

September 1982

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Recommended Citation

Howard, Jeanne (1982) "Our Own Worst Enemies: Women Opposed to Woman Suffrage," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 9: Iss. 3, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.1543>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol9/iss3/9>

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OUR OWN WORST ENEMIES: WOMEN OPPOSED TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE

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ABSTRACT

Opposition by women to a movement which identifies itself as for women is not new. In the late 19th and early 20th century female anti-suffragists organized to oppose "the burden of the ballot." The writings of the "antis" (as the female anti-suffragists became known) demonstrate an allegiance to class over gender, a sense of powerlessness beyond traditional roles and a fear of change. Exploring this early anti movement may give us a better understanding of the women opposed to the contemporary woman's movement.

Can any reasonable man or woman deny that there is some impelling reason for the fact that woman suffrage is the only woman's movement that has ever been opposed by women organized for that purpose? (Mrs. A. J. George, 1915).

A significant obstacle to the progress of the contemporary women's movement is conservative opposition by women themselves. This opposition to a movement identifying itself as representing women serves to fundamentally discredit the claims of those seeking reform in the name of all women.

As the quotation from Mrs. George indicates, opposition by women to a cause which seems to benefit them is not new. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries women also organized in opposition to the women's movement, as represented by woman suffrage. Then as now, opposition stemmed from three closely related perceptions: that the rapid social change occurring in the nation was a threat to families and to the traditional function of women; that women had more in common with, thus more allegiance to, members of their own class than with all members of their gender; and that women were powerless outside their own narrow sphere. Class allegiance, fear of change and the sense of limited power are apparent in much of the anti-suffrage literature written by women.

ANTI ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP

Organized resistance by women to their own enfranchisement began almost concurrently with the woman suffrage movement. The strongest opposition to the suffrage came from the highly industrialized states experiencing a flood of immigration and rapid urbanization. The first and most active organization was the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women. Founded in 1890, it continued its fight against suffrage through October of 1920 when the battle was

clearly lost. For many years it served as an unofficial national association, distributing materials, organizing chapters and cataloging arguments against women suffrage. Its newsletter The Remonstrance chronicled the efforts of the antis for thirty years.

Ultimately associations were formed in twenty six states, but with varying levels of activity. The Southern Women's Anti-Ratification League, led by a group of wealthy and influential Southern women, organized late in the struggle. Massachusetts and New York had the most consistently active organizations.

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was formed in 1911. It was first headquartered in New York but was moved to Washington when the passage of a federal amendment seemed possible. Its weekly publication, The Woman's Protest, (which became The Woman Patriot during World War I) described the "antics" of the suffragists, the danger of suffrage to home, family and state and inroads made on American democracy by dangerous foreign influences from abroad. Its masthead read "For Home and National Defense, Against Woman Suffrage, Feminism and Socialism" (The Woman Patriot, July 1918). The national organization was represented at state hearings on suffrage and lobbied actively against the federal amendment. It is difficult to determine the number of women engaged in the anti movement. The Massachusetts organization claimed a peak membership of 41,635. In 1919 The Woman Patriot claimed a membership of 600,000 women in the national organization. Whether membership entailed active work for the cause or merely inclusion on an anti mailing list is not clear. While degree of involvement may not be ascertained, we can assume that a significant number of American women were interested in the message of the anti-suffragists.

Leadership

Women who led the anti movement were often of high social station, the wives of wealthy businessmen or politicians, the daughters of important families. One of the earliest remonstrances, a petition of 1,000 names submitted to the U.S. Senate, was organized by the wives of General Sherman and Admiral Dahlgren. The names of the leaders often appeared in social registers. Prominent antis were often middle-aged women with histories of service in charity and civic reform.

An early leader of the Massachusetts organization was Mrs. J. Elliot Cabot. She was a president of Boston's prestigious Mayflower club, chairman of the Volunteer Aid Society and one of Massachusetts' first women overseers of the poor. She served as president of the Massachusetts anti association in 1897 and was on the Executive Committee until her death in 1902.

Caroline Fairfield Corbin was the president of the Illinois Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage throughout its seventeen year existence. She was a charter member of the Daughters of the American Revolution and traced her ancestry to passengers on the Mayflower. Her husband, Calvin R. Corbin, was an important Chicago wholesaler. Caroline Corbin authored numerous tracts and pamphlets linking suffrage to socialism and defending the importance of women in the home.

