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Clubwomen, Reformers, Workers, and Feminists of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

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Women's Rights

People and Perspectives

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Northern black and white women reformers entered the Civil War with high hopes that slavery would be abolished and that all women and men would achieve the right to vote, universal suffrage, at the end of the conflict. During the war, some women participated in the Woman's National Loyal League, organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, which collected 400 thousand signatures on petitions to Congress, demanding that it pass the Thirteenth Amendment to end slavery. Others joined the U.S. Sanitary Commission, a volunteer women's organization that achieved official sanction from the government; it raised tens of millions of dollars for the war effort, improved sanitary conditions at hospitals, and organized relief supplies, lodgings, and nursing for Union soldiers. Southern white women did not create similarly sophisticated organizations to help the Confederate cause, but did volunteer as nurses and donate supplies to the troops. A few women broke gender boundaries by dressing as men, in order to fight in the war. Slave women, especially those who lived in areas occupied by the Union army, often ran away with their families to the Union lines, where they worked as laundresses and cooks. Overall, women's wartime voluntary efforts increased their organizing skills, self-confidence, and determination to play an expanded role in politics.

In the decades after the Civil War, women engaged in maternalist politics—arguing that their roles as mothers and potential mothers justified their participation in the political arena. This chapter focuses on clubwomen, reformers, workers, and feminists during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, from about 1870 through the 1910s, as they fought for increased social, legal, and political rights for women.

The Gilded Age refers to approximately the last three decades of the 19th century, when the U.S. government's policy of *laissez-faire* capitalism allowed industrialists and corporate leaders to amass huge fortunes. The industrial revolution produced the wealth that allowed leisured women

opportunities to participate in club work and reform, even as it also produced poverty and terrible working conditions among wage-earning women and men. During the last two decades of the 19th century, immigrants, from eastern and southern Europe in particular, arrived in a huge influx of almost nine million per decade. Living in crowded tenements and working in dangerous factories, their health and safety suffered. Determined to improve their working conditions, wage-earning women and men participated in strikes and work stoppages, and joined unions.

Concerned that their cities and even their own children might be harmed by the problems of increasing industrialization and immigration, middle-class and elite women began to work for reform during the Progressive Era, from approximately 1890 through the 1910s. Progressives tried to expand the role of government and reign in the worst aspects of industrial capitalism by passing state and federal legislation, such as child labor laws, laws mandating school attendance, and laws stipulating maximum hours and minimum wages for factory work. By the 1910s, some women refused to rely on the ideology of separate spheres, or true womanhood, upon which most clubwomen's and reformers' maternalist politics were based. Pushing beyond conventional expectations of women's roles and status in society, they identified themselves as feminists and strove for economic, personal, and sexual independence for women. Whatever their differences, clubwomen, reformers, workers, and feminists supported woman suffrage by the start of World War I, and viewed the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 ás a milestone achievement for women's rights.

Clubwomen in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

The first secular women's club formed after the Civil War, Sorosis, was organized in 1868 by the journalist Jane Cunningham Croly, who found herself and other female journalists excluded from a press dinner hosted by the Press Club of New York. Croly decided to provide a venue for educated women interested in literature, music, drama, and art to meet, network, and develop themselves and their professional careers. Sorosis, its constitution proclaimed, "aims to establish a kind of freemasonry among women of similar pursuits, to render them helpful to each other" (Croly 1975, 8–9). The creation of a women-only club for professionals provoked considerable ridicule in the press, especially when its members chose to meet in what had been considered men's domain, such as restaurants and banquet rooms at the best hotels. To broaden their appeal, Sorosis members chose not to support the seemingly radical demand for woman suffrage.

The New England Woman's Club was also formed in 1868, by Caroline Severance of Boston. Fewer of these clubwomen had professional careers than did the members of Sorosis; more of them had participated in antebellum causes such as women's rights, temperance, abolitionism, and transcendentalism. Because of their reform backgrounds, members of the New England Woman's Club supported higher education for women, dress reform, and, especially, woman suffrage.

