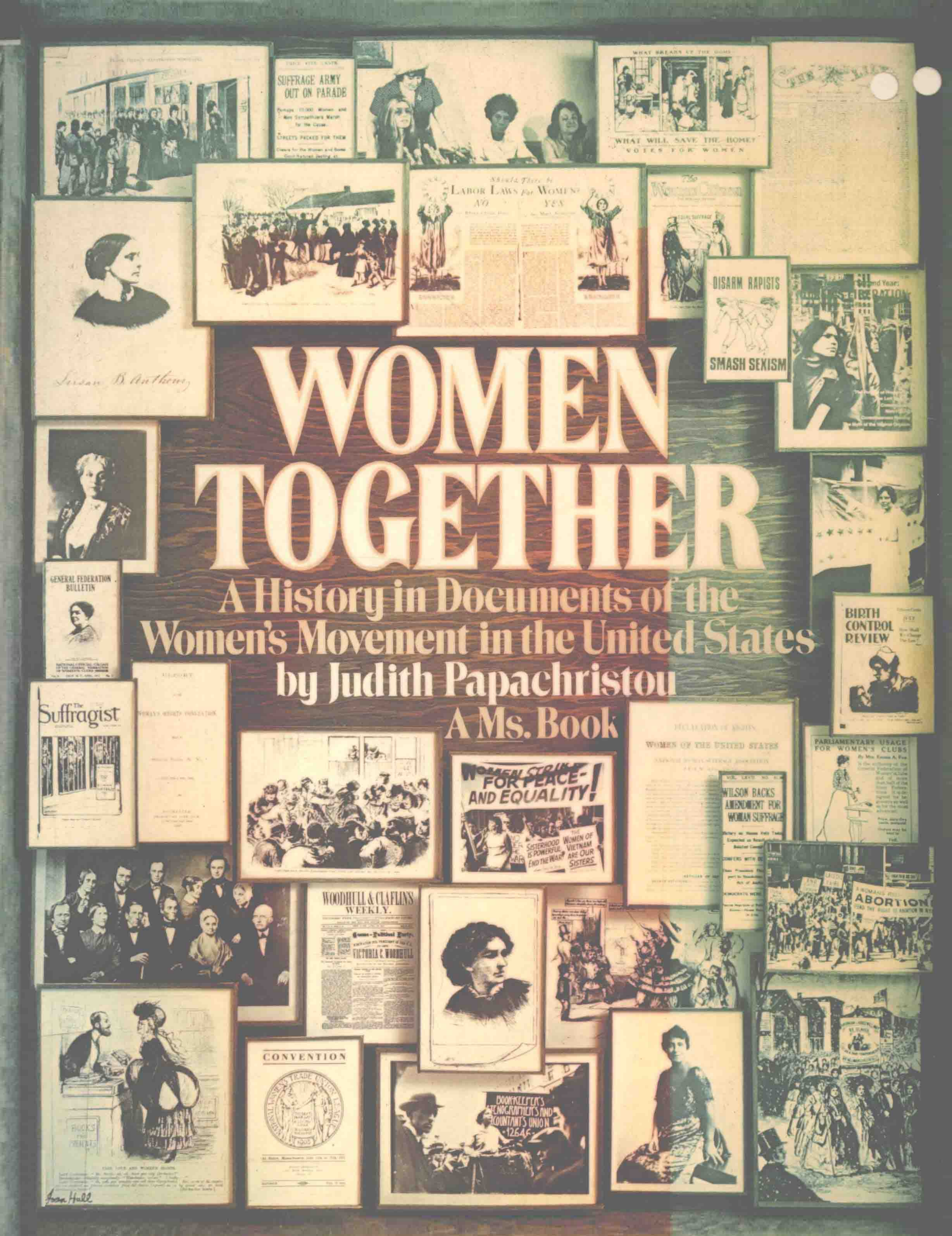


# WOMEN TOGETHER

## A History in Documents of the Women's Movement in the United States

by Judith Papachristou

A Ms. Book

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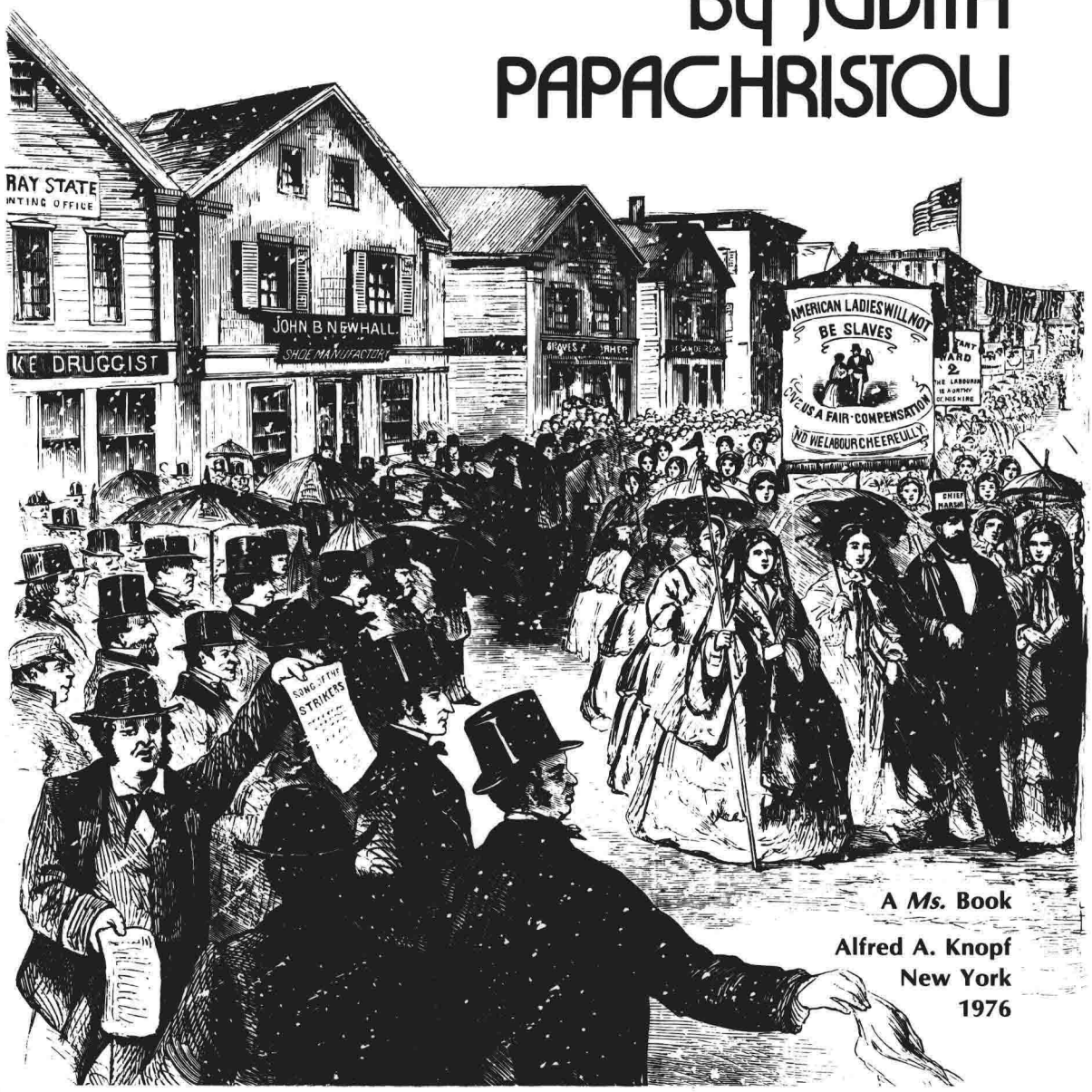
## by JUDITH PAPACHRISTOU

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# WOMEN TOGETHER

**A History in Documents of the Women's Movement in the United States**

**To the women, all of them,**
**who lived and wrote this book.**

## Author's Note and Acknowledgments

*The documents that have been collected and reprinted here have not been revised or corrected, except for obvious typographical errors. In most cases, their original spelling, punctuation, and grammar have been retained. All deletions from the documents, with the exception of footnotes, have been noted by ellipses, and any explanatory or clarifying additions made by the author are enclosed in brackets.*

*Many people helped me, in many different ways, in the writing of this book. I thank them all—my dear friends whose interest and enthusiasm for this project encouraged my own, and the many librarians who have assisted me. I am especially grateful to the staff and the Executive Office of the Research Libraries at the New York Public Library, where much of this research was accomplished and where the bulk of the illustrations in this book were obtained.*

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is part of a reexamination of American history that is going on today. It focuses on American women and, most specifically, on what women in the United States have done together to change their condition and move from a position of inferiority and subservience toward equality and independence.

