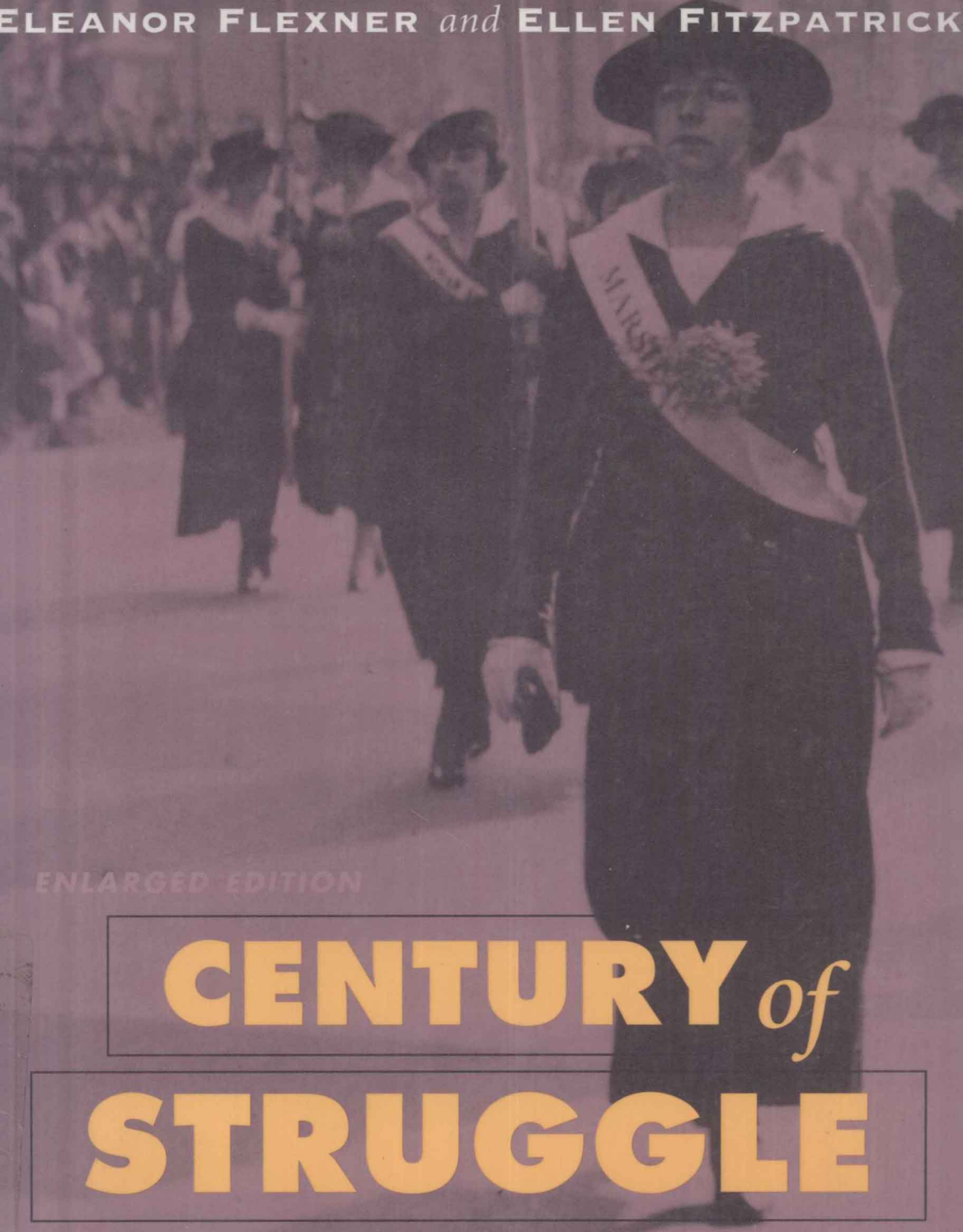
ELEANOR FLEXNER *and* ELLEN FITZPATRICK



ENLARGED EDITION

CENTURY *of* STRUGGLE

THE WOMAN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

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To the Memory of

Anne Crawford Flexner

June 27, 1874–January 11, 1955

My mother's life was touched at many points by the movement whose history I have tried to record. Born in Georgetown, Kentucky, she graduated from Vassar (class of '95) at a time when relatively few Southern girls went away to college. She marched in the New York suffrage parades. She made her mark as a playwright at a time when such an achievement was still unusual for a woman. She was active in organizing playwrights into a professional association, and served for years as an officer of what is now the Dramatists Guild of the Authors League of America.

