaringly points out incredible injustices and inequalities in a system that calls itself a democracy. Both black history and female history expose the caste system of this country; together they present a picture of a white, male ruling class, and for this reason, they are a dangerous threat.

Since women's history has been suppressed and omitted, few people today are aware that there was a time when women could not vote, go to high school or college, or choose a profession. They do not know how extraordinarily difficult women's struggle was to attain these goals we now take for granted.

What was the situation of women in the past century? Why did a woman's rights movement arise at a particular time? What were the goals and strategies of this early movement, and who were its leaders? What were the responses of the government, industry, religion, and men in general? What were the successes and failures of this movement, and what have women inherited from

it? What lessons can today's feminists learn from this early movement?

At the beginning of the last century, a woman was regarded as a thing, a possession of her father or husband. The English common law gave men unlimited power over the persons of their wives and daughters, just as it did over black slaves:

Both were expected to behave with deference and obedience towards owner or husband; both did not exist officially under the law; both had few rights and little education; both found it difficult to run away; both worked for their masters without pay; both had to breed on command, and to nurse the results... The authority of a husband was as absolute and unquestionable as that of a plantation owner.<sup>1</sup>

A married woman suffered 'civil death', having no legal existence apart from her husband; the law held that man and wife are one, and that one is the husband.\* She could not sign contracts; any money she earned or inherited belonged to the husband; she lost title to her separate property or any material goods she might accumulate—she had no property rights at all, not even to her own clothes. A mother had no legal claim to or authority over her children; by law the husband owned the children just as he owned her and could give them away or leave them by will (even an unborn child) to any other person. A wife had to ask her husband for money to buy anything and for permission to travel to visit her family or friends. If a wife ran away from a brutal husband, not even her own family could legally harbor her. Divorce, when given at all, was granted only for such abuses as extreme cruelty, adultery, desertion, and non-support. In the South, the legal dissolution of marriage was especially difficult to achieve and there were no divorce statutes for a long time.

Along with common law, religion was an extremely powerful force in defining and perpetuating woman's inferior position. The church taught that woman's place was determined by God-given limitations of mind and body, that God had created man first to have dominion over the earth and secondly had created, from the rib of man, woman to be man's companion and helpmate. According to the Bible, woman had been the first to sin and was responsible for the original fall of humanity from paradise and, therefore, she would always be subordinate to her husband.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth... And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth... And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman and brought her unto the man... And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou has done?

\* According to Blackstone, the classic commentator on British common law: "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything." Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, London, 1813 (I, p.444)

And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat... Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 1, 2, 3)

The New Testament writings of St. Paul provided further proof of woman's inevitable inferiority and subordination to man:

For a man . . . is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. (I Cor. 11)

Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (Ephesians V, 22-24)

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (I Timothy 2)

Both church and community expected women to be properly submissive, modest, and retiring. A woman who spoke in a public meeting was considered immoral.

The "Lady's Books" of the day detailed extensively a woman's limitations and responsibilities; they strongly endorsed the double standard by preaching the necessity of a woman's virtue, in contrast to the wide latitude permitted a man.

Women were denied education simply because they were female. Public high schools did not admit girls, for it was considered a waste of time and money to educate them. It was generally believed that women had smaller brains than men, and that female minds were inferior in quality and too fragile to withstand the rigors of learning. Besides, the function of women was to keep house and bear children, and people felt that no education was needed for that. There were some boarding schools for wealthy girls, but their curriculum consisted mainly of such pursuits as needlework, dancing, music, and other accomplishments considered proper for a fashionable young lady. The French philosopher Rousseau set down clearly the universally accepted belief that any education for women should be restricted to her proper sphere:

The whole education of women ought to be relative to men. To please them, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honored by them, to educate them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, and to make life sweet and agreeable to them—these are the duties of women at all times, and what should be taught them from their infancy.<sup>2</sup>

Although women were regarded as inferior and weaker beings, the realities of pioneer life meant that women actually had a great deal of responsibility and engaged in numerous occupations that were supposedly masculine. The Puritan moral code which held idleness to be a sin encouraged women working, for the more she

worked, the less likely she was to succumb to the temptations of the devil.

The role of the pioneer women was as indispensable as that of the men in settling and cultivating the land, and the seven-year Revolutionary War could not have been waged successfully without the efforts and sacrifices of women. But when the framers of the Declaration of Independence proclaimed that "all men are created equal", they meant 'men' in the strict sense of the word and had no intention of including women as equals. In 1777, Abigail Adams wrote her husband, John Adams:

In the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you should remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we had no voice or representation

She was far ahead of her time, for women received as little political recognition as did black slaves in the new U.S. Republic.

Long before the emergence of a sustained movement for women's rights, there had always been protests by isolated individual women who felt the need for greater autonomy and defied conventional expectations. The first known protest of a woman in America against her position as an inferior of man was that of Anne Hutchinson. In the earliest days of the founding of this country, she challenged the Puritan theocracy in Boston in its assumption that no female could have a voice in church affairs as well as in its religious dogma. She held meetings with women at her home, and made the unprecedented demand that women should be allowed to think for themselves about the religious doctrines of the Puritan leaders and the affairs of the community. She was such an eloquent speaker that men began to come to her meetings also, which horrified the authorities even more, for it was unthinkable that a woman should presume to speak to men. "To be a religious rebel was wicked, but to be a woman rebel was devilish. The first of Anne Hutchinson's crimes, according to her accusers, was to inspire other women to be 'rather . . . a Husband than a Wife'."<sup>3</sup> Since church and state were not separate in Puritan Boston, a challenge to one was a challenge to both. Anne Hutchinson created what amounted to the first opposition party in America, for she won a large portion of the community to her beliefs. Accused of sedition, she was brought to trial before the Massachusetts General Court in 1637, banished from the colony, and excommunicated from the church.

Like Roger Williams, Anne Hutchinson challenged church and state on behalf of new ideas of tolerance and religious freedom; as a woman she went further, questioning, for the first time on this continent, the validity of the place assigned to her sex."<sup>4</sup>

Another female rebel was Margaret Brent who, in the early days of the colony of Maryland, became the colony's acting executive, in fact if not in title. Although her request was denied when she appeared before an astounded House of Burgesses to demand the right to vote, she was the power behind the scenes in the colony for over fifteen years.