During the Gilded Age, other middle-class women across the country took advantage of their increased leisure to educate themselves and increase their cultural refinement and class status. Middle-class women formed clubs to study art, history, and literature. Most of these women had not been able to attend college, so self-education was important to them. In 1890, Sorosis founder Jane Cunningham Croly established the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC) to unite the vast array of disparate white women's clubs. The GFWC's national structure allowed for greater communication and coordination among clubwomen, who were expanding beyond their original focus on self-improvement, to what settlement house leader Jane Addams termed "Civic Housekeeping" (Joslin 2004, 45). Some clubs pursued plans for community uplift, to solve problems such as intemperance and children's health and safety. Municipal reform projects that promoted responsible government and legislation to help working families captured the interests of clubwomen. The GFWC formally endorsed woman suffrage in 1914; by that point, clubwomen and suffragists shared the view that women could best achieve their reform goals through the vote.

Middle-class black women were not accepted into white women's clubs, and so formed their own clubs, most of which also had self-improvement as their goal. Middle-class black clubwomen hoped to further their educations and establish themselves as respectable, refined ladies—a status that middle-class white women often claimed for themselves alone. This assertion of true womanhood on the part of black women was subversive because it challenged the dominant stereotype of white women as the only pure women. In the context of increased segregation and violence against African Americans, the black women's club movement was a form of resistance against racist stereotypes that wrongly categorized black women as either "Jezebels" or "Mammies" (Hale 1998, 32).

Reformers of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1874, was the largest 19th-century women's organization. Its members cannot be narrowly defined as clubwomen because from the start they worked as reformers for political and legislative change. Frances Willard, WCTU president from 1879 to 1898, had been educated at a Methodist female seminary, North Western Female College. She became the first dean of the new Woman's College at Northwestern University in 1871, and moved on to her work with the WCTU after Northwestern University's president (her former fiancé) tried to diminish her power and autonomy.

Embracing her role as WCTU president, Willard successfully mobilized tens of thousands of women around two central concepts: a "Do Everything" policy and the "Home Protection Ballot" (Bordin 1981, 117–39). By encouraging local and state unions to act upon and set their own reform priorities, Willard allowed for local control within a cohesive national structure. Thus, WCTU members could variously focus on gaining local dry laws, promoting censorship of impure literature, fighting for women's right to vote,

establishing boarding houses for wage-earning women, working with the Knights of Labor in favor of an eight-hour day, or on recruiting black and immigrant women as WCTU members. In addition, the national WCTU's endorsement in 1881 of what Frances Willard brilliantly termed the "Home Protection Ballot" allowed women to link their role as mothers or potential mothers—whose first priority was protecting children—to their demand for the vote. By moving the argument for woman suffrage away from potentially threatening natural rights and equality positions, and toward an argument for suffrage based on women's unique differences, Willard greatly increased the number of women lobbying for the right to vote. Whereas the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) had only 13,000 members in the mid-1890s, the WCTU had over 150,000 members by that time.

Of all the late 19th-century national women's organizations, only the WCTU actively recruited black women as members. In 1883, Frances Willard appointed a prominent black woman, Frances Watkins Harper, to be national superintendent of the Department of Work Among Colored People. A former abolitionist and a celebrated author, Harper had turned her focus to temperance and woman suffrage after the Civil War. As a WCTU national superintendent, she built up the organization's black membership. Although the WCTU was the most inclusive women's group of its time, black women still encountered racism and resistance. The national WCTU refused, for instance, to lobby Congress for national anti-lynching legislation.

