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ACHIEVING WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN THE USA: AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOVEMENT FROM 1848 TO 1920

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ACHIEVING WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN THE USA:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOVEMENT FROM 1848 TO 1920

An Essay Submitted to the
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By
Jessica Marie Seaman
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The essay of Jessica Marie Seaman is hereby accepted:

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PREFACE

During my time as a graduate student at John Carroll University I was able to explore my educational curiosities through my course selections. I started to become intrigued with the women's suffrage movement after being assigned a project on Elizabeth Cady Stanton in my Readings in Modern American History (HS 541) class. I had heard of Elizabeth Cady Stanton before but knew little about her life. I found her story inspirational and wanted to learn more about the women's suffrage movement. I was able to research the topic more thoroughly in my Introduction to Graduate Research and Writing (HM 503) class. It was here that I discovered that most of the research on the suffrage movement focused on the North and little was discussed on the South or West. This sparked my curiosity and I began researching the different regions and how they impacted the movement. During the next academic year (2014-2015), I enrolled in two special topics courses, Slavery and Abolition (HS 500) and Abraham Lincoln (HS 495). These two courses along with the knowledge I retained from my Readings in Modern American History class helped me to understand Southern society and its cultural ideology. This information was critical in understanding the philosophy behind the Southern women's suffrage movement. In addition to attending classes I also went to Kentucky to study the Laura Clay collection at the University of Kentucky's Special Collection Library. The collection housed the personal papers of Laura Clay along with newspapers and flyers about women's suffrage. Some of the newspaper articles referenced to the success of the West and their state by state suffrage campaign. This

information led me to begin my research on the West and Jeannette Rankin. I also found Google Books to be an incredible aid in finding and accessing primary sources. I was inspired by the writing style of Ronald C. White Jr's book *A. Lincoln: A Biography*. White uses Abraham Lincoln's life as a window into the past. He not only comments on the life of Lincoln but also on current events and the ideologies of the time. White's writing style helps to paint a full picture of the antebellum period. It is my hope that through the lives of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Laura Clay, and Jeanette Rankin I can paint a full picture of the women's suffrage movement in the United States.

The battle for women's enfranchisement in the United States raged across generational lines as well as state borders on its way to achieve victory in 1920. The movement first gained public recognition in 1848, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton publicly delivered her "Declaration of Sentiments" speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. In her Declaration, Stanton challenged the treatment and position of women within the United States. She stated, "The history of mankind is a history repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of men toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of absolute tyranny over her." She urged women to fight against their oppressors by attending other conventions as well as petitioning state and national legislatures. Stanton's speech was used as the cornerstone for the women's suffrage movement and inspired future suffragettes. Laura Clay, a Southern suffragette, was inspired by Stanton's words and actions. Clay faced different forms of resistance from suffragettes in the North. However the North and South were not alone in their fight for women's rights; the West also played an instrumental part in achieving women's suffrage, this can be seen through the life of Jeannette Rankin. This essay will follow the lives of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Laura Clay, and Jeannette Rankin and discuss the difficulties each faced during the women's suffrage movement due to their different geographical locations. The goal of this paper is to demonstrate that each region played an important role in the gradual success of the movement. Furthermore, one can argue that without the involvement of the West, the passing of the 19th Amendment would not have succeeded in the early 20th century.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born to a prominent Northern family on November 12, 1815. She was one of ten children born to Daniel and Margaret Cady. Her father was

a member of the United States House of Representatives and later served as a Supreme Court Judge for the state of New York. Elizabeth's mother Margaret was related to the Livingston family that had dominated New York politics and business since the colonial days.¹ Margaret's father was a proud patriot who had fought during the Revolutionary War. Later in her life, Elizabeth Cady Stanton referred to herself as a Daughter of the Revolution. She believed just as the United States had gained independence from Britain, she would lead the battle for women's independence from men.²

However, before the battle could be fought the groundwork had to be laid. The preparation for Cady Stanton's battle began after the death of her older brother Eleazar. Both she and her father took the loss of Eleazar especially hard. In her writings, Cady Stanton remembered how devastated her father was at Eleazar's funeral:

I still recall, too, going into the large darkened parlor to see my brother, and finding the casket, mirrors, and pictures all draped in white, and my father seated by his side, pale, immovable. As he took no notice of me, after standing a long while, I climbed upon his knee, when he mechanically put his arm around me and, with my head resting against his beating heart, we both sat in silence, he thinking of the wreck of all his hopes in the loss of a dear son, and I wondering what could be said or done to fill the void in his breast. At length he heaved a deep sigh and said: 'Oh, my daughter, would that you were a boy!'³

Her father's words had a profound effect on her and from that moment on she would strive to be all her brother was in order to repair her father's heart. To Cady Stanton this meant succeeding in areas that were traditionally reserved for men, such as education.

In honor of her brother, Cady Stanton was determined to make the most out of her life. With the support of her parents, she attended Johnstown Academy for boys and girls.

¹ Michael Burgan, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Social Reformer* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Compass Point Books, 2006), 17.

² Burgan, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 18.

³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*. Vol. 1. (New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1969), 22-23.

She thrived in school and was at the top of her class. Throughout her years at the academy Cady Stanton had one goal in mind, to win the award for excellence in Greek. Cady Stanton recalled, “How well I remember my joy in receiving that prize...One thought alone filled my mind. ‘Now,’ said I, ‘my father will be satisfied with me.’ So, as soon as we were dismissed, I ran down the hill, rushed breathless in to his office, laid the Greek Testament, which was my prize on his table and exclaimed: ‘There, I got it!’”⁴ Cady Stanton stood and waited with anticipation for her father’s approval but never received it. Instead her father sighed and said, “Ah, you should have been a boy!”⁵ Besides dealing with the rejection of her father, Cady Stanton was also faced with the harsh reality that there were no colleges in the United States which women could attend. Her only option, like other women of her time, was to continue her post-secondary education at a seminary. (The term seminary was assigned to privately run female education institutions during the eighteenth century and did not necessarily have a religious affiliation.)

After graduating from Johnstown Academy, Cady Stanton decided to continue her education at Emma Willard’s Seminary School for girls. Her father did not agree with her decision to continue her education but still financially supported her. Traditionally, during this time, women only learned the basic skills of reading and writing. After learning these basic skills women then focused all their energy on becoming a wife and mother. This stereotypical lifestyle did not appeal to Cady Stanton; she wanted to continue to nourish her intellectual curiosity.

⁴ Stanton, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Cady Stanton began her studies at Emma Willard's Seminary in January of 1831. While attending the Seminary, Cady Stanton was taught subjects that were deemed appropriate for women such as French and music. However, unlike most institutions of its time, the Emma Willard Seminary also taught a "male" inspired curriculum that focused on mathematics, science, politics, history, and philosophy.⁶ After graduating from the Seminary in 1833, Cady Stanton began spending a majority of her time with her cousin Gerrit Smith. Smith was a wealthy man who, like most Americans of the 19th century had been influenced by the Second Great Awakening. This religious revival was sparked by the transportation revolution.