Her hope for me was that I would be a writer; her own success made it possible for me to write this book, which I dedicate to her with respect and gratitude.

Eleanor Flexner

Foreword

The book you are about to read tells the story of one of the great social movements in American history. The struggle for women's voting rights was one of the longest, most successful, and in some respects most radical challenges ever posed to the American system of electoral politics. For more than a century, millions waged an exhausting battle to secure the franchise for "one half the people" with fierce determination and resolute commitment. Many of the pioneering suffragists never lived to savor their success. Some of those who did were destined to confront the sometimes disappointing consequences of their hard-won victory.[1]

It is difficult to imagine now a time when women were largely removed by custom, practice, and law from the formal political rights and responsibilities that supported and sustained the nation's young democracy. Yet for well over a century women had no formal legal right to participate in much of American electoral politics. As suffragists understood so well, voting rights symbolized more than the opportunity to cast a ballot for a favored candidate. The vote invoked a wider universe that defined an individual not as man or woman but as citizen, that carved out a vital role for each member of society as a person who held responsibility for the future of the Republic and the orderly workings of the state. Moreover, the vote was a passkey to public life, the vast arena outside the home where ideas were propagated, fortunes made, and the future charted by those who participated in rather than observed or reacted to the making of public policy.

Voting rights had long been denied to women as much by prevailing notions of who they were and what capacities they possessed as by any explicit and carefully planned scheme to deny women access to the instruments of democracy. In many respects, traditional notions about men's and women's respective natures and responsibilities were far more difficult to challenge and dislodge than any plot fomented by determined enemies.

Indeed, among the first obstacles suffragists needed to overcome were messages about woman's proper place that they had received almost as a birthright. Notions that women belonged only in the domestic sphere, where they would exercise crucial responsibility for the care and nurture of families, were bred in the bone for many centuries. It took tremendous courage and vision to challenge, never mind topple, restrictive ideas about women's natural abilities and place in society.[2]

Women who questioned and even jettisoned prevailing mores in their own lives were compelled to go a step further if they hoped to change the larger society. They needed to create a way of understanding the constraints imposed upon women that did not reduce their rebellion to pathology or to the idle whims of those unwilling to conform to society. This was no small task, as religious leaders and, increasingly in the nineteenth century, "scientists" offered elaborate explanations for the importance of female passivity and domesticity. Perhaps most daunting was the suffragists' need to speak out publicly against injustice—the act of public speaking itself defied prevailing notions of female propriety. They had to persuade those who blithely accepted long tradition to reconsider values and customs that seemed beyond reproach, immune to criticism and removed from the reach of public policy.

Despite such challenges, millions of women and men actively participated in the suffrage movement over its long history. Millions more sympathized with the aspirations of suffragists and applauded their determination to secure women's political equality. Their support sustained the suffrage movement through years of bitter disappointment and sweet moments of victory. By 1920, the country officially embraced women's suffrage as national policy. But for several generations of suffragists, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, in August 1920, marked a triumph that had often seemed impossibly out of reach.

For sheer drama the suffrage movement has few equals in modern American political history. And yet, the story of women's voting rights figured very little in the work or interests of most American historians before Eleanor Flexner chose to write *Century of Struggle* in the early 1950s. Although historians seemed to feel compelled to record the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, few were similarly moved to explore the forces that shaped the long campaign that resulted in that notable victory. One exception was Mary Beard, herself an active suffragist, and to a lesser extent her husband and occasional co-author, Charles. The Beards addressed women's importance to American history in

their book *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927); Mary Beard completed much pioneering work on women and politics throughout her long career.[3]

Most historical studies of women's suffrage before Flexner's *Century of Struggle*, however, were written by feminists who had themselves participated in the women's suffrage movement. As Flexner notes in her Bibliographical Summary, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Mathilda Gage made perhaps the most substantial historical contribution in 1881 and 1886, when they wrote the first three volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage*. These early volumes were published well before feminists had achieved victory. Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper edited volume 4, which appeared in 1902. Volumes 5 and 6, edited by Harper alone, appeared in 1922. All three of the later volumes, as Flexner points out, suffered from a paucity of historical analysis and a tendency to treat the movement as a parade of names, dates, events, and various state victories. Still, they constituted an effort to construct a reliable history of the suffrage movement that would prove essential to Flexner's research and that of other historians in subsequent years. As one might expect given their intense identification with the cause, early chroniclers placed little value on "objectivity" in their histories of the women's suffrage movement.[4]