Finding that their attempts at building genuine interracial alliances were unsuccessful, black clubwomen formed their own organization in 1896. In the 1890s, moreover, lynchings of African Americans were at their peak, and the Supreme Court ruled, in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), that segregation laws did not violate the Constitution. Black clubwomen met at a conference in Washington, D.C. in 1896 to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). The NACW's first president, Mary Church Terrell, was an Oberlin College graduate, the first black member of the District of Columbia's School Board, a clubwoman, and a suffragist. Terrell explained: "We denominate ourselves colored, not because we are narrow, and wish to lay special emphasis on the color of the skin . . . but . . . because our peculiar status in this country at the present time seems to *demand* that we stand by ourselves in the special work for which we have organized" (Jones 1990, 134). Like Frances Willard, Terrell emphasized black women's public and political responsibilities as mothers. When advocated by black women—whose claims to true womanhood were continually denied by the dominant white culture—maternalism became a subversive rhetorical tool. As a whole, black women were negatively stereotyped by white Americans as impure, uneducated, unrefined, and poor. The NACW's motto, "lifting as we climb," emphasized the necessity of a cross-class alliance among black women. If middle-class black women wanted to break down hateful and ignorant stereotypes, they recognized that they had to work with all black women to improve their conditions and to assert their rightful place as true women. Black clubwomen were necessarily Progressive reformers who hoped to help their children by advocating federal funding for public schools and anti-lynching laws at the national level, as well as kindergartens, nurs-

Mary Church Terrell, an African American suffragist, was president of the National Association of Colored Women and a charter member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. (Library of Congress)

ery schools, day care facilities, and settlement houses for black women and men at the local level.

The settlement house movement epitomized many of the main characteristics of Progressive reform. Hull House, the first settlement in the United States, was founded in 1889 by two well-off white women, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, in a poor immigrant community on Chicago's west side. During a tour of Europe, Addams had visited Toynbee Hall, in which educated reformers lived in London's East End, helping the immigrants and poor people who lived there. She was inspired by this visit, saying, "our consciences are becoming tender in regard to the lack of democracy in social affairs" (Elshtain 2002, 95). Settlement house residents were generally single, college educated, reform-oriented women who lived together in poor neighborhoods to learn directly about the problems there and begin to develop solutions. Settlement house residents established English classes, encouraged workers to organize for better health and safety regulations, set up kindergartens and after-school programs for children, established

Mary Church Terrell

Born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1863, as the daughter of light-skinned former slaves, Mary Eliza Church (1863–1954) had more advantages than did most freed slaves and their descendants. Her family's wealth came first from her mother's beauty parlor and then from her father's saloon and investments in Memphis real estate. One of only a handful of black women in America to do so, Mary Church graduated in 1884 from Oberlin College, the first institution of higher education in the U.S. to admit blacks and women. In 1891, she married Robert Heberton Terrell, a graduate of Harvard University who became a lawyer and the first black municipal court judge in Washington, D.C. Mary Terrell taught high school, and, in 1895, was the first black woman to be appointed to a school board in the United States; she served on the Washington, D.C. school board for 11 years. Throughout her long life, Mary Church Terrell helped found several important reform organizations, including the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the D.C. Anti-Discrimination Laws decades later, in the early 1950s.

After concerted attempts at interracial work and a series of rebuffs from white women, Mary Church Terrell, Frances Harper, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and many of their fellow black clubwomen decided to organize separately. During her presidency of the new National Association of Colored Women, from 1896–1901, Terrell focused on uplifting poor and working-class black families with a self-help reform agenda. Appealing to the broadest possible audience of African American club women, by organizing them as mothers and potential mothers who were concerned about children, Terrell hoped that black women could mobilize in large numbers, while fending off criticisms that their reform work was unwomanly or overly political. One of the most prominent woman suffrage proponents in the black community in the late 1890s, Terrell built support for women's voting rights among rank-and-file National Association of Colored Women members.

By the early 1900s, Terrell moved to the forefront of working against institutionalized racism, arguing that white laws and attitudes played a more central a role in stunting opportunities for black youths than did their impoverished home environments. In 1906, Terrell, W. E. B. DuBois and the white reformer John Milholland formed the Constitution League, a group that monitored violations of citizens' constitutional rights and called for the full enforcement of the Constitution by federal, state, and local authorities. By 1909, she was a member of the Committee of Forty on Permanent Organization, which founded the interracial civil rights group, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Terrell continued to follow her conscience, becoming a member of the Board of Directors of the NAACP and traveling extensively under its auspices as a public lecturer, promoting its antiracism campaigns, especially anti-lynching. Through her public speaking, Terrell served as a liaison bringing "the goals of the NAACP before white organizations" (Salem 1990, 156).

boarding houses for single wage-earning women, and offered cooking classes, as well as courses in the traditional arts and crafts of the immigrant groups in the neighborhood. Settlement residents favored an increased regulatory role for local, state, and federal governments, such as mandating maximum work hours, inspecting factories for safety violations, and setting a minimum wage.


