Seneca falls essay

Title: The road from SENECA FALLS. (cover story)Source: New Republic, 08/10/98, Vol. 219 Issue 6, p26, 12p, 3bwAuthor(s): Stansell, ChristineAbstract: Reviews several books related to womens suffrage and feminism. The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady STANTON and Susan B. Anthony, Volume One: In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840-1866, edited by Ann D. Gordon; Harriet STANTON Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage, by Ellen Carol DuBois; Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920, by Suzanne M. Marilley; More.

AN: 888132ISSN: 0028-6583Full Text Word Count: 9663Database: Academic Search PremierSection: BOOKS & THE ARTSThe feminism of the mothers, the feminism of the daughters, the feminism of the girls. THE ROAD FROM SENECA FALLSI.

One hundred and fifty years ago this summer, in the little country town of SENECA FALLS in upstate New York, several dozen excited women and a few interested men held the first meeting in the world devoted solely to womens rights. It was 1848, the springtime of the peoples in Europe; and, although these Americans were far removed from the emancipatory proclamations in Europe, they caught the fever and produced one of their own, the Declaration of Sentiments: We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal. Compared to the apocalypticism of The Communist Manifesto, another product of that year, the SENECA FALLS Declaration seems modest, a relic of right-thinking republicanism rather than a portent of wrenching revolutionary transformation. Yet its effects were destined to be no less profound, and far more benign. The gathering in 1848 emerged from a long, fitfully articulated history of womens grievances,

though the participants were not aware of it. The interruption of historical memory and, in its absence, the strains of improvising a politics of grievance on the spot, have always characterized this tradition. The written record of female protest extends back to the late middle ages, to the French woman of letters Christine de Pizan and her Book of the City of Ladies. It was in the late eighteenth century, however, that the language of the rights of man gained momentum around the northern Atlantic world, shifting the idea of justice for women out of the register of utopia to make it, for a few highly politicized women in the age of revolution, a plausible goal in the here and now. Thus, in 1776, Abigail Adams admonished her patriot husband, away in Philadelphia at the Continental Congress, to remember the ladies in their declarations, a nudge tempered by coyness but at heart quite serious. Later, in Paris, groups of women in the early days of the Revolution protested, unsuccessfully, their exclusion from representation and the franchise. And the excitement of the revolutionary debate in France stirred the young English writer Mary Wollstonecraft, who was trying to earn her own living outside a mans household. In 1792 she produced, in a few red-hot months, her sensational Vindication of the Rights of Women, the first full-scale argument for womens equality. The Americans of the middle of the nineteenth century knew little or nothing about these earlier claims and events, which were erased by the revanche against the French Revolution. The intertwined devils of Jacobinism and sexual irregularity tainted the reputation of Wollstonecraft, who died in 1797 giving birth to a child out of wedlock. (The baby grew up to be Mary Shelley.) The Vindication passed out of print, and with it any knowledge that a woman had spent concentrated intellectual labor in reflection upon the oddity of her sexs inability to profit

from the universal rights of man. The absence of an accessible tradition makes the Americans resourcefulness all the more remarkable. In the 1830s, a few firebrands of gender subversion wandered around the English-speaking world, representatives of the utopian socialist fringe where revolutionary womens rights still flickered: Fanny Wright, for example, a labor radical and an early advocate of contraception. Yet such sensations operated at a remove from the respectable ladies who called the meeting at SENECA FALLS. For them, there was no living memory of advocacy for womens rights. In the 1830s, as the struggle to end slavery accelerated, women in the inner circles of abolitionism began to stretch the metaphor of enslavement to encompass their own situations. The energy of extrapolation, rather than the confidence of tradition, galvanized their thinking. The analogy of woman and slave was by turns histrionic, sentimental, and brilliantly revealing, given all the actual ways in which men had the ability to coerce and to constrain wives and daughters, and given the legal fact that wives and daughters were, to some degree, the property of their husbands and fathers. Thine in the bonds of womanhood, the Southern ex-slaveholding renegade Sarah Grimke signed each of her Letters on the Equality of the Sexes (1838), a paraphrase of the bonds of slavery designed to detonate regular provocations throughout the text. The controversy over womens proper role was one of several differences that split the abolitionist movement in the 1830s. The nub of the issue was a womans right to follow the dictates of her conscience into public protest. The conversion of Sarah Grimke and her sister Angelina, daughters of a leading South Carolina family, to the cause immediately made them prized speakers on the antislavery circuit. Yet the prohibitions against women exposing themselves to audiences including men

were so strong that leading New England clergymen threatened to withdraw their support from the movement unless the Grimkes retired. In free black circles, too, women became dedicated antislavery activists: Maria Stewarts public lectures aroused concerted opposition from African American men, as Suzanne Marilley discovers in her interesting book. The radicals led by William Lloyd Garrisonthe immediatists who pressed for an unconditional end to slaverybacked the Grimkes. The moderates in antislavery politicsgradualists who believed in courting mainstream opinionlined up with the clergy to send the women back home. The ruckus spread through the ranks, carried by the fevered gossip of protest politics as well as by Sarah Grimkes published Letters, a truculent rejoinder to the ministers. The result can be glimpsed in a letter from 1841, reprinted early on in Ann D. Gordons captivating first volume of Elizabeth Cady STANTONs and Susan B. Anthonys papers. Elizabeth Cady STANTON came of age in upstate New York, a hotbed of all sorts of reform, where the debate over womans nature was a muted clamor in the background. Newly married to Henry STANTON, an antislavery pragmatist who had broken with Garrison, STANTON refused to abjure her own loyalties to the womens rights wing of abolition. In language echoing Sarah Grimkes, the young wife declared herself preeminently an independent morally responsible being, answerable not to her husband but to a higher authority. I do in truth think & act for myself deeming that I alone am responsible for the sayings & doings of E. C. S. Elizabeth Cady STANTON was twenty-four when this volume of the Selected Papers begins. She was the daughter of a distinguished and well-heeled family: her mother was from the great New York land-holding Livingston clan, her father made his name in politics and the law. She benefited from the best education available to girls