During the 19th century, the transportation revolution closely related to the Industrial Revolution, helped to improve and develop roadways as well as open up new canals. These advances in transportation led to the creation of new markets and a rise in profits. Although advances in transportation helped to stimulate the market, they also hurt many Americans who were unable to take advantage of the new opportunities. Small self-employed farmers who had no access to canals or roads were unable to compete with their transit competitors. A majority of small farmers were forced to leave their homes and migrate to the West. The migration to the West led to the breakup of many religious communities across the United States. Religious leaders began to question their congregation's devotion to God and their increasing fondness of materialism and egotistical behavior.⁷ This sentiment is reflected in Minister Timothy Dwight's statement, "The profanation of the Sabbath . . . profaneness of language, drunkenness, gambling, and lewdness, were exceedingly increased; and, what is less commonly remarked, but is

⁶ Burgan, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 25.

⁷ David Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 250.

not less mischievous, than any of them, a light, vain method of thinking, concerning sacred things, a cold, contemptuous indifference toward every moral and religious subject.”⁸ Religious leaders believed that the only way to save the United States was through a religious revival. The revival is referred to as the Second Great Awakening and changed the way people thought of sin. In the past sin was seen as a supernatural evil that affected everyone. However, during the 19th century, sin was described as a particular type of behavior. Revivalists were trying to establish a new moral character in the United States. They were trying to create a new Eden, a society that was free from sin.

The Second Great Awakening made it possible for women to participate in public matters concerning morality. Revivalists urged sinners to demonstrate their repentance through their actions and words.⁹ As a result, women began to take a more hands-on approach to mending society’s moral problems. Women began to establish their own groups and organizations that sought to help the less fortunate members of society. They organized sewing groups and distributed food to the “deserving poor” in cities and towns.¹⁰ The “deserving poor” is a reference to widows and orphans, who through no fault of their own ended up in a state of poverty. Many female-run societies focused solely on improving conditions for women and children.

The Second Great Awakening led to a dramatic increase in the number of social reforms in the United States, such as the temperance and abolitionist movements. The temperance movement was a reform aimed at ending excessive alcohol consumption, a problem which affected all levels of society. Men typically were the drunkards while

⁸ Minister Timothy Dwight as cited in Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1918), 25.

⁹ S.J. Kleinberg, *Votes for Women: Women in the United States 1830-1945* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 81.

¹⁰ Kleinberg, 82.

women and children were cast as their victims. Men who suffered from alcoholism and gambling put their families at risk. It was not uncommon for a man to drink away his pay or become abusive while under the influence of alcohol. Temperance reformer Amelia Bloomer often wrote about the evils of alcohol in her newspaper *The Lily*. On January 1, 1849 Bloomer wrote,

It is woman that speaks through *The Lily*. It is upon an important subject, too, that she comes before the public to be heard. Intemperance is the great foe to her peace and happiness. It is that above all which has made her home desolate and beggared her offspring. It is that above all which has filled to its brim her cup of sorrow and sent her moaning to the grave. Surely she has a right to wield the pen for its suppression. Surely she may, without throwing aside the modest retirement which so much becomes her sex, use her influence to lead her fellow-mortals away from the destroyer's path. It is this which she proposes to do in the columns of this paper.¹¹

Bloomer's editorial captured the pain and suffering that alcoholism brought to its victims. Both men and women gathered together to battle alcohol consumption. Although men and women worked together, they did not work as equals. Bloomer mentioned in other editorials that although women attended meetings, they were encouraged not to speak but show their support through fundraising.¹² Women who wanted to be more proactive were forced to leave the conservative co-ed groups in order to form their own female-run organizations.

In addition to working on the temperance movement, women also became active members of the abolitionist movement, as new ideas of liberty and equality began to surface, ideas sparked by the Second Great Awakening. Through this religious revival abolitionist principles were developed. Many abolitionists come to believe that slavery

¹¹ Accessible Archives Inc., "Amelia Bloomer and the Birth of *The Lily*," (accessed June 16, 2015).

¹² Kleinberg, 84.

was the sin of the nation. Minister John Fee criticized the institution of slavery in his *Anti-Slavery Manual* claiming,

If, by faith in God and persevering effort, you succeed in removing this great evil (slavery), you will wipe out the darkest spot on your nation's escutcheon, and achieve the most glorious triumph written upon the scroll of time...But, on the other hand, if you refuse to co-operate with your fellow-men in removing this growing curse, then calamity, untold and inevitable, awaits you, and your posterity. Never has it been known that any people remained perpetually in bondage. Either they have risen in their own strength, by the aid of allies, or by the arm of God, and avenged their wrongs.¹³

Fee preached that slavery was the greatest sin of our nation and that those who did not act against it would surely pay the price. Women were motivated to join the abolitionist movement because they were able to sympathize with the slaves. Cady Stanton believed that a woman could be “more fully identified with the slave than man can possibly be, for she can take a subjective view...For while the man is born to do whatever he can, for the woman and Negro there is no such privilege.”¹⁴ It was through the influence of her cousin Gerrit Smith that Cady Stanton became an activist in the abolition movement. While at her cousin’s home, Elizabeth met Henry Stanton. Henry Stanton was ten years older than Elizabeth Cady Stanton but these two shared the same passion for reform. Henry and Elizabeth were married on May 1, 1840, against the wishes of Elizabeth’s father.

Daniel Cady was a conservative man who did not support Henry Stanton’s radical belief in immediate emancipation. Although some Americans supported the idea of gradual emancipation, few called for slavery’s immediate end. Those who did were viewed as extremists because American society was deeply dependent upon slavery.

¹³ "An Anti-Slavery Manual, Or, The Wrongs of American Slavery Exposed By the Light of the Bible and of Facts, with A Remedy for the Evil (1851), by Rev. John G. Fee." (accessed June 16, 2015).

¹⁴ Susan B. Anthony, Ellen Carol DuBois, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. 1992. *The Elizabeth Cady Stanton-Susan B. Anthony reader: correspondence, writings, speeches* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992).

Basic institutions such as the judicial system and the interstate economy were connected with slavery; most Americans consumed slave-grown produce. Many Northerners' jobs were tied in some way to Southern markets or to serving the export of Southern products; the country as a whole was dependent on slave labor.¹⁵ Many Americans believed that an immediate end to the institution of slavery would ruin the American economy. These worries were justified by an awareness of Britain's economic decline after it emancipated its colonies.

Britain banned the slave trade in 1807 and emancipated her colonies in 1833. She was the first country involved in the Atlantic slave trade to take a stand against slavery, an institution that had been around from antiquity. Slavery up until this point in time had been viewed as an acceptable practice by multiple nations. Great Britain challenged this system when she went from being the world's leading purchaser and transporter of African slaves to abolishing the practice.¹⁶ The British government was successful in stopping the slave trade from Africa to the British colonies. However, their antislavery policy raised production costs and prevented British planters from exploiting the expanding world market.¹⁷ "After 1838 British leaders learned with much dismay that free black laborers were unwilling to accept the harsh plantation discipline and working conditions that made the sugar cultivation a highly profitable investment."¹⁸ Britain sustained a huge loss from their decision to emancipate their colonies.

The remedy for slavery in America was often debated but never settled until the conclusion of the Civil War. Extremists like Henry Stanton called for an immediate end

¹⁵ Davis, 261.

¹⁶ Davis, 233.

¹⁷ Davis, 243.

¹⁸ Davis, 243.

to slavery, while others like Abraham Lincoln believed in gradual emancipation. Still there were a large number of Americans, mainly in the South, who strongly supported the institution of slavery.

