

# SUSAN B. ANTHONY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

*Christine L. Ridarsky &  
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*Susan B. Anthony  
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Edited by  
Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth

With an introduction by Nancy A. Hewitt

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*Susan B. Anthony and the  
Struggle for Equal Rights*

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# Gender and Race in American History

Alison M. Parker, The College at Brockport, State University of New York  
Carol Faulkner, Syracuse University

ISSN: 2152-6400

*The Men and Women We Want*  
*Gender, Race, and the Progressive Era Literacy Test Debate*  
Jeanne D. Petit

*Manhood Enslaved: Bondmen in Eighteenth- and*  
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*Interconnections: Gender and Race in American History*  
Edited by Carol Faulkner and Alison M. Parker

*Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*  
Edited by Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth

For my great-grandmother Erma Elizabeth Black Morrison  
and my great-aunt Erma Adalyn Morrison Mitchell,  
who inspired my love of history and taught  
me what it means to be a strong woman.

CLR

For Nancy A. Hewitt in appreciation  
of our longstanding friendship.

MMH

In memory of Nora Bredes.

## *Preface*

The essays collected in this volume grew out of a conference, also titled "Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights," held at the University of Rochester in 2006. Sponsored by the Anthony Center for Women's Leadership, the Department of History, and the University of Rochester Libraries, the conference commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of Susan B. Anthony's death. Like the conference, this volume explores the diversity of thought and action in American women's involvement in nineteenth-century reform movements, especially those to which Anthony dedicated her life: women's rights, racial equality, and temperance. Activists routinely faced hostility from opponents who did not share their views, but, as these essays demonstrate, the challenges did not always come from the outside. While advocates of particular reforms may have shared common goals, they often differed in opinion on how best to achieve those goals. Thus, activists' passions for their causes sometimes led to conflict over tactical and philosophical issues within organized reform movements.

As William Lloyd Garrison Jr. said at Susan B. Anthony's funeral, "Dissensions are inevitable in all human organizations, those of reform included. The contrary points of view regarding methods, and the personal equations which always enter, cause lines of cleavage and make grievances that rankle."<sup>1</sup> Women's rejoinders to the challenges they faced from both internal and external sources were as numerous, complex, and varied as the challenges themselves. The essays in this volume examine the conflicts and disputes that confronted female reformers and offer insights into how these differences in philosophy and tactics affected individual reformers and ultimately shaped the women's rights movement and its history.

Planning a conference and compiling a volume of this nature are complicated and time-consuming tasks, and we are indebted to numerous others for their assistance and support. We are especially grateful to the contributors and the series editors for sharing their expertise and displaying great patience during the long incubation of this book. Suzanne Guion first suggested that we compile this volume, and we were inspired by her faith that two relatively inexperienced editors were up to the task. We would also like to acknowledge the two anonymous readers who provided thoughtful and valuable suggestions, and Richard Peek and Joan Rubin for the encouragement they have provided along the way.

The conference from which this publication resulted would not have been possible without the committed volunteers who served alongside us on the planning committee: Nora Bredes, Lynn Gordon, Tara McCarthy, Carol Faulkner, Mary Ellen Zuckerman, Jennifer Lloyd, Alison Parker, Susan Strong, Lisa Tetrault, Carolyn Vacca, and Judith Wellman. Bredes and the staff of the Anthony Center for Women's Leadership deserve special recognition for their tireless efforts and the attention to detail that was necessary to put the conference together. We deeply regret that Bredes did not live to see this book published. We would also like to thank the thirty-five scholars who presented their work at the conference; Theodore Brown, who chaired the Department of History in 2006 and provided departmental support and encouragement, both for the conference and the graduate student who envisioned it; Ronald F. Dow, then Dean of the University of Rochester Libraries, and members of the library staff who assisted in making the conference a success; and the Goldberg-Berbeco Foundation for its financial support.

Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth

## Notes

1. Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* (Indianapolis: Hokenbeck Press, 1908), 3:1436.