in antebellum America, which meant access to a good library (her fathers) and a stint at Emma Willards boarding school for girls, which was the first attempt to provide a serious curriculum beyond the ladies academies regime of French and music. No college and no career awaited a student upon leaving Willards, and so, in the early 1840s, the newlywed settled into provincial domesticity. Voracious for life and ideas, Mr. STANTONs wife must have been a handful. On the honeymoon trip that she and Henry took in 1840 to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, he found her capacity for fearless conversation irritating. Henry admonished her, she dutifully wrote a cousin, for her lack of discretion; she was too gay, she talked too much, she professed her views on slavery before people who knew much more than she did. Yet Lucretia Mott, an older Quaker abolitionist of great distinction, found her enchanting, an open generous confiding spirit. The two immediately forged a bond. In London, the British forbade the women to participate in the convention and cordoned them off in a balcony behind a curtain, setting off a bitter floor fight that the Garrison faction lost. STANTON and Mott sat in seclusion with the others for three days and fumed. They vowed to hold a meeting on womens rights when they returned to the States. But the plan lay fallow for years: Philadelphia was a long way from upstate New York, and STANTON was preoccupied with having babiesthere would be seven over the course of nineteen years, the last in 1859–and managing a large household. Throughout the 1840s, there was scant letter-writing. STANTON seems to have bided her time at the edge of history, waiting to jump. Like other abolitionists, she had an acute sense of historical calling that translated, psychologically, into a belief that it was only a matter of time before her own hunger for change became general. She seldom fell

prey to the dissenters depleting fear that her grievances were superfluous. She was sociable, and blessed with an optimistic outlook. She was also given to cheerful indulgence in the pleasures of the flesh: guiltless overeating (by the 1850s she was plump, and heading toward obesity) and perhaps guiltless sex (the marriage was chilly, but the seven babies make one wonder). They say I am good natured, generous, & always well & happy, she matter-of-factly informed a friend. She popped out most of her babies with aplomb: a twelve-pound Margaret was born after STANTON lay down for fifteen minutes. As a mother, she was confident and warm, particularly intelligent and loving, Ellen DuBois tells us in her biography of STANTONs second daughter, Harriot. When Mott visited relatives nearby in the summer of 1848, STANTON mobilized immediately. She may or may not have read Mary Wollstonecraft, but in any case she knew exactly the place in history that she wished to stake out: the first womans rights convention that has ever assembled, she stressed to a neighbor. Her circle of friends, crack political organizers by virtue of their years in what Suzanne Marilley nicely terms the free space of Garrisonian antislavery work, threw together the meeting in three days. They worried that the attendance would be small: it was high summerbusy on the farms, hot and slow in town. Yet a substantial crowd gathered, about two-thirds women and one-third men. The Declaration of Sentiments produced at SENECA FALLS went far beyond Wollstonecrafts Vindication in its list of injustices. In lofty abolitionist-inspired rhetoric, the signers pointed out that women were legally the subjects of their husbands and fathers; that wives could not hold property in their own names; that divorce was an economic and social disaster for women; that they could not go to college or become doctors, lawyers, or clergy; that no decently paid

work was open to them; and so forth. The culprit was man: He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for woman a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God. The perpetrators identity remained vague, a generic despot; but the pressure of the Declarations specific grievances was to make actual male people responsible. This conception of the effects of male power over women came from the images of subjugation in Grimkes Letterstake your feet off our backs, Grimke urged her male readers, and let us stand upright on the ground God designed us to occupyand produced a detailed view of the resulting social debilities. In retrospect, it marked a turning point. For Wollstonecraft had little use for her sex as it was presently constituted: the Vindication tended to blame either womens supposedly thwarted characters or the lack of reasonable education for the handicaps that they suffered. The Declaration of Sentiments, by contrast, was a firm defense of women as they were, poised to exercise their God-given capacities were it not for men. In its implicit ideas about the workings of power, you catch a faint echo of the clarion call of 1848: The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. The remedies for which the signatories called were vague, tending toward a call for moral enlightenment for both men and women; but there was one point that was precise and political. This was the demand for womens suffrage, and it was STANTONs special contribution. The idea was startling. Women in revolutionary France had raised the issue, but nobody in England or America had ever broached it. Some of the organizers balked at the proposal; but Frederick Douglass, who attended the meeting, threw his considerable moral

weight behind STANTON, and the resolution prevailed. It was the harbinger of a program that would eventually hold out to its participants, first in the United States, then in Britain, and then throughout the world, the epochal promise of equalizing, and even obliterating, the social effects of sexual difference. Susan B. Anthony was not at SENECA FALLS, though she lived nearby. Slightly younger than STANTON, Anthony was a schoolteacher in 1848, working to support herself and to help out with the failing fortunes of her debt-ridden family. Raised as a Quaker and sent, in the familys prosperous years, to a good Quaker boarding school for girls, Anthony was also up-to-date on abolition and reform, but her need to earn a living kept her from active involvement. In the contrasting textures of Anthonys and STANTONs letters in Selected Papers, more vivid differences also appear. Despite her provincial base, STANTON moved in a cosmopolitan Anglo-American milieu, intellectually and socially; her mind stretched to Harriet Taylor, John Stuart Mill, and Jane Eyre. Anthonys world, the upstate countryside, was a universe of pigs and parsnips, of the homey concerns of a large struggling family. The epistolary styles of the early correspondence are wonderfully revealing: STANTONs letters are lifted by the swooping cadences that the great nineteenth-century political minds used even in their most intimate letters, Anthonys letters are knotted intricately in the everyday particulars of money, work, and sickness. Do write very soon, she adjures the folks, tell me about the strawberries & peaches, cherries & plums. Joseph talks some of going with us & going to his fathers … Joshua and Elisha want to come too. I guess I will come home & live this winter & let Mary and Merritt go to Washington Co. The marvel is that Anthony ever lifted her head from her appointed furrow. It was difficult for anyone to extricate any kind of

