UP FROM THE PEDESTAL

SELECTED WRITINGS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN FEMINISM

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cut off the poor and ignorant; but we may live to see the hard-working, uncultivated day laborers, foreign and native born, learning the power of the ballot and their vast majority of numbers, combine and amend State constitutions so as to disfranchise the Vanderbilts, the Stewarts, the Conklings and the Fentons. It is a poor rule that won't work more ways than one. Establish this precedent, admit the State's right to deny suffrage, and there is no limit to the confusion, discord, and disruption that may await us. There is and can be but one safe principle of government—equal rights to all. Discrimination against any class on account of color, race, nativity, sex, property, culture, can but embitter and disaffect that class, and thereby endanger the safety of the whole people. Clearly, then, the national government not only must define the rights of citizens, but must stretch out its powerful hand and protect them in every State in this Union. . . .

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THE "EXPEDIENCY" ARGUMENT. I: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA ENLISTED IN THE CAUSE OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Henry B. Blackwell, What the South Can Do (1867)

One of the principal arguments used by suffragists might be termed the "statistical" argument: that since there were in the South more white women than blacks of both sexes, woman suffrage would insure white supremacy. The following is the first major statement of this argument. [Henry B. Blackwell, "What the South Can Do: How the Southern States Can Make Themselves Masters of the Situation" (1867), in *HWS* II, 929–31.]

To the Legislatures of the Southern States:—I write to you as the intellectual leaders of the Southern people—men who

should be able and willing to transcend the prejudices of section —to suggest the only ground of settlement between North and South which, in my judgment, can be successfully adopted.

Let me state the political situation. The radical principles of the North are immovably fixed upon negro suffrage as a condition of Southern State reconstruction. The proposed Constitutional Amendment is not regarded as a finality. It satisfies nobody, not even its authors. In the minds of the Northern people the negroes are now associated with the idea of loyalty to the Union. They are considered citizens. They are respected as "our allies." It is believed in the North that a majority of the white people of the South are at heart the enemies of the Union. The advocates of negro suffrage daily grow stronger and more numerous.

On the other hand, a majority of the Southern white population are inflexibly opposed to negro suffrage in any form, universal or qualified, and are prepared to resist its introduction by every means in their power. In alliance with the President and the Northern Democracy, they protest against any and all terms of reconstruction, demand unconditional readmission, and await in gloomy silence the Republican initiative.

This absolute and growing antagonism can only end, if continued, in one of two results, either in a renewal of civil war, or in a concession by the South of political equality to the negro. But in the case of war, the South can not possibly succeed. The North is to-day far stronger in men and money, in farms and factories, than she was in 1860. She is now trained to war, conscious of overwhelming strength, flushed with victory, and respected, as never before, by the nations of Europe. Moreover, she is much more united in political sentiment. Do not again deceive yourselves. If you should resort to arms, the North would be practically unanimous. The President would instantly be impeached and a radical successor appointed. The South has lost social unity with the loss of slavery. She can not fight better than before. And the braver her action, the more terrible would be her fate.

Gentlemen, these are the facts—not theories. Wise men try to see things as they are, uncolored by opinion or preference. The interest of both North and South, since they must live together,

is peace, harmony, and real fraternity. No adjustment can fully succeed unless it is acceptable to both sections. Therefore the statesman and patriot must find a common ground as a basis of permanent reconciliation.

Now the radicalism of the North is actual, organic, and progressive. Recognize the fact. But if "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed"—if "taxation without representation is tyranny"—and "on these two commandments hang all the (Republican) law and the prophets"—then these propositions are as applicable to women as to negroes. "Consistency is a jewel." The principle is so broad that, if you accept it in its entirety, you can afford to lead—not follow.

The population of the late slave States is about 12,000,000; 8,000,000 white, 4,000,000 black. The radicals demand suffrage for the black men on the ground named above. Very good. Say to them, as Mr. Cowan said to the advocates of negro male suffrage in the District, "Apply your principle! Give the suffrage to all men and women of mature age and sound mind, and we will accept it as the basis of State and National reconstruction."

Consider the result from the Southern standpoint. Your 4,000,000 of Southern white women will counterbalance your 4,000,000 of negro men and women, and thus the political supremacy of your white race will remain unchanged.