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# Introduction

Nancy A. Hewitt

When most Americans think about Susan B. Anthony and the struggle for equal rights, they focus on the battle for the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (1920) guaranteeing woman suffrage. Yet campaigns for equal rights extended across the nineteenth century and beyond the voting booth to religious institutions, the workplace, the home, and other sites of gender inequality. Moreover, the battle for suffrage itself unfolded in multiple arenas and was shaped by race, nationality, region, and class, as well as gender. In the 1840s and 1850s, for instance, Susan B. Anthony advocated for women's rights in temperance societies and state teachers' conventions and fought for the abolition of slavery by emphasizing the cruelty visited on enslaved women. In the post-Civil War period, she demanded women's access to jobs outside their prescribed sphere, ranging from typesetters to ministers, and argued vociferously for their personal, economic, and political independence. Alongside these campaigns, she fought tirelessly for woman suffrage, believing that the vote symbolized true citizenship and that electoral power would advance equality in other arenas. She also collaborated on the multivolume *History of Woman Suffrage*, an effort to document the movement for equal rights, especially women's right to vote.<sup>1</sup> The seven essays collected here trace the complex struggles for equal rights during Anthony's lifetime, the ways that Anthony helped shape those struggles along with our memories of them, and the process by which she became a symbol for political constituencies on the left and the right in the century since her death.

In recent decades, historians have documented myriad paths to women's advancement and gender equality. They have examined the ways that region, race, religion, and ethnicity have shaped battles for suffrage; campaigns to advance women's roles in churches, reform societies, labor unions, and the home; and debates over historical events and popular memory. These studies illustrate the uneven progress in efforts to achieve women's rights and the challenges posed by competing concepts of equality. This volume extends these analyses in new directions. It is framed by two essays that explore the politics of history and memory, opening with an analysis of how Anthony sought to capture her version of the women's

rights movement for future generations, and closing with an exploration of how scholars and activists have wielded Anthony's life story over the past century. The five essays in between investigate other critical dimensions of the movement for equal rights, particularly the challenges posed by racial, ethnic, and class differences and the diversity of arenas in which women's rights were contested.

Taken together, these essays explore the rich and variegated tapestry formed by women's rights campaigns in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States. Although the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment marked the culmination of one aspect of this struggle, there were many other critical moments in the battle for equal rights. For example, studies of women's efforts to achieve equality in churches, workplaces, union halls, and reform organizations demonstrate the importance of particular institutions to specific groups of women.

This was especially true for women of color, since they were often prevented from exercising their right to vote even in municipalities, states, and territories that approved woman suffrage. Nor did the Nineteenth Amendment necessarily guarantee federal voting rights to women of color, who could still be excluded from the electoral process by virtue of race. Indeed immigrants, American Indians, and African Americans were often excluded from first-class citizenship for reasons of race as much as gender, and thus they often fought side by side with men in their communities for equal rights. Yet these women also recognized the need to forge alliances with middle-class white women, no matter how difficult or fragile, on behalf of gender equality in the larger society.

It is not only the achievements of earlier activists that shape ongoing campaigns for social justice but also the stories they leave behind. Thus some reformers seek to preserve their political vision by writing histories of the movements in which they participate. Susan B. Anthony was among these activist authors. Working alongside Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, she spent enormous time and energy gathering material for, editing, and publishing the three-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*. (Three additional volumes were published later, two of them after Anthony's death.) When women's history emerged as a distinct field in the 1960s and 1970s, these volumes were some of the main resources for tracing the development of women's rights in America. The long and complicated history of how this monumental work shaped later versions of the equal rights narrative is analyzed by Lisa Tetrault in her essay "We Shall Be Remembered."<sup>2</sup>

Tetrault makes clear Anthony's critical role in both launching the *History of Woman Suffrage* and completing the first three volumes. She also explores the difficult decisions that had to be made by the three coeditors and the tensions that emerged as a result. This was a massive undertaking

that required corresponding with dozens of contributors, compiling and checking thousands of pages of material, and then editing to create a narrative that was compelling if necessarily incomplete. Taking on this project in the midst of state and federal suffrage campaigns made decisions about what story to tell and which activists and events to highlight all the more difficult. Perhaps most importantly in this regard, Anthony, Stanton, and Gage had helped found the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869 after former allies split over support for black men's enfranchisement following the Civil War. This provoked criticism from members of the rival American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), who were convinced that their contributions to the cause would be marginalized in the *History of Woman Suffrage*. They were right, but as Tetrault makes clear, AWSA leaders like Lucy Stone shared some responsibility for this outcome by refusing to contribute their own version of events.