self from this kin-based country life of thick obligations, dependencies, and anxieties, but it was virtually impossible for a woman to do so. STANTONs difficulties in grabbing time away from her household to read and to write are more easily appreciable now: they are a little resonant with our own dilemmas of bourgeois busyness. But it was Anthony, the unmarried sister whose labor and time were claimed not by one family but by several, who had the harder time launching herself. It seems to me that no one feels that it is any thing out of the common course of things, for me to sacrifice my every feeling, almost principle, to gratify those with whom I have chance to mingle, she complained of one stint helping out a relative. Yet slowly she crafted an independent life, helped by her friendship with STANTON, which began in 1851. First in temperance work, and then in abolitionism combined with womens rights, Anthony found her voice as a speaker and her genius as an organizer. From her complicated, dutyridden family life she brought to political work a habit of altruism and a focus on details. Anthonys later persona in the womens movement was so much the workhorsethe stoic mother of us all, as Gertrude Stein called herthat it is jolting to realize that she was not yet thirty when she threw in her lot with the cause. She worked incessantly, often traveling alone by coach or even on foot. Although she seldom noted the costs, the stress of her young life can be glimpsed in her letters: the penny-pinching of organizational funds, the slogging on bad roads, the miserable crowds at lectures, the loneliness, the struggle to support herselfall that went into the cold hard labor of which she complained in a low moment. The Selected Papers uphold a nowcommon view of STANTON as the brains of the pair and Anthony as the dogsbody organizer, but the books offerings deepen the meaning of both roles. This was a

different political and intellectual world, in which the determination to eradicate the evil of slavery gave drive and authority to all sorts of American lives, mixing up ideas and politics. The friendship had the consequence of attaching some of STANTONs intellectual boldness to Anthony the schoolteacher-organizer, and some of Anthonys political acumen to STANTON the cerebral housewife. Anthony thrilled to STANTONs leaps of the mind; and their sallies into the world helped to transform STANTON from a bold thinker into a political swashbuckler. In the human soul, the steps between discontent and action are few and short indeed, she once observed to her abolitionist cousin Gerrit Smith; and it was in large part Anthony who helped her to compress the distance. In the 1850s, each moved from the edges to the center of radical reform. STANTON did so by means of her prominence at SENECA FALLS, which instituted a loose organization for womens rights embodied in annual conventions. Anthony became a paid organizer for anti-slavery. The renewed interest in women was so strong in the ranks that female lecturers sometimes alternated topics: one night slavery, the next womens rights. The new pride of status, coupled with the exhilarating new friendship, unleashed in these extraordinary women a torrent of work that continued unabated through the Civil War. The political culture of the 1850s provided audiences with an enormous sense of political efficacy (even for disenfranchised women), and a rich repertoire of metaphors and images: of bondage, which STANTON translated into the mental bondage of undereducated, housebound women, and of universal democracy, the redolent term for a consortium of rights-bearing individuals. Ann Gordons subtitle for this first volume of the STANTON-Anthony Papers, In the School of Anti-Slavery, is apt, for Northeastern reform politics at

midcentury were indeed a huge pedagogical effort in reasoning, arguing, writing, orating, and storytelling. STANTON and Anthony learned from their fellows a method that was closely reasoned and argumentative (rather than exhortatory and denunciatory, in the twentieth-century mode of left-wing persuasion). Long speeches and long articles geared to patient audiences turned upon the enunciation of a series of errors, refuted point by point to listeners accustomed to sitting for hours. A fair sample of the method can be gleaned from STANTONs first public address on womens rights, delivered right after SENECA FALLS. She states a mistaken idea (let us consider mans claims to physical superiority), then circles around it, raising a calm objection, a commonsensical point, some shrewd reversal of accepted wisdom. Men are intellectually superior, Satan picked the weaker sex for his designs, women are satisfied with things as they are: little is left of these hoary claims when she is done. Even the easily verified point that the Bible tells wives to obey their husbands seems shaky after STANTON has worked over Genesis and Pauls epistles. These speeches and writings are heavy going today, but even a cursory look shows how intrepidly and efficiently STANTON, with Anthony close behind, cut her way through the defense of the status quo to occupy her own intellectual redoubt. In the 1850s, the vote was only one concern among many. Searching for a pure liberal lineage for feminism, recent writers have suggested that this early movement kept itself away from the task of changing private life, but nothing could be farther from the truth. In the 1850s, womens rights leaders used the metaphor of bondage to argue that disenfranchisement was inextricable from womens relegation to the home. Anthony eventually settled on the vote as sufficient, but STANTON never lost the drive to peer into the crevices of private life.

What do you women want?: this volume of papers shows that she raised the rhetorical question years before Freud put it slightly differently; and unlike Freud, she went on to speculate on why they didnt get it. The pedagogy of abolition helped both women in the 1850s to entertain simultaneous, even contradictory, ardors. The vote was their passion, but they also challenged differences between the sexes that even friends and compatriots tolerated as natures inevitabilities. It was the unjust nature of marriage for women that quickly became STANTONs hobby horse. The rectification of civil disabilities for married women, especially their right to hold property in their own names and their right to child custody in divorce, were mainstays of the movement after SENECA FALLS. Yet STANTON sailed past the legal remedies to a hard-edged criticism of the cultural and psychological limitations on women that were embedded in the institution: Among all Christian nations, woman is still regarded as an article of merchandise; she is given in marriage as an inferior; promises to obey and to cleave to that one man as long as he lives; no matter what his transformation or her development may be. This sort of thinking veered dangerously close to free love heterodoxy, and it made STANTONs moderate companions queasy. Like her contemporaries John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor in London, she grasped the connection between the subjugation of women in marriage and their inability to move in the world. She called for the entire desacralization of the relationship as the first step toward rectifying its inequities. As early as 1854, STANTON raised the hackles of more temperate souls by calling for the regulation of marriage as a purely civil contract, dissoluble at the behest of either party. She could not bear the encrustation of custom that masked the fundamentally unfair position of wives. In 1860, at the tenth womens rights