Henry Stanton's extreme views about slavery did not seem to bother Cady Stanton, who later in life would be criticized for her extreme views about women's suffrage. After the two were wed they traveled to London to attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention. Originally the convention claimed to welcome all "friends of the slave" to its meeting, but rejected "promiscuous female representation."¹⁹ "As with other moral reform movements men accepted women's participation, but expected them to restrict themselves to fund-raising and periphery of the movement."²⁰ Female participation in public speaking and voting were prohibited at the convention. Elizabeth Cady Stanton along with other women in the American delegation were forced to sit behind a curtained balcony, separated from the men and forbidden from commenting publicly on the issues. During the convention Cady Stanton meet Lucretia Mott, an American Quaker and human rights activist. The two women shared similar views on social reform and were both disappointed in their treatment at the convention. "In her memoirs, Stanton recalls walking about London arm-in-arm with Lucretia Mott. Speaking of their disappointment, they 'resolved to hold a convention as soon as we returned home, and form a society to advance the rights of women.'"²¹

After returning home from London, Cady Stanton and Henry Stanton started a family; by 1848 she had given birth to three sons. Cady Stanton remained concerned

¹⁹ Kleinberg, 94.

²⁰ Kleinberg, 90.

²¹ Cited by George Klosko and Margaret G. Klosko, *The Struggle for Women's Rights: Theoretical and Historical Sources* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 5.

about the treatment of women in the United States. She shared her frustrations with Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann McClintock, Martha C. Wright, and Jane C. Hunt. On July 13, 1848, sharing similar views and frustrations, the group decided to hold a women's rights convention. They published an ad in the Seneca Falls newspaper the following day calling for "a convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition of women" to be held "on the 19th and 20th of July, 1848."²² The first day of the convention was exclusively for women; however, the second day was open to the public. The convention attracted more than 300 people. During the convention Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered one of her most famous speeches, the "Declaration of Sentiments", a document that was framed after the Declaration of Independence and listed 12 resolutions that women wanted changed. These resolutions included freedom of speech, the right to own property, equal participation in the workforce and the right to vote.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was viewed by many as an extremist for her belief in women's suffrage. Even her comrade Lucretia Mott was nervous about Cady Stanton's revolutionary ideas. In her writing Cady Stanton recalled how she persisted despite the objections of others:

My revolutionary sentiment read: "Resolved, that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." When I spoke to Lucretia Mott about my intention to present this, she amazed me by objecting, "Why, Lizzie, thee will make us ridiculous." But I persisted, for I saw clearly that the power to make the laws was the right through which all other rights could be secured.²³

At the convention all 12 resolutions including enfranchisement were voted on and passed.

The convention received mixed views from critics; some supported the cause while

²² Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: In the School of Anti-Slavery* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 75.

²³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*. Vol. 1. (New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1969), 22-23.

others condemned it. In a letter to Lucretia Mott, Cady Stanton thanked Mott for sending her a copy of the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*. She replied to Mott, “I see that the editor is especially agitated over my ninth resolution, for he says: ‘The New York girls desire to mount the rostrum-to do all the voting.’ No; not all, but our part our part; and that we will do some day, mark my word, though probably after our death and that of the editor of the *Public Ledger*, unless he is going in for the hundred.”²⁴ Regardless of the negative response, the convention brought national attention to the women’s suffrage movement.

After the convention Elizabeth Cady Stanton started writing monthly articles for Amelia Bloomer’s newspaper, *The Lily*. Cady Stanton’s articles focused mainly on the temperance movement and women’s issues. Elizabeth Cady Stanton split her time among multiple movements, such as temperance, abolition, and women’s suffrage. While raising her children Cady Stanton was unable to travel and could only attend local meetings on social reform. Cady Stanton met Susan B. Anthony while attending an abolitionist meeting in Seneca Falls, New York. The two women became fast friends and together created the Women’s New York State Temperance Society in 1852. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was elected president of the society while Anthony served as secretary. Over the next several years Cady Stanton and Anthony worked together to promote social reform. Cady Stanton wrote a majority of the speeches while Anthony acted as the voice of the cause. She traveled around the country delivering the speeches that Cady Stanton composed. Cady Stanton began to take a more active speaking role in reform movements after the birth of her seventh child. In 1860 Cady Stanton started publicly speaking on behalf of the anti-slavery movement.

²⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*. Vol. 2. (New York: Arno & The New York Times, 1969), 20-21.

The women's suffrage movement and the abolitionist movement began to merge together in the minds of many Americans. The merging began when women and men from both races and movements disagreed on how to achieve their goals.²⁵ Frederick Douglass was a supporter of the women's suffrage movement but believed that "the battle of Woman's Rights should be fought on its own ground."²⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton on the other hand believed there was value in linking major reform efforts together. She often mentioned how women and slaves both suffered under the white man, "to you, white man, the world throws wide her gates: the way is clear to wealth, to fame, to glory...but the black man and the woman are born to shame."²⁷ It was because of this convergence and its Northern origins that the women's suffrage movement became linked with abolitionism. This link intensified from 1861 to 1865 as the women's suffrage movement turned its focus on the American Civil War and emancipation.

Early in American politics it was considered taboo for political parties to publicly address their stance on slavery. The topic of slavery caused in-house fighting and weakened unity within the political parties. It was not until the North had undergone a political revolution during the mid-1850s that political parties began to take a stance on slavery. The first to do so was the newly formed Republican Party, whose main political agenda was to stop the expansion of slavery into the western territories of the United States. The Republican Party's main rival was the Democratic Party, which supported the institution of slavery and its expansion. In the election of 1860, for the first time in history a Republican candidate was elected President of the United States of America.

Abraham Lincoln was sworn into office on March 4, 1861 and became the 16th president

²⁵ Kleinberg, 96.

²⁶Frederick Douglass as cited in Kleinberg, 96.

²⁷ Stanton as cited in Burgan, 57.

of the United States. He believed that slavery was a direct violation of the Declaration of Independence, which states: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Lincoln believed that Americans were hypocrites who boasted about freedom and equality but denied these inalienable rights to their enslaved population. In a letter to his friend Joshua Speed Lincoln wrote, “Our Progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that ‘all men are created equal.’ We now practically read it as ‘all men are created equal, except negroes.’ When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read ‘all men are created equal, except negroes and foreigners and Catholics.’”²⁸

Although Lincoln believed slavery was morally wrong, he did not believe in racial equality nor did he plan to emancipate the enslaved population upon his Presidency. His main goal was to stop the expansion of slavery into the western territories. Lincoln’s victory over the Democratic Party caused a large number of southern states to panic, as they feared Lincoln would infringe on their state sovereignty and bring an end to the institution of slavery. In retaliation southern states began to secede from the union and formed the Confederate States of America. Lincoln wanted to maintain the union and rejected southern secession. He claimed the south had no legal right to leave the union. Southerners thought they were justified in their actions to preserve state sovereignty and continue the practice of slavery. The tensions that developed during the civil war between the North and the South play an important role in the progression of the women’s suffrage movement; this will be later demonstrated in the life of Laura Clay.

²⁸ David S. Reynolds, ed., *Lincoln’s Selected Writings* (W.W. Norton, 2015), 99.