Think well of this. It is a calculation of the relative political influences of white women and of negroes which perhaps your people have not yet considered. Let us make the statement in figures. Estimating one male voter to every five persons, your present vote is:

White males	1,600,000
Add white females	1,600,000
Total white voters	3,200,000
Negro males	800,000
Negro females	800,000
Total negro voters	1,600,000

Suppose all the negroes vote one way and all the whites the

other, your white majority would be 1,600,000—equal to your present total vote. Thus you would control your own State legislation. Meanwhile, your influence in the councils of the nation will be greater than ever before, because your emancipated slaves will be counted in the basis of representation, instead of as formerly, in the ratio of five for three. In the light of the history of your Confederacy, can any Southerner fear to trust the women of the South with the ballot?

But the propriety of your making the proposal lies deeper than any consideration of sectional expediency. If you must try the Republican experiment, try it fully and fairly. Since you are compelled to union with the North, remove every seed of future controversy. If you are to share the future government of your States with a race you deem naturally and hopelessly inferior, avert the social chaos, which seems to you so imminent, by utilizing the intelligence and patriotism of the wives and daughters of the South. Plant yourselves upon the logical Northern principle. Then no new demands can ever be made upon you. No future inroads of fanaticism can renew sectional discord.

The effect upon the North would be to revolutionize political parties. "Justice satisfies everybody." The negro, thus protected against oppression by possessing the ballot, would cease to be the prominent object of philanthropic interest. Northern distrust, disarmed by Southern magnanimity, would give place to the liveliest sentiments of confidence and regard. The great political desideratum would be attained. The negro question would be forever removed from the political arena. National parties would again crystallize upon legitimate questions of National interest—questions of tariff, finance, and foreign relations. The disastrous conflict between Federal and State jurisdictions would cease. North and South, no longer hammer and anvil, would forget and forgive the past. School-houses and churches would be our fortifications and intrenchments. Capital and population would flow, like the Mississippi, toward the Gulf. The black race would gravitate by the law of nature toward the tropics. The memory and spirit of Washington would be cherished; and every deed of genuine gallantry and humanity would be treasured as the common glory of the republic.

Do you say that Northern Republicans would not accept such a proposition? They can not avoid it. The matter is in your own hands.

In New Jersey (then a slave State) from 1776 to 1807, a period of thirty-one years, women and negroes voted on precisely the same footing as white men. No catastrophe, social or political, ensued. The following is an extract from the New Jersey election law of 1797:

"SEC. 9. Every voter shall openly and in full view deliver his or her ballot, which shall be a single written ticket containing the names of the person, or persons, for whom he or she votes," etc.

Your Southern Legislatures can extend suffrage on equal terms to "all inhabitants," as the New Jersey State Convention did in 1776. Then let the Republicans in Congress refuse to admit your Senators and Representatives, if they dare. If so, they will go under. Upon that issue fairly made up, the men of positive convictions would rally round the new and consistent Democratic party. The very element which has destroyed slavery would side with the victorious South, and "out of the nettle danger you would pluck the flower safety."

Respectfully yours, HENRY B. BLACKWELL.

NEW YORK, January 15, 1867.

Olympia Brown, On the Foreign Menace (1889)

Olympia Brown (1835–1926) became a Universalist minister in 1862. She had a parish in Weymouth, Massachusetts, but in 1878 moved to Wisconsin, and it was as a resident of that state that she delivered this speech at the 1889 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. [*HWS* IV, 148–49.]

FOREIGN RULE

["After pointing out the glory of a country which offered a home to all, and expressing a belief in universal suffrage," write the editors of the *HWS*, "she continued:"]

In Wisconsin we have by the census of 1880 a population of

910,072 native-born, 405,425 foreign-born. Our last vote cast was 149,463 American, 189,469 foreign; thus you see nearly 1,000,000 native-born people are out-voted and out-governed by less than half their number of foreigners. Is that fair to Americans? Is it just to American men? Will they not, under this influence, in a little while be driven to the wall and obliged to step down and out? When the members of our Legislatures are the greater part foreigners, when they sit in the office of mayor and in all the offices of our city, and rule us with a rod of iron, it is time that American men should inquire if we have any rights that foreigners are bound to respect. . . .