convention, she scandalized the New York press and many in the audience by calling for, in our parlance, no-fault divorce. STANTON and Anthony grasped the structural constraints of customs prettied up by patriarchal niceties and spurious respect. Thus STANTON could not bear to be called Mrs. Henry STANTON: it was unthinkable that she would divest herself of the encumbrance of her husbands name, but at least she would keep herself from being entirely eradicated nominally. Denying to woman her own name, she upbraided Wendell Phillips, who had written her as Mrs. H. B. STANTON. Had he never heard that women & negroes were beginning to repudiate the name of their masters?–& claiming a right to a life long name of their own? For Anthony, the battle was female dress. There is a lot in the letters about the ordeal of high principle represented by bloomersthe Turkish-inspired blousy culottes invented by Amelia Bloomer, editor of a womens rights newspaper. This narrative thread shows vividly what the penchant for high principle could cost women in daily life. A number of women reformers adopted bloomers in the 1850s, but they met such insults on the street, and such dismay from their loved ones, that they generally gave them up. STANTONs correspondence with abolitionist luminaries shows that even sympathetic men were oblivious to what was at stake. As usual, she was especially tart with Gerrit Smith, whose dull adherence to the status quo in gender relations (though not in slavery) annoyed her no end. Believing as you do in the identity of the sexes, she remonstrated, why keep up these distinctions in dress? Surely, whatever dress is convenient for one sex must be for the other also. But bloomers meant something different to Anthony. Since she was alone among the early womens rights crowd in needing to earn her own living, Anthony comprehended viscerally the problems that

working women encountered. Traveling for her work, Anthony knew the literal drag of long skirts: the impossibility of keeping the hems clean, the worry of getting clothes washed on the road. She saw the ways in which Victorian dresses played into the rigid sex bar in work: women in skirts could not even try remunerative manual trades, so easily could they become tangled up with machinery and tools. I can see no business avocation, in which woman, in her … present dress can possibly earn equal wages with man–& feel that it is folly for us to make the demand until, we adapt our dress to our workI every day, feel more keenly the terrible bondage of these long skirts. Bloomers represented a chance to redress not an abstract injustice but a mundane material inequity, and she clung to them after the others had abandoned the fight. From the beginning, then, the preoccupation with unfettering the entire female person, soul and body, from degrading customs led womens rights advocates simultaneously to agitate for the vote and to protest the indignities of personal relations. Full citizenship meant the vote, full personhood meant a release from coerced femininity. Both were swirled into the meaning of that quintessential phrase equal rights. Some have seized upon the rallying cry of equal rights to mark womens rights as a movement of well-mannered liberals who properly limited themselves to changing the law and left the rest of womens difficulties to individual choice. Thus Suzanne Marilleys book is a carefully argued and learned contribution to the view that feminism and liberalism are synonymous. Her account is an excellent introduction to the nineteenth-century campaign; it tracks the movement from 1848 through a series of dogged state campaigns in Colorado in the 1890s and beyond. Marilley stresses the suppleness of the abolitionist legacy and admires the

capaciousness of equal-rights ideology after the Civil War to contain a variety of goals for women, including goals to protect women. Still, the focus is too limited. To attribute the development of womens rights to liberalism alone is to miss what makes it a vital and particularly American inheritance. Such a view is finally an ideological reduction, not a historical interpretation, since it bypasses the living streams of womens-rightsand eventually feministthought. Liberalism cannot explain Anthonys bloomers or STANTONs vitriol about the sexual double standard. While supple enough to allow womens rights to coalesce in the 1850s, liberalism cannot account for the explosive elements of the traditionfor its historically unprecedented evaluation of the female self and the ability of its leaders to ally themselves, in practice and in imagination, with women as they were, in a variety of situations. For this we must look to sources outside liberalism, to the freshets that dissolved the inherited limits of the imagination. In STANTONs offhand remarks in Selected Papers, in particular, an unexpected admixture of influences is plain. Although she would in time become a militant secularist, STANTONs Protestant heritage always undergirded her radical faith that the soul had no sex and that the seemingly preordained differences between men and women were earthly conceits, temporary and circumstantial. Transcendentalist cadences move through STANTONs profession that anything that is outward, all forms and ceremonies, faiths and symbols, policies and institutions, may be washed away, but that which is of the very being must stand forever. (She lived off and on in Boston, the transcendentalist capital.) And the influences of Romantic writers are also evident. A wonderful profession of womens rights as a spiritual vocation beats with a Romantic passion that merges body and soul, imagination and

intellect: Nothing, nobody could abate the all-absorbing, agonizing interest I feel in the redemption of woman. I could not wash my hands of womans rights, for they are dyed clear through to the marrow of the bone. II.

For all the heat that STANTON and Anthony generated, their influence was limited, as Marilley explains, to circles of radical Quakers and Garrisonian activists: a little apostolic number, in Anthonys depressed description. Debacle was in the wings. When the Civil War came, they threw themselves into the effort, though the Selected Papers show how the more practical Anthony grew uneasy and then panicked as she saw the interest in womens rights petering out. All our reformers seem suddenly to have grown politic, she lamented in 1862. All alike say, ... Wait until the war excitement abates, which is to say, Ask our opponents if they think we had better speak, or, rather, if they do not think we had better remain silent. I am sick at heart, but I can not carry the world against the wish and the will of our best friends. The Reconstruction amendments, which marked a turning point that might have enshrined universal democracy as the law of the land, had the paradoxical effect of explicitly repudiating woman suffrage by introducing the qualification male in the Fourteenth Amendment. This first volume of the papers takes the story up to the end of 1866: the Amendment had yet to pass Congress, but the fissures were already evident in state meetings and conventions. The books gleanings show that a ferocious and highly principled debate was smoldering. STANTON and Anthony have been accused, not unjustly, of restricting the campaign for woman suffrage to white women, but at this point they were working from the premise of votes for everyone. As a loyal male supporter maintained, the real question was not the rights of