Alice Hays Wadsworth was a younger anti leader. She was president of the national organization until the passage of the federal amendment by the U.S. Senate caused her to resign in despair. She was the daughter of statesman John Hays and wife of Republican senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr. of New York. While Mrs. Hays had

particularly direct political connections, many of her anti colleagues came from families of wealth, influence and political power.

The antis were not reluctant to use the resources and influence of their husbands, fathers and male friends. Several anti authors had husbands who were active in the male anti-suffrage movement. Anti speakers and writers relied heavily on arguments proposed by men in opposition to female suffrage. They welcomed the organization of male anti-suffrage leagues. Some anti organizations had male members and the Massachusetts organization initially had a male treasurer. Anti publications often had male contributors and sometimes had male editors. While the antis perceived their organizations being by and for women, they were anxious to appear united with men in the cause.

The anti movement was one of reaction, expanding and contracting as the suffrage movement did. It used public education and polite lobbying to further its cause. At all times antis were careful to be ladylike in their requests that the gentlemen of the legislature protect them and the nation from woman suffrage.

Early in the movement the antis submitted petitions, presented testimony to congressional hearings (often delivered by a male representative to preserve the dignity of the ladies), circulated newsletters and pamphlets and wrote to newspapers. As the suffragists gained momentum the antis became more visible and vocal. They solicited membership, participated in debate, held rallies, testified in their own behalf and urged conservative women to labor for the cause.

Suffragist writings portray antis as unenlightened, insensitive women of privilege or dupes of the liquor industry. Stanton and Anthony's History of Woman Suffrage describes them as women who "have dwelt since they were born in well-feathered nests and have never needed do anything but open their soft beaks for the choicest little grubs to be dropped into them" (Anthony and Harper, 1902: xxv).

While early suffrage leaders noted the political efficiency of the antis, later suffragists felt their work was insignificant in preventing suffrage. Carrie Chapman Catt did recognize the importance of the antis as a symbol: "Probably the worst damage that the women antis did was to give unscrupulous politicians a respectable excuse for opposing suffrage, and to confuse public thinking by standing in the lime light while the potent enemy worked in darkness" (Catt, 1923:273). Whatever their view of anti effectiveness, the suffragists seemed unable to recognize that the antis were capable of deep personal conviction to the anti cause based on careful reflection on the suffrage question.

A MOVEMENT OF FEAR

The wealth of writings by women engaged in anti-suffrage work reveal that women who resisted the "burden of the ballot" were involved in a personal battle. These were women tenaciously clinging to traditional roles and patterns of behavior. They viewed their functions as wives, mothers and keepers of the home as increasingly threatened by the range of progressive movements at the turn of the century. From their earliest remonstrances to their final pleas, they defined the importance of the traditional woman to the welfare of the state.

The earliest recorded remonstrance by a woman set the tone for anti-suffrage arguments for the next fifty years. In 1871 Catharine Beecher (of the noted abolitionist Beecher family) stated: "A large majority of American women would regard

the gift of the ballot, not as a privilege conferred but as an act of oppression, forcing them to assume responsibilities belonging to a man, for which they are not and cannot be qualified; and consequently, withdrawing attention and interest from the distinctive and more important duties of their sex" (Beecher, 1871:5).

The belief in woman's greater power in the home (and her limited power outside it) is a common theme in anti literature. Indeed, the antis often seemed to be defending their critical importance to society. In Why Women Do Not Want the Ballot, the point was often made: "The family is the safeguard of the State, and the granting of the suffrage to women tends to weaken this mainstay of the nation by bringing into it elements of discord and disunion" (M'Intire, 1894:6).

Such emphasis on the home and family served to validate the worth of the women who guided them. If the nation's families were its mainstay and if only women had the innate ability and expertise to guide them then the role of the traditional wife and mother was an essential one. Despite their emphasis on woman's place in the home the antis were not opposed to all progress for women. In their charitable and philanthropic activities, their commitment to higher education and a broader career choice for women, in their work for reform for the women and children of the slums they were sometimes difficult to distinguish from the moderate suffragists. Most applauded the expanding opportunities for women in society. An 1895 essay expresses this paradoxical sentiment:

We antisuffragists yield not one iota to the prosuffragists in our belief in woman's capacity for advancement in every direction; in her right to receive the highest education, to demand wages equal with men, to work as physician, lawyer, minister, lecturer or whatever profession she chooses. We wish no curtailment of a woman's sphere except in the direction of suffrage (Wells, 1885:2).