Anne Hutchinson, Margaret Brent and women like them challenged the assumption that women's activities should be defined by their sex; they demanded the right to be treated as human beings who happened to be female. These female rebels were prophets and forerunners, rather than initiators of a feminist movement. The issues they raised would not become vital issues for women until a group of female rebels could get together and discover that their feelings of being wronged were not simply individual, that they were not exceptions, but that their sex shared a common oppression.

The battle for broader opportunities and rights for women really began around the issue of education. During the Revolution, Judith Sargent Murray (under the pen name of Constantia) wrote about the disparity of educational opportunities open to men and women:

How is the one exalted and the other depressed, by the contrary modes of education that are adopted! The one is taught to aspire, the other is early confined and limited. As their years increase, the sister must be wholly domesticated, while the brother is led by the hand through all the flowery paths of science.<sup>5</sup>

She demanded more intellectual activity for women than that "suggested by the mechanism of a pudding, or the sewing of the seams of a garment." She wrote some ten years before Mary Wollstonecraft in England in 1792 published "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" from which the conscious beginning of the struggle for woman's rights is usually dated.

"A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" was one of the earliest challenges to male supremacy and had a great influence on early American feminists. Mary Wollstonecraft argued that biology counted for nothing and education for all and that it was woman's false training that made her consider herself naturally subordinate to man. The book reflected her sympathy with the American and French revolutions but demanded that woman's rights be included in the rights of man for which the revolutionists were fighting.

The teachings of Frances Wright, the first famous speaker for woman's rights in America, were a strong stimulus for woman's education. Like Mary Wollstonecraft, she argued that society itself suffered as long as woman was degraded and treated as a lesser human being:

Until women assume the place in society which good sense and good feeling alike assign to them, human improvement must advance but feebly. It is in vain that we would circumscribe the power of one half of our race, and that half by far the most important and influential. . . .

Let women stand where they may in the scale of improvement, their position decided that of the race.<sup>6</sup>

Her ideas about equal education and rights for women were part of her radical philosophy which included such views as opposition to marriage, support of political action by workers, and an insistence on the importance of free inquiry and the rational basis of all knowledge. She edited her own paper, the "Free Enquirer", in New York. She achieved notoriety by pioneering as a woman lecturer and by founding a colony at Hashoba, Tennessee, with the aim of setting an example of how to free slaves and give them economic independence, which became well-known for its open repudiation of the institution of marriage. People tried to deal with her threatening ideas by writing her off as an immoral atheist advocate of free love; nevertheless, she had a widespread influence on women in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The question of sex and marriage explains much about the scandal associated with the earliest feminist leaders, who often opposed marriage as an institution designed for the subjugation of women. Later, as an organized woman's movement grew in numbers, its members tried hard to disassociate themselves from the reputation of being advocates of free love, but were never entirely successful. In the 1870's Victoria Woodhull, a supporter of woman's rights, outraged public opinion by publicly declaring her belief in free love from a stage in New York City, and by publicizing in her newspaper, "Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly", a love affair between Henry Ward Beecher, the most popular preacher in America and a fortress of piety, and Elizabeth Tilton, a parishioner of Beecher's and wife of a well-known magazine editor. Victoria Woodhull's activities forged a new link between the woman's rights cause and free love in the public mind, and the resulting criticism was so great that radical feminists retreated from further discussion of the marriage question.

A woman who marked a turning point in women's education was Emma Hart Willard, who opened a school for girls in Middlebury, Vermont, to teach them subjects such as algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and natural science which they could not learn in other schools. She tried to take education out of the realm of a privilege for the wealthy by making grants in the form of loans, but she knew that this was not the solution and was the first to raise the question of private endowment for women's education institutions. (It was not until after the Civil War that free high schools for women were opened.) After persuading the New York legislators to vote her a charter for a woman's seminary and the Troy Town Council to subsidize the school, she opened the Troy Female Seminary, the first endowed institution for the education of females, in 1821. She continued to introduce innovations into her course of study, such as the subject of physiology, "at a time when any mention of the human body by ladies was

considered the height of indelicacy”.

By the middle and late 1800's seminaries and colleges for women were beginning to be established, and women graduated from them with their minds opened to new ideas and opportunities. Among the graduates were those feminists who began to demand freedom to speak out and be heard in a world that listened only to men.

Oberlin, founded in 1833 in Ohio, was the first such institution of higher education to admit all students, regardless of race or sex. Lucy Stone, who became one of the outstanding orators of her day, and Antoinette Brown, the first woman to be ordained as a minister, graduated from Oberlin. Their feminist views conflicted constantly with the assumption of the founders and authorities of Oberlin that women needed education only to better carry out their duties as mothers and wives.

Oberlin's attitude was that women's high calling was to be the mothers of the race, and that they should stay within that special sphere in order that future generations should not suffer from the want of devoted and undistracted mother care. . .Washing the men's clothes, caring for their rooms, serving them at table, listening to their orations, but themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages, the Oberlin Co-eds were being prepared for intelligent motherhood and a properly subservient wifehood.<sup>7</sup>

The founding of Mount Holyoke in 1837, now generally regarded as the oldest woman's college in the United States, represented an important move away from those attitudes about women's education. Mary Lyon, its founder, spent several long years tirelessly traveling and appearing at public meetings to ask for money, in spite of people's strenuous objections that this kind of behavior was highly improper for a woman.

Mary Lyon followed the path charted by Emma Willard, but went much further. . .She established certain fundamental principles which succeeding institutions accepted as axiomatic: the schools must have adequate financial endowment; they must try in some degree to make education available to girls of all economic groups; they must offer a curriculum more advanced than that envisaged even by Mrs. Willard; and they must prepare their students for more than homemaking or teaching.<sup>8</sup>

The way had been prepared for the opening of Vassar in 1865, of Smith and Wellesley in 1875, of the "Harvard Annex" (Radcliffe) in 1879, and of Bryn Mawr in 1885.

The year Mount Holyoke was founded, anti-slavery women were holding their first national convention in New York. Women's anti-slavery activities brought about the spark which really ignited the feminist movement. Until this time feminism was an unorganized social movement developing in an informal and uncoordinated manner; advocates of women's rights were like "voices crying in the wilderness". After 1837 the woman question was thrust into the foreground of the anti-slavery movement.