Ultimately, it was Anthony who ensured that the first three volumes of the *History* were completed. Although Stanton and Gage continued to share the title of coeditors, Anthony controlled the finances, and this provided her with greater authority than her two collaborators. Just as importantly, she maintained greater commitment to the project in its final years, as Gage and Stanton turned their attention to what they considered more important issues. Both had become deeply concerned about the toll that patriarchal religions took on women's rights, and in the 1890s, each authored a book to make her case.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Anthony assumed sole copyright on volume three, which gave her even more control than she had had on the first two volumes. Still, as Tetrault notes, Anthony had to convince Gage and Stanton to continue working on the *History* if the massive undertaking was going to see the light of day.

The *History of Woman Suffrage*, while offering a diverse range of stories and perspectives, is intended to emphasize a particular version of women's rights. The choice of the title, for instance, proclaims woman suffrage as the principle goal of the movement. The decision about where to begin the story also raised critical issues. Anthony and her coeditors could have begun with Abigail Adams's letters to her husband John in 1776. Or, as Lucy Stone once suggested, they might open with New Jersey's recognition of voting rights for single women of property that same year. Alternately, they could have started with the decisions of the interracial and mixed-sex American Anti-Slavery Society to grant women the right to vote and hold office in the organization in the 1830s. They did mention these events in the opening chapter of the first volume.<sup>4</sup> But for them, the real story began with the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention of 1848. Of the coeditors, only Stanton attended the convention, but they all agreed that the resolution passed there publicly demanding women's right to vote accorded it a special place in the history of the movement. From there, the

three activists continued the tale mainly by following debates at women's rights conventions and in the press across the nineteenth century alongside the numerous local, state, territorial, and federal campaigns for suffrage in that period.

Although these choices narrowed the focus of the project, it was nonetheless a gargantuan task. Local, state, and regional conventions and organizations proliferated in the decades following Seneca Falls, and battles for suffrage received abundant and varied coverage in the reform and mainstream press. Moreover, the coeditors covered campaigns for women's rights in other venues—the American Equal Rights Association, the National Labor Union, and religious institutions—where these impinged directly on the fight for suffrage. Still, no work could fully capture the range of the movement. Debates over women's rights seemed to erupt everywhere in the years surrounding the Civil War, including the United Colored American Association and the Irish National Land League, as well as in temperance societies, churches, utopian communities, labor reform groups, and a host of other settings. Indeed, from the 1870s on, such debates and the movements they inspired exploded across the American landscape.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, despite the popular notion that the Nineteenth Amendment granted suffrage to all US women in 1920, tens of thousands were already voting in state and local elections, and tens of thousands more were denied the right to vote even after 1920 based on race and nationality. In addition, hundreds attempted to vote in federal elections in the late 1860s and early 1870s as they sought to prove that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments granting citizenship and suffrage to newly emancipated African-American men applied to women as well. These efforts, known as the New Departure, ended in 1875, when the Supreme Court decided against women's claims to suffrage as a benefit of national citizenship. But by that time, women had secured voting rights in the Wyoming Territory, leading to a host of other state and territorial campaigns. Moreover, for many women, voting in churches, unions, fraternal societies, and other community institutions was as important to their daily lives as casting ballots in local, state, or national elections. In the nation's centennial year, for instance, women finally gained voting rights in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which opened the gates for a flood of other church-based suffrage battles in black and white communities. At the same time, immigrant and working-class women demanded rights in ethnic, political, and social organizations, while American-Indian women sought recognition in both tribal governance and the white-dominated women's movement.<sup>6</sup>

Issues of race and ethnic differences, which haunted the woman suffrage movement throughout its existence, appeared in especially stark form in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. With the emancipation

of formerly enslaved African Americans, the question of civil and political rights, including suffrage, loomed large. As Laura Free argues in "To Bury the Black Man and the Woman in the Citizen," the battle for universal suffrage, which would enfranchise black men and women of all races, faced daunting obstacles. It also unleashed powerful conflicts within the former abolitionist coalition. Some longtime activists argued that universal suffrage was the only goal worthy of support; others believed that it was critical to gain suffrage for black men immediately and then work to extend rights to women, black and white.