Through most of history, women's lives have differed from those of men in that it has been women who have given birth and nurtured and reared the new generations. They were often separated from the world of men by custom and law. They have, moreover, been cut off from the centers of power: in ancient and modern societies, politics, religion, education, and economics have been dominated by men.

History up to present times has been largely the story of the powerful and the rich, and, necessarily, the story of men. It has ignored the experience of women as it has ignored the poor or the powerless. Only recently have scholars begun to reexplore the terrain of the past to learn about the lives of ordinary people and to reevaluate their contributions.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, women in the United States (as elsewhere) were vastly inferior in status to men: they could not vote, and played no role in the political affairs of the country; they usually had no economic resources of their own and could not even control what they earned; married women had no legal existence apart from their husbands; generally, women were uneducated and considered intellectually deficient. The wives of our more affluent citizens may have benefited from the material comforts provided by their husbands, but they were subjected to a rigidly restrictive social code that made them among the most confined and isolated women in history. Yet out of their frustrations and sense of oppression, the women's movement was born.

This came about, in large part, from a gradual lowering of barriers, which permitted early-nineteenth-century women to participate in such causes as abolitionism and which led them indirectly to an awareness of the poverty of their own position and a realization of their potential strength. A few women and men had protested the inequality of American females—their subjugation and lack of opportunity and civil rights—before 1800; but it was not until around the middle of the century that the first organizations of women, specifically concerned with women's issues, began to form. The pioneering assemblage, the Seneca Falls Convention, was called in 1848 to discuss "the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women." After the convention, women continued to come together in groups, to act publicly, and to seek change for themselves and others. This is the beginning of what can properly be called the "women's movement" in the United States.

The story of the movement is told here through historical documents—the speeches, letters, resolutions, plans for action, declarations, and other testimony of the participants themselves. The long and difficult struggle these documents reveal has taken place against the background of a century and a half of incessant social change, with old traditions and institutions continually supplanted or transformed, and Americans constantly confronted with new ways of living and working. Such leading feminists as Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived in a nation that was agricultural, rural, and relatively homogenous in population. By the time of World War I—the era of women like Jane Addams, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Florence Kelley—the United States had become a complex industrialized urban society, with a heterogeneous people, divided by differences of race, wealth, and cultural tradition. Today, as women march and broadcast their demands for reform, the pattern of life continues to change with unsettling rapidity. Reliable methods of birth control, automation, public education, and mass communication make our lives significantly different from those of our parents and grandparents.

And yet, one surprising revelation of these documents is how many things have remained the same: "Women's Liberation" today provokes much the same kind of opposition and anger that "The Woman Question" did well over a century ago, and the goals and attitudes of feminists in the 1970s are in many respects strikingly similar to those of the 1850s.

In women's long and persistent effort to bring about changes in their status, three periods of intense activity stand out: the first began in 1848 and extended into the 1870s; the second, which saw women achieve the vote, stretched from about 1890 to 1920; and the last, the contemporary phase, began in the late 1960s. Each of these periods had its origins in a time of national reform. Before the Civil War, abolitionists agitated in behalf of the black slaves; in the Progressive era, in the early decades of the twentieth century, social workers, muckrakers, and reformers spoke out for the vic-

tims of industrialization and slum life; and in the 1950s and 1960s, protesters called attention to minority and poverty groups denied civil rights and economic opportunity. Each time, women were attracted to reform activities and joined in them, and each time, as a result of their involvement, whether as abolitionists, Progressives, or civil rights workers, they came to discover and deplore their own inferiority and demand equality and freedom for all women.

In the first phase, women fought to establish their legal existence as persons by gaining the right to own and control their own property and earnings, the right to share with their husbands in control over their children, the right to be guardians of their children in case of the husband's death, and the right to vote. They also demanded the right to an education that could prepare them for profitable and satisfying lives, and the right to work for decent pay in the jobs and professions of their choice.