In the 1830's and 40's thousands of women and men

were drawn into the anti-slavery work. Among these were the women who, moved to horror at slavery, became the first conscious feminists when they found that they could not work against slavery until they first established women's rights to do public work. When the leading male abolitionists met in Philadelphia in 1833 to organize the first anti-slavery society they permitted a few women to attend, but not to join the society. When the convention adjourned, some twenty women met to form the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society; and within a few years other women were organizing for the same purpose in New York, Boston, and many other New England towns. Because women were stepping out of their proper place, they aroused an enormous amount of hostility. Their brazen conduct in forming anti-slavery societies was attacked by clergymen, supporters of slavery, and male abolitionists alike. The women's meetings were often interrupted by mob violence. In 1833 at a national convention of American Anti-Slavery Women in Philadelphia, hundreds of women adopted a resolution justifying women's right to take part in the activities of all anti-slavery groups, while crowds of angry men surged around the building, tried to force their way in, and chanted, "burn down the hall." Abolitionist women were ridiculed when they appeared on speakers' platforms and not accepted as delegates at anti-slavery conventions; and within a short time most of the women active in abolitionist work began speaking out for their own rights also.

It was two sisters from the South — Angelina and Sarah Grimke — who really opened the way to public speaking for women. When they came of age, they freed the slaves they had inherited and moved to the North, determined to help arouse people against slavery. When they started touring New England, lecturing against slavery, their "unladylike" actions aroused a torrent of protest. Clergymen all over argued fervently that it was against God and nature for women to assume the place of man as a public reformer. The powerful Council of Congregational Ministers in Massachusetts issued a pastoral letter sternly condemning the behavior of the Grimke sisters as "unwomanly and unchristian."

We invite your attention to the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with wide-spread and permanent injury. The appropriate duties and influence of woman are clearly stated in the New Testament. . .Her power is in her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection, and which keeps her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals and of the nation. . .We appreciate the unostentatious prayers and efforts of woman in advancing the cause of religion at home and abroad; in leading religious inquirers to the pastors for instruction; and in all such associated effort as becomes the modesty of her sex. . .But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer, our care and protection seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her; she yields the power which God has given her for protection, and her character becomes unnatural. If the vine, whose strength and beauty is to lean upon the trellis-work and

half conceal its clusters, thinks to assume the independence and the over-shadowing nature of the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but fall in shame and dishonor into the dust. We cannot, therefore, but regret the mistaken conduct of those who encourage females to bear an obtrusive and ostentatious part in measures of reform, and countenance any of that sex who so far forget themselves as to itinerate in the character of public lecturers and teachers.<sup>9</sup>

Some ministers might support the abolitionist crusades and moral reform in general, but few would go so far as to advocate such a revolutionary doctrine as equality for women. Newspapers published scathing editorials.

The Grimke sisters started to answer their critics by linking the issues of slavery and the position of women. The speeches of both started to emphasize women's rights. The first major work by an American feminist, Sarah Grimke's "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women" (1838), was directed against those clergymen who taught that God had ordained women's inferior state. In it she attacked male supremacy:

(Man) has done all he could to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior. . . I ask no favors for my sex. I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethen is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed us to occupy.<sup>10</sup>

The entire abolitionist movement was divided by stormy arguments over whether women should be allowed to speak publicly, to have a vote in the societies, or to hold office. Many male abolitionists tried to stop the Grimke sisters from speaking out on women's rights because they feared that the effort to end slavery might not succeed if it were linked with a premature demand for women's rights. But many abolitionists did not believe in equal rights for women and protested against women speaking out because they considered any public activity by women indecent.

From the ranks of abolitionist women who began to follow the lead of the Grimke's and speak out in public against slavery and who were also denounced, threatened, and mobbed, came the leaders of the organized woman's rights movement. It is no wonder that women became aware of their own lack of freedom while fighting for the abolition of slavery, for at every step of the way, they found themselves in opposition to the traditions in which women were bred and bound. "We have good cause to be grateful to the slave," wrote the feminist and abolitionist Abby Kelley, "for the benefit we have received to ourselves, in working for him. In striving to strike his irons off, we found most surely, that we were manacled ourselves."<sup>11</sup> Women had only to substitute the word "husband" or "father" for the word "slave-owner" to see themselves as slaves; they knew what it was to be held in legal and social bondage and to be refused basic rights men claimed.

The abolitionist and feminist movements were closely allied for a quarter of a century. The anti-slavery cam-

paigned thousands of women into a radical movement, and through their involvement many discovered a series of grievances against men and began to develop a philosophy of their position in society and of their basic rights. Women first won the right to speak in public by speaking out against black slavery. The abolitionist movement furnished the feminists with a militant ideology of emancipation and with the political knowledge to begin fighting for their own equality, for it was as abolitionists that women learned to organize, to hold meetings, to carry out petition campaigns. This relationship between the anti-slavery and the women's rights movement helps explain why an organized feminist movement began in the United States instead of elsewhere. Concern over the status of women was fairly widespread in England and Western Europe, but it was the fight for the emancipation of women in the United States that ignited the international feminist movement. From the United States the woman's rights movement spread to England and Europe and later other parts of the world.

The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 is generally credited with being the first step in a worldwide campaign for women's rights. The seed for this Equal Rights Convention was sown in 1840 at a World Anti-Slavery Convention in London which eight American women attended as delegates. The men at the convention were so horrified that they spent an entire day debating the issue and finally voted not to seat the women, despite the strong objections of some of the American abolitionists such as Garrison. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the women who later called the Seneca Falls meeting, met each other at this convention; compelled to sit behind a curtain in the balcony during the convention, they talked indignantly together about the injustice of devoted abolitionist workers being denied any voice in the convention simply because they were women and about the need for action such as calling a woman's rights meeting.