The story of these conflicts usually focuses on battles among national antislavery and women's rights leaders.<sup>7</sup> By highlighting the way these debates played out in the New York State Constitutional Convention of 1867, Free offers a richly detailed and nuanced analysis that demonstrates the critical role that gender-specific representations of citizenship played in the outcome. She reminds us, moreover, that the debate did not occur just between contending factions of reformers. Rather, each faction had to consider the response of legislators—all of whom were white men—to their arguments. In the end, despite decades of racial discrimination in state laws, white politicians in New York State embraced black manhood suffrage. Convinced of a common manhood, represented most importantly by African-American soldiers' contributions to the Union victory, the delegates overcame their racial prejudice. Yet the power of manhood rights to expand the political role of African-American men worked against women's claims to first-class citizenship.

Free also uses the debates in New York State, which took place in both committee chambers and the press, to evaluate the strategies wielded by Stanton and Anthony as they sought to convince, cajole, and embarrass delegates into supporting universal suffrage. Free makes clear that entrenched notions of manhood and womanhood confronted women suffrage advocates with almost insuperable odds. Yet she also recognizes that Stanton and Anthony's confrontational tactics, which were effective at garnering media attention, could backfire. In demonstrating the lengths to which women would go to gain the vote, they reinforced the worst fears of many delegates: that granting suffrage to women would undermine traditional gender roles and subvert domestic harmony. Thus, despite the support of some leading politicians, the 1867 New York State Constitutional Convention continued to deny voting rights to women.

In the face of such daunting obstacles and disheartening defeats, what kept suffragists committed to the cause? In "I Pray with My Work," Kathi Kern analyzes the religious beliefs that supported Anthony's lifelong devotion to women's rights. Many leading women's rights advocates, including Stanton and Gage, considered institutional religion the *bête noir* of gender equality. Others, like Antoinette Brown Blackwell, believed that



churches could be transformed from within; she became the first woman to be ordained a minister in the United States. Still others, including many Quaker activists, merged spirituality and social change in ways that replaced traditional forms of worship with commitment to a cause. Anthony carved out a path that drew on elements of all three approaches.

Kern traces the ways that Quakerism, in particular, influenced Anthony, religiously and politically. Her father Daniel Anthony was a devout Quaker, and his wife Lucy, raised as a Baptist, allowed their children to be raised in the Society of Friends. In addition to family heritage, Anthony was surrounded by Quakers in her work for abolition and women's rights. Many of these reformers—Amy and Isaac Post, Sarah and Benjamin Fish, Sarah and Lewis Burtis—were disowned by or withdrew from the Society of Friends as a result of their “worldly activism”; but Anthony, like Lucretia Mott, remained a lifelong member. At the same time, she followed many former Quakers and other reformers into the Unitarian faith, claiming membership in the First Unitarian Society of Rochester as an adult without ever withdrawing from the Society of Friends. She was also influenced by and worked closely with evangelical Protestants in the temperance and suffrage movements. Indeed, one of her closest friends and allies in Rochester was Maria Porter, an evangelical Presbyterian. Thus, unlike her longtime partner Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who broke with the Presbyterian Church in which she was raised and spoke eloquently against the patriarchal character of established religions, Anthony believed that equal rights was foundational to true religion, whatever the specific denominational form it took. This ecumenical approach allowed Anthony to work closely with a wide range of activists—from the Reverend Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Frances Willard of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union to Stanton, Gage, and other critics of organized religion. Ultimately, as Kern shows, Anthony's one true faith lay in her work for women's rights, and she spent her life seeking converts to that sacred cause.

At times, the interest of women's rights activists in religion extended beyond the Christian faith. Lucretia Mott and Matilda Joslyn Gage, for instance, explored the religious beliefs of American Indians, especially those like that of the Iroquois, who had historically granted women a greater say in economic, political, and spiritual life than did Euro-American cultures. In the 1840s, Mott, Amy Post, and other Quaker reformers worked closely with Seneca Indians, who had once belonged to the great Iroquois Confederacy. Indeed, they considered Native American rights as part and parcel of their reform agenda.<sup>8</sup> Yet by then the Seneca and many other eastern Indians had lost much of their land and many of their traditional rights; in the process, the authority of Seneca women had been seriously undermined. Still, as Melissa Ryan shows in “Others and Origins,” as Native peoples across the United States lost their territory and their tribal

independence, more and more women's rights activists became interested in the plight of Indians. At the same time, Indians from a range of nations battled for sovereignty and equality in a society that viewed them as subordinate to white men.