Despite the existence of several partisan histories of the movement, the campaign for women's suffrage remained a largely untold story when Eleanor Flexner embarked upon *Century of Struggle* in the early 1950s. What prompted Flexner to turn her attention to the women's suffrage movement in the early post–World War II period? Her interest in the women's rights crusade had complex roots. Although Flexner herself gave little credence to the theory, her family history no doubt influenced her to some degree. Her parents' lives reflected many of the forces that shaped feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Certainly Eleanor's mother, Anne Crawford Flexner, proved essential to the writing of *Century of Struggle*. A graduate of Vassar College, Class of 1895, Anne Flexner belonged to the early generation of college-educated women in America. Thereafter she achieved considerable renown as a playwright. Her dramatization of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, a folk tale about an immensely optimistic though much-beleaguered widow from Kentucky, was spectacularly successful and made her a wealthy woman. Income from *Mrs. Wiggs* and her mother's various other productions gave Eleanor Flexner the financial independence to research and write *Century of Struggle*.

Both of Flexner's parents supported the cause of women's suffrage. Al-

though she was just a young girl at the time, Flexner vividly recalled as an elderly woman the day her parents "marched in the New York woman suffrage parade in the summer of 1915. It was the summer of the polio epidemic and *I* had rheumatic fever. I can just remember them coming in in their white clothes, which they had to change before they came into my room." Abraham Flexner, Eleanor's father, was then widely known for his progressive ideas about social issues and public policy. The author of a deeply influential report on American medical education published in 1910, he served as an adviser to the Rockefeller philanthropies and wrote widely on education and an array of other public issues. Having two parents who were so successful sometimes felt like a burden to Eleanor Flexner, who recalled late in life how tired she got "of being considered Abe Flexner's daughter. When I was introduced to people they'd say, 'Which Flexner?' And it was a long time before I became my own Flexner."[5]

Whatever the impact of parental example, Eleanor Flexner showed an avid, early interest in the study of history. At Swarthmore College, she majored in history and English and participated in an innovative honors program that emphasized small-group learning. Flexner's senior honor's thesis on Mary Tudor won her a fellowship for a year's study at Oxford University after she graduated from Swarthmore in 1930. There she continued to study history, though her many years of progressive schooling had failed to give her the background in Latin necessary to earn an Oxford degree. Nonetheless, she had acquired a solid intellectual foundation in the field of history. Her thesis research, especially, required immersion in dense primary sources, which Flexner "chomped" her way through with great energy.[6]

Family influence, intellectual interests, and educational training ultimately proved far less important to *Century of Struggle* than the historical moment of the 1930s. Flexner returned to the United States from England soon after the start of the Great Depression. The nation was then reeling under the impact of the collapsed economy and the ever more visible evidence of widespread misery. In New York City alone, spiraling unemployment and swelling relief rolls gave ample evidence of the depth of suffering. "By the time I came back," she later remembered, "it was a deep depression, and although our family was miraculously spared because of a fixed, assured income, on both parents' side . . . I felt that what was going on at home was something I ought to be a part of." A cousin put Flexner in touch with the Welfare Council, an umbrella organization of volunteer relief agencies. In

this period before the election of Roosevelt, efforts to meet the needs of those thrust into joblessness and indigence could not keep up with the unrelenting demand for such services. Flexner wrote essays for the council's magazine, simultaneously "horrified . . . by the magnitude of the economic disaster and consumed with guilt as a lot of other people were. No credit to myself, I was secure from all this."[7]

Flexner soon attempted to find a public voice for her social conscience in theatrical writing. Sharing her mother's love of the theater, she joined a small repertory company in New York in the early 1930s. The group folded for lack of funding, but by then Flexner had found a home in the theater for her emotional and intellectual energies. She began to write plays that focused on social and economic unrest and the rise of fascism. The latter theme provided the focus for a play that depicted the uprising of Austrian Socialists against local authorities in 1934–1935. In 1934, Flexner began working for the well-connected Broadway press agent Helen Deutsch, a position that earned her her first salary. Among the plays Deutsch was then handling was Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*, a drama that focused on the infamous case of Sacco and Vanzetti.[8]