Circumstances delayed their plans, but the decisive factor was added when Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved with her family from Boston to Seneca Falls, New York, and had to face the reality of a housewife's isolation and drudgery in a small town. She found the situation intolerable and wrote:

I now fully understand the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, and the impossibility of woman's best development if in contact, the chief part of her life, with servants and children. . . The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper. . . and the wearied anxious look of the majority of women, impressed me with the strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general and of women in particular. My experience at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. . . I could not see what to do or where to begin — my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion.<sup>12</sup>

She got together with Lucretia Mott and a few other friends and poured out her dissatisfaction. Their decision to call a woman's rights convention, the first of its kind in the world, helped launch a feminist movement that would leave its imprint on women everywhere. For the Seneca Falls Convention on July 19 and 20, 1848, the women drew up the first public protest in America against woman's political, economic, and social inferiority. Modeled after the Declaration of Independence, it was called the "Declaration of Sentiments" and forcefully indicted the "long train of abuses" inflicted by men upon women.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurptions on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of absolute tyranny over her. . . He has compelled her to submit to laws in the formation of which she has no voice. . . In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming to all intents and purposes her master — the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement. . . He closes against her all the avenues of wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known. . . He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account to man. He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it is his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God. He has endeavored in every way that he could to destroy her confidence in her own powers to lessen her self-respect and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.<sup>13</sup>

The resolutions adopted called for complete equality in marriage; equal rights in property, wages, and custody of children; the right to make contracts, to sue and be sued, and to testify in court; and for the vote. Despite the fact that only one notice had been put in the "Seneca Courier" about the meeting, women who had never known any other kind of life came in wagons from a radius of fifty miles to attend.

Within a year a National Woman's Rights Association was organized. Over 1000 delegates attended the first national woman's rights convention which met in Worcester, Massachusetts on October 22-24, 1850, and they came from as far away as California which was a tremendous achievement considering the travel conditions of that time.

One of the great problems the women faced was how to achieve reforms. They were severely handicapped by having no rights and no power at all, not even the vote, with which to win their demands. At first it seemed as if there was nothing they could do but talk and use their ideas as weapons. They held women's rights conventions every year after 1848, state and national conventions and also numerous meetings in various cities and towns. From these gatherings there emerged a body of ideas about woman's situation, dedicated leaders, many new recruits, and widespread, even though hostile, publicity.

The early woman's rights movement showed little interest in getting the vote, for of much more immediate concern were such issues as oppressive family relationships, control of earnings and of property, guardianship, divorce, lack of legal status, increased opportunities for education and employment, and the whole ideology of female inferiority perpetuated by organized religion. Another issue of concern to some feminists was dress reform, for the clothing which "ladies" were required to wear was extremely unhealthy and uncomfortable — "stays so tightly laced that women could hardly breathe, and half a dozen skirts and petticoats (which might weigh as much as twelve pounds), long enough to sweep up refuse from the streets and dust from the floor."<sup>14</sup> Compared to its child, the suffrage movement, the early woman's rights movement radically attacked the family, religion and the legal system. Susan B. Anthony summed up the goal of the pioneer feminists: "We call for nothing less than emancipation from all political, industrial, social, and religious subjection."

Since all of the early women's rights leaders were devoted abolitionists as well, they suspended their conventions during the Civil War and dedicated themselves to various kinds of anti-slavery and war work. For six years women held their tongues on woman's rights and placed other causes before their own. The end of the war brought about a split between the abolitionist and the feminist movements, for the women were incensed at the injustice of the Fourteenth Amendment of 1866 which granted the vote only to black men but not to women black or white. After spending thirty years supporting the anti-slavery groups, the women felt they had won the right to be included in the suffrage amendment. Instead they found that the Fourteenth Amendment inserted the word "male" into the U.S. Constitution for the first time, for it specifically gave "male inhabitants" the right to vote and then referred to them as "male citizens". This not only amended the Constitution to include the principle of discrimination by sex, but also implied that women could not be citizens. Later the Fifteenth Amendment was added, which stated that the vote could not be denied "on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude," but did not include sex. Women would have to get a new constitutional amendment passed in order to gain the right to vote in federal elections. Abolitionist and Republican leaders argued that this was the "Negro's hour" and that it was a matter of political expediency to push through the Fourteenth Amendment while it had a chance of being ratified. The Republicans were not especially interested in rights for black men, but they wanted votes; they felt they knew how blacks would vote but were not sure of women. Most of the women were extremely angry over the men's readiness to postpone women suffrage and felt deserted by this sell-out after they had worked so long and hard for the abolitionist cause. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in an argument with the abolitionist Wendell Phillips, said: "May I ask just

one question, based on the apparent opposition in which you place the Negro and woman? Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?"

The women disagreed among themselves about supporting the Fourteenth Amendment while the question of woman suffrage was postponed. Because of this and other issues, a formal split occurred in the woman's movement in 1869. The radical minority, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, believed that it was primarily due to the influence of the abolitionist men that women's interests had been betrayed and that the women who followed the men's lead had been used; they organized the National Woman Suffrage Association which permitted women only to be members. The conservative majority, led by Lucy Stone, Henry B. Blackwell, and Julia Howe, among others, formed the American Woman Suffrage Association which enrolled men as officers as well as members. Except for a few brief attempts at reconciliation, the two groups worked separately for twenty years.

The members of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) regarded woman's rights from a broad perspective and felt that although the vote was important, other matters were equally vital, especially reforms in the marriage and divorce laws. One member wrote:

But we are not dreamers or fanatics; and we know that the ballot when we get it, will achieve for woman no more than it has achieved for man. . . The ballot is not even half the loaf; it is only a crust — a crumb. The ballot touches only those interests, either of women or men, which take their root in political questions. But woman's chief discontent is not with her political, but with her social, and particularly her marital bondage. The solemn and profound question of marriage. . . is of more vital consequence to woman's welfare, reaches down to a deeper depth in woman's heart, and more thoroughly constitutes the core of the woman's movement, than any such superficial and fragmentary question as woman's suffrage.<sup>15</sup>

For two years Stanton and Anthony published a journal properly called "The Revolution", for they wanted to revolutionize the American domestic system and to get to the roots of woman's oppression. In it they attacked religion, morals, the legal system, and the economy, as well as marriage; and they advocated a wide range of reforms for a variety of causes, such as the eight-hour day for labor, freedom for Ireland, and an easy money policy through the issue of greenbacks.

The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) decided to dedicate itself to the one reform of woman suffrage, and concentrated on trying to amend the constitutions of the individual states as a necessary prelude to federal action, while the NWSA worked for the vote by trying to get a suffrage amendment to the Constitution through Congress. The leaders of the AWSA felt that the vote could best be won by avoiding all issues that might alienate influential sections of the society; they had little or no interest in the divorce and marriage question, in criticizing the churches, or in organ-

izing working women. The AWSA had its own paper, the "Woman's Journal", which spoke more conservatively to the growing numbers of club women and professionals, while "The Revolution" spoke to the exploited woman worker or social outcast.