The last census shows, I think, that there are in the United States three times as many American-born women as the whole foreign population, men and women together, so that the votes of women will eventually be the only means of overcoming this foreign influence and maintaining our free institutions. There is no possible safety for our free school, our free church or our republican government, unless women are given the suffrage and that right speedily. . . . The question in every political caucus, in every political convention, is not what great principles shall we announce, but what kind of a document can we draw up that will please the foreigners? . . .

When we remember that the first foot to touch Plymouth Rock was a woman's—that in the first settlement of this country women endured trials and privations and stood bravely at the post of duty, even fighting in the ranks that we might have a republic—and that in our great Western world women came at an early day to make the wilderness blossom as the rose, and rocked their babies' cradles in the log cabins when the Indians' war-whoop was heard on the prairies and the wolves howled around their doors—when we remember that in the last war thousands of women in the Northwest bravely took upon themselves the work of the households and the fields that their husbands and sons might fight the battles of liberty—when we recollect all this, and then are told that loyal women, pioneer women, the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers, are not even to ask for the right of suffrage lest the Scandinavians should be offended, it is time to rise

in indignation and ask, Whose country is this? Who made it? Who have periled their lives for it?

Our American women are property holders and pay large taxes; but the foreigner who has lived only one year in the State, and ten days in the precinct, who does not own a foot of land, may vote away their property in the form of taxes in the most reckless manner, regardless of their interests and their rights. Women are well-educated; they are graduating from our colleges; they are reading and thinking and writing; and yet they are the political inferiors of all the riff-raff of Europe that is poured upon our shores. It is unbearable. There is no language that can express the enormous injustice done to women. . . .

We are in danger in this country of Catholic domination, not because the Catholics are more numerous than we are, but because the Catholic church is represented at the polls and the Protestant church is not. The foreigners are Catholic—the greater portion of them; the foreigners are men—the greater part of them, and members of the Catholic church, and they work for it and vote for it. The Protestant church is composed of women. Men for the most part do not belong to it; they do not care much for it except as something to interest the women of their household. The consequence is the Protestant church is comparatively unrepresented at the ballot-box. . . .

I urge upon you, women, that you put suffrage first and foremost, before every other consideration upon earth. Make it a religious duty and work for the enfranchisement of your sex, which means the growth and development of noble characters in your children; for you can not educate your children well surrounded by men and women who hold false doctrines of society, of politics, of morals. . . .

Resolutions Adopted at a Convention (1893)

These resolutions, unanimously adopted at the 1893 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, are thor-

oughly typical of the period between Reconstruction and about 1910. The first applies Henry B. Blackwell's "statistical" argument to the North as well as to the South. [*HWS* IV, 216n.]

Resolved, That without expressing any opinion on the proper qualifications for voting, we call attention to the significant facts that in every State there are more women who can read and write than the whole number of illiterate male voters; more white women who can read and write than all negro voters; more American women who can read and write than all foreign voters; so that the enfranchisement of such women would settle the vexed question of rule by illiteracy, whether of home-grown or foreign-born production.

Resolved, That as all experience proves that the rights of the laboring man are best preserved in governments where he has possession of the ballot, we therefore demand on behalf of the laboring woman the same powerful instrument, that she may herself protect her own interests; and we urge all organized bodies of working women, whether in the field of philanthropy, education, trade, manufacture or general industry, to join our association in the endeavor to make woman legally and politically a free agent, as the best means for furthering any and every line of woman's work.

Resolved, That in all States possessing School Suffrage for women, suffragists are advised to organize in each representative district thereof, for the purpose of training and stimulating women voters to exercise regularly this right, using it as a preparatory school for the coming work of full-grown citizenship with an unlimited ballot. We also advise that women everywhere work for the election of an equal number of women and men upon school boards, that the State in taking upon itself the education of children may provide them with as many official mothers as fathers.

WHEREAS, Many forms of woman suffrage may be granted by State Legislatures without change in existing constitutions; therefore,

Resolved, That the suffragists in every State should petition for

Municipal, School and Presidential Suffrage by statute, and take every practicable step toward securing such legislation.

Resolved, That we urge all women to enter protest, at the time of paying taxes, at being compelled to submit to taxation without representation.

Carrie Chapman Catt, Danger to Our Government (1894)

Carrie Chapman Catt made this speech at a suffrage meeting in Iowa in a year of militant nationwide strike activity, before she became a national suffragist leader. [*Woman's Journal,* December 15, 1894.]