What was it about woman suffrage which led the antis to oppose it so vehemently when they supported, at least tacitly, other gains? To the antis the extension of suffrage was far more than the next logical step in the steady march of increasing opportunities. Part of their fear undoubtedly stemmed from the contentions of the suffragists about the far-reaching changes suffrage would ensure. Initially suffrage had been one of many rights sought by the women's movement. It evolved to become the pre-eminent right, and was seen as a means to achieving all others. Thus, suffrage was a symbol for both suffragists and antis of major change for women. To the antis it represented a dangerous readjustment in the relationship between the sexes. They feared the extension of suffrage would lead to the loss of protection and special privilege which women of their station enjoyed. Suffrage was seen as the tip of the feminist iceberg, leading to a vastly different society from the one traditional women knew, valued and felt comfortable in.

In late anti writings and speeches, socialism and feminism with their call for fundamental changes in marriage and the home were commonly identified as tied to woman suffrage. But even in early writings the fear of a rapidly changing society is expressed:

This woman movement is one which is uniting by cooperating influences, all the antagonisms that are warring on the family state. (By this I mean) spiritualism, free love, easy divorce, the vicious indulgences consequent on unregulated

civilization, the worldliness which tempts men and women to avoid large families often by sinful methods (Beecher, 1871:3).

An 1895 essay articulates the fears of antis repeated over the next 25 years: "When motherhood is spoken of with contempt, when a homelife is considered too dull to be endured, when the ambition of the intellectual life becomes so warped . . . what is to become of the future?" (Scott, 1895:4).

The self-worth of the antis was hardly enhanced by the push by some suffragists for the economic independence of women. Such comments as Carrie Chapman Catt's "I believe the day will come when every woman who does not earn her own living will be considered a prostitute" were a serious affront to those who gained their identity from their unpaid labor in the home. (The Remonstrance, 1910:4).

Economic independence for women was only one of the changes called for in the early 20th century. The antis viewed the world outside their doors as one of confusion, near chaos. The influx of foreigners, the growth of socialism abroad, the clamoring of women for a change which antis so feared contributed to their sense of confusion. And whether suffrage was symptom or cause of this turmoil, the antis wanted it halted. Suffrage had come to symbolize all the fears of women during a period of change and perceived conflict in America. This fear, untempered by any sense of commonality with all women, or any sense of potential gain, led to organized public protest by women against their own enfranchisement. Because suffrage was seen as so dangerous and because the anti movement was one of reaction based on fear, anti women used any and all arguments to defend their right not to vote. Some arguments seem to stem from deep conviction. Others seem based on expediency. The result was a collection of objections which never coalesced into a coherent ideology.

ARGUMENTS OF THE ANTIS

The arguments used by women antis remained remarkably consistent over the nearly 50 years of the movement. While they were modified somewhat in tone (and the states' rights argument was added only when the Federal Amendment seemed possible) the essence of anti statements of opposition was largely the same from Catharine Beecher's remarks in 1870 to the last issue of The Remonstrance in 1920. The thousands of words of women's remonstrance can be summarized in ten arguments.

1. Men and women are ordained (by God or nature) to operate in separate spheres, each with specialized expertise, each superior in his/her own realm.

The attempt to enter into the sphere of men contradicts the will of God or the increased specialization of function which is the hallmark of the higher species. Crossing over to the opposite sphere is destructive to both. Early anti arguments focused on divine order, i.e. that God had purposefully designated separate functions for men and women. Later arguments borrowed from science:

When there is specialization, there comes to be greater and greater perfection; nowhere is progress accompanied by a diffusion of force, but always by a concentration of effort in special directions. So, since the first development of the sex, has specialization of the male and female types gone on; men have grown more

womanly. Are we alone of all nature to forcibly destroy the work of untold ages? (Scott, 1895:3).

Thus by divine or natural design women were not suited to vote. Often antis did concede some women might be suited for suffrage, but women as a whole were not. Inferior when invading the sphere of man, woman was superior in her own realm. For while some could perform men's roles, no man could perform a woman's. Stated Caroline Corbin:

While it may be granted that woman has the physical capabilities to cast a ballot, man has not the physical ability to bear and nourish children. If . . . he demands of her that she participate in those external and general duties such as labor for the support of the home . . . while he cannot relieve her of those most necessary offices and duties which nature demands of her, he commits a palpable and monstrous injustice (Corbin, 1887:1,2).