woman, or the negro, but the rights of all men and women. The problem was that most of their allies divided the issues. The situation of black men, especially that of Republican supporters and returning soldiers in the South, required immediate help. Frederick Douglass, once a fellow traveler of the founding feminists, argued on grounds of realpolitik that the women could wait. When women, because they are women, are hunted down … when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lampposts; when their children are torn from their arms and their brains dashed out upon the pavement … when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads … then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own. STANTON protested that women were black as well, but it was a weak retort. In the 1860s, womens rights advocates paid the price for their earlier lack of interest in the free black abolitionist women who, after the war, might have helped to create a politics that joined the plight of the freedpeople to the plight of women. Enraged by the abolitionists defection, STANTON and Anthony turned to racist and nativist arguments to bolster womens suffrage. How dare Congress enfranchise ignorant black men and foreignersPatrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, in STANTONs ugly phrasewhen its finest Saxon daughters had no voice in government? They even campaigned in the company of a pro-Southern Democrat who championed votes for women. Old friends were appalled. The ranks divided. The majority of antislavery reformers gravitated to a Boston-based organization, mild in tone, mindful of the necessity of accepting a lower priority for womens rights in the reform agenda. STANTON and Anthony regrouped in New York, and in 1869 they started their own association single-mindedly committed to womens rights and to pressing for a

constitutional amendment. The movement was irreparably torn, but the disarray had the virtue of spilling womens rights out into national political culture. Over the next four decades, the suffrage movement expanded exponentially, drawing tens of thousands of new recruits from womens civic clubs, benevolent societies, and temperance reform into a plethora of campaigns, mostly conducted at the state and local levels. The leadership passed from a seasoned minority of dissenters, who were propelled by the conviction that the differences between men and women could be undone, to a younger generation of more moderate disposition, who accepted those differences and sought to enhance womens power within them. The shifts in emphasis and membership were complex. The womens movement in the late nineteenth century fanned out over a broad spectrum of overlapping causes and constituencies, from progressive champions of labor in the cities to African American temperance supporters in the South. But one way to understand those competing strainswhich persist into our own dayis to notice the latent psychological polarities that structure the manifest political content. Over time, the sisterhood of womens rights has broken apart into wary if not antagonistic camps, particularly at those moments when one generation succeeds another. One might say that there has been a feminism of the mothers and a feminism of the daughters. The feminism of the mothers leans toward responsibility and propriety; accepts the constraints of custom; acknowledges the comforts and the compensations of traditional families; wants to make men more accountable to their wives and their homes. It seeks, in sum, to find a basis for womens power in things as they are. The feminism of the daughters tends toward contempt for things as they are. It is utopian, flamboyant, defiant, insistent on claiming the privileges of

men. It is animated by a bold imagination of equality, so that women may act in the world exactly as men act. It was a politics of the mothers that coalesced after the Civil War, displacing the natural rights thinking of the 1850s, which, if it was not quite a daughters platform, certainly toyed with ideas of making the lives of the metaphorical sisterhood more consonant with the brotherhood of man. This postwar generation lacked the intrepidity to poke and prod at the carapace of accepted roles. For them, the distinctions between the sexes, especially the assumption of womens superior gifts for domesticity and child-rearing, seemed unobjectionable. The problem was that women, because they did not vote, could not extend their motherly capacities into the world. This new generation had little use for the thoroughgoing analysis and experimentation that STANTON, Anthony, and their peers had undertaken in the 1850s. They were not keen for bloomers or for prying into marriage or for challenging the interpretation of Scripture. Anthony eventually accommodated herself to the situation by training her sights on the vote and the vote alone, and fashioning herself as a fictive mother to the movement, Aunt Susan, a leader who kept divisive issues of sexuality, religion, and racial integration at bay. For her efforts, she was anointed the leader of suffrage forces when the rival factions reunited in 1892. But STANTON had a more difficult task. She needed a different sort of constituency: peoplebut especially womenwho could occupy the large imaginative space that she cleared for her sex. For all her interest in the plight of married women, she was a born daughter, who required female allies who saw themselves as free agents. Enter Victoria Woodhull. Ann Gordons first volume of Selected Papers stops short of the 1870s, but Barbara Goldsmiths book opens up a lively vista onto the changed womens

rights scene that the extraordinary Woodhull galvanized in 1871-72. Woodhull was an arriviste to New York, a drifter and hustler born on the wrong side of the tracks in the Ohio countryside, a one-time medicine-show performer and spiritualist medium who had a shady past with men. She had two husbands in tow when she arrived in New York with a sprawling menage of family members. (One of them was, ostensibly, an exhusband, but the finality of the divorce was questionable.) There were rumors that she had been a prostitute out West. Goldsmith tells little about how she gravitated to womens rights. The sensationalist Woodhull seems to have been drawn to militancy as much for profit as for principle. After the break in the movement, so much of its direction and its leadership was up for grabs that an upstart daughter could create quite a commotion. Woodhull transformed herself into the free spirit of sexual equality. And of sexy equality, too: she was much happier, at first, advertising her alliances with powerful men than her indebtedness to other women. Woodhull liked to snatch the rights that her predecessors had demanded be given to them. Her response to womens exclusion from the professions was to set herself up, with her sister, as the first female stockbroker on Wall Street, under the protection of a doting Commodore Vanderbilt. She went one better on bloomers by wearing snappy mens suits to the office. In 1870, she confronted female disenfranchisement by declaring herself a candidate for president, under the tutelage of another eminent patron, Republican Congressman Benjamin Butler. The symbolic presidential campaign, and Woodhulls subsequent appearance before Congress to argue for suffrage, attracted the attention of STANTON and Anthony. Many veterans of womens rightsespecially in Bostonwere appalled by the escapades of a newcomer who could at best be seen as an unruly