This Government is menaced with great danger, and that danger cannot be averted by the triumph of the party of protection, nor by that of free trade, nor by the triumph of single tax or of free silver. That danger lies in the votes possessed by the males in the slums of the cities, and the ignorant foreign vote which was sought to be bought up by each party, to make political success. It made no difference whether that vote was usually found with one party or not (except that one has more respect for an open bid than for a disguised one), the corrupting influence was just the same. In the mining districts the danger has already reached this point—miners are supplied with arms, watching with greedy eyes for the moment when they can get in their deadly work of despoiling the wealth of the country. The hoodlums of Chicago gave us a forecast of their intent to reproduce the horrors of the Old World when their numbers are sufficiently increased, and every ship load of foreigners brings them nearer to their object. These men hold the government of the large cities in the hollow of their hands. There is but one way to avert the danger—cut off the vote of the slums and give to woman, who is bound to suffer all, and more than man can, of the evils his legislation has brought upon the nation, the power of protecting herself that man has se-

cured for himself—the ballot. Put the ballot in the hands of every person of sound mind in the nation. If that would make the vote too cumbersome, cut it off at the bottom, the vote of the slums. For several years past the proportion of men to women immigrating to this country has been increasing and has reached that of seven to one. In the five years preceding and including 1890, 1,020,032 men of voting age came to this country. And as in fourteen States an immigrant may vote, according to the laws of some States, in one year, or, in some, six months (as in Kansas), or in four months (as in Wisconsin), or in three months (as in Michigan), we can get some idea of their influence with the Government. Not only is the native-born American jeopardized in life and property, but the citizens of foreign birth who desire good government. It will be readily seen that granting the vote to woman and cutting off the vote of the slums, if it could not be otherwise controlled, would result at once in good to the nation. And those good men who fear that evil would result to woman by depositing her opinion where it will be counted, who yet, like Dr. Parkhurst, call upon woman to face the dangers of walking day after day upon the streets frequented by the men who have built up Tammany, to use their influence upon voters to tear it down, when a little piece of paper deposited in a ballot-box, which would take but a small part of one day, surrounded by no greater danger, would do the work far more effectually. This shows how tenacious of power men are when once possessing it, even when they mean to use that power for good as they see it.

Belle Kearney, The South and Woman Suffrage (1903)

In the 1890's a suffragist movement gradually developed in the South. Although the maintenance of white supremacy was not the southern suffragists' primary motivation, its desirability was something they all took for granted and some of them spotlighted in their propaganda. As suffragism's abolitionist origins receded into the past, the southern women found the northern leaders more

and more sympathetic to their point of view. The following speech, by Mississippi suffragist Belle Kearney (1863–1939), at the 1903 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in New Orleans, can be considered a signal of this growing understanding. ["The South and Woman Suffrage," *Woman's Journal*, April 4, 1903.]

[The first part of the speech, omitted here, traces the history of slavery in the colonies and the United States.—*Ed.*]

. . . By degrees, slavery became the bone of contention in politics. In course of time it would probably have been abolished by the Southerners themselves, if they had been left to work out their own destiny and that of the black man in bonds, but a conflict of ideas gathered to a storm-center between the Puritan of the North and the Cavalier of the South, and the institution was wiped out in blood. . . .

The world is scarcely beginning to realize the enormity of the situation that faces the South in its grapple with the race question which was thrust upon it at the close of the Civil War, when 4,500,000 ex-slaves, illiterate and semi-barbarous, were enfranchised. Such a situation has no parallel in history. In forging a path out of the darkness, there were no precedents to lead the way. All that has been and is being accomplished is pioneer statecraft. The South has struggled under its death-weight for nearly forty years, bravely and magnanimously.

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. If the United States government had been wise enough to enact such a law when the negro was first enfranchised, it would have saved years of bloodshed in the South, and such experiences of suffering and horror among the white people here as no other were ever subjected to in an enlightened nation.

The present suffrage laws in the different Southern States can be only temporary measures for protection. Those who are wise enough to look beneath the surface will be compelled to realize the fact that they act as a stimulus to the black man to acquire both

education and property, but no incentive is given to the poor whites; for it is understood, in a general way, that any man whose skin is fair enough to let the blue veins show through, may be allowed the right of franchise.