From 1890 to 1920, the vote and the right to participate in public affairs were the main goals of organized women's activities; to many, woman suffrage appeared as the key to achieving all other reforms. In the popular mind, of course, this is the most familiar phase of the women's movement, although its emphasis on the vote made it the most limited in its objectives.

Like its predecessors, the contemporary phase of the movement seeks rights still denied to women. Since 1966, women have tried to end discrimination in education and employment and to gain equal treatment under the law. Through equal rights amendments to state and federal constitutions, they are trying to end all legal bases for discrimination and to achieve civil equality. Contemporary women have also expanded significantly the scope of women's rights—and, indeed, of human rights overall—with their advocacy of a general human right to develop freely, without being limited by predetermined and restrictive notions of what a woman or a man is or should be. They have also demanded the right of each woman to sexual freedom and to control over her own reproductive capacity.

Movement activity has consistently been an educative experience, raising to prominence questions about women's status and abilities. Investigating, reporting, and publicizing the facts about women in the United States, movement women have taught themselves and others. At the first women's rights convention, for example, in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, and at every state and national meeting thereafter, women reported and described their lack of legal and political rights, their low-quality education and training, their restricted job opportunities and pitiful wages, their confinement to a narrow sphere of experience, as well as their own inhibitions and limited aspirations.

After the Civil War, repeated failures to gain the vote provided a glaringly clear and palpable demonstration of women's second-class status. Outraged and frustrated, women learned the hard lesson that they were outside of public life, powerless to affect the world around them, and restricted to indirect, and often ineffective, means of expressing their needs.

Today, education is still an important aspect of the movement—perhaps more so than ever before. Women's organizations continue to investigate and publicize the facts of women's lives and the nature and extent of sex discrimination. The contemporary movement, moreover, is consciously involved in a process of self-education, focusing on the individual woman's perception of herself. Certainly the nineteenth-century feminist pioneers rued the lack of confidence and the low level of ambition common to females, and understood the importance of changing women as well as the laws and customs affecting them; but only in our own time has a substantial, calculated, and organized effort been launched to effect change within the individual woman. Today, indeed, self-education is seen by some as a prerequisite to all reform and by others to be at least as important as the reform of laws and institutions. In asserting that "the personal is political" and in purposefully trying to change the way women perceive themselves, the movement today encompasses individual change as both part of its strategy and one of its primary goals.

Actually, participation in the movement has often changed women of its own accord, simply by introducing them to group activity. Historically, women's lives have generally tended to be more isolated than men's, narrower in scope and often cut off from those of other women with similar needs. The movement provided a way of breaking out of this isolation and entering into the public sphere. Movement activities gave many women a practical education in fields such as economics, politics, sociology, psychology, and law that had not previously been accessible to them; and they discovered that they were capable not only of comprehending these subjects, but of mastering skills usually defined and preempted as masculine, such as speaking in public, organizing and conducting large meetings, staging demonstrations, agitating and lobbying, and planning political campaigns. In the face of persistent criticism, they discovered their inner reserves of courage and determination. Repeated failures evoked their anger and militancy. Overcoming the strictures of church and family and conquering their own doubts, women learned to be confident and to esteem themselves.

The very existence of a women's movement has from its beginning challenged traditional concepts of what a woman is and how she should behave. Circulating petitions, lobbying in legislatures, testifying before congressional committees, and marching militantly down the nations's boulevards, women have disputed the prevalent image of themselves as passive, compliant, dependent, and intellectually inferior. At the same time, feminist spokeswomen and writers directly and explicitly proclaimed women's equality with men. The movement has posed a radical challenge to the status quo, and it is quite understandable that the documents that follow should contain evidence of unending resistance and hostility.

When women first organized and spoke out, they provoked a barrage of anger and opposition. Often, the anger was expressed as ridicule. In 1848 and for decades to follow, women activists were pictured as spinsters and ugly, bitter malcontents. In the early decades of the present century, clubwomen and suffragists regularly suffered humiliation in cartoons and caricatures. Today, similarly, feminists are often regarded as foolish, unattractive, or deviant, and labeled as man-haters and bra-burners.