daughter, at worst as an ignorant hussy. But for STANTON and (at least initially) Anthony, Woodhull seemed a marvelous portent of possibility. She stood out thrillingly in a political milieu now bare of the adamantine idealism of the Garrisonians, and listing toward the respectability into which it would soon settle. Many of the recruits whom STANTON and Anthony were attracting in New York were novices, too young to have attended the school of antislavery, intellectually tepid and far more timid in the face of forms and ceremonies than the abolitionist women had been. By virtue of their youth, they should have brought fresh ideas and daring. In fact, they were literally and temperamentally matronly, given to a smug faith that ladylike manners would win the day. But not Woodhull. Intellectually, Woodhull was dazzling. The Woodhull strategy, laid out in her testimony before the House and Senate Judiciary Committees, slashed through the sex qualification of the Fourteenth Amendment, reasoning syllogistically that women were already enfranchised. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments conferred citizenship on all persons born or naturalized in the United States and guaranteed their rights. Women were persons; suffrage was a right of citizenship; women, therefore, could vote. Congress and the newspapers chattered; and women from STANTON and Anthonys organization followed suit that fall by trekking to the polls to claim the right to vote. The infusion of bold action was invigorating. Anthony was leery of Woodhullshe disliked those men buzzing around her, the taint of scandalbut Woodhulls triumph in Washington erased Anthonys doubts temporarily and she got herself arrested for trying to vote. Bravo! My Dear Woodhull! she cheered, I feel new lifenew hope that our battle is to be short, sharp and decisive.... I have never in the whole twenty years good fight felt so full of life and hope. For

STANTON, the encounter was serendipitous in marking a transition that was at once political, generational, and social. This comes through in Goldsmiths rendition, though unwittingly, since Goldsmith is not interested enough in STANTON to wonder what the well-bred judges daughter, once the consort of high-minded Quakers and Frederick Douglasss co-conspirator, gained from her friendship with the one-time medicine show performer. The collaboration confirmed STANTONs willingness to cut herself loose from the old political base and its sterling principles, the old-time religion of the 1850s. The dark side of STANTONs openness to new political forces was her racism, her willingness to make alliances with whatever set of prejudices suited her cause. But there was also a newfound interest in the resources of those outside the charmed circles in which she had been raised. And so STANTON extended herself, with a politically sensuous come-hither, to the emboldening impulses that Woodhull beamed. Let the eccentrics, the untutored, the politically suspect come on, she wrote her new ally: politically, I would rather make a few blunders from a superabundance of life than to have all the proprieties of a well embalmed mummy. Woodhulls superabundance of life sprang from both her suffrage extremism and her willingness to talk about sex. A veteran of the rough gender economy of seedy boarding-houses, she had a bred-in-the-bones appreciation for the part that mens social and sexual privileges played in the system of inequality. Yet she did not conclude that men should be reined in, which was the womens rights position. She concluded that women should be let loose. With a daughters eagerness to kick over the traces, she denounced marriage as legalized prostitution and advocated a philosophy of free love, a branch of utopian socialism that championed the womans right to sexual fulfillment

separated from child-bearing. (This idea made free-lovers the prescient champions of contraception.) Free-lovers spurned legal marriageit coerced what should be freely givenand argued for a heterosexual union close to our own notions of living together, a higher monogamy outside marriage that could be dissolved at will. At the edgesand Woodhull skirted the edgesthe ideal of a higher monogamy could stray into the realm of serial, even multiple partners. All this made free love tantamount to prostitution in the minds of the respectable. Still, Woodhulls wildness appealed to STANTON. She had been moving toward similar conclusions about marriage (though the lurid metaphor of legalized prostitution had not yet occurred to her), but she was on her own: even Anthony, loyal as she was, struggled against her distaste for her friends preoccupation with sexual matters. Woodhull, a shady lady who had schooled herself in a world of anarchists and utopian socialists into which STANTON had never ventured, brought vitality to the older womans intuitions and meditations. But STANTONs embrace of a loose woman outraged her political enemies all the more. The Boston group in particular looked to draw blood. STANTON was too big a target, but not Woodhull. And Woodhull was aware that there was danger in several quarters. As Goldsmith shows, the rival womens rights factions were not the only ones who saw their chance as Woodhull shifted from suffrage to advocating free love. There were also the resentful members of her family. In 1873, Woodhull made a spectacular admission to a packed New York house: Yes! I am a free lover! I have an inalienable, constitutional, and natural right to love whom I may, to love for as long or as short a period as I can, to change that love every day if I please! This crippled Woodhulls viability as a speaker, transforming her in the public mind from a personage evoking the

liminality of the stage actress to a self-confessed harlot. Desperate and angry, Woodhull played the hand that proved her undoing. In a monthly paper, she and her sister published the revelation of an adulterous liaison between the charismatic minister Henry Ward Beecher, scion of the eminent reformer family, and his parishioner Elizabeth Tilton. The affair was common knowledge among the reformer sophisticates of Manhattan and Beechers Brooklyn Heights church; and so were the dalliances of Libby Tiltons husband Theodore, an up-and-coming newspaperman, liberal politico, and one of STANTON and Anthonys stalwarts. But Woodhull charged that Beecher and his cronies were hypocrites for repudiating publicly the ethos that they privately enjoyed. Free love seems to have become the rage in Brooklyn Heights, a moony opportunism that justified serial infidelities, mens and womens, in an age when divorce was next to impossible. The explicit nature of the revelations, coupled with Beechers success in cleaning up his reputation in the long divorce trial that followed, sealed Woodhulls fate. Hounded by the vice crusader Anthony Comstock for her obscene lectures and her writings about free love, she was indicted and jailed repeatedly over the next few years. For all of Goldsmiths assiduous research into the historical context, her portrait of Woodhull is flat. It falls back into a line of sensationalized journalistic depictions of the fabulous siren: a backwoods original, an entrepreneur and con artist, a self-promoter devoid of inner life. Goldsmith is too unskeptical about the scandal-mongering against Woodhull; and she is weirdly uninterested in relationships between women and in the drama of womens rights, in which Woodhull created a starring role for herself. Thus she ends up demoting a rich political conjuncture into a tale of gullibility and opportunism. Even New York Citya historic refuge of plotters,