2. The imposition of the ballot is burdensome and destructive.

The women who opposed suffrage felt if it were granted they could not fail to vote. Voting meant becoming knowledgeable about a vast array of issues previously peripheral to women's lives. The antis claimed they would be duty bound not only to drop their ballots in the box on election day but to become involved in government; attend party caucuses, participate in primaries, perhaps even sit on juries and run for office. That such activities would impair their duty to their children and charitable work was obvious to them. The Dahlgren-Sherman petition stated:

- We feel that our present duties fill in the whole measure of our time and ability and are such that none but ourselves can perform.
- (Suffrage) cannot be performed by us without the sacrifice of the highest interests of our families and of society (Dahlgren and Sherman, 1872:1).

3. Woman suffrage would lead to the doubling of the ignorant, vicious vote.

Strong class identification and suspicion and disdain for the lower classes was apparent in anti writing. A major contention was that woman suffrage would double the power of the poor. The antis had no doubt the poor would vote as a block. The regularity of the appearance of this argument underscores the fear of the growing masses of immigrants and their influence on American society which was prevalent in American thought. The antis sometimes admitted the major problem with suffrage was that all women, not just the good and moral would be allowed to vote. This would require all "good" women to vote to counteract the ignorant vote. Beecher, like the antis who followed, feared the vote of ". . . the most degraded and despised who would like nothing more than to insult and oppose those who look down upon them with disgust and contempt" (Beecher, 1871:10).

The antis consistently equated the poor, the black and the foreign born with depravity and viciousness. They felt even those women who might be suited to vote should forego the privilege to protect society from the effect of extending the franchise to multitudes of unfit women. An 1885 essay illustrates the danger of extending the franchise with a personal anecdote from charity work:

I had occasion one winter to be connected with some work in the North End. The women were too careless and wretched in their condition to be here described . . . many a one spoke of the time

when she could vote as the only vengeance left her to exercise upon the wealthy classes . . .

Once let the great mass of uneducated women be added to the great mass of uneducated men voters and the state will slowly shake under the varying demands made upon it for bread, work, money, leisure . . . (Wells, 1885:3).

The antis seemed largely oblivious to the plight of poor and working class women. They saw little connection between their own lives and those of women with even less power. The president of one anti-suffrage organization wondered " . . . why is it that when women have so much justly to complain of, as workers outside the home, there is so much difficulty in obtaining women helpers in the home . . . ?" (Corbin, 1910:2).

4. The vote has no value without the power to enforce it.

The antis were much concerned with women's physical and emotional unfitness to vote. The essence of this particular argument was that each vote must be backed by force. If the majority could not exert force on an unruly and ignorant minority, social order could not prevail. Women, clearly, could not back up their votes with force. The result? Mrs. W. Winslow Crannell left little to speculation: "To imagine a government unbacked by the physical power to enforce its laws, is to imagine an anomaly, or something which must of necessity develop into anarchy" (Crannell, 1896:3). Is woman willing to do all the ballot requires? Is not the voter really a militiaman on inactive duty? Woman must realize all her responsibility if granted suffrage. "The ballot box, cartridge box, jury box, sentry box, all go together . . . (Bissell, 1911:147).

The antis speculated, especially in early writings, about the possibility of a measure supported by a majority of women voters and a minority of men. Could men be compelled to comply, especially if this was a move toward war? The fact that such speculation contradicted earlier claims that women would vote along class lines rather than as a block did not seem to concern the antis.

5. Women will be corrupted by the ballot.

The antis argued that although woman was superior in her own realm this was as much due to protection from the vicissitudes of the world outside as to her superior moral character. Mrs. Clara Leonard feared if women were given the vote and allowed to hold office "all the intrigue, corruption and selfishness displayed by men in political office would also be displayed by women" (Leonard, 1884:3). Caroline Corbin stated the case even more forcefully. Women were noble only within the boundaries of home and family. "Emancipated from these restraints, the intensity of their nature often betrays them into surpassing depths of depravity" (Corbin, 1887:3).

The antis sometimes expressed the fear that the excitement, the seeming progress and challenge of the woman suffrage movement would lure women away from home and family. A female journalist concluded "that the majority of women have hurt themselves and hurt themselves very cruelly (in suffrage states). By perverting the most tender of feelings to a hard and practicable political use, they have been less fitted to guide the children growing to manhood and womanhood in their state" (McCracken, 1903:5). Not only were women corrupted in the political realm, but political involvement cost them their effectiveness in child-rearing as well. Furthermore, woman suffrage's intimate ties with socialism and free love meant

social problems such as juvenile delinquency and illegitimacy would be on the rise.