During the whole period of struggle for legal equality and the vote, women were entering into factory and office work, trades and professions, and were beginning to participate in the union movement. The demand for suffrage was taken more seriously as women gained economic independence. The rise of the union movement and the strikes against intolerable work situations provided an example and an impetus to the woman's movement.

The Lowell mill girls who organized the Lowell Female Labor Reform in 1831 and many other women working in factories who made repeated efforts to build their own labor organizations to fight the inhuman working conditions and to gain equal pay with men were crucial pioneers in the woman's movement.

For the Triangle Shirtwaist girls, working for as little as \$6 a week, as late as 10 o'clock at night, fined for talking, laughing, or singing, equality was a question of more than education or the vote. They held out on picket lines through bitter cold and hungry months; dozens were clubbed by police and dragged off in Black Marias.<sup>16</sup>

Many early labor organizers such as Augusta Lewis and Kate Mullaney were feminists; numerous working women participated vigorously in the suffrage movement; women factory workers spoke from suffrage platforms. But it was very difficult for working women, who would still have household duties to attend to after working a twelve or fourteen hour day in the factory, to take the lead in the woman's movement. The accumulation of money, recent household inventions, and the availability of cheap labor for domestic employment, due to increasing immigration, had permitted the growth of a class of leisured women, the American "ladies"; and it was these women who had the time and the education, thanks to the efforts of the pioneers in women's education, to lead a women's rights movement.

Many black women, like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frances E.W. Harper, and Sarah Remond, played an active role in the early woman's rights movement. Although their primary interest lay in the anti-slavery struggle and in fighting racism, they constantly pointed out the relationship between freedom for the slave and equality for women of any color. The sentimental Romantic movement, one of the principal intellectual currents of the nineteenth century, put a morbid emphasis upon the weakness and fragility of woman. Black women and women working in factories helped undermine this feminine stereotype of dependent helpless gentility that had been used to justify woman's subordination. In 1851 at a woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, when none of the women seemed able to answer men's heckling and jeers at trusting the vote to women so weak and helpless, Sojourner Truth's eloquent words turned the

whole tide of feeling in favor of the feminists:

The man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best places everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place—and ain't I a woman?

Raising her arm with a gesture that electrified the audience:

Look at my arm! 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 can get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most of 'em sold into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me—and ain't I a woman?<sup>17</sup>

The woman's movement was a grass roots one. Dedicated women traveled from town to town, often covering immense distances, enduring all kinds of weather and travel conditions, in order to talk to women about women's rights and working for suffrage, to hold meetings and sell literature. They went door-to-door collecting thousands of signatures for numerous petitions which were frequently laughed at when the women would present them to the legislators. The women spoke spoke over and over again with male voters and legislators.

The first place in America to give full suffrage rights to women was Wyoming Territory in 1869. Utah was next the following year. The realities of frontier life did not encourage the idea that women should lead sheltered lives, and women won suffrage victories in the West sooner than other parts of the country.

Winning the vote was infinitely more difficult than most people today appreciate—numerous women work out their lives in fighting for it. In "Woman Suffrage and Politics" two suffragists write:

It is doubtful if any man, even among suffrage men, ever realized what the suffrage struggle came to mean to women, before the end was allowed in America. How much of time and patience, how much work, energy and aspiration, how much faith, how much hope, how much despair went into it. It leaves its mark on one, such a struggle. There were some women in every state who knew nothing about it. Not all the women in every state were in it. But most of the women in all the states were at least on the periphery of its effort, and interest, even when they were not in the heart of it. To them all its success became a monumental thing.<sup>19</sup>

The women fought tirelessly against incredible odds, only to be met, for the most part, with defeat after defeat. Between 1897 and 1910, there were fourteen bleak years of exhausting campaigning in which not one state enfranchised its women. It took seventy-two years for women to get the vote. Altogether, the suffragists organized 56 campaigns of referenda to male voters; 480 campaigns to get legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include woman's suffrage planks in their platforms; 30 campaigns to get presidential party con-

ventions to adopt woman's suffrage planks; 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses; and the ratification campaign of 1919 and 1920.

In 1890 the two women's organizations (NWSA and AWSA) merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The NAWSA concentrated on winning the suffrage by amending state constitutions and used basically education strategy, trying through propaganda to appeal to men's sense of justice.

The turn of the century marked a new state in the women's movement, for most of the early abolitionist leaders died or retired during the 1890's and were replaced by younger leaders, increasingly women of wealth and professional women who were more conservative politically, and who focused exclusively on obtaining the vote. Woman suffrage had become a respectable cause by this time, and women could join a suffrage organization without fear of ostracism. The social prestige of suffrage continued to rise until, by the end of the decade of the first World War, it was socially fashionable in the large cities to be a suffragist. The feminist movement that had begun as a Northern outgrowth of the abolitionist cause had by the beginning of the twentieth century become a nationwide movement.

American society was undergoing many important changes which influenced the suffrage movement. The massive waves of immigration and the class struggle of the 1890's led native, middle-class, white Americans to question the concept of the "consent of the governed." Reflecting this fear of the growing numbers of immigrants, suffragists began to argue that their votes would counteract the votes of the "undesirable elements" of the population—the immigrants and the blacks. This was a major change from the arguments of the early women's rights leaders who had demanded the vote as a natural right of all citizens. Besides sharing the anti-foreignism and class prejudices (class chauvinism) and racism of the men, the suffragists turned to other arguments also because the appeals to natural right and justice fell on deaf ears, and they sought others which would gain more support from the men who had the power to give them the vote. One suffragist argument used statistics to show that there were more native-born women than foreign-born men and women combined, and the corollary in the South was to show that there were more white women than black men and women combined; therefore, giving women the vote would mean increasing the proportion of native-born to foreign-born voters and white voters to black.