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Detach the coupon now—before you turn this page—and become at least an associate member. Your $2 may save a little boy or girl from industrial slavery.

MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT

DETACH, SIGN AND RETURN

National Child Labor Committee

Women of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era explained their involvement in a wide array of social reforms, including the campaign to abolish child labor, on the basis of their maternal qualities and their special role in protecting children and families. This poster was produced by the National Child Labor Committee to protest child labor in the cotton mills, c. 1906. (Library of Congress)

Settlement house workers advocated good government campaigns for civic improvement, including direct primary elections, civil service examinations, and the referendum. Recognizing that the infant mortality rate was higher in her neighborhood than in most others, for instance, in 1894 Jane Addams organized the neighborhood's better-established Irish-American clubwomen (not the Italian or Russian new arrivals who were focusing on sheer survival) to survey conditions, including the frequency of waste removal by the city and the rate of infant mortality on a block-by-block basis. Addams' progressive critique of corruption in local government was based, in part, on her arduous attempt to get better garbage removal in the neighborhood. Urban machine politics, she charged, allowed incompetent cronies to gain vital government jobs as rewards for political loyalty rather than on the basis of their qualifications. Addams presented the women's findings in sophisticated, statistical charts to Chicago's City Hall. Rather than relying on the

more sentimental language of maternal concern for child welfare, these seemingly neutral statistics helped settlement house workers argue for better services based on science. Her campaign against the negligent political appointee who was in charge of waste disposal in her west side neighborhood inspired Addams to put in an ultimately successful bid to be the first woman and the first reformer to hold the position of chief garbage inspector for her district.

The Hull House became a model for over 400 settlements across the United States by 1910. Although native-born white settlement house workers willingly tried to improve the lives of European immigrants, they often refused to offer services to African Americans, Jews, and Hispanics, who subsequently formed their own settlements. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, for instance, established the Negro Fellowship League in 1910 to serve Chicago's south side black population, especially men and boys, many of whom were migrants from the South like her. As settlement houses spread, the voluntary work of the residents became professionalized. By 1920, there were 30,000 social workers in the United States, and most of them were female.

Settlement house residents led a variety of state-level reform campaigns, including those for safety regulations in factories. Florence Kelley, for instance, who earned a law degree from Northwestern University while living at the Hull House, successfully won a maximum-hours law for women, and a ban on child labor in Illinois in 1893. Arguing for "a rigid inspection service" to enforce "all laws relating to the employment of women and children," Kelley won appointment as chief factory inspector for the state (Sklar 1995, 233). In 1899, Kelley took on the leadership of the National Consumers' League (NCL), a group that harnessed the purchasing power of middle-class and elite women, as consumers, to demand better conditions for female workers. The NCL guided consumer spending by issuing "white labels" for products that were made under good working conditions and "white lists" of stores that treated their female employees fairly. Kelley shifted the direction of the NCL to the fight for protective labor laws for women and children, including shorter-hours legislation and a minimum wage. NCL members provided essential research support for lawyer Louis Brandeis' brief in favor of the state of Oregon's maximum-hours law for women. On the grounds that women needed more protection as mothers and potential mothers, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned protective labor laws for women in *Muller v. Oregon* in 1908.