Work with the *New Theatre Magazine* followed, as Flexner increasingly gravitated to left-leaning groups intent upon mobilizing social and political discontent into a radical movement. One such organization was the Theatre Arts Committee, a group that was struggling to raise money for Republicans in Spain during the civil war in 1936. Flexner worked on the committee's publication *TAC*, an assignment that left her "up to my neck" in the radicalism of New York's theatrical community. In 1937 Flexner began to write a book that took the measure of American playwrights as social critics. Entitled *American Playwrights, 1918–1938: The Theatre Retreats from Reality* (1938), the study "tried to show," in Flexner's words, "how their best plays were those that were socially most committed or progressive, and when they opted for the fleshpots and Hollywood and so forth, then the plays themselves became less punchy and less effective drama."[9]

By that time Flexner had become involved with the American Communist Party. Though she ultimately considered herself "too individualistic, too independent" to have the "makings of a real Marxist," she devoted considerable time and energy in the 1930s to the Party and continued her associations with radical activists and organizations at least through the 1940s. Perhaps more than anything else, Flexner's involvement with the Left, her

experience with labor organizing, and her many political activities shaped both the genesis and the content of *Century of Struggle*. "In all honesty I have to say," she later recollected, "that my real concern and interest in women came out of my connection with the radical movement in the thirties. Like many other people in my circumstances, I had great feelings of guilt because I was so much better off than most other people that I knew and was not exposed to any of the hazards they were struggling with. Anybody who wasn't, as I used to say, dead from the neck up ended [up] in the Left movement or its fringes because the Left was the only organized movement that was trying to do something to break out of the dreadful morass that the American economy was sinking in."[10]

So deep was the impression made by the Left that Flexner later credited the movement with opening the fields of African-American and women's history—a conviction that both acknowledged the important historical work done in the 1930s and gave less than full due to the roots of such concerns earlier in the twentieth century. "The point I want to make," Flexner said in the early 1980s, "is that the Communist Party, and Marxist publications like *New Masses* and others, did have an enormous impact on the nearly non-existent (among whites) interest in black history and black thought and writing, and much later, the area of women's rights and ideology." Flexner was clear that her own affiliation with the Communist Party prompted her determination to write a book on women's history. "I can definitely trace the origins of my book, *Century of Struggle*," she explained, "which has been called a classic and 'definitive' (which I doubt, but which did open up the whole field), to some of my contacts with Communists like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Claudia Jones (who was quite unknown to the larger white community)."[11]

Flexner found her way to such influential figures through Marian Bachrach, a close friend whom she much admired and who played an active role in the American Communist Party. Flexner remembered Bachrach as a "totally unrigid, undemagogic Marxist, one of the few I have ever known, and a wise and compassionate and brilliant woman." The two women formed a strong bond that was especially meaningful for Flexner, who recalled that Bachrach "was one of the few people whom I got to know in the movement who had my kind of background in intellectual discipline and wide-ranging interests in reading and so forth." Many in the Communist Party, Flexner noted, "were too busy trying to stay alive to get a really wide education." Bachrach and

Flexner both came from wealthy families, a reality that divided them from many working-class participants in the Left. Indicted under the Smith Act, which made it illegal to advocate or join an organization committed to the overthrow of the U.S. government by force or violence, Bachrach advanced the goals of the Party through her work as a journalist. She never stood trial for her Communist Party affiliations because she was critically ill with cancer by the time of her indictment. Flexner experienced Bachrach's untimely death in 1957 as a devastating loss, one that still pained her deeply twenty-five years after the fact. "I wish every day of my life she was still with us these days," she sadly mused in 1982.[12]

It was Bachrach who suggested, probably in the 1940s, that Flexner attend a speech given in New York City by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a fiery Irish-American labor organizer known as the "Rebel Girl." Flynn had been a driving force in the radical Industrial Workers of the World, and by 1937 was a rising star in the American Communist Party. Flexner recalled, "It was from Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in that talk that I first heard about people like the Lowell mills girls and other early activists of American working women. I began hunting for books in the library because Flynn had made the story so vivid; she was a real old-time orator with fire and vigor, and by the end of the evening I was passionately interested in some of the people and the events she talked about." Her curiosity piqued, Flexner soon discovered to her disappointment that very few history books contained accounts of the heroic struggles of working women so vividly recounted by Flynn. The Party strongly endorsed the goal of attracting women to Marxism, and Flexner believed that an alluring story could be told by drawing on the facts of American history. "So that was really how I got started, because, there being no other book, I decided I'd write one," Flexner later explained.[13]