Opponents have consistently tried to distort the meaning of the movement. Repeatedly they have insisted that the demand for equality was, in fact, a challenge to morality; feminists were described as women with unnatural and uncontrollable sexual needs, free-lovers, libertines determined to destroy the moral foundations of society, interested only in their own sexual gratification—Eve all over again. In 1915, for example, when a bitter and difficult battle for the vote was being fought in New York State, suffragists were charged with advocating "free love," and the Empire State Suffrage Committee felt compelled to defend its sexual standards and devotion to Christian ethics. In the 1920s, the women's movement was smeared as a Communist front, and feminists were labeled "Bolshevik sympathizers" and dupes of Moscow.

Beyond the anger, ridicule, abuse, and distortion, opponents have simply refused to make the changes women have sought. Male-dominated legislatures, courts, industries, and educational institutions have failed, whether purposefully or negligently, to meet the needs of women.

It is important to realize the significance of this opposition. Those who have fought reforms for women did so because they understood that sexual equality of necessity involved changes in the institutions that controlled women's lives and maintained the status quo, like the family, the church, the schools, and, indeed, the entire economic system. They realized that a changing role for women meant a changing role for men as well, and that as women's lives altered, the entire fabric of society would have to be readjusted accordingly.

We must remember also that the women's movement has not taken place in isolation but in a complicated and ever-developing society, where changing patterns of life have created tensions between workers and employers, parents and children, immigrants and natives, blacks and whites, rich and poor. The movement, with its promise of change for men as well as women, has threatened those whose lives were already in flux and, coming at periods of general agitation for reform, has added to the strain and confusion of a growing nation; it is hardly surprising, then, that it should have brought down upon itself an enormous amount of frustration and anger.

By and large, organized women have understood and accepted the radical implications of their demands for reform. They have often, and accurately, described themselves as crusaders, fighters, and revolutionaries, and have been willing to use innovative and militant tactics. In the middle of the last century, when women found themselves in defiance of church and community merely by meeting together to protest, they went even further to demand radical change in their lives. Women today repeat the breadth and daring of the earliest feminists: they propose an end to masculine supremacy and a new concept of male as well as female nature. They challenge existing institutions and advocate change in every aspect of life—in politics, education, economics, and social relations. Coupled with this broad scope of concern is the use of new and dramatic techniques of protest and agitation. Women have actively adopted militant tactics and are experimenting with new forms of group organization and leadership.

In contrast to the radicalism of both the earliest and latest phases of the movement, the early decades of this century, the time of the big suffrage drive, seem more restrictive and moderate in tone (although some suffrage groups—the National Woman's Party, for example—pioneered in the use of militant tactics, picketing the White House, staging massive parades and demonstrations, and even going on hunger strikes). During this time, such radical feminist reformers as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Margaret Sanger evoked a relatively weak response from women's organizations. But it is important to remember that the stand on suffrage was more radical at the time than it seems to us today. Fighting for the vote and participating in progressive reform activities, women were demanding a share of the political power monopolized by men. Those who opposed woman suffrage so tenaciously and ferociously realized what was at stake: the demand for the vote was a radical challenge to things as they were.

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The documents that follow show that the women's movement, like all reform movements in American history, has never been a mass movement. In the 1870s and 1880s, probably no more than 10,000 women were at any one time directly involved with the two major suffrage organizations. By the end of the century, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the most successful and influential nineteenth-century organization, had only 200,000 members. During the Progressive era, when public activities for women had become more acceptable, numbers grew. National suffrage organizations enrolled more than two million members, and between two and three million women were introduced to public affairs through membership in women's clubs.

Both the membership and the leadership of the movement have tended to come from the affluent middle of the population—neither from the very rich nor from the very poor; and in racial or ethnic terms, it has been, with few exceptions, native-born white women, better educated and with more leisure than most, who have filled its ranks. The movement has reflected their interests and attitudes and has concentrated on the goals most important to them. Often it has neglected the problems and needs of other women, although movement spokeswomen have usually spoken in principle for all women and proclaimed the solidarity of

women in the United States as well as in the world.