After the war the United States Congress ratified the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery. With slavery abolished, suffragettes hoped that enfranchisement would be extended to both women as well as former slaves. Unfortunately for women, the proposed 14th Amendment only granted the right of citizenship and suffrage to men. Women watched as black men gained the right to vote while their own rights were constitutionally denied.²⁹

In response to the proposed 14th amendment Elizabeth Cady Stanton helped form the American Equal Rights Association. The goal of the association was to promote universal suffrage on a national level. In 1867, Cady Stanton and Anthony traveled to Kansas to campaign for universal suffrage. The two hoped to sway white male voters into passing universal suffrage within the state of Kansas. Unfortunately, the Kansas campaign ended with neither black males nor females gaining the right to vote. Although universal suffrage was rejected in Kansas, Cady Stanton and Anthony made the acquaintance of George Francis Train, a wealthy millionaire. He agreed to finance the publication of a women's newspaper entitled *The Revolution*. Cady Stanton and Anthony used the publication to promote women's suffrage and comment on universal labor issues. While writing for the paper, Cady Stanton wrote an article opposing the 15th Amendment due to its exclusion of women. That amendment stated that 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."

Cady Stanton was later criticized by the American Equal Rights Association for her refusal to support the 15th Amendment. As a result, Cady Stanton left the American Equal Rights Association and cofounded the National Woman Suffrage Association

²⁹ Klosko, 6.

(NWSA) with Susan B. Anthony. The NWSA worked to secure women's suffrage through the passing of a constitutional amendment. The NWSA also worked to pass female friendly divorce laws and worked to resolve labor issues for both men and women. Reformers who opposed Cady Stanton and Anthony's position on women's suffrage formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). The AWSA believed that women's suffrage could be obtained more easily through a state to state campaign than through a federal amendment. However in 1890, the two groups merged together to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Cady Stanton was voted president of the NAWSA but left for Europe shortly after being elected. Anthony was left in charge while Stanton visited her family overseas.

Over the years Cady Stanton and Anthony started to grow apart in their ideologies. Cady Stanton wrote, "I get more radical as I get older, while Anthony seems to grow more conservative."³⁰ Anthony wanted to focus solely on suffrage while Cady Stanton wanted to continue to work on multiple issues. Cady Stanton stepped down as president of the NAWSA in January 1892.

After she retired from the public sphere, Cady Stanton focused on her writing. Cady Stanton along with a committee of 26 other women wrote *The Woman's Bible* which challenged the way women were depicted in the Bible. The book was the center of great controversy and caused an uproar in the women's movement. The NAWSA did not want to be associated with Cady Stanton's radical views and severed all ties with her. From that moment on Cady Stanton's role as a leader in the women's suffrage movement ceased to exist.

³⁰ Elizabeth Cady Stanton as cited in Burgan, 89.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton never lived to see women gain national suffrage. She died on October 26, 1902. Although she was abandoned by her peers for her radical views on women's equality, her legacy lives on. It was through her sacrifices and dedication that later suffragists were able to achieve the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's story illustrates the beginning of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Cady Stanton along with Lucretia Mott and other Northern activists organized the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. It was at this convention that Cady Stanton presented the "Declaration of Sentiments" speech, which became the main platform for the women's suffrage movement. Although her resolutions were sometimes met with criticism, overall the North was tolerant of her views. The North remained the headquarters of the Women's Suffrage Movement throughout its duration.

Laura Clay was a Southern suffragist from Kentucky, who was born one year after Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered her "Declaration of Sentiments" speech. She believed that women's suffrage should be decided on a state to state basis and in favor of white women only. Laura Clay was one of ten children born to Cassius and Mary Jane Clay. Cassius Clay was a wealthy landowner who was nationally recognized for his antislavery efforts as well as his involvement in the Mexican War. Clay was often absent from his family due to business. In April of 1861 he accepted the position of the United States Ambassador to Russia. During his nine year appointment in Russia, Clay only saw his family for a few months. Originally the Clay family planned to stay in Russia for the duration of Cassius Clay's appointment. But financial hardships and undesirable weather conditions persuaded Cassius Clay to send Mary Jane Clay and the children back home to Kentucky. During their absence the country had entered into a civil war.

During the war, Kentucky was considered a border state, a slave state that did not secede from the Union. When the war started Kentucky tried to maintain neutrality but was forced to petition for Union assistance when Confederate troops tried to take control of the state. Kentucky served as the battleground for brother against brother combat. Since Kentucky was a border state, many families were torn apart or divided by mixed loyalties. When the war ended on April 9, 1865, the South took the loss hard and desperately tried to preserve its Southern culture. The soldiers who had taken part in the Civil War were viewed as martyrs who fought to preserve Southern values. In response, the South began building monuments in order to commemorate their wartime heroes, such as Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. The South wanted to ensure that southern curricula accurately portrayed the events that took place during the Civil War. Specifically, they wanted to argue that the South had a constitutional right to secede from the Union and that the war was fought to defend states' rights rather than slavery. Colonel Richard Henry Lee of the Confederate States of America stated at the dedication of the Confederate Monument at Old Chapel, in Clark County:

In books and papers that Southern children read and study that all the blood shedding and destruction of property of that conflict was because the South rebelled without cause against the best government the world ever saw; that although Southern soldiers were heroes in the field, skillfully massed and led, they and their leaders were rebels and traitors who fought to overthrow the Union, and to preserve human slavery, and that their defeat was necessary for free government and the welfare of the human family. As a Confederate soldier and as a citizen of Virginia, I deny the charge, and denounce it as a calumny. We were not rebels; we did not fight to perpetuate human slavery, but for our rights and privileges under a government established over us by our fathers and in defense of our homes.³¹

³¹ Colonel Richard Henry Lee as cited in S.A. Cunningham, *The Confederate Veteran Magazine 1893* (Wendell, N.C.: Broadfoots Bookmark), 201.

Southern Democrats were large supporters of state sovereignty. In fact, Southern Democrats believed that the 15th Amendment had been a mistake and that the South should have been allowed to handle the crucial matter of black male suffrage without federal interference.³² They perceived a federal woman suffrage amendment as threatening since it would advocate more federal regulation.³³

Besides state sovereignty the South also valued the concept of natural responsibilities of the sexes, which included the exclusion of women from politics and cast the “Southern Lady” as a symbol of virtue. The Southern lady was seen as “serene and compassionate, she cared for the health and welfare of her family, servants, and others in the community who needed her beneficence. But she played an even more important role as preserver of religion and morality, inspiration to her husband, and the conduit of Southern values to future generations of Southern statesmen.”³⁴ The South’s commitment to the preservation of domestic ideology hindered the women’s rights movement in that region.

However, after the American Civil War, Southern women’s roles and ideologies began to change and admirers of the traditional Southern lady were in for a harsh reality. Many of the men were in denial about the social and economic impact the Civil War had on their women. During the Civil War, Southern white women had to perform many masculine tasks such as, aiding soldiers, managing businesses, and providing the basic necessities for their family.³⁵ One example of a Southern lady performing these stereotypically masculine tasks was Mary Jane Clay. She supervised everything from the

³² Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Southern States* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6.

³³Wheeler, 19.

³⁴ Wheeler, 6-7.

³⁵ Wheeler, 9.

production of butter to the renovation and enlargement of the family home.³⁶ Throughout her husband's absence during the Civil War, Mary Jane Clay secured horses and mules for sale to Union soldiers as well as provided accommodations for the men. When White Hall was eventually raided by Confederate soldiers, the property sustained a lot of damage. Mary Jane Clay was able to successfully renovate and expand White Hall after the attack. She was a very capable woman who unfortunately was trapped in a rigid patriarchal society that underestimated its women.