Workers in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

At the start of the Gilded Age, both wage-earning women and farmwomen suffered from the lack of a political voice and access to organizations that could articulate their rights as workers, as farmers, and as women. The Farmers' Alliances of the late 1870s and 1880s attempted to create farmers' cooperatives to compete against the railroad monopolies. The Alliances united isolated farmwomen, bringing them together for social and political pur-

poses. In the 1880s, the Knights of Labor went one step further by bringing all producers—farmers, workers, and small business owners—into one union. This union, run by Terence V. Powderly, accepted unskilled and skilled workers, resisting attempts to divide members of the working classes based on race or gender. It began accepting women in 1881, with 50,000 female members by 1886. An Irish immigrant widow, Leonora M. Barry, began working in the hosiery industry to support her young children. Determined to improve women's horrible pay and working conditions, Barry worked out of the Knight's national headquarters in Philadelphia, in a paid job as the "general instructor and director of women's work" (Wertheimer 1977, 186–89). Traveling widely, she organized working women into unions, started cooperative shirt factories, gave temperance and woman suffrage lectures, and fought for state-level factory inspection laws.

The Knights of Labor gained its greatest support by organizing workers to fight for an eight-hour day; many workers affiliated with the Knights went on strike throughout the 1880s. In 1886, the Knights supported a strike for an eight-hour day at the McCormick Reaper Works in Chicago. A rally the next day for the striking workers in Chicago's Haymarket Square ended with a bombing that resulted in the deaths of seven police officers. Eight anarchist labor leaders, who were not involved in the bombing, were arrested, charged, and convicted of murder. Labor opponents wrongly smeared the Knights as a radical, violent organization simply because workers affiliated with the union had participated in the strike and rally. Later that year, in a show of solidarity, Frances Willard and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union reached out to Powderly and the Knights of Labor. Reflecting her involvement in the Social Gospel movement, Willard wanted the "political machinery to dethrone those who reap the fruits but have not sown the seeds of industry" (Bordin 1986, 138). Appreciating the Knights' support of woman suffrage and equal pay for equal work, her organization offered to support their struggle for the eight-hour day in return for the Knights' support of prohibition and social purity. Already sympathetic to these reforms and to expanding women's rights, Powderly and the Knights agreed to this collaboration.

By the 1890s, farmers and workers decided to create a third national political party, called the People's or Populist Party. Unlike the two mainstream political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, the Populists welcomed black and white women as full members and endorsed woman suffrage. Kansan Mary Lease, whose husband had failed as a farmer, was a member of both the WCTU and the Knights of Labor before her involvement with the Populists. Lease gave approximately 160 speeches for Populist Party candidates in the months before they swept the 1890 election in Kansas. In her speeches, she declared, "I hold to the theory that if one man had not enough to eat three times a day and another man has $25 million, that last man has something that belongs to the first" (Edwards 2000, 60). Lease helped launch the Populist Party nationally in 1892, giving well-attended speeches across the country for the party and its presidential candidates. Several women toured the country on behalf of the Populist Party, yet its support remained concentrated in the West.

Even as they involved themselves in party politics, wage-earning women also searched for a new home within the labor movement. Women workers had participated in work stoppages and strikes, and had joined unions since their early days in the textile mills in the 1830s and 1840s, but they now found themselves unable to join the rising American Federation of Labor (AFL), which limited its membership to skilled white men in order to have more bargaining power with employers. During a convention of the AFL in 1903, where only four working women were in attendance, the National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was founded to encourage working women to organize. Settlement house residents and other women reformers brought the unionizing of wage-earning women and protective labor issues to the attention of the men's trade union movement. In New York and other states across the country, the WTUL formed local leagues to train wage-earning women to become union organizers "and persuade the labor movement to integrate women into its ranks" (Dye 1980, 2).

The Women's Trade Union League was a cross-class alliance that brought middle- and upper-class women reformers together with mostly Jewish and Italian immigrant young women wage earners, on the idea that women of all classes could unite for protective labor laws and voting rights. The WTUL's greatest accomplishment was its encouragement of the 1909 "uprising of the twenty thousand." Between 20 and 40 thousand mostly teenaged workers walked off their jobs in New York City's shirtwaist industry for over two months, demanding better conditions, pay increases, and recognition for their unions. The WTUL did not initiate the strike, but funded striking women workers and helped them gain publicity. "Mink brigades" of elite women visited the picket lines and helped contain police violence against the strikers. This cross-class alliance was strained when elite leaders tried to tamp down the socialist ideas of working-class labor organizers.

Workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory had joined the 1909 uprising of the twenty thousand, but had been forced to return to work without gaining union representation, new fire safety regulations, or new fire escapes. The subsequent Triangle factory fire of 1911, which resulted in the tragic deaths of 146 workers, mostly women and girls, intensified calls for unions and for safety regulations in factories. The deaths were preventable: the company routinely locked the doors from the outside (so that the workers could not take breaks, talk with union organizers, leave the premises, or take any materials from the factory), thereby trapping the workers when the fire broke out.

In the 1912 "Bread and Roses" strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, approximately 25,000 textile workers from at least 30 different countries—over half of them girls and women—struck against their employers, in spite of significant ethnic, religious, and language barriers. Young girls and women carried picket signs, poignantly articulating their desire for a higher quality of life: "We want bread and roses too" (Kornbluh 1988, 164). The strike had strong female leadership, including Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a dynamic organizer for the International Workers of the World (IWW), or the Wobblies, a radical union that was dedicated to organizing the unskilled, immigrants, and women. Radical labor organizer Mother Jones (Mary Harris Jones) devel-

oped the Children's Campaign to highlight the needs of the children by bringing them directly into the public eye. Impoverished children of the striking workers traveled to different cities asking for support; some even got a hearing before members of Congress. The IWW's dynamic radicalism threatened the staid American Federation of Labor; its skilled male workers offered to compromise with the employers, a move intended to damage the rising strength and popularity of the IWW. After witnessing police brutality against women and children, middle-class allies in the WTUL came out to the picket lines to help protect the workers. After less than two months, the strikers defied the odds and won concessions from their employers.

Feminists in the 1910s

During the 1910s, a small subset of women began to self-identify as feminists, a term that had its origins in the French language and meant a shared commitment to women's rights, individualism, free speech, economic and psychological independence, and sexual freedom. Feminists rejected female subservience in the family and in society, and believed in wage earning as a way to achieve independence. Unlike clubwomen and reformers who tried to make change without overtly challenging women's traditional roles, feminists purposefully did so; as a result, they were viewed as radicals by the wider culture. Several prominent feminists lived and worked in New York City's Greenwich Village, creating a space for themselves to experiment with ideas about free love, equality, and pro-labor radicalism.

Emma Goldman, a Russian Jewish immigrant, became radicalized by the Haymarket Tragedy of 1886, when authorities rushed to prosecute leading anarchist immigrants, whom they smeared as un-American. Goldman's first arrest and imprisonment, for allegedly trying to incite a riot, came during the economic crisis of 1893, when she urged unemployed workers to protest their conditions. In prison, she became interested in nursing, and subsequently used her skills in the tenements, where she witnessed married immigrant women suffering and dying from frequent pregnancies. Goldman advocated women's control over their own bodies. In 1906, her feminist, anarchist publication, *Mother Earth*, fought for better wages and conditions for workers, as well as for women's right to enjoy sex outside of marriage and reproduction. Her participation in the 1915–1916 movement for legalized birth control resulted in her arrest for distributing birth control literature, and confirmed her reputation as a champion of free speech. During World War I, Goldman helped organize No-Conscription Leagues against the draft, was arrested, and was charged with obstructing the draft. Acting as her own attorney, Goldman noted that "To charge people with having conspired to do something which they have been engaged in doing most of their lives, namely their campaign against war, militarism and conscription as contrary to the best interests of humanity, is an insult to human intelligence" (Goldman 2004, 292–94). After her imprisonment and release, Goldman was among those immigrants

targeted by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer for deportation during the Red Scare of 1919. Suspected of being a sympathizer with the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, she was forced to return to Soviet Russia, where she found the communist regime to be disappointingly repressive. Her criticisms of the Soviet Union led to her deportation from that country as well.