conspirators, and flamboyant radicalscould not provide Woodhull sanctuary. None of her new acquaintances came to her aid, not even STANTON. Woodhull sank down to the dim lower levels of the lecture circuit. By 1877, America was no good for her. She moved to England, where her old skills landed her a rich Londoner named John Martin, who set her up, a respectable lady for the first time in her life, in a fine big establishment in the substantial suburb of Kensington. Despite her husbands valiant efforts, London society shunned her. Goldsmith does not say so, but among those who would have chosen not to visit would have been the Martins neighbors at Hyde Park Gate, the eminent critic Leslie Stephen and his wife Julia. There, on the little sealed loop of a street, where everybody knew everything about everybody, and all the residents took their daily walks, we may spot (thanks to Hermione Lees Virginia Woolf) Mrs. Martin. We may see her as the small, curious Virginia saw her, out of the corner of her eye, a shadowy figure draped in her mothers suspicions of a somehow infamous suffragist past. How Woolf, with her second sense of a secret history of women which drifted through the London streets, would have loved the story! How she would have kindled to the evanescent metropolitan moment when that odd, dashing female past glanced against her own gathering feminist present! III.

The vote was not won until 1919, but other demands for equality were achieved in the late nineteenth century, including the opening of higher education to women. Newly-founded womens colleges and coeducational public universities sent out self-consciously New Women to work in the world as doctors, businesswomen, settlement house residents, artists, professors. This was the first generation of middle-class women to choose paid work

over what one of their number, Jane Addams, called the family claim. They were going to matter in the world. In the 1880s, the small Virginia Stephen and the middle-aged Mrs. Martin lived in a London where (Woolf later recalled wryly) a respectable woman was as likely to be seen alone in town as to walk outside in a dressing gown carrying a bath sponge. Similar rules of seclusion held in the United States. In both countries, however, they were buckling under the to-ings and fro-ings of New Women, independent-minded and often marriage-spurning daughters. One of the beneficiaries of the changing dispensation was Elizabeth Cady STANTONs daughter Harriot. Primed with her mothers fierce pride (STANTON modestly enjoined her daughter to love and work for humanity, to go on with my work when I am done, to make life easier in any direction for those who come after you), she received a stiff education at Vassar and then went on to Europe, where she imbibed the latest currents in the social sciences and soon married Harry Blatch, a kindly Englishman. Marriage and two daughters scarcely slowed her: she plunged into politics, working with the British suffragists at the point when votes for women were inseparable from broader issues of enfranchisementa historical moment that resonated with her mothers first involvement in the issue in the 1850sand then, briefly, with the Fabians. The Fabians were hostile to womens rights, but the mixing of labor, socialist, and womens concerns in concrete legislative proposalsand especially the keen interest in the plight of working womentaught her a practical and inclusive approach to electoral politics that went far beyond the strategies in use in the United States. When Blatch returned to America in 1896, Ellen Carol DuBois suggests, she was uniquely equipped by virtue of her maternal heritage and, more important, by the intellectual receptivity that heritage

had bequeathed her, to become a leader in transforming womens rights into its twentieth-century incarnation as feminism. In America, Blatch found a stultifying suffrage movement that bored its devotees and repelled its opponents: Most of the ammunition was being wasted on its supporters in private drawing rooms and in public halls where friends, drummed up and harried by the ardent, listlessly heard the same old arguments. Still, distinct from this network of staid matrons was an inchoate milieu of young New Women who defined themselves by the modernist term feminism. Imported from France, feminism denoted youth, psychology, sex, financial independence, self. And elements of the marginalized nineteenth-century critique of marriage resurfaced, this time with broader appeal to a generation more interested in expressing female sexual desire than in containing men. Blatch swiftly attached herself to this milieu and reinvigorated the scene in the city. She organized an Equality League, a small but influential group that brought together some of New Yorks most brilliant New Women professionals with gifted working women and labor organizers from the trades. The focus was on the bond that joined employed women across class lines, on the conviction that paid work, since it freed women from economic dependence on men, was the necessary basis for sex equality. The feminist movement of the nineteenth century had treated the working woman as a pitiable victim, imagined quintessentially as the starving seamstress in her garret. But feminists in the early twentieth century promoted a spirited, youthful working woman as the exemplar of emancipation, the feisty rebel girl of the picket lines to be admired, emulated, and supported. The tinge of youthful hope, the emphasis on a destiny outside marriage, the scornful rejection of conventional womanhood:

all this went into the militant suffragism of the rebellious daughters. By the early 1910s, suffragism was one of the largest and most varied democratic movements in the countrys history, encompassing a cast of characters that stretched far beyond the stalwart mothers of the nineteenth century. The superabundance of life with which STANTON had flirted now materialized in a politics that combined intellectual force with social eclecticism. Recruits from the socialists, the trade unions, African American groups, and the immigrant Left worked for the vote. Disgruntled high society ladies mixed with working women, New Women all. The militant movement that again surged out of New York City took womens rights into the era of modern electoral politics. There was plenty of the plain, dead-ahead slogging at which Anthony had excelled; Blatch learned the arts of legislative lobbying and door-to-door electioneering. Yet the range greatly expanded. Late-Victorian ladies had kept politics safely indoors, where they protected themselves from exposure to the smearing public eye. Blatch and her contemporaries took their campaign outdoors, in marvelous outdoor parades (all dressed in white marching down Fifth Avenue) and coast-to-coast all-female automobile entourages. They tapped the enlivening properties of commercial culture with suffrage hats, suffrage postcards, suffrage dances, even suffrage movies. The feminism of the daughters made some room for a feminism of the sons. The enthusiasm was contagious, and blended with the optimistic American spirit of the new. Even liberals and progressivesespecially young menwho ten years earlier would have been cool to the suffrage issue now warmed to its promise. At the The New Republic, just founded and buoyant with modern sensibilities, the editors gave over an issue in October 1915 to rousing support for the New York State campaign that Blatch orchestrated. A