In 1878, Mary Jane Clay separated from her husband Cassius Clay after his return from Russia. Mary Jane Clay accused Cassius Clay of violating their marriage contract while he was overseas. In Russia Cassius Clay had an affair with a Russian courtesan, which led to the birth of his illegitimate son, Launey. Mary Jane Clay and Cassius Clay were separated for eight years before Cassius Clay filed for divorce claiming desertion. Their marriage ended on February 7, 1878. During the 19th century divorce laws favored the men. They were typically granted absolute custody of their children and retained all property rights. Although Cassius Clay was granted full custody of their youngest daughter Annie, he did not separate the child from her mother. In the divorce, Mary Jane Clay received no property or compensation for her work on the family estate. She did, however, inherit a trust fund from her parents and was able financially to support herself after the divorce.

The Clay girls were all inspired to join the women's suffrage movement after seeing the injustice their mother faced during her divorce. Laura Clay was especially convinced that God had called her to fight in the great battle for women's rights and "that

³⁶ Paul E. Fuller, *Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 2.

he would give her the courage to go against the grain.”³⁷ Clay had grown up in a household that promoted education and religion. Both her parents believed in the value of an education and sent all their children to Foxtown Academy. At the Academy Clay was given the option to study compositions or communication. She chose to study communications, a decision that would benefit her as a speaker for the women’s suffrage movement.

After completing her education at Foxtown Academy, Clay attended the Sayre Female Institute in Lexington, Kentucky at the age of 14. The school’s curriculum focused on a wide range of subjects such as music, literature, foreign languages, math, science, history, and philosophy. Sayre was one of the few female schools in the United States at the time that focused on academics rather than etiquette. Sayre’s academic mission was to teach girls about their intellectual self-worth. In 1865, Clay graduated from the Sayre Institute and began to deliberate about her future. Most Southern girls her age had already been introduced into society. In keeping with Southern tradition, Laura Clay would have been expected to settle down and marry into a bluegrass family and begin the management of her own household.³⁸ However this was not the case for Laura Clay, who unlike many Southern girls was not pressured into marriage.

After graduating from Sayre, Mary Jane Clay urged Laura Clay to continue her education at Mrs. Ogden Hoffman’s Finishing School in New York City. Cassius Clay, like Daniel Cady, did not agree with his daughter’s desire to continue her education but still financially supported her. While at Hoffman’s Finishing School Clay perfected her French and continued her musical education. She returned home to White Hall, her

³⁷ Wheeler, 60.

³⁸ Fuller, 11.

family estate, in 1865. Clay's completion of finishing school also marked the end of the American Civil War.

The war had many casualties, which resulted in a large shortage of Southern white men. As a result many white Southern widows were in need of work. Women began entering the workforce, filling positions that were once occupied by the men. Belle Kearney, a Mississippi suffragist, observed the evolution of Southern white women from working for wages to seeking political equality, which she thought was the result of events put in motion by the bombardment of Fort Sumter.³⁹ In her autobiography *A Slaveholder's Daughter*, Belle Kearney writes about the awakening of Southern women:

There are multitudes of others who are still in a deep sleep regarding the necessity of having the ballot, and are continuing to drone the old song in their slumbers: 'I have all the rights I want'; but there are many of their sisters who are beginning to rub their eyes and look up with a glad surprise upon the new day that is breaking, while scores of others have shattered every shackle that bound them to the old conditions and have walked out boldly into the floodtide of the most benignant evolution that the centuries have brought to them, and are working with heart and brain on fire to materialize into legislation the most potential gift that civilization can bestow.⁴⁰

The war had changed the way women viewed themselves and expanded their influence beyond the domestic sphere.

As a result of the war and with the establishment of the public school system, women were able to experience new educational and employment opportunities. Unskilled women were able to obtain jobs in factories and as domestic servants while educated women could pursue careers as teachers. The establishment of the public schools provided employment for Southern white women. The women who filled these positions were given a unique educational opportunity and were sent to training schools

³⁹ Wheeler, 9.

⁴⁰ Belle Kearney, *A Slaveholder's Daughter* (The Abbey Press, 1900), 120.

in the South. Many of them applied to liberal art colleges in the North after completing their training. Northern colleges offered more opportunities for women than their Southern counterparts, although both regions had colleges that excluded the education of women.

Laura Clay attended the University of Michigan in 1879. She had no desire to become a teacher, one of the only professions available to women at the time, but went to college simply to improve her mind. Clay attended classes for one year at the university and then returned home to Kentucky. She never returned to complete her degree but the fact that Laura was given the opportunity to go to college shows the advances in women's education in the United States. Just 46 years prior, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was not given the opportunity to apply to a university due to the fact that she was a female. She was only able to attend a seminary school. Through Laura Clay we can actively see the educational progress of women in the United States. Not only were the women allowed to attend schools past the primary level, but they also had the opportunity to study academics rather than social etiquette.

Besides education another driving force in Laura Clay's life was religion. She was raised in the Episcopal Church. Clay chose to be baptized in June and confirmed in November of 1864. Clay found strength and courage in her religious beliefs and rejected religious conservatism with regard to gender.⁴¹ Women who felt compelled by God to join the women's suffrage movement often participated in missionary groups and temperance organizations. It was through their involvement in these organizations that Southern women were able to gain new knowledge of conditions beyond the home and a

⁴¹ Fuller, 59.

new level of interest and involvement in public affairs.⁴² But not everyone in the South was supportive of women elevating their position and influence through Christianity.

Religious leaders of the South gradually tried to strip away the power that had developed out of the organization of women's groups. In 1893, a Presbyterian church issued a decree that forbade women from speaking in churches and reminded them that they are to be subordinate to men as it is stated in the Bible multiple times.⁴³ Southern ministers also used their time on the pulpit to publicly oppose the expansion of women's roles in the church and society. Bishop Warren A. Candler of the Methodist Episcopal Church vocally denounced woman suffrage in an article he wrote in *The Woman Patriot*:

Yes, I am opposed to Woman Suffrage, believing as I do that it is unscriptural, injurious to women, hurtful to men, damaging to children, unfriendly to the home and harmful to the State. At best it is an unnecessary and dangerous experiment and in the South it is especially undesirable in view of the race question, which it would surely complicate further.⁴⁴

As far as Southern men were concerned, women should have no input outside of their domestic sphere. Southern men were concerned that a woman's increased role in society or politics would damage Southern industry. The Southern cotton and textile industries were fearful that women would support social reforms that would restrict child labor laws, institute mandatory education, and regulate working conditions.⁴⁵ According to Florence Kelly, the author of "Child Labor and Woman Suffrage," the enfranchisement of women was directly related to the success of child labor laws:

In the four states in which women vote on all subjects, child labor and illiteracy have ceased to be problems. Nowhere in the industrial world are children so effectively safeguarded in life, limb, health, education, and morals as in Denver, where mothers and teachers unite to keep in office the justly famous Judge

⁴² Wheeler, 9.

⁴³ Wheeler, 10.

⁴⁴ Minnie Bronson, *The Woman Patriot: Issues 3-4* (Woman Patriot Publishing Company, 1919), 105.

⁴⁵ Wheeler, 10-11.

