

2. New Yorkers Ridicule Feminists (1856)

Male opponents of feminism claimed that the female crusaders were frustrated old maids (many, in fact, were married); that women would become coarsened and demasculinized by entering the culbroad arena of politics; that their husbands (if they were lucky enough to have husbands) would look after their rights; and that women, like black slaves, were divinely ordained to be inferior and would be happier in that status. An editorial in the New York Herald wondered what would happen if pregnant sea captains, generals, members of Congress, physicians, and lawyers were suddenly seized with birth pangs in critical situations. The following official report reveals the joking condescension with which the New York legislature approached the problem. How might feminists have answered these jibes?

Mr. Foote, from the Judiciary Committee, made a report on Women's Rights that set the whole House in roars of laughter:

"The Committee is composed of married and single gentlemen. The bachelors on the Committee, with becoming diffidence, have left the subject pretty much to the married gentlemen. They have considered it with the aid of the light they have before them and the experience married life has given them. Thus aided, they are enabled to state that the ladies always have the best place and choicest tidbit at the table. They have the best seat in the cars, carriages, and sleighs; the warmest place in the winter, and the coolest place in the summer. They have their choice on which side of the bed they will lie, front or back. A lady's dress costs three times as much as that of a gentleman; and, at the present time, with the prevailing fashion, one lady occupies three times as much space in the world as a gentleman.

"It has thus appeared to the married gentlemen of your Committee, being a majority (the bachelors being silent for the reason mentioned, and also probably for the further reason that they are still suitors for the favors of the gentler sex), that, if there is any inequality or oppression in the case, the gentlemen are the sufferers. They, however, have presented no petitions for redress; having, doubtless, made up their minds to yield to an inevitable destiny.

"On the whole, the Committee have concluded to recommend no measure, except that as they have observed several instances in which husband and wife have both signed the same petition. In such case, they would recommend the parties to apply for a law authorizing them to change dresses, so that the husband may wear petticoats, and the wife the breeches, and thus indicate to their neighbors and the public the true relation in which they stand to each other."

3. Lucy Stone Protests Traditional Marriage (1855)

Lucy Stone graduated from Oberlin College (America's first coeducational institution of higher learning) in 1847 and launched herself on a lifelong career as a reformer. She was an outspoken abolitionist and advocate of women's rights. Traditionalists were so irritated with her that they rudely repeated a poem published

by a Boston newspaper promising "fame's loud trumpet shall be blown" for the man who "with a wedding kiss shuts up the mouth of Lucy Stone." When she did marry Henry B. Blackwell in 1855, she hardly fell silent. Instead, with her new husband, she used the occasion to dramatize the plight of women. In her wedding declaration, which follows, what aspects of women's condition are most condemned? In what ways does this document suggest the relationship between the abolitionist and feminist crusades?

Protest

While acknowledging our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage, as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise, and which no man should possess. We protest especially against the laws which give to the husband:

1. The custody of the wife's person.
2. The exclusive control and guardianship of their children.
3. The sole ownership of her personal, and use of her real estate, unless previously settled upon her, or placed in the hands of trustees, as in the case of minors, lunatics, and idiots.
4. The absolute right to the product of her industry.
5. Also against laws which give to the widower so much larger and more permanent an interest in the property of his deceased wife, than they give to the widow in that of the deceased husband.
6. Finally, against the whole system by which "the legal existence of the wife is suspended during marriage," so that in most States, she neither has a legal part in the choice of her residence, nor can she make a will, nor sue or be sued in her own name, nor inherit property.

We believe that personal independence and equal human rights can never be forfeited, except for crime; that marriage should be an equal and permanent partnership, and so recognized by law; that until it is so recognized, married partners should provide against the radical injustice of present laws, by every means in their power.

We believe that where domestic difficulties arise, no appeal should be made to legal tribunals under existing laws, but that all difficulties should be submitted to the equitable adjustment of arbitrators mutually chosen.

Thus reverencing law, we enter our protest against rules and customs which are unworthy of the name, since they violate justice, the essence of law.

¹W. C. Stanton et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881), vol. 1, pp. 629-630.

²W. C. Stanton et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881), vol. 1, pp. 260-261.

2. What does the IWW's experience reveal about the status of civil liberties in early-twentieth-century America?

118. Margaret Sanger on "Free Motherhood," from *Woman and the New Race* (1920)

Source: Margaret Sanger, "Free Motherhood," from *Woman and the New Race*, 1920. Reprinted with permission of Alexander Sanger, Executor of the Estate of Margaret Sanger.

The word "feminism" entered the political vocabulary for the first time in the years before World War I. It expressed not only traditional demands such as the right to vote and greater economic opportunities for women but a quest for free sexual expression and reproductive choice as essential to women's emancipation. The law banned not only the sale of birth control devices but distributing information about them.