Out of its close ties with abolitionism, the women's movement gained the support of black members, male and female, who played a conspicuous role in women's rights activities during the 1850s and 1860s. Most of these ties were broken by 1870, however, and from that time on, organized women remained generally cut off not only from black women but also from the growing numbers of poor white and immigrant women in the country. By the turn of the century, the white middle-class majority of the movement was generally out of touch with the poor and the most disadvantaged. Despite a belated realization of the value of solidarity during the final suffrage campaigns, and despite the humanitarian doctrines of Progressivism which impelled many middle-class women to become involved in the plight of women wage earners, sisterhood was more an abstract ideal than an operating principle.

The leaders of the contemporary movement, with their origins in the civil rights and New Left activities of the 1960s, again claim to speak for all women. While its leadership, admittedly, is still largely white and middle-class, it is now drawn from minority groups as well, and its goals—especially the attack on discrimination, the fight for legalized abortion, and the fight against the poverty of women—have come substantially to reflect the major concerns of underprivileged women.

It is difficult to compare the membership of the movement today with that of the past: organized feminist activity resumed only in the late 1960s after a long period of quiescence, and there is, in addition, the speed and efficiency—unique to our time—with which ideas can now be communicated. Today, it is easy to participate in movement activities without joining organizations. Insofar as consciousness-raising is part of the movement, for example, millions of women (and men) can be counted as participants, and women of all classes and backgrounds are involved in efforts to bring about social change.

In several ways, the documents that follow reveal similarities between the history of the women's movement and other important reform movements in the United States. Disagreements between radical and moderate women over goals and tactics, and the resulting compromises and schisms, have repeated in part the experiences of abolitionists, labor organizers and reformers, peace activists, and civil rights workers. Along with these other reform drives, the women's movement is part of a great continuing drama in which the oppressed seek the chance to be what they will. It has needed courageous and confident women to carry on the struggle in a world in which women have not been taught to be courageous or confident. Nonetheless, such women have and do exist, and the history that follows is their story.

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# WOMEN TOGETHER

# THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IS BORN

## The 1830's

*If you were born a female in the early decades of the nineteenth century in America, many things about you were decided before you could walk or talk. You were a religious person, specially tuned by nature to spiritual matters; you were pure of heart, free from sensual needs. You were going to be a wife and a mother; you would be sympathetic, and would put aside your own needs and wants without hesitation to minister to the needs and wants of others.*

*All your interests and talents centered on the home, the family, and the church. Together they constituted your part of the world. As for the rest—what went on outside the home and the church—that was man's world, and you were ignorant of it, neither interested in it nor able to understand it. In everything connected with that world, you needed guardianship. Your father, and later your husband, was in charge of you; you could not own or control wealth by yourself; you could not sign a will or have custody of your children; you couldn't vote. You were not a whole person legally or politically.*

*God had made man woman's superior, and you were a subordinate member of society, without many of the freedoms and rights that men laid claim to and of which they boasted so proudly.*

*Hardly any women conformed to these ideals of womanhood; frontier women, black slaves, and poor women were destined to the sweat and labor of poverty as well as to motherhood and domesticity. In a country where labor was in small supply, women worked the fields, the shops, and the home industries. Such women were neither ignorant of the ugly realities of life nor incapable of coping with them.*

*In the increasingly prosperous parts of the population, there were women who refused to accept this rigid prescription for their lives; they strove to break through the walls that surrounded them, to defy social convention, to seek an education, and to question and take part in the world around them. By the 1830's their numbers were increasing, and the women's movement began to take form.*

## WOMEN AND ABOLITIONISM

*It was, strangely enough, out of her concern for others that the American woman found concern for herself. In the 1820's and 1830's, especially in New York, Pennsylvania, and New England, an exciting and contagious spirit of reform was in the air. It started in the churches and was involved at first with such Christian and humanitarian issues as temperance, peace, capital punishment, and education. In church, women became part of the reform movement.*

*Although some causes, like temperance and peace, seemed particularly fitting for women to take up, the cause that attracted many to its side, with compelling force and drastic repercussions, was that of the black slave in America—the most far-reaching and potentially disruptive of all reforms. It was through abolitionism that white American women realized their own inequality and began the first organized effort to change their dependent and inferior place in American life.*

*Four women were present at the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia in 1833. None of them signed the organizing document, but one did speak at the meeting, after receiving permission to do so. A participant,*