Lindsey of the juvenile court, overcoming (with the help of a minority of politically independent fathers) the united efforts of the Republican and the Democratic bosses against them... In Georgia, where no protection is afforded to working children, little girls work in cotton mills all night at the age of six, seven, and eight years. In that state women have used their right of petition five years on behalf of the working children, and have achieved nothing for their protection. Women in Georgia have no vote on any subject.⁴⁶

The Civil War had a devastating impact on the economy of the South. Prior to the war, the South relied heavily on slave labor and agriculture, while the North relied on industry. Preceding the war the South was financially more stable than the North. "By 1840 the South grew more than 60 percent of the world's cotton and supplied not only Britain and New England but also the rising industries of continental Europe, including Russia. Throughout the antebellum period cotton accounted for over half the value of all American exports, and thus it paid for the major share of the nation's import and investment capital"⁴⁷ However, after the war the South fell on hard times; their economy had been destroyed by the emancipation of slaves. It was not until the 1890s that the Southern economy was starting to make a comeback. The Southern textile industry had undergone a remarkable expansion and was considered the jewel of the New South; this was one of the few industries that was surpassing its Northern competitors.⁴⁸ Cheap labor from women and children gave the South the competitive edge it needed in order to surpass the North. Southern businessmen felt threatened by the women's suffrage movement. They became increasingly active in attempts to stop female enfranchisement

⁴⁶ Phelps, Edith M., *Debater's Handbook Series: Selected Articles on Woman Suffrage* (Minneapolis: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1910), 197.

⁴⁷ Davis, 184.

⁴⁸ Wheeler, 12.

in order to prevent women from interfering with the exploitation of other women and children.⁴⁹

Southern businessmen had every right to be concerned that women's enfranchisement would jeopardize their cheap labor profits. Southern suffragettes believed women were needed in politics, in order to bring a sense of morality to the law. Laura Clay stated, "Motherhood makes women the guardians of a nation's ideals of truth and morality. In short the government can no more be ideal without the help of women than the home can be."⁵⁰ In a later speech Clay continued to fight for enfranchisement and female representation by claiming that:

For 364 days of the year, not only in home and in churches, but in the factories, the shops and the offices, in all the busy marts of labor, women are found side by side with men. Is it right, is it wise, that on the 365th day, on election day, men only go to the ballot box and by their votes alone make the laws which control all the conditions of women's work, its hours of toil, its protection from dangerous machinery, the sanitary of its surroundings, in short, all the things which make up their industrial woe?⁵¹

Laura Clay was every Southern businessman's nightmare. She wanted to stop the exploitation of women and children by giving the women the right to vote.

The South was against the enfranchisement of women just as it was against the enfranchisement of black men. After the South was defeated in the Civil War, African American men were granted the vote. They began to gain political power, which frustrated those Southern white men who believed in white supremacy. Their frustration hit an all-time high in 1896 when Populist leader Marion Butler won the North Carolina election. He was able to successfully sustain a bi-racial coalition that stretched

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Laura Clay papers. Speeches; undated and or incomplete box 16 folder 276, 5. University of Kentucky: Special Collections Library.

⁵¹ Laura Clay papers. Speeches; undated and or incomplete box 16 folder 275, 2. University of Kentucky: Special Collections Library.

throughout the black majority counties, in the eastern part of the state. He was able to achieve this by electing black officeholders in law enforcement, education and other areas of governance.⁵² White Democrats began to fear the possibility of “negro domination.” This hindered the women’s suffrage movement in the South because white supremacists did not want black women to gain the right to vote. Suffragist Belle Kearney addressed the problem of “negro domination” in her speech “Durable White Supremacy” at the 1903 NAWSA Convention. She claimed, “The Southern States are making a desperate effort to maintain the political supremacy of Anglo-Saxonism by amendments to their constitutions limiting the right to vote by a property and educational qualification.”⁵³ These restrictions were just some of the tactics used to limit black mobility. Kearney believed that enfranchisement of white women along with literacy tests would insure immediate white supremacy at the ballot box. She claimed, “In every Southern State but one, there are more educated women than all the illiterate voters, white and black, native and foreign, combined... When it comes to the proportion of property between the races, that of the white outweighs that of the black immeasurably. The South is slow to grasp the great fact that the enfranchisement of women would settle the race question in politics.”⁵⁴ Although Kearney felt that the answer to white supremacy was women’s suffrage, her male counterparts did not feel the same way. They viewed women’s suffrage as an argument for black suffrage.⁵⁵ From the beginning, Southerners were apprehensive of the women’s rights movement.

⁵² T.J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 192.

⁵³ Dawn Keetley and John Pettegrew, ed., *Public Women, Public Words: A Documentary History of American Feminism* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Group, Inc., 2002), 157.

⁵⁴ Keetley, 157.

⁵⁵ Wheeler, 26.

White Southerners regarded it as threatening, not only to the relationship between men and women, but to the South's paternalistic, hierarchical social structure and to white supremacy. They were well aware that the women's movement was an offshoot of the despised abolitionist movement, which condemned the slave based Southern society as immoral and labored for its destruction. Thus even before the war, white Southerners came to think of the two movements as symbiotic and inseparable.⁵⁶

This symbiotic view of the two movements hindered the success of the woman suffrage movement in the South and the nation. In 1887, the first woman suffrage bill was brought before the United States Congress for debate. Southern Democrats pleaded with their Northern counterparts to remember that the South was already struggling to adapt to black male enfranchisement and that the enfranchisement of colored women would further set back the development of the South. Southern Democrats were fearful that the woman suffrage movement would hinder white supremacy because it would be harder to exclude colored women from the polls. Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi was quoted saying: "We are not afraid to maul a black man over the head if he dares to vote, but we can't treat women that way. No we'll allow no woman suffrage. It may be right, but we won't have it."⁵⁷

Southern suffragists tried to solve the "negro problem" by campaigning for the solo enfranchisement of the Southern white woman. The "whites only" strategy started to gain support among southern suffragettes after Belle Kearney's keynote address at the NAWSA convention in 1903. Kearney celebrated and defended the South for its Anglo-Saxon purity and political wisdom.⁵⁸ She hoped to solve the race problem by endorsing the enfranchisement of literate women. When the NAWSA refused to support her literacy campaign, she started advocating for white only enfranchisement. The NAWSA publicly

⁵⁶ Wheeler, 16.

⁵⁷ Senator John Sharp Williams as cited in Wheeler, 18.

⁵⁸ Wheeler, 119.

disapproved of both campaigns, claiming that “as a National Association it would be impossible for us to be allied with any movement which advocated the exclusion of any race or class from the right of suffrage.”⁵⁹ Although the NAWSA did not support the “white only” campaign, Laura Clay and Kate Gordon believed it was the key to winning women’s suffrage in the South. The two suffragettes believed “the enfranchisement of white women offered Southern Democrats the inducement of adding to the white and Democratic voting majorities already achieved through methods such as literacy and understanding tests.”⁶⁰ In reality Southern politicians would not support “white only” enfranchisement because they believed it would only be a matter of time before the Northern feminists pushed for black women’s rights as well. Southern Democrats began to dread the passage of a federal suffrage amendment. Many Southerners feared that if the amendment was passed it would infringe on white supremacy and Southern culture. Laura Clay was of similar mind and continued to fight for women’s suffrage on a state to state basis until national suffrage was passed in 1920. Prior to the passing of the federal amendment, Laura Clay wrote a letter to her friend Kate Gordon sharing her views on the subject:

Every day I think of [the federal amendment] seems to increase my antipathy to it. I believe in States’ Rights: and in these war times, when so much extraordinary power is being given to the Administration, it may well turn out that undiminished states’ rights maybe the anchor of our government. I shall not give up hope that another way than the Federal Amendment may be found until it is taken from me by the accomplishment of that amendment, both in Congress and by the ratification of 36 state legislatures.⁶¹

Laura Clay exemplifies the ideology of Southern suffragettes, believing that suffrage should be passed on a state to state basis as well as a white’s only platform. In a

⁵⁹ Anna Howard Shaw as cited in Wheeler, 121.