The industrial education that the negro is receiving at Tuskegee and other schools is only fitting him for power, and when the black man becomes necessary to a community by reason of his skill and acquired wealth, and the poor white man, embittered by his poverty and humiliated by his inferiority, finds no place for himself or his children, then will come the grapple between the races.

To avoid this unspeakable culmination, the enfranchisement of women will have to be effected, and an educational and property qualification for the ballot be made to apply, without discrimination, to both sexes and to both races. It will spur the poor white to keep up with the march of progression [*sic*], and enable him to hold his own. The class that is not willing to measure its strength with that of an inferior is not fit to survive.

The enfranchisement of women would insure immediate and durable white supremacy, honestly attained; for, upon unquestionable authority, it is stated that "in every Southern State but one, there are more educated women than all the illiterate voters, white and black, native and foreign, combined." As you probably know, of all the women in the South who can read and write, ten out of every eleven are white. 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.

The civilization of the North is threatened by the influx of foreigners with their imported customs; by the greed of monopolistic wealth, and the unrest among the working classes; by the strength of the liquor traffic, and by encroachments upon religious belief.

Some day the North will be compelled to look to the South for redemption from these evils, on account of the purity of its Anglo-Saxon blood, the simplicity of its social and economic structure, the great advance in prohibitory law, and the maintenance of the

sanctity of its faith, which has been kept inviolate. Just as surely as the North will be forced to turn to the South for the nation's salvation, just so surely will the South be compelled to look to its Anglo-Saxon women as the medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African. . . .

Anglo-Saxonism is the standard of the ages to come. It is, above all else, the granite foundation of the South. Upon that its civilization will mount; upon that it will stand unshaken. . . .

Thank God the black man was freed! I wish for him all possible happiness and all possible progress, but not in encroachments upon the holy of holies of the Anglo-Saxon race. . . .

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THE "EXPEDIENCY" ARGUMENT. II: OTHER FORMS

Anna Garlin Spencer, Duty to the Women of Our New Possessions (1899)

Once suffragists began to demand the vote not solely as a matter of right but also on the ground that they could effect specific reforms with it, their propaganda instantly reflected all current issues. In 1899 the headlines featured annexation of Hawaii and occupation of the Philippines, and, in the same year, the Reverend Anna Garlin Spencer, of Rhode Island, spoke on the "Duty to the Women of Our New Possessions" at the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. [*HWS* IV, 328–34.]

. . . Bebel says, "Woman was the first human being to taste of bondage." True, and her bondage has been long and bitter; but the subjection of woman to man in the family bond was a vast step upward from the preceding condition. It gave woman release from the terrible labor-burdens of savage life; it gave her time and

strength to develop beauty of person and refinement of taste and manners. It gave her the teaching capacity, for it put all the younger child-life into her exclusive care, with some leisure at command to devote to its mental and moral, as well as physical, well-being. It led to a closer relationship between man and woman than the world had known before, and thus gave each the advantage of the other's qualities. And always and everywhere the subjection of woman to man has had a mitigation and softening of hardships unknown to other forms of slavery, by reason of the power of human affection as it has worked through sex-attraction. As soon, however, as the slavery of woman to man was outgrown and obsolete it became (as was African slavery in a professedly democratic country like our own) "the sum of all villainies." And to-day there is no inconsistency so great, and therefore no condition so hurtful and outrageous, as the subjection of women to men in a civilization which like ours assumes to rest upon foundations of justice and equality of human rights. . . .

To-day these considerations (especially the failure fully to apply the doctrine of equality of human rights to women, even in the most advanced centers of modern civilization) have an especial and most fateful significance in relation to the women of the more backward races as they are brought into contact with our modern civilization. I said the peoples with whom we are now being brought as a nation into vital relationship may be still in the matriarchate. If they are not, most of them are certainly in some transition stage from that to the father-rule. Not all peoples have had to pass through the entire subjection of women to men which marked our ancestral advance. The more persistent tribal relationship and collective family life have sometimes softened the process of social growth which was so harsh for women under the old Roman law and the later English common law. It may be that the dusky races of Africa and of the islands of the sea, as well as our Aryan cousins of India, may pass more easily through the stages of attachment of man's responsibility to the family life than we, with our tough fiber of character, were able to do. If so, in the name of justice they should have the chance!

But if we, who have not yet "writ large" in law and political