If Flynn stimulated Flexner's interest in writing women's history, her political activities also shaped the ways in which Flexner would later conceptualize the women's rights movement. *Century of Struggle* is unusually attentive to the persistent economic burdens shouldered by working-class women throughout American history. It also devotes a remarkable amount of attention, given the state of African-American women's history in the mid-1950s, to black women. These themes had first captured Flexner's attention in the 1930s. They became a central focus of her interest during the Second World War, when she joined the Congress of Industrial Organizations' campaign to unionize workers across industries.

Flexner devoted most of her energy during the war to organizing clerical and secretarial workers in professions that ranged from banking to book publishing to social work. The predominance of women in these often "pink-collar" jobs heightened Flexner's sensitivity to sex discrimination—as did, eventually, the paternalism and sexism of many men in the Left and the union leadership. Flexner ran a placement service for a union of office workers that was especially aggressive in its efforts to find employment for African Americans and women. She believed that the importance of women's work to the wartime economy and the militant efforts on the part of civil rights activists to pressure the federal government into ensuring fair employment practices presented an unusual opportunity for social change. As she reflected on the intersection of race and gender in the lives of black working women, "two streams converged."[14]

Her political activities did not provide Flexner with the employment and financial security she increasingly sought in the late 1940s. Still dependent on the largesse of her parents to a far greater degree than made her happy, Flexner took a series of jobs in her search to find some professional niche for her talents and political convictions. Between 1946 and 1948, she served as secretary to the Congress of American women. Strongly influenced by the American Communist Party, this popular-front organization sought to mobilize women to fight for "the four freedoms and all the rest of it, decent wages, jobs, housing, and so forth." Through the congress, Flexner met and became friendly with Claudia Jones, a black woman of West Indian origin who was influential in the Communist Party leadership. Jones criticized the Party for its inattention to women's issues and succeeded in getting Flexner, in her words, similarly "all worked up." But in spite of such inspiration, the congress's financial insecurity and the difficulty in organizing branches in various eastern cities deeply discouraged Flexner.[15]

Returning to the union she had worked for during the war, Flexner declared that "it was time I got a job instead of handing them out." The union sent her to the Foreign Policy Association, one of the organizations whose work force Flexner had earlier helped integrate. Throughout its history, the FPA had devoted much energy to lobbying Americans to support international peace efforts by organizations such as the League of Nations and, later, the United Nations. Nonetheless, "It was a great blow for democracy," Flexner remembered, "when we got an outfit like the Foreign Policy Association to hire their first black secretary and similar shattering events—

at least they shattered the FPA, they didn't shatter us. We were on the verge of picketing the place when they hastily hired a very attractive and competent black secretary." Flexner served as an assistant to the head of the Speakers Bureau of the Foreign Policy Association. In this position, she ran across the names of many women who had been active in the later stages of the women's suffrage movement. The association had for some time been a favorite of feminists committed to both suffrage and pacifism.[16]

While working for the FPA, Flexner met Helen Terry, who soon became her companion and remained so until Terry's death in the early 1980s. As Flexner put it, a year or two after they met the two women "shacked up together." They shared, among many things, similar political convictions. Both participated actively in labor and tenant organizing in the late 1940s. Flexner lived just two blocks from Stuyvesant Town, a housing community then being developed in Manhattan by the Metropolitan Life Company. Not only did she participate in sit-ins called to force integration of urban housing, but she also tried to get "as many Communists into Stuyvesant Town as possible so there could be pressure from the tenants . . . to admit [blacks]. And we did get some black families into Stuyvesant Town. Big victory."[17]

Throughout the late 1940s, Flexner's life was a whirlwind of politics, work, and organizing. Through her activities she became acutely aware of the struggles of labor and the exhausting effort and exhilarating possibilities that formed the core experience of participating in a social movement. She was captivated by the existence of "black women's organizations . . . who were active in trying to forward the cause of black women and black working women." Among her most gratifying jobs was her work with the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, for whom she did public relations work after World War II. Barred from state nursing associations in the Deep South, many black nurses had no entree in the American Nursing Association. This barrier became of growing economic moment as the American Nursing Association increasingly broadened its efforts to lobby for the economic well-being and professional standing of its members.[18]