⁶⁰ Wheeler, 123.

⁶¹ Laura Clay as cited in Wheeler, 166.

letter to Anna Howard Shaw on October 30, 1907, Laura Clay stated: “I am in favor of obtaining the right of white women to vote, if I can, even if the Negro women will still have to wait awhile for the fit ones among them to vote. I do not think their chances for enfranchisement are delayed by this procedure, but to the contrary. This move may be the speediest for the enfranchisement of all women north and south.”⁶²

In general the South was not as open minded as the North and resisted the movement from its beginning. Southern men viewed the movement as a Northern creation or idea. Although the South had few victories it was responsible for pushing for a state to state campaign which succeeded in the West.

By the end of 1914, almost every Western state and territory in the United States had enfranchised its female citizens.⁶³ The West had remarkable success in the fight for women’s suffrage, compared to its Eastern (“the North”) and Southern counterparts. Elizabeth Cady Stanton may have started the movement but Jeannette Rankin was going to see it through to completion. Jeannette Rankin was a Western suffragist who was born in 1880 in the Montana territory. She was the oldest of five children born to John and Olive Rankin. Her father was a self-made man, who emigrated from Canada to the United States in order to find opportunity on the American frontier. John Rankin came from a lower class family and only attended three years of school. He made a living as a hired hand and carpenter before settling in Montana. He believed in the free enterprise system and became a successful entrepreneur. John Rankin opened one of the first water-powered saw mills in the area and used his carpentry and math skills to become a self-made architect.

⁶² Laura Clay as cited in Wheeler, 237.

⁶³ Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote was Won: Women Suffrage in the Western States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 1.

Jeannette Rankin's mother, Olive Pickering Rankin, came from a prestigious family in New England, whose lineage dated back to a land grant given to John Lowe Pickering from the king of England in 1692.⁶⁴ Although her family enjoyed good social standing, most of their family fortune had dwindled over the years. Olive Rankin grew up on her family farm in New Hampshire and eventually started teaching at a local school. She often felt that there was no future for her in New Hampshire and wanted to move West like her uncle Bill Berry. Olive's uncle filled her head with fascinating tales of the West. He told her stories of cowboys, Indians, adventure, and romance. He also spoke of employment opportunities which caught the attention of the young and adventurous Olive. Uncle Bill Berry also informed her that the current school teacher in Missoula, Montana was engaged and planned to resign after her wedding. Olive Pickering desperately wanted to fill the position, but her parents were apprehensive about their daughter traveling to the frontier. Olive Pickering's parents agreed to let her go as long as her sister and uncle would accompany her to Montana. She worked as a teacher for one year before getting married to John Rankin in August of 1879.

As a child growing up in Montana, Jeannette Rankin was energetic, opinionated, and above all compassionate. She could not stand to see anyone or thing in pain. When Jeannette Rankin was 12 years old, one of her family's horses had run into some barbed wire and suffered a nasty wound. Several men struggled to keep the horse down as Rankin cleaned and sewed the wound shut with a needle and thread. All accounts of the incident mention how calm and brave Rankin was in a crisis situation. Her childhood ambition was to become a nurse, like her role model Florence Nightingale. However

⁶⁴ Ted Carlton Harris, *Jeannette Rankin: Suffragist, First Woman Elected to Congress, and Pacifist* (New York: Arno Press, 1982), 5.

Rankin's father disapproved of the profession, claiming that Rankin's health was not good enough. Little is known about Rankin's health as a child. When asked later in life she simply said, "I may have fainted a few times when I was a child" and left it at that.

Education in the Rankin household was held in high regard. John Rankin wanted his children to receive the education he was denied, which is why he took an active role in selecting the site location for the State University of Missoula in 1896.⁶⁵ John Rankin's efforts paid off as all of his children attended and graduated from the university.

Jeannette Rankin graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree and then returned home to her family's ranch. Jeannette Rankin, like Laura Clay, struggled to find her purpose in life. Her graduation marked the beginning of her search for her personal identity and career. She eventually became a school teacher not because she wanted to but because it was the only profession available to her at the time. Jeannette Rankin taught for a short time and then resigned. The job did not appeal to her.

Following her resignation, Jeannette Rankin was faced with the death of her father. John Rankin died in 1904 after contracting a fever. His death was unexpected and came as a shock to his family. John Rankin's death left Jeannette Rankin and his son Wellington Rankin with a great deal of responsibility. Wellington Rankin took control of his father's business affairs while Jeannette Rankin ran the household. Her siblings described Rankin as overbearing and strict. In an interview, her younger sister Edna Rankin told the story of how she found out she was getting her tonsils out: "It wouldn't have occurred to Jeannette to tell me. She just ordered me to come downstairs and there was a thing draped like an operating table. The doctor took out my tonsils and adenoids. I

⁶⁵ Harris, 15.

had nothing to say about it.”⁶⁶ Jeannette Rankin’s mother did nothing to help with the household responsibilities. In fact, she had relinquished much of her maternal responsibilities to Jeannette Rankin prior to her husband’s death.⁶⁷ As Olive Rankin grew older she lost her sense of adventure and confined herself within her house. There is some speculation that Olive Rankin may have suffered from a thyroid deficiency which left her depressed and overweight. Jeannette Rankin was forced to take on the role of her mother. According to her sisters, Jeannette Rankin was often angry and annoyed at having these parental responsibilities imposed upon her.⁶⁸

After her siblings had matured, Rankin was free to explore her interests. She tried multiple careers but was dissatisfied with all of them until she discovered social work. Rankin discovered this career option while traveling to California in order to recuperate from inflammatory rheumatism.⁶⁹ Instead of resting, Jeannette Rankin began working in the Telegraph Hill Settlement, a social work project in San Francisco started by Elizabeth Ash. Jeannette Rankin watched over the children as their mothers attended educational classes. On her off days Jeannette Rankin attended hearings on social legislation. She became interested in social reform, a concept that was starting to gain support during the Progressive Era.

The Progressive reform movement began in response to the rapid growth of industry and urbanization in the 19th century. Cities grew rapidly as factory jobs lured people out of the country and into the city. Many Americans as well as immigrants came to the big cities looking for opportunity, but all they found were miserable living

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Norma Smith, *Jeannette Rankin: America’s Conscience* (Helena, Montana: Montana Historical Society Press, 2009), 36.

⁶⁸ Harris, 15.

⁶⁹ Harris, 30.

conditions and harsh working environments. A series of depressions from the 1870s to the 1890s convinced female reformers that big business as well as other economic issues caused mass poverty rather than individual behavior. This realization led to a renewed battle for women's suffrage as means of solving social problems such as children's welfare and education.⁷⁰ The social reform movement during the post-Civil War era in the United States can be divided into three distinct stages: The first phase lasted until the 1880s, in which women organized outdoor relief programs in their cities to combat the depressions of the 1870s. The next step in social reform led to women being financially compensated for their involvement in welfare organizations and settlement house. The final phase focused on placing women's issues on the public agenda.⁷¹ Jeannette Rankin participated in the last two stages of social reform.

Jeannette Rankin thought she had finally found her niche in life, social work. As she continued to work at the Telegraph Hill Settlement, Rankin became an avid reader about social reform and humanitarianism. Rankin was inspired by what she read and wanted to take on an active role in the movement. Therefore she enrolled in the New York School of Philanthropy in order to gain more experience. While studying at the school of philanthropy, Rankin worked in the night courts of New York City. It was there that she learned that women in the North had been denied suffrage. Rankin had assumed from her own experiences that if Northern women wanted the right to vote all they had to do was ask. She was outraged when she found out that their requests had been denied. In a letter to her brother, Wellington Rankin, she described her disappointment in the

⁷⁰Kleinberg, 176-77.