As Ryan demonstrates, the commonalities in the circumstances of Indians and women did not generally create the kinds of rhetorical connections that early women's rights activists had forged with their enslaved sisters. Nonetheless, white women reformers did benefit from their exploration of the "Indian problem," coming to deeper understandings of their own situation by comparing themselves with their Native counterparts. In addition, many suffragists claimed that white women's contributions to "civilizing the savage" reinforced their claim to political rights. Ryan focuses on the efforts of Alice Fletcher, an anthropologist and Indian allotment agent, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, coeditor of the *History of Woman Suffrage*, to introduce the "Indian problem" into suffrage politics in the late nineteenth century. Although both saw themselves as especially sympathetic to Native peoples, they reinforced paternalistic views held by many white suffragists: that Indians required the civilizing influence of their racial superiors and that rights granted to Indians, however limited, further diminished the status of white women. Echoing the post-Civil War debates analyzed by Laura Free, Ryan shows that suffragists in the late nineteenth century continued to be frustrated (sometimes infuriated) by legislators' willingness to accord voting rights to Indian men on the basis of a shared manhood while refusing to grant suffrage to women of their own race and class. Still, in her later years, Gage came to see Indian women, or at least Iroquois women, as members of an ancient "matriarchate," whose history offered a model and a historic claim for gender equality in the present.

In embracing a more positive vision of Indian women's relation to women's rights, Gage and her followers focused on the distant past rather than on the needs and concerns of contemporary American Indians. Building alliances in the present proved more daunting, and this was true whether it was Indian or African-American activists who sought to build bridges with white suffragists.<sup>9</sup> Frances Watkins Harper, a black leader whose career bridged the pre- and post-Civil War eras, fought ceaselessly to bring women together to achieve social justice and equality. Cooperation across the racial divide appeared possible in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, but as Alison Parker argues in "Frances Watkins Harper and the Search for Women's Interracial Alliances," such opportunities failed to survive the spread of segregation, the increase in racial violence, and the retreat of federal support in the late nineteenth century. By examining Harper's efforts as the national superintendent of "Work among Colored People" for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Parker reveals both the possibilities and the limits of interracial cooperation.



An advocate of woman suffrage, temperance, and civil rights for blacks, Harper looked to both voluntary organizations like the WCTU and the federal government to aid the cause. While many white suffragists joined local, state, and territorial battles to gain voting rights, Harper believed that only federal authority was sufficient to override racial and gender discrimination. The WCTU also asked that federal power be wielded on behalf of woman suffrage and against alcohol abuse. In the 1870s and 1880s, the organization sought as well to increase black participation in their work. Although Harper had disagreed with Anthony over the Fifteenth Amendment, supporting black men's enfranchisement over demands for universal suffrage, she shared Anthony's view of the WCTU. Like Anthony, Harper viewed the WCTU's appeal to a wide array of women, particularly religiously devout women, as key to the success of both temperance and suffrage campaigns. As Parker shows, the organization also offered Harper the opportunity to strengthen alliances among black and white women by embracing a common and explicitly Christian concept of politicized motherhood. Throughout the 1880s, Harper thus worked assiduously to expand the role of black women in the WCTU and extend the organization's agenda to include racial justice.

Harper's achievements as the leading black organizer in the WCTU are detailed by Parker; but so, too, are the many obstacles she faced in building truly interracial alliances. In the late 1880s, for instance, the national WCTU began recognizing separate black branches in the South. Most had been founded by African-American women who sought autonomy from the racist leaders of white-controlled state chapters. Yet the willingness of the WCTU to accept segregation rather than punish racist leaders worried Harper even as she applauded the increasing participation of Southern black women in the temperance movement. Seeking both to persuade and cajole her white WCTU sisters into embracing blacks as equals, Harper became increasingly frustrated with their assumptions of racial superiority and their eagerness to accept blacks only in separate and segregated branches. After losing her position as national superintendent in 1890, Harper gradually turned away from interracial efforts and by 1896 tied her hopes to the newly-founded National Association of Colored Women, where she sought to build support for women's rights and racial justice within black communities.

Irish immigrants, like African Americans, established organizations focused on meeting the needs of their own community and joined broader coalitions in hopes of gaining greater leverage to transform American society. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, most ethnic associations were open only to men. Irish-Catholic women thus relied mainly on informal networks among neighbors or coworshippers to meet their needs. Some did demand a place in union ranks, and a few joined mainstream