The number of Southern women in the early woman's rights movement was very small because of the connection with abolition, and because the South idealized the patriarchal family, with both women and slaves as parts of the ideological complex, and interference with the position of either the women or the blacks was considered an unspeakable blow at a cherished way of life which Southerners considered to be the highest of Ameri-

can culture. In the early 1890's, however, woman suffrage in the South began to be advocated as a "solution to the race problem", with the principle argument being that the enfranchisement of women would insure the permanency of white supremacy, and suffrage associations appeared in one Southern state after another. In 1903, the NAWSA adopted the principle of states' rights as the basis of the National organization; this meant that state affiliates could use whatever arguments they saw fit within their territories and could express racist views from NAWSA Convention platforms. White supremacy persisted as an ugly issue within the suffrage movement until its final victory (and subsequent death) in 1920.

Suffrage arguments, reflecting the economic realities of an industrial age, also began to stress the ways in which women differed from men and the reforms that women would bring about when they were enfranchised, in contrast to earlier arguments based primarily on the natural equality of all people and woman's inalienable right to political citizenship. Waves of reform movements swept the country in the two decades before World War I, and the male reformers were a different group of men in or near power to whom the appeal for suffrage could be directed. Much of the energy of middle-class women had been channeled into various reform and philanthropic activities, and during the Progressive Era when those reform activities acquired political significance, many male reformers saw women as likely allies in the reform movement and endorsed woman suffrage.

Twentieth-century suffragists frequently called government "enlarged house-keeping," for more Americans were living in cities and the functions which individual women had performed in isolation at home—growing and processing food, baking bread, making clothes, educating children—became social functions and subjects for government legislation. Suffragists argued that government needed the special experience of women, whose training as cooks, seamstresses, house cleaners and mothers qualified them to help in legislation concerned with food inspection, sweatship sanitation, streetcleaning, and public schools, and that it was necessary that women have increased power over many things outside their homes in order to protect their homes. By justifying political activities for women on the grounds that society was an extension of the home, the suffragists were supporting the domestic status quo and encouraging the cult of motherhood. However, their arguments were also pointing out the contradictions in the belief that woman was morally and spiritually superior to man and yet was to submit completely to masculine authority and domination. They were asserting that women could no longer accept uncritically those role definitions drawn up for them by men, but must take an active, responsible part in public life.

The need of government for women's participation and woman's duty to participate in the legislative process became the core of the suffrage rationale of a generation of middle-class women who wanted the vote in order to reform the society and not simply because they sought freedom for themselves.<sup>19</sup>

In 1913 the suffrage movement split again, this time over the question of tactics. A group of younger women, headed by Alice Paul, broke with the NAWSA to form a separate organization, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, which was influenced by the example of the English suffragists, who were organized and powerful. Despairing of ever getting men to listen to reason, English suffragists, led by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, resorted to militant tactics—they hounded public officials and battled cops, chained themselves to public buildings and went on talking while the police sawed them loose, smashed store fronts on Bond Street, set fire to empty buildings, threw acid in mail boxes, broke porcelains and slashed pictures in museums, climbed on rafters above Parliament and lay there for hours so that they could speak out at any opportune moment, disguised themselves as telegraph boys so that they could get into meetings. Hundreds were arrested and continued to battle prison officials in jail, went on hunger strikes and were subjected to forced feeding. Alice Paul and another American woman, Lucy Burns, took part in militant English suffragist demonstrations, were imprisoned and went on hunger strikes. When they returned to the U.S., they were determined to introduce new tactics into the somewhat stagnant woman's movement.

Adopting a tactic of the British suffragists, the Congressional Union decided to hold the party in power responsible for the delay in granting woman suffrage and to campaign against all candidates of that party, regardless of whether or not they supported suffrage as individuals. By this time, women had won the vote in nine states. The CU's campaign to politically punish the Democratic party, which was in power, must have rudely jolted the belief that most women were content with their disenfranchisement, for "during the congressional elections of 1914, only 20 of 43 Democratic candidates in those states won, and the fury of women scorned was fully demonstrated."<sup>20</sup>

In 1916 the leaders of the CU founded the Woman's Party, an organization of women voters in the full suffrage states in the West. In 1917 the WP and the CU merged to form the National Woman's Party, which also followed the British policy of putting a lot of pressure on top officials. To get favorable action from President Wilson, the National Woman's Party formed a picket line around the White House in January, 1917. When they continued to picket after war was declared, patriotic mobs began to maul the pickets and tear down their banners. Police started arresting the women on contrived charges, for they were violating no law, and hundreds were sent to prison when they refused to pay fines. The arrests

never included the men who snatched the banners from the hands of the women and destroyed them and frequently physically mistreated the women. A History of the National Woman's Party describes some of the treatment the women received in prison:

The guards from the male prison fell upon us. I saw Miss Lincoln, a slight young girl, thrown to the floor. Mrs. Nolan, a delicate old lady of seventy-three was mastered by two men. . . Whittaker (the superintendent) in the center of the room directed the whole attack, inciting the guards to every brutality. Two men brought in Dorothy Day, twisting her arms above her head. Suddenly they lifted her and brought her body down twice over the back of an iron bench. . . The bed broke Mrs. Nolan's fall, but Mrs. Cosu hit the wall. They had been there a few minutes when Mrs. Lewis, all doubled over like a sack of flour, was thrown in. Her head struck the iron bed and she fell to the floor senseless. As for Lucy Burns, they handcuffed her wrists and fastened the handcuffs over her head to the cell door.

Alice Paul started a "watch fire" in an urn in front of the White House and every time President Wilson made a speech referring to freedom, a copy of the speech was burned. Police would arrest the women who burned the speech.

When the Senate finally voted on the suffrage amendment, it lost by two votes, and the women transferred their pickets to the Senate. The Senate voted again in February, 1919, and the amendment lost by one vote. It took the election of a new Congress before the Nineteenth Amendment was finally passed on June 4, 1919. And then it took a state-by-state struggle lasting another fourteen months to get it ratified. After thirty-six states had ratified, the amendment became law on August 26, 1920. Subsequently five other states ratified, but it was rejected by Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, Delaware, and Louisiana. (Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia signed a resolution on March 27, 1970, which ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, bringing that state up to date a mere half a century late.)

By the time of the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, nearly 18 million women had already been enfranchised through amendments to state constitutions; the amendment actually gave the vote to an additional 9½ million women. The NAWSA had continued with its painstaking educational work during the final years before passage of the federal amendment, but it was the militant minority who gave the necessary final push to the suffrage movement.