Despite dire warnings, the antis feared love of excitement would overcome love of home and women would forego their divinely appointed duties with devastating consequences. As Mrs. Corbin put it, "Woe betide the land which thus offers its political trusts as premiums for childless women!" (Corbin, 1887:5).

6. Women can and do have influence without the vote because they are free of political affiliations and partisan commitments.

That women have more power without the vote was expressed in two ways. First, woman's real power lay in shaping the attitudes of future citizens, "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" notion. Second, women would be better received by those in political power if their motives were above reproach. In a letter to a Boston paper one anti stated, "The influence of women standing apart from the ballot is immeasurable. Men look to her (knowing she has no selfish, political interests to further) as the embodiment of all that is trueist and noblest" (M'Intire, 1894:7). The antis cited the great improvement in the status of women gained without the ballot and the alleged superiority of women and child protection laws in non-suffrage states as evidence. The best advantage of mobilization for change outside of politics was that "the state gets all the benefits of its best women and none of the danger of its worst" (Bissell, 1911:147).

This method, then, more effective for women and less dangerous to society was much preferred to the extension of suffrage. And the antis had no doubt that men in politics would work for women's interests if only women would keep their place. Argued the Woman's Protest in 1913, "Suffragists claim that women suffer from unjust laws. If this is so, the remedy for the woman who feels this is to point it out, and every legislature will be ready to correct such injustice" (Bronson, 1913:151). Such naivete may reflect the antis perception of themselves as extensions of their husbands, brothers and sons. They were content in their belief that they could influence their men whether they were in the home or in the legislature.

7. The family and not the individual is the unit of representation.

The antis viewed with deep distrust the individualism they perceived as being promoted by suffragists. To them the family, not the individual was the basic element of society. They believed a woman's true interests lay with her family and did not perceive commonality with women across class. As one anti put it:

Our trouble lies in calling women a distinct class, and in regarding the question from the point of view of an individual rather than of the whole state and nation. The men and women of a given stratum of society form one class together; for men and women living together, whether in tenements or palaces are not antagonistic or even indifferent to each other's welfare . . . The whole agitation is founded on a misapprehension of the social unit, which is not the individual but the family" (Sedgewick, 1902:2).

In the anti view fathers, sons and husbands represented women at the ballot box while women represented men in the schoolroom and at the hearth. Women suffrage would be either superfluous (because women would vote exactly as their men did) or dangerous (because if women voted differently from their men disharmony and strife

would result). Better for the anti woman to influence the holder of the ballot than to vote herself.

8. The extension of suffrage may result in the loss of special protections women enjoyed.

Subsumed in this argument are a cluster of related ideas, some of which build on those previously stated. First, the antis contended women were adequately protected. Thanks to the solicitude of right thinking men and the force exerted by women standing apart from politics, the position of American women was enviable. This contention exemplifies the upper-middle class and upper-class orientation of the antis. Their satisfaction with their legal protections showed a vast indifference to the plight of poor and working women, even though they sometimes claimed to represent them. In an address to the Republican National Convention a prominent anti leader stated: "We assert that women today are so protected by laws made by men, that they have nothing more to ask for legally" (Crannell, 1896:2). And such protections had come without the ballot - proof that men of goodwill would protect their women.

But men were not of such goodwill they could be expected to protect women who left their sphere. A second contention was that women clamoring for more power risked losing the chivalrous attention of men. They wondered, "Will man continue to feel the same responsibility for woman's welfare when women have the ballot and can vote for themselves?" (Chittendon, 1911:138).

A third contention was that the power gained by the ballot could not compensate for what would be lost. The antis were fond of comparing the protections granted women and children in suffrage and non-suffrage states. Invariably they found evidence of poorer working conditions, fewer juvenile courts, less progressive child labor laws, less temperance progress and fewer protections for women. A common theme in the literature was the futility of the ballot in helping the working woman. The antis argued that vast opportunities existed for women wishing to work. Virtually every field was open to them. In many states they were granted special protections. If there were discrepancies in the wages of men and women doing the same work, this could be attributed to women's short time in the labor force on their way to marriage. When wage differences were truly discriminatory the ballot could not be a remedy, for only the law of supply and demand could affect wages. The ballot, then, might not only fail to improve the wages of working women but cost them their shorter work days, mandatory breaks and other considerations.