string of male pundits proclaimed the value, the importance, the necessity of votes for women. Walter Lippmann, a card-carrying suffragist since his days at Harvard, believed that a great deal of change between men and women was in the works and he welcomed it. In an essay deeply sympathetic to feminism, he made suffrage the centerpiece of an all-embracing program: At bottom the struggle might almost be described as an effort to alter the tone of peoples voices and the look in their eyes. But that means an infinitely greater change, a change in the initial prejudice with which men and women react towards each other and the world…. Thought will not flow freely and inventively so long as it runs in the narrow channels of the older tradition. Rather remarkably, Lippmann proves to have been the first advocate of the no-more-nice-girls idea: This change women cannot bring about by being nice girls, dancing well, dressing well, becoming adept in small talk, marrying an honest man, supervising a servant, and seeing that the baby is clean, healthy and polite. They have to take part in the wider affairs of life. Their demand for the vote expresses that aspiration. Such encouraging male counterpartsfrom The New Republic, the radical Masses, whereverwere brothers to be welcomed. Older womenthe mothers so committed to the niceness that the daughters were fleeingwere more problematic. Suffrage veterans disliked the feminists sexually adventurous spirit and their eagerness to defy ideals of feminine propriety. For the new generation, however, the repudiation of older womens timidity before the gender status quo seemed a virtual requirement of the modern spirit. Ellen Carol DuBois has done more than any contemporary historian to bring to life the history of suffrage politics, and she sees a great deal at stake in these efforts to preserve the sense of a complex historical legacy. She is exquisitely attuned

to the undertow of disaffiliation between women in this high-flying political moment. Blatch, the paradigmatic daughter, was one of the few to see that repudiation of past womens efforts was not without its costs, that it depleted the present as well as emancipated it. For her, the challenge of finding a relationship to the legacy of the nineteenth century was personal and political. Blatch needed to be her own person as well as her mothers daughter, and she resolved this dilemma politically, by extending her sense of feminism beyond her mothers reachinto issues of womens paid work, for example, that the latter was ill-fitted to understand. At the same time, Blatch sensed that her mothers most heterodox ideas, spurned by her Victorian contemporaries, resonated with the requirements of female modernity. She deeply resented Susan Anthonys ascendancy, and the secondary status to which her mother had been relegated in the history of suffrage. She worked hard to restore the full range of STANTONs thought, which had been excised and pruned away to fit the single-issue focus of the late-nineteenth-century campaign. For Blatchs most searching feminist contemporaries, discovering the breadth and the complexity of STANTONs ideas was exhilarating. I have longed to rush in upon you with my excitement over your mother, the historian Mary Beard wrote Blatch after having raced through the collection of STANTONs papers that Blatch had amassed and deposited at the Library of Congress. Every item in those folders excites me. Here was a usable past that billowed out from the confines of Victorian maternalism. Even the reputation of Victoria Woodhull, whose role in suffragism had been consistently suppressed in the official history of the movement, made a comeback after her death in 1927; and STANTON, whose devotion to

Woodhull had been held against her for thirty years in the suffrage movement, gained luster through the association. IV.

This saga of generation and memory, of mothers and daughters, is the standard by which the convulsions of contemporary feminismor rather, postfeminismmust be measured. We are the heirs of a great tradition of intelligence, courage, and imagination; but you would not know it from the post-feminism that surrounds us. Characterizing Harriot Blatchs self-understanding when she was just out of Vassar, Ellen DuBois nicely captures the mentality: young, self-confident, and sure she had never experienced discrimination by sex, a century later she would have been called a postfeminist, exhibiting in equal measure arrogance and naivete about the condition of her sex. The postfeminist of the 1990s revolts against a fantasy of traditional feminists as older, puritanical, limiting, hectoringthe tight-lipped, overly serious, disapproving mothers. Indeed, the generational tension seems a little familiar. Here, again, surely, is a feminism of the daughters. But it is not that at all, because this construction of womanhood is fundamentally timid and trivial. A career decision, a wardrobe decision, a cosmetic-surgery decision: these are the occasions for the postfeminist call-to-arms. Sisters, fight for the legitimacy of your lingerie! Do not surrender your nail polish to the prudish mothers! You are free to swish your hips! Contemporary postfeminist writingsnotably the recent books by Katie Roiphe, Karen Lehrman, and Elizabeth Wurtzelbelong to the literature of adolescence rather than the literature of ideas. They confuse sex with life, as adolescents do. They are driven mainly by appearances. They are unable to grasp the requirements of the world outside the self. They defend little and

they build nothing. From these books the misogynists and the enemies of equality have nothing to fear. In the hands of the postfeminists, even Elizabeth Cady STANTON, the champion of dress reform, the inveterate foe of mens power over womens self-esteem, the fierce analyst of the ways in which the coercive power of men over women disguised itself within marriage, is complacently enlisted as just another advocate of female self-improvement. In this readingwhich is really the consequence of a lack of readingSTANTON joins Sharon Stone in a single sacred sisterhood. The strenuous worldview at the heart of the feminist tradition has been usurped by the epicene worldview of the womens magazines, which hides its indifference to critical thinking, its substitution of psychology for politics, its prescriptions for conformity, its enslavement of women to style, all behind the good and complicated name of feminism. This is not the feminism of the daughters. It is the feminism of the girls. Not bad girls, just girls; shrewd, not rebellious; ostensibly brazen, but essentially anxious. Confronted with these whining and self-indulgent outbursts, one longs for the spirit of SENECA FALLS, for the imagination, the empathy, and the ingenuity of the past, for the superabundance of life that is feminisms legacy.~~~~~~~~~By Christine StansellChristine Stansell is Professor of History at Princeton University. Her new book, American Moderns, will be published next spring.

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Item Number: 888132Many strong and varied reform movements took root and flourished in the Northern United States in the decades before the Civil War. Abolitionism and a movement for women’s rights arose in these years; temperance and moral reform crusades garnered both male and female supporters; utopian communities and other diverse religious groups strove to perfect society; and varied health reforms, from hydropathy to vegetarianism to homeopathy, promised to provide a safer and healthier alternative to treatments offered by “ regular” physicians. In this reform atmosphere, it is not surprising that a movement began to free women from the restrictive clothing of the antebellum period; in fact, many of these reform currents contributed to the movement to reform women’s dress.