More than any other individual, Margaret Sanger, one of eleven children of an Irish-American working-class family, placed the issue of birth control at the heart of the new feminism. She began openly advertising birth control devices in her own journal, *The Woman Rebel*. In 1916, Sanger opened a clinic in a working-class neighborhood of Brooklyn and began distributing contraceptive devices to poor Jewish and Italian women, an action for which she was sentenced to a month in prison. Like the IWW free-speech fights, Sanger's experience revealed how laws set rigid limits to Americans' freedom of expression.

THE MOST FAR-REACHING social development of modern times is the revolt of woman against sex servitude. The most important force in the remaking of the world is a free motherhood. Beside this force, the elaborate international programmes of modern statesmen are weak and superficial. Diplomats may formulate leagues of nations and nations may pledge their utmost strength to maintain them,

statesmen may dream of reconstructing the world out of alliances, hegemonies and spheres of influence, but woman, continuing to produce explosive populations, will convert these pledges into the proverbial scraps of paper; or she may, by controlling birth, lift motherhood to the plane of a voluntary, intelligent function, and remake the world. When the world is thus remade, it will exceed the dream of statesman, reformer and revolutionist.

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Most women who belong to the workers' families have no accurate or reliable knowledge of contraceptives, and are, therefore, bringing children into the world so rapidly that they, their families and their class are overwhelmed with numbers. Out of these numbers... have grown many of the burdens with which society in general is weighted; out of them have come, also, the want, disease, hard living conditions and general misery of the workers.

The women of this class are the greatest sufferers of all. Not only do they bear the material hardships and deprivations in common with the rest of the family, but in the case of the mother, these are intensified. It is the man and the child who have first call upon the insufficient amount of food. It is the man and the child who get the recreation, if there is any to be had, for the man's hours of labor are usually limited by law or by his labor union.

It is the woman who suffers first from hunger, the woman whose clothing is least adequate, the woman who must work all hours, even though she is not compelled, as in the case of millions, to go into a factory to add to her husband's scanty income. It is she, too, whose health breaks first and most hopelessly, under the long hours of work, the drain of frequent childbearing, and often almost constant nursing of babies. There are no eight-hour laws to protect the mother against overwork and toil in the home; no laws to protect her against ill health and the diseases of pregnancy and reproduction. In fact there has been almost no thought or consideration given for the protection of the mother in the home of the workingman.

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Great Migrations

The basic freedom of the world is woman's freedom. A free race cannot be born of slave mothers. A woman enchained cannot choose but give a measure of that bondage to her sons and daughters. No woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother.

It does not greatly alter the case that some women call themselves free because they earn their own livings, while others profess freedom because they defy the conventions of sex relationship. She who earns her own living gains a sort of freedom that is not to be undervalued, but in quality and in quantity it is of little account beside the untrammelled choice of mating or not mating, of being a mother or not being a mother. She gains food and clothing and shelter, at least, without submitting to the charity of her companion, but the earning of her own living does not give her the development of her inner sex urge, far deeper and more powerful in its outworkings than any of these externals. In order to have that development, she must still meet and solve the problem of motherhood.

With the so-called "free" woman, who chooses a mate in defiance of convention, freedom is largely a question of character and audacity. If she does attain to an unrestricted choice of a mate, she is still in a position to be enslaved through her reproductive powers. Indeed, the pressure of law and custom upon the woman not legally married is likely to make her more of a slave than the woman fortunate enough to marry the man of her choice.

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Voluntary motherhood implies a new morality—a vigorous, constructive, liberated morality. That morality will, first of all, prevent the submergence of womanhood into motherhood. It will set its face against the conversion of women into mechanical maternity and toward the creation of a new race.

Woman's role has been that of an incubator and little more. She has given birth to an incubated race. She has given to her children what little she was permitted to give, but of herself, of her personal-

ity, almost nothing. In the mass, she has brought forth quantity, not quality. The requirement of a male dominated civilization has been numbers. She has met that requirement.

It is the essential function of voluntary motherhood to choose its own mate, to determine the time of childbearing and to regulate strictly the number of offspring. Natural affection upon her part, instead of selection dictated by social or economic advantage, will give her a better fatherhood for her children. The exercise of her right to decide how many children she will have and when she shall have them will procure for her the time necessary to the development of other faculties than that of reproduction. She will give play to her tastes, her talents and her ambitions. She will become a full-rounded human being.

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A free womanhood turns of its own desire to a free and happy motherhood, a motherhood which does not submerge the woman, but, which is enriched because she is unsubmerged. When we voice, then, the necessity of setting the feminine spirit utterly and absolutely free, thought turns naturally not to rights of the woman, nor indeed of the mother, but to the rights of the child—of all children in the world. For this is the miracle of free womanhood, that in its freedom it becomes the race mother and opens its heart in fruitful affection for humanity.