Flexner's work with the black nurses only deepened her interest "in black women's history and problems" and sharpened her conviction that African-American women ought to play a prominent role in any historical study she undertook of the women's movement. She tried her hand at teaching courses in American women's history at the Jefferson School of Social Science, one of several academies supported by the American Communist Party that

offered part-time courses to working people. As she prepared her courses, Flexner's "ideas about the historical development of the struggle for women's rights began very slowly to crystalize." The concept of struggle by now permeated her understanding of history, the labor movement, and the place of working women and African Americans within American society.[19]

By the early 1950s, Flexner's general thoughts of undertaking a book on women's history devolved into a decision to write a narrative of the women's suffrage movement. Her resolve to focus on the campaign to win voting rights stemmed, at least in part, from her reading of Alma Lutz's admiring 1940 biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Created Equal*, in 1950. Study of the then limited literature on the women's rights movement followed. Flexner was dismayed that works such as Inez Irwin's suffrage history, *Angels and Amazons*, devoted not "a word" to black women or working women. Nonetheless, Flexner was convinced that the suffrage movement was a compelling story, rarely told and full of possibility. She discussed her ideas for *Century of Struggle* with Marian Bachrach, who encouraged her interest. She pored over the nineteen-volume *Report on the Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States*, commissioned by the U.S. Congress in the early twentieth century. The report persuaded Flexner that information on working-class women could be incorporated into women's history. Then began the daunting struggle to locate primary research material on individuals, organizations, state campaigns, and ideas necessary to enrich the tale.[20]

Much inspired by the example of Herbert Aptheker, a Communist historian who was avidly engaged in uncovering archival sources in African-American history, Flexner was determined to compile a broad array of sources detailing the history of American women. "I knew nothing about archives interested in women or other historians interested in women, and if there was a Berkshire Conference for Women Historians as they claimed since then, I certainly had no knowledge of it or contact with it." Early in her research, Flexner approached W. E. B. DuBois in search of material on African-American women. DuBois seemed dismissive of her project and her goals, a response that bitterly disappointed Flexner. Much more encouraging was an archivist at Swarthmore College who directed Flexner to the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College. This tip led Flexner to a veritable historical gold mine, full of fascinating bits and pieces of evidence and priceless details. "That was how I got plugged in," Flexner explained. "Everything else came from that."[21]

At Smith, archivists offered a "fabulous collection of articles and clippings . . . a kind of grab bag full of individual names which you could then pursue in other sources." Undaunted by her disheartening experience with DuBois, Flexner pressed on in her efforts to incorporate African-American women into the history of the suffrage movement. "Previous so-called historians of the movement," Flexner observed with disgust, "never had a word in them about black women." (Working-class women, she believed, had fared little better.) But at Howard University, Dorothy Porter's efforts to create the Spingarn Collection of African-American history made possible a new realm of intellectual inquiry. Similarly, in New York, Jean Blackwell Hutson was creating the Schomburg Collection at a branch of the New York Public Library in Harlem. Both women took pains to ensure that black women would find a place in future histories. Porter and Hutson "embraced" Flexner and generously shared references, contacts, and suggestions. In a private collection of books and pamphlets held by Mrs. Miriam Holden, Flexner also found an extraordinary library. "I was invited to her home in New York. There was everything there was in any of these libraries I'd been to, but I could take as much of it as I could stagger home with, whereas in most places the stuff was in rare book collections and you could only use it from nine to five under somebody's eagle eye."[22]

As Flexner began to sort through a growing mountain of historical evidence, she settled on a theme that would provide shape and coherence to her findings. The theme would be "struggle," she decided, a choice that reflected her ideas about historical development, her politics, and her growing sense of American women's history. "Anything that [does bear] directly on the organized efforts, the organized *struggle* of women . . . belonged in the book, and anything that did not encompass that, I would omit." (In fact, the narrative of *Century of Struggle* covers a terrain that ranges far beyond such fixed boundaries.) For Flexner, the idea of struggle was a "touchstone . . . to fall back on. That's what the title came out of . . . I think that's the most important thing about the book."[23]