⁷¹ Kleinberg, 184.

treatment of women in the North. When Wellington Rankin responded his sister's letter he suggested to her, "Perhaps that's a better thing to do than social work."⁷²

Jeannette Rankin began to evaluate the world around her and found women and children had fallen victims to the laws over which they had no representation or control. From that moment Jeannette Rankin became a crusader for the women's suffrage movement. After finishing school, Rankin returned home to Montana and tried her hand at social reform. She had two failed reform attempts in Montana and eventually left for Seattle, Washington. In Washington she worked for an orphanage but found the work to be very depressing. She decided to go back to school and prepare for a career as a social reformer and a suffragette. She enrolled at the University of Washington and studied economics, sociology, and public speaking. While at the University, Jeannette Rankin joined the Washington Equal Suffrage Association and began to campaign for women's suffrage. Their plan was to try and contact every voter in the state by going town to town and engaging them in polite conversation. Adella M. Parker wrote specific set of guidelines for suffragettes to follow when campaigning for suffrage in the state of Washington:

Keep the issue single. Be for nothing but suffrage against nothing but anti-suffrage. Pin your faith to the printed word. It carries conviction. Rely upon facts rather than argument. Plead affirmative arguments. Put your opponent on the defensive. Convert the indifferent – there are thousands of them. Let the incorrigible alone; they rouse your enemies. Avoid antagonizing "big business," but get the labor vote – quietly. Be confident of winning. Try to have every voter in the state asked by some women to votes for the amendment; this will carry it. Always be good-natured.⁷³

Jeannette Rankin and her fellow suffragettes celebrated their victory on November 8, 1910, when the state of Washington passed the equal suffrage amendment granting

⁷² Wellington Rankin as cited in Harris, 34.

⁷³ Adella M. Parker as cited in Harris, 44.

women the right to vote. Prior to the Washington victory, suffragettes had not won a campaign in over 13 years. The victory in Washington was soon followed by victories in California (1911), Oregon (1912), and most other western states by the end of 1914. These victories inspired suffragists all over the nation to regain the fight. Southern suffragists celebrated their successes in Arkansas (1916) and Texas (1918) as women gained the right to vote in primary elections. Southern women also won partial suffrage in Tennessee, where the legislature adopted a presidential suffrage bill in 1919. The West was able to achieve these victories by utilizing new campaign strategies. The Washington and California campaigns used a hybrid of older conservative techniques combined with newer contemporary notions.⁷⁴ The new campaign strategy relied heavily on grassroots networks, political alliances, advertising and mass organization.⁷⁵ Western suffragettes took their new ideas and strategies and headed east to fight for a federal women's suffrage amendment.

The Western victories helped to shed light on the flaws of the Northern and Southern campaigns. The main difference between the Western campaigns and the rest of the nation was that they utilized the working class. Carrie Chapman Catt, leader of the NAWSA, was running an elitist campaign in the North even though she knew from campaigning data that the working class vote was needed in order to achieve victory in New York in 1917. Older suffragettes such as Carrie Chapman Catt found it hard to repress prejudices against the working class.⁷⁶ It was the new generation of suffragettes that helped bridge the gap between the elitists and the working class. Most of the younger suffragettes, like Jeannette Rankin, were college-educated women who had experience in

⁷⁴ Mead, 99.

⁷⁵ Mead, 149.

⁷⁶ Mead, 171.

social work and reform politics. The blending of the older and younger generations helped to push the movement forward. The younger generation supplied their talent, energy, progressivism while the older generation provided resources, connections, and organization.⁷⁷ The West was instrumental in the women's suffrage movement due to their improved campaign strategies. Western suffragettes focused on a door to door campaign in which they engaged the voter about women's suffrage. Their policy was to be for nothing but suffrage and against nothing but anti-suffrage.⁷⁸ This strategy differed from the North and South, who were involved in multiple movements at one time. The West perfected state by state suffrage campaigns. Their victories sparked a revitalization across the nation.

The momentum of the women's suffrage movement was cut short by the start of World War I in 1914. However, this did not stop Jeannette Rankin from achieving political success. In 1916 Jeannette Rankin became the first woman elected to the United States House of Representatives. This was a remarkable feat considering that national suffrage was not yet a reality. The possibility of the United States entering World War I divided the suffragettes into two groups, one group that was for the war and the other against it. Rankin was against the war and was one of the only members of Congress to vote against the United States' involvement in World War I and World War II. After Rankin lost reelection she turned her attention to obtaining world peace rather than suffrage.

Carrie Chapman Catt continued to fight for women's suffrage during World War I. "The NAWSA continued to pressure the President and Congress to pass a woman

⁷⁷ Mead, 149.

⁷⁸ Harris, 44.

suffrage amendment.”⁷⁹ During the war suffragettes gained enfranchisement in New York and Illinois in 1917 and victories in South Dakota, Michigan, and Oklahoma in 1918. Suffragettes worked vigorously during the war to promote pro-suffrage senators to office, ensuring a more favorable political climate for their cause. “The growing number of states where women could already vote helped persuade congress to amend the constitution in 1919.”⁸⁰ Women officially gained suffrage on August 18, 1920 when Congress ratified the 19th Amendment guaranteeing all American women the right to vote.

The battle for women’s enfranchisement was hard-fought and crossed over generational lines. Women from all walks of life had to unite under a common goal in order to achieve victory. The North, South, and West were all instrumental in achieving national woman’s suffrage. Over the course of history the North has become synonymous with the woman’s suffrage movement. The region produced the some of the movement’s greatest leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. It was also the region where the first United States woman’s suffrage convention was held and where the “Declaration of Sentiments” speech was first heard. Even with all these accomplishments, the North had very little success prior to the passing of the federal amendment. The only region that had less success than the North was the South. The South was unable to obtain female enfranchisement because of its fear of Northern reform. They harbored ill feelings towards the North due to the outcome of the Civil War. The South took the loss hard and desperately tried to preserve its Southern culture. It was the South’s commitment to the preservation of domestic ideology, industry, and white

⁷⁹ Kleinberg, 202.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

supremacy that contributed to the failure of the woman suffrage movement in the South. Still the South contributed to the movement by pushing a state by state campaign that proved to be very beneficial in the West. The West achieved the most success on the state to state level and was able to revitalize the movement in 1910, with a victory in Washington State. During the Washington campaign western women developed a new campaign strategy that was used to enfranchise every state in the West by 1914, with the exception of New Mexico. The West was essential to the movement.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Laura Clay, and Jeannette Rankin are all examples of important women who fought for women's suffrage. Together their stories eloquently capture the progression of the women's suffrage movement. Cady Stanton's story sheds light on the Northern perspective. Clay's account demonstrates the plight of the movement and the dedication of the suffragettes, especially those in the South. Rankin's tale is one of progress and change. Her story takes place during the Progressive Era in the West that was instrumental to the movement. All these women and regions are responsible for the overall success of the national suffrage amendment. All three regions motivated each other to succeed. The North laid the cornerstone that the movement was built upon, while the South was influential in pushing for a state by state campaign. The West perfected this state by state strategy and revitalized the movement through its victories. The North then utilized the Western campaign strategies to gain federal enfranchisement in 1920.

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