*J. Miller McKim, wrote an account of this unusual event. The speaker he described was Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister and dedicated abolitionist.*

### LUCRETIA MOTT AT THE AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

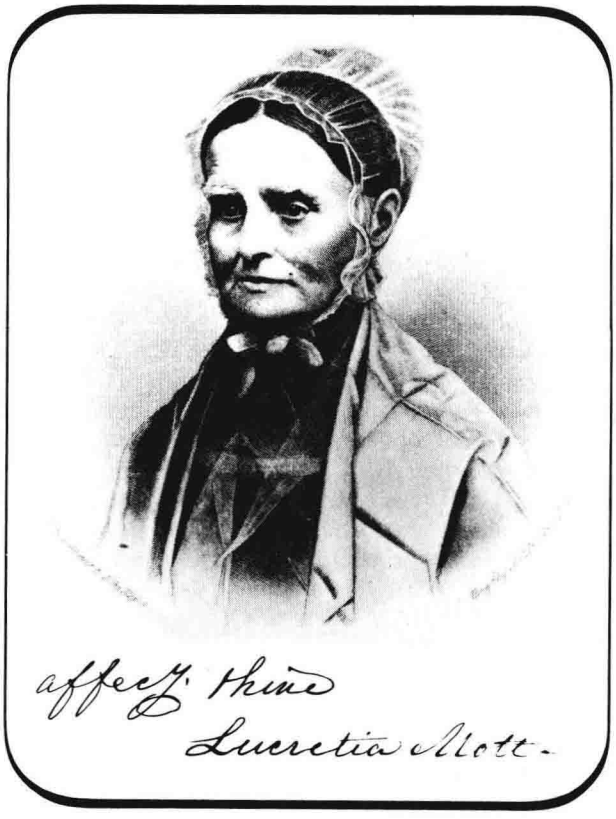
The other speaker was a woman. I had never before heard a woman speak at a public meeting. She said but a few words, but these were spoken so modestly, in such sweet tones, and yet withal so decisively, that no one could fail to be pleased. . . . She apologized for what might be regarded as an intrusion; but was assured by the chairman and others that what she had said was very acceptable. The chairman added his hope that 'the lady' would not hesitate to give expression to anything that might occur to her during the course of the proceedings.[1]

## FEMALE ANTISLAVERY SOCIETIES

*By the time the first national antislavery association was founded in Philadelphia, women were already involved in abolitionism; in New England they had formed several female antislavery societies. The four women who had attended the Philadelphia meeting reconvened when it was over and proceeded to organize their own Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.*

*Soon societies existed in New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The Michigan Territory could boast of one of the earliest. Most of the work women did for abolitionism they did as members of these organizations, of which there were about a hundred by the end of the 1830's.*[2]

*The first such society was founded by black women in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1832; similar groups followed. Most of the members of the female societies were, of course, white, reflecting the predominance of white people in the population, and they were also often the better-educated and more prosperous women of the community. A few societies, like those in Boston and Philadelphia, had black as well as white members.*




*After 1833, in town after town, small groups of women formed small local antislavery societies; most of them followed the pattern that is shown here in the constitution of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.*

### PHILADELPHIA CONSTITUTION

WHEREAS, more than two millions of our fellow countrymen, of these United States, are held in abject bondage; and whereas, we believe that slavery and prejudice against color are contrary to the laws of God, and to the principles of our far-famed Declaration of Independence, and recognising the right of the slave to immediate emancipation; we deem it our duty to manifest our abhorrence of the flagrant injustice and deep sin of slavery, by united and vigorous exertions for its speedy removal, and for the restoration of the people of color to their inalienable rights. For these purposes, we, the undersigned, agree to associate ourselves under the name of "THE PHILADELPHIA FEMALE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY."

**Article I.**

The object of this Society shall be to collect and disseminate correct information of the character of slavery, and of the actual condition of the slaves and free people of color, for the purpose of inducing the community to adopt such measures, as may be in their power, to dispel the prejudice against the people of color, to improve their condition, and to bring about the speedy abolition of slavery.

**Article II.**

Any female uniting in these views, and contributing to the funds, shall be a member of the Society.

**Article III.**

The officers of the Society shall be a President, a Vice President, a Recording Secretary, a Corresponding Secretary, a