Perhaps most of all, the idea of struggle enlivened the past and shaded with meaning the seemingly disparate moments of reform enthusiasm that punctuated modern American history. In writing *Century of Struggle*, Flexner returned again and again to her own sense of what it meant to try to change American society. Here she found the passion to describe the hard determination, heart-breaking frustration, and fantastic exhilaration she believed

infused the suffrage movement. "I *knew*," she later said, "what it was, not exactly to be bodily thrown down stairs, but to have the door slammed in my face when I was canvassing for the union, [for] various unions at various times." She recalled:

> I knew the work that was involved in mounting an election or union-organizing campaign; I had been through this. I never got over the kick of the solidarity activity of a group of people working very hard together and giving up a great deal else and triumphing when they won and taking a deep breath to start all over again when they lost . . . I knew what it was like to have sore feet and an aching back and hurt feelings and so forth.[24]

By 1955, Flexner was working full time on *Century of Struggle*. Her mother's death that year freed her from the necessity of earning an income. Now in her late forties, she found not only literary inspiration and historical imagination but comfort in her increasingly distant memories of the 1930s. By that time, American revulsion against Communism, the horrific crimes of totalitarian regimes (widely known before Flexner ever abandoned the Communist Party), a raging Cold War, the repression of the Left, and the retreat of labor in the 1950s seemed to make a mockery of radical visions and dreams. Work on *Century of Struggle* made it possible for Flexner to feel "that practically nothing that happened to me in earlier days was wasted in terms of experience; or I would say, 'Well, it's too bad I spent time on that because it really never amounted to very much.'" Little seemed to endure in the climate of the postwar years, or so Flexner came to believe. "Certainly the union disappeared without a trace, all of the militant ones I was involved with; they were inevitably more radical, more left wing, than the respectable ones. In a sense, *Century* was almost a product of that activity, so [my early work] wasn't wasted."[25]

It was not clear, however, who would be interested in a book on the women's suffrage movement at mid-twentieth century. "Women's history in this country," Flexner later recalled, "was an area in which there had been very little writing, very little interest. The whole time I was working on [*Century of Struggle*] I was dogged by the feeling that nobody was ever going to read this book, much less publish it." Arthur Schlesinger, a professor of history at Harvard and an early advocate of women's history, had strongly encouraged Flexner and warmly endorsed the significance of her project to American history. Flexner remembered asking the distinguished historian,

"Should I write this book?" "By all means," he replied. But, Flexner stressed, she was not a Ph.D. "That doesn't matter," Schlesinger responded. "You're literate." He encouraged Flexner to contact the historian Janet James, who was then teaching at Wellesley College, working to develop the field of women's history, and laboring on the massive biographical work *Notable American Women* (1971), which would do so much to advance women's history.[26]

Despite hopeful signs that others shared her enthusiasm for women's history, when Flexner showed a draft of the first one hundred and fifty pages to an editor friend of her father's, the response was less than encouraging. The material on black women would have to be removed to sell the book, the publisher told her, as no one had any interest in that subject. Although Flexner strenuously disagreed, doubts about the book's appeal dogged her, though they did not shake her determination to include African-American women in her history. When the book was completed, another publisher urged Flexner to inject some levity into the account. Others refused to even consider the manuscript. For this reason, Flexner expressed skepticism when the historian Arthur Mann's wife urged her at a League of Women Voter's Meeting (how times had changed!) in Northampton, Massachusetts, to speak to Mann about having Harvard University Press publish *Century of Struggle*. "They wouldn't touch such a book," Flexner replied.[27]

In fact, Mann, then a professor at Smith College in Northampton, where Flexner was residing, shared his wife's belief that the book was precisely the sort of study Harvard would be eager to publish. "I have encountered a marked lack of interest among the publishers I have approached," Flexner confessed in a letter to Schlesinger. "Nevertheless, I am still hopeful that a place exists for a history that will redress the existing imbalance on women's place in American history." Schlesinger apparently agreed. With his colleague Oscar Handlin, he evaluated the manuscript for Harvard University Press; both men recommended its publication enthusiastically. "In my judgment," Schlesinger advised the Press, Flexner "has written a much-needed book. There have been earlier works on the history of women's rights, but these have seen the subject more narrowly and treated it with the emotional overtones of fighters in the cause. Miss Flexner views it rather as a significant phase in the development of American democracy and deals with it even-handedly, though the reader can have no real doubt as to where her own sympathies lie."[28]