Margaret Sanger, a young nurse and socialist with a working-class background, met the famous Emma Goldman in 1911 and was deeply influenced by her radical advocacy of women's sexuality and erotic desires. Sanger viewed "birth control" (a term she coined) as a mode of liberation for the many married immigrant women who were suffering under the strains of repeated pregnancies: "Three hundred thousand mothers . . . lose their babies every year from poverty and neglect . . . Are the cries of these women to be stifled?" (Gordon 1974, 223). Wanting to empower working-class women, Sanger identified birth control as fundamentally an issue of equal rights—of women's control over their own bodies. In 1912 and 1913, Sanger contributed a weekly column titled "What Every Girl Should Know" to the *Call*, a socialist newspaper. The pro-censorship crusader, Anthony Comstock, inadvertently turning birth control into a popular free speech cause, threatened to block the *Call* from the federal mails, unless it stopped publishing her column. Frustrated by her own lack of knowledge about contraceptive options, Sanger researched contraceptive devices in Europe. In 1914, she launched the journal the *Woman Rebel* and was charged with violating the 1873 Comstock Act, which labeled the dissemination of birth control information as obscene. Sanger fled to Europe to escape federal charges but returned in 1916 to introduce the vaginal diaphragm to the United States. Opening a free medical clinic in Brooklyn, New York, Sanger was arrested after having seen 464 married women in nine days. Her imprisonment gained public sympathy for her cause.

Unlike Emma Goldman, over time, Sanger chose to moderate her political stance and narrow her focus. Instead of advocating socialism or anarchism, she concentrated on challenging legal restrictions to birth control. Moving away from her radical roots and from advocacy of women's free expression of sexuality, Sanger's American Birth Control League (1921–1938) cultivated alliances with male medical doctors by convincing them to support laws that allowed married couples to receive birth control only when provided by a licensed physician. This strategy allowed doctors to see the legalization of birth control at the state level as an increase in their professional responsibilities and authority. Margaret Sanger's phrase, "planned parenthood," emphasized the respectable effort to control reproduction within marriage, rather than single women's sexual expression. Through Sanger's persistent efforts, more married women gained access to safe and legal birth control than ever before.

Women's Voluntary Efforts in World War I

World War I marked an important turning point for women, as workers, reformers, clubwomen, and feminists. When the Great War first began in

Women add to a pile of peach stones in this World War I advertisement for the unusual drive for peach stones, which were used as filters in gas masks, Boston, 1918. (National Archives and Records Administration)

Europe, many American women favored peace and arbitration rather than what they viewed as the barbaric, uncivilized nature of war. In 1915, Jane Addams presided over the first meeting of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in The Hague, Netherlands, to try to bring about a fair and equitable peace. Pacifists who supported U.S. neutrality risked their reputations by continuing to support pacifism after the United States declared war on Germany in 1917. Representative Jeannette Rankin, for instance, lost her seat in Congress by voting with a small minority of congressional representatives against U.S. entry into WWI. Jane Addams found herself marginalized and even demonized for her continued pacifism. She won the Nobel peace prize in 1931 in recognition of her courageous work.

Once the U.S. Congress declared war on Germany, most Americans set aside their isolationist tendencies and fully embraced the war effort. Clubwomen and suffragists alike supported the war by volunteering to knit socks, roll bandages, sell war bonds, and limit their family's food consumption. As increasing numbers of American men fought in the war, wage-earning women proved their patriotism and earned better wages by shifting from, for instance, sex-segregated jobs in domestic work or the textile industry to new jobs in factories and munitions plants. Women's participation in vital war work bolstered their demands for the right to vote, a goal that they finally achieved after the war's end, when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920.

Conclusion

During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, clubwomen, reformers, laborers, and feminists asserted their right to participate in the public, political sphere. Whether they intended to further their education, improve society, gain better working conditions, or control their own bodies, women expanded traditional gender roles and played an important role in transforming their society. Most significantly, the guarantee of voting rights provided by the Nineteenth Amendment marked a major milestone in the history of the struggle for women's rights. While women made important advances in other areas as well, many of the goals of turn-of-the-century reformers and feminists—for economic justice, racial equality, and women's full emancipation—remained unrealized, and would be left for subsequent generations of women to continue to pursue as the 20th century unfolded.

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