More feared than the losses to working women were the potential losses to non-working women. Author Molly Seawell outlined the privileges women stood to lose. Without suffrage:

The wife upon her marriage does not become responsible for any debts owed by her husband before marriage; the husband before marrying becomes responsible for every debt owed by his wife before marriage . . .

A wife is not responsible for her husband's debts . . .

A married woman is entitled to keep her own earnings, a married man is not . . .

The woman seeking divorce from her husband can compel him . . . to give her alimony . . .

She can compel her former husband to provide support for her minor children.

A woman may have millions, yet (except in suffrage states) she owes her husband no maintenance (Seawell, 1911:44-49).

9. The woman suffrage movement is a minority movement. The majority of women should not be forced to have the ballot.

Suffragist and the antis agreed the majority of American women did not actively seek suffrage. They recognized large numbers of women were apathetic about the issue and that some were adamantly opposed. The suffragists felt the resistance of other women stemmed from "the narrowness and isolation of their lives" (Anthony and Harper, 1902:xxii). The antis felt resistance was due to careful reflection on the issue. As the President of the Massachusetts anti-suffrage organization stated:

The great majority of women who have thought deeply enough about the question of enfranchising their sex see in it a menace to society, while the great majority of those who have not thought about it deeply are naturally opposed. Here is a danger signal that men should not and will not ignore. If the majority of women demanded the ballot men would not withhold it from them, even though they might have serious misgivings about its expediency. But when only a very small fraction of women demand the ballot, while the great majority do not want it, the granting of the demand would be the rankest injustice (George, 1915:10).

This "forcing on the majority the whims of the minority" theme was carried over to arguments against a federal amendment.

10. Woman suffrage is inextricably tied to revolutionary social movements and threatens the social order.

The final anti argument is perhaps the most important. The antis attempted to link woman suffrage with a variety of feared social movements such as socialism, communism, free love and easy divorce. They saw in the woman suffrage movement the symbol of a fundamental change in the relationship between men and women, and ultimately, in the entire social order. While all anti arguments were used throughout the movement this one became the predominant one in the latter stages.

Anti references to woman suffrage as a part of socialism and feminism are almost too numerous to cite. This linkage began early and continued throughout the movement's history. One of the earliest and most vocal spokeswomen on suffrage and socialism was Caroline Corbin in Illinois. In an early Remonstrance she claimed "the founthead of woman suffrage is the revolutionary Socialism of Europe" (Corbin, 1892:2). In April of 1914 the magazine exhorted its readers, "If you hold your family relations, your home, your religion as sacred and inviolate . . . then work with all your might against the companion, the handmaiden, the forerunner of Socialism - Woman Suffrage." And in July of 1915 The Woman's Protest declared: "This is the real menace of woman suffrage - its diabolical alliance with socialism and feminism."

The success of the federal woman's suffrage amendment was a bitter blow to the antis. Near the end The Remonstrance raised the old fears one last time:

To those antis who believe that man's first duty is to the state woman's to the home - that the home life of a nation is the measure of its civilization and that our great need today is for

more home life and a better home life, the tragedy of the federal amendment is great" (Balch, 1920:6).

Although defeated on the suffrage issue some antis continued in their struggle to protect home and family. The Woman's Patriot published into the 1930s, battling against child labor reform, the establishment of the Women's Bureau, and the federal government's involvement in maternal and child health care. Most antis, like many suffragists returned to the good works which had always occupied them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

The antis strove to protect the status quo against the forces of change which suffrage represented. Their remonstrance represented their sense of women's limitations, their inability to identify with women beyond their own class, and fear of fundamental social change. They viewed themselves as a bulwark against the flood of dangerous movements threatening the familiar and the comfortable. These were women who could see no personal gain in the passage of suffrage and much loss.

While today's antis are typically not women of wealth and high social standing they are women who hold to the traditional. They are women who have responded out of fear of change, women who perceive they have much to lose if the Equal Rights Amendment and other goals of the woman's movement are realized. Like their predecessors they are women who fail to see commonality in women's concerns, at least as those concerns are articulated by the current movement.

Conservatism speaks to the deep fears of many in times of rapid social change. If women are to unite in a movement which represents all women it is essential that the movement respect the depth of feeling of women who take comfort in traditional roles, who fear change and who feel unprepared for a significantly changed society. This respect is the precursor of common perception. Until it exists we will continue to have two women's movements, diametrically opposed.

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