Who opposed the woman's movement and why? What were the major arguments used by the "anti"? "Opposition to feminism antedated the feminist movement and represented that concern for social stability which motivated much conservatism on the woman question."<sup>21</sup> The antifeminist ideology was based on the link of the woman to the home.

Close to the heart of all antisuffragist orators, particularly congressmen, was a sentimental vision of Home and Mother, equal in sanctity to God and the Constitution. . . The anti's

regarded each woman's vocation as determined not by her individual capacities or wishes but by her sex. Men were expected to have a variety of ambitions and capabilities, but all women were destined from birth to be full-time wives & mothers. To dispute this eternal truth was to challenge theology, biology, or sociology.<sup>22</sup>

Woman's place was in the home, and politics was man's business. The cult of the home was the national religion, and women were considered the moral custodians of society. Anti's declared that social stability and human welfare depended upon woman staying in her proper sphere—if women participated in politics, juvenile delinquency would increase because children would be neglected, homes would be broked up because spouses would argue politics, sex would be injected into politics, and society in general would collapse. Those who defined woman's place as the home also expressed a desire that woman should be kept out from where the action is for man's sake, because somehow a woman was supposed to be a more inspiring influence on a man if she was deprived of the means to achieve her own independence and identify and kept in passive submission.

Fiction around the turn of the century abounds in criticism of the "emancipated woman." Antifeminist writers argued that the women's struggle for a larger role was itself the cause of the whole problem of social disorder. Robert Herrick, one of the so-called problem novelists of that time, wrote a typical indictment of feminism in a book called "Together" in which he portrays a group of restless, striving women who leave destruction everywhere. It was frequently asserted that most women were perfectly contented with their position, and that only a minority of unhappy, neurotic spinsters and misfits were behind the agitation for women's rights and the ballot.

Another argument tried to show that women were physically and mentally incapable of undertaking the duties of voting and taking an active role in the world. Femininity was identified with emotionalism and illogicality, while masculinity was linked with rationality and practicality.

The feminists had to constantly fight the belief that they were violating the God-given nature of women. Most clergymen opposed the feminists, and argued that God had ordained woman for the home and man for the world, that the existing division of labor between man and woman happened to correspond exactly with that decreed by the Creator, and therefore must not be changed in any way. Many feminists opposed most clergymen and considered religion and the Bible an implacable enemy. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's primary concern became the responsibility of established religion for woman's inferior position. In 1895 she published "The Woman's Bible, a series of commentaries on male supremacist passages in the Bible. She believed that woman could achieve equality only when the influence of organized

religion had been destroyed. In the introduction to "The Woman's Bible," she writes:

From the inauguration of the movement for woman's emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the "divinely ordained sphere," prescribed in the Old and New Testaments. . . The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man. . . The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned, and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjugation, she was to play the rôle of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Here is the Bible position of woman briefly summed up.

Many suffragists opposed "The Woman's Bible" for fear that it would alienate religious believers, and the suffrage convention of 1896 passed a resolution disavowing any responsibility for the work. Also, many of the women were deeply religious and preferred to identify the enemy as the perversion of true Christianity and misinterpretations of the Bible; they argued that the Bible really supports female equality and that male supremacist sections can be explained away historically or metaphorically.

The feminists faced, however, more than mere conservative ideas and feeling about the sanctity of home and motherhood; behind the cries of "save the home" and "save femininity" were vested economic and political interests. The women fought against highly organized opposition which became increasingly hostile as woman suffrage was slowly won in one state after another. Conservative ideology and religious beliefs about the place of women had an economic basis; they would not have stopped the men in power from equalizing the situation of women if it had been in their interest to do so. But the vote and more freedom for women threatened to cut into profit-making and to upset established political and social patterns which were advantageous for white men.

Industrial and business interests fought suffrage vehemently, although usually with the greatest of care to hide their activities. Suffrage organizers reported the activity of railroad, oil, and general manufacturing lobbies, whenever suffrage was up for legislative action or referendum. Corporate interests opposed woman suffrage as a threat to their profits, for they feared that women would use the vote to improve the conditions of working women and children and men, to regulate wage scales and the industries in general, to reduce tariff schedules, and to harm the enormous advantages businesses received in various grants and tax loopholes.

Since many suffragists had also worked in the temperance movement to bring about Prohibition, the liquor and brewing interest bitterly opposed woman suffrage

from the beginning. The liquor groups were extremely well-organized; besides buying editorial support for educational campaigns, they would allocate quotas to saloon keepers and bartenders of the number of customers for whole "no" vote at the polls they would be held accountable, and would, of course, openly influence legislators through their lobbying.

The weight of the political machines was invariably thrown against votes for women.

Machine men were plainly uncertain of their ability to control an addition to the electorate which seemed to them relatively unsusceptible to bribery, more militant, and bent on disturbing reforms ranging from better sewage control to the abolition of child labor and, worst of all, "cleaning up politics."<sup>24</sup>

In the South racism was the major source of opposition. White Southerners feared the black vote and always pointed out that votes for women also meant black women. They feared that women suffrage might weaken the Jim Crow restrictions which had disenfranchised black males and bring about an enforcement of the Fourteenth Amendment. One leaflet warned:

Men of the South, heed not the song of the suffragist siren! Seal your ears against her vocal wiles! For no matter how sweetly she may proclaim the advantages of female franchise, remember that woman suffrage means a reopening of the entire Negro suffrage question, loss of States Rights, and another period of Reconstruction horrors, which will introduce a set of female carpetbaggers as bad as their male prototypes of the Sixties.

Most suffragists overestimated the power of the vote. Some believed that the female vote would end graft and corruption, do away with war, and bring a peaceful millennium on earth. As the women invested greater emotional energy in the sole issue of the ballot, their need to exaggerate its value become more urgent. However, there were always a small minority of feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who criticized the woman's movement for attributing too much significance to suffrage and focusing too exclusively on it. In "Women and Economics" Charlotte Gilman argued that woman's economic dependence was a basis of her oppression.