Questions

1. How does Sanger define "free womanhood"?
2. How does she believe access to birth control will change women's lives?

American History
Great Migrations

been held abroad for the discussion of common interests, colonial questions and the future cooperative development of Africa. In terms of the race question as a world problem, the Negro mind has leapt, so to speak, upon the parapets of prejudice and extended its cramped horizons. In so doing it has linked up with the growing group consciousness of the dark peoples and is gradually learning their common interests. As one of our writers has recently put it: "It is imperative that we understand the white world in its relations to the non-white world." As with the Jew, persecution is making the Negro international.

As a world phenomenon this wider race consciousness is a different thing from the much asserted rising tide of color. Its inevitable causes are not of our making. The consequences are not necessarily damaging to the best interests of civilization. Whether it actually brings into being new Armadas of conflict or argosies of cultural exchange and enlightenment can only be decided by the attitude of the dominant races in an era of critical change. With the American Negro, his new internationalism is primarily an effort to recapture contact with the scattered peoples of African derivation. Garveyism may be a transient, if spectacular, phenomenon, but the possible role of the American Negro in the future development of Africa is one of the most constructive and universally helpful missions that any modern people can lay claim to.

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Questions

1. What does Locke mean when he writes, "the day of 'aunties,' 'uncles' and 'mammies'" is gone?
2. Why does Locke consider Harlem a true "race capital" for blacks?

136. Elsie Hill and Florence Kelley Debate the Equal Rights Amendment (1922)

Source: *The Nation*, April 12, 1922, p. 421.

With the ratification of the constitutional amendment barring states from discriminating in voting qualifications because of sex, the women's movement faced a crossroads. The National Woman's Party, whose militant protests during World War I had helped secure passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, now called for a new Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) prohibiting all legal distinctions between the sexes. Only in this way, its leaders insisted, could women gain full access to the economic, educational, and other opportunities of American society. But many veterans of the movement to protect women workers feared that the ERA would wipe away their hard-won gains as well as deny women alimony and child support in the event of divorce. The result was a bitter split among feminists, illustrated in a debate in the pages of the liberal magazine, *The Nation*, in 1922: Elsie Hill, the daughter of a Connecticut congressman who had been arrested for picketing at the White House during Woodrow Wilson's presidency, represented the Woman's Party. Florence Kelley, the head of the National Consumers' League and an architect of legislation limiting the hours of work for women, offered the traditional view that women needed special protection by the government. The ERA failed, and the debate would be repeated in the 1970s when it once again entered national politics.

HILL: THE REMOVAL of all forms of the subjection of women is the purpose to which the National Woman's Party is dedicated. Its present campaign to remove the discriminations against women in the laws of the United States is but the beginning of its determined effort to secure the freedom of women, an integral part of the struggle for human liberty for which women are first of all responsible. Its interest lies in the final release of women from the class of a

dependent, subservient being to which early civilization committed her.

The laws of the various states at present hold her in that class. They deny her a control of her children equal to the father's; they deny her, if married, the right to her own earnings; they punish her for offenses for which men go unpunished. . . . These laws are not the creation of this age, but the fact that they are still tolerated on our statute books and that in some states their removal is vigorously resisted shows the hold of old traditions upon us. Since the passage of the Suffrage Amendment the incongruity of these laws, dating back many centuries, has become more than ever marked. . . .

An amendment to the Federal Constitution . . . if adopted, would remove them at one stroke.

KELLEY: Sex is a biological fact. The political rights of citizens are not properly dependent upon sex, but social and domestic relations and industrial activities are. All modern-minded people desire that women should have full political equality and like opportunity in business and the professions. . . . The inescapable facts are, however, that men do not bear children, are freed from the burdens of maternity, and are not susceptible, in the same measure as women, to poisons now increasingly characteristic of certain industries, and to the universal poison of fatigue. These are differences so far-reaching, so fundamental, that it is grotesque to ignore them. Women cannot be made men by act of the legislature or by amendment of the Federal Constitution. . . . The inherent differences are permanent. Women will always need many laws different from those needed by men.

The effort to enact the blanket bill in defiance of all biological differences recklessly imperils the special laws for women as such, for wives, for mothers, and for wage-earners. . . . Is the National Woman's Party for or against protective measures for wage-earning women? Will it publicly state whether it is for or against the eight-hour day and minimum-wage commissions for women? Yes or no?

Questions

1. How do the arguments of Hill and Kelley reflect different definitions of women's freedom and their role in society?

2. Why does Kelley think that the Equal Rights Amendment will do a disservice to women?