Today's feminists have learned some extremely important lessons from the early woman's movement. And one of the most basic is an understanding of the danger of focusing exclusively on a single issue rather than developing the most complete analysis possible of female oppression. Most of the early feminists did not examine closely enough the limits that the organization of society placed on their emancipation. Their analysis of woman's position, especially after the movement began to focus narrowly on the vote, was inadequate and too superficial. Their experiences show the importance of developing a perspective which reveals the roots of oppression so that women will not be co-opted by various reforms, but will know how far they will have to go in transforming society.

Another crucial lesson is about racism and class prejudice. Racism was used to get white suffragists to identify with white men rather than with black women, and class prejudice placed barriers between women working in industries and women married to middle-class men. A society based on caste and class depends upon people of the lower castes and classes identifying with those of the higher rather than with other oppressed people. Women have always been divided by racism and class chauvinism, and this serves to help perpetuate white men as a ruling group. Women today must develop an understanding of the interdependence of their oppression with racism and class exploitation. The reaction of white male Southerners to the suffragists points out the connection of racism to sexism; the racism of the Southern suffragists prevented them from seeing this connection. The woman's movement today has to analyze how the fact that all white men can consider themselves as superior to all blacks and all women serves as a useful function for those white men who economically exploit others—how racism and sexism are economically beneficial to the group of white men who control the major wealth and resources of this country. Black and brown women and poor white women are the most severely oppressed groups of females; instead of being divided from them by racism and class prejudice, other women must try to learn from them and to understand that their needs and consciousness must be in the forefront of any woman's movement.

Another lesson learned is about male supremacy and how it exploits women through their socialization to be self-denying and supportive of others. Women are conditioned from birth to the virtue of female self-sacrifice and, therefore, are easily persuaded to put the interests of everyone else above their own and to put aside their struggle for liberation for "more important issues." Most of the early feminists dropped their own cause during the Civil War and World War I in order to work for what they thought was the good of their country; most feminists were persuaded to accept the Fourteenth Amendment which completely excluded them from the suffrage. From the abolitionists to the labor struggles, women have been used to fight men's battles. After the struggle over women being excluded from the Fourteenth Amendment, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony concluded that men could not be trusted and wrote: "We repudiated man's counsels forevermore; and solemnly vowed that there should never be another season of silence until woman had the same rights everywhere on this green earth as man." Man could be of little help because as long as he regarded woman as "subject, his inferior, his slave, their interests must be antagonistic." Women today have learned both from their own experiences and from those of the early feminists that men will welcome them to the fight when their help is needed and will sell them out again and again and send them back to the home when it is no longer

required, unless women themselves insist on dealing with their own oppression. This lesson has been amply demonstrated again today in the history of the male-dominated New Left's relation to the female liberation movement. The early feminist movement points out clearly the necessity for an autonomous woman's movement.

Even though men still clearly occupy the commanding positions in American society and women are still discriminated against and exploited in a multitude of ways, nevertheless the early feminist movement accomplished a great deal and prepared the way for today's female liberation movement. In the course of their long and courageous struggle, they not only won the vote, but changed traditional attitudes toward early marriage and divorce; won many legal rights, including custodial rights to their children; fought against the prejudice that women were too emotional to be educated, won the right to equal education, and established a system of women's schools and colleges which still flourishes; won the right to speak out in public and to own property, and the right to work at a job or profession and control their own earnings; brought about dress reform and did away with the corset as a symbol of woman's bodily bondage; helped to destroy women's ignorance about their own situation and showed that women did have rights for which they must fight; shattered many myths and rigid rules dominating woman's life, and proved that the female was not a passive, mindless, decorative thing to be disposed of by others and incapable of a voice in her own existence.\* In their struggle, the women gained self-confidence; they emerged from the isolation of their private lives to work and fight collectively and politically. And the rewards and excitement of doing so were many. Ida Alex Ross Wylie, an English feminist, wrote:

To my astonishment, I found that women, in spite of knock-knees, and the fact that for centuries a respectable woman's leg had not even been mentionable, could at a pinch outrun the average London bobby. Their aim with a little practice became good enough to land ripe vegetables in ministerial eyes, their wits sharp enough to keep Scotland Yard running in circles and looking very silly. Their capacity for impromptu organization, for secrecy and loyalty, their iconoclastic disregard for class and established order were a revelation to all concerned, but especially themselves. . . . The day that, with a straight left to the jaw, I sent a fair-sized CID officer into the orchestra pit of the theater where we were holding one of our belligerent meetings, was the day of my own coming of age. . . . For two years of wild and sometimes dangerous adventure, I worked and fought alongside vigorous, happy, well-adjusted women who laughed instead of tittering, who walked freely instead of teetering, who could outfast Ghandi and come out with a grin and a jest. I slept on hard floors between elderly duchesses, stout cooks, and young shopgirls. We were often

\* During the first decade after the winning of woman suffrage many state laws equalized or at least improved the position of women with regard to the guardianship of her children, jury duty, inheritance, property, citizenship, and many other legal rights. A bill, known as the Cable Act, providing independent citizenship for married women was passed in 1922.

tired, hurt and frightened. But we were content as we had never been. We shared a joy of life that we had never known. Most of my fellow fighters were wives and mothers. And strange things happened to their domestic life. Husbands came home at night with a new eagerness. . . As for children, their attitude changed rapidly from one of affectionate toleration for poor, darling mother to one of wide-eyed wonder. Released from the smother of mother love, for she was too busy to be more than casually concerned with them they discovered that they liked her. . . She had guts. Those women who stood outside the fight. . . and who were being more than usually Little Women, hated the fighters with the venomous rage of envy.<sup>23</sup>

In their rebellion against woman's place, the early feminists opened up many alternatives for women today, as well as winning important basic rights. Because of the passionate struggle of these female pioneers, today's feminists have many new possibilities and a foundation of rights, as well as greater knowledge and power to work for female liberation.

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- <sup>16</sup>Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963. (p. 90)
- <sup>17</sup>Flexner, pp. 90-1.
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- <sup>19</sup>Kraditor, Aileen S. *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965. (p. 72)

<sup>20</sup>Gruberg, Martin. *Women in American Politics*. Wisconsin: Academia Press, 1968. (p. 6)

<sup>21</sup>Kraditor, Aileen S. *Up From the Pedestal*. Chicago, Quadrangle Books, 1968. (p. 45)

<sup>22</sup>Flexner, p. 299.

<sup>23</sup>Friedan, pp. 92-3.

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