Chapter Five

The Hour Not Yet, 1871 to 1888

At their Chestnut Street headquarters for the Philadelphia centennial, the National Woman Suffrage Association kept "an immense autograph book" for visitors. Greetings "from the old world and the new" in it showed that the women's movement increasingly was going global. Some international links had been part of the movement from the beginning: Scottish Frances Wright had set the example in the 1840s, while German Mathilde Anneke and French Jeanne (Jenny) d' Héricourt followed up by speaking to women's rights conventions in the 1850s and 1860s. After the Civil War, two feminist pioneers, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell and Ernestine Rose, returned to Britain and helped to spread the equal rights gospel there. For different reasons, African American Sarah Remond returned to the United States only briefly after the Civil War; disappointed with the reality of black life in the United States, she lived out the rest of her life in Italy.

The first attempt at globalizing the women's movement came in 1871, when Julia Ward Howe and Caroline Severance, both officials of the American Woman Suffrage Association, called a women's conference on international understanding and peace. Although most people did not know it, Howe had a long list of literary credentials before she became famous for the Civil War's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." That militaristic song, however, clashed with her own liberal views, and this fame motivated Howe to work for peace. Along with Severance, she helped organize a Woman's Peace Conference in London, and she assumed the American presidency of the new Woman's International Peace Association. Some of the foreign women who signed the 1876 autograph book in Philadelphia probably had read Howe's *Appeal to Womanhood*

Throughout the World (1870) and were part of her loose network, but no one properly up on this in the 1870s.

Another organization that began in the 1870s also would become international, but the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had its greatest effect in the United States. Its beginnings were less consciously planned than most organizations: in the winter of 1873–1874, women in small Midwestern towns began singing and praying outside of saloons, hoping to embarrass their men into spending less time and money there. The next year, Annie Wittenmyer, an Iowan who learned organizing skills in the Civil War's Sanitary Commission, linked these gentle protesters together into the WCTU. They met for the first time in Cleveland, and within a few years, the WCTU—which, unlike the women's rights movement, was endorsed by most ministers—would have 25,000 members, far exceeding the older suffrage associations.

Julia Ward Howe (Library of Congress)

The link between the temperance and suffrage movements, of course, was long and close. Although Amelia Bloomer's *The Lily* became known as the first feminist journal, she had founded it to advocate temperance (and her association with dress reform was accidental). Susan B. Anthony also initially worked as a temperance lecturer, and the refusal of men in the movement to allow her to speak at conventions was an important factor in her decision to prioritize women's rights. Countless other women who were involved in the temperance movement back in the 1830s and 1840s saw this goal coming to fruition in the post–Civil War years, and the move from temperance work to suffrage work was a natural evolution for tens of thousands.

The increase in the social and political activity of women meant an expansion of organizations. Until this time, the average woman belonged to virtually no groups; even church-based ones often were considered unacceptable if they were run by female officers. The endless round of meetings

that seemed so commonplace for the women's rights leadership was still an unknown activity for most women—but finally, 30 or 40 years after the travel and speaking taboos had been broken by the exceptional, mainstream women began to emulate them. The 1870s and 1880s saw an explosion of organization-building, especially in the North, which came to be called the club movement.

This movement's best-known pioneers were the Boston-based New England Women's Club and New York City's Sorosis, both of which began in 1868. Loosely defined, these groups were either "study clubs" that aimed to give women educational and literary access or "civic clubs" that aimed to improve their communities with libraries, kindergartens, parks, and playgrounds. Most clubs were stepping-stones toward full emancipation and usually did not endorse suffrage, but suffragists almost invariably found them to be helpful campaign tools. Someone within, say, the Peoria Women's Club or the Portland Women's Club would step forward to assist Lucy Stone or Susan B. Anthony when they came to Illinois or Oregon.

An 1874 lithograph published by Currier and Ives; the original caption read, "Woman's Holy War. Grand Charge on the Enemy's Works." (Library of Congress)

Julia Ward Howe, the first president of the American Woman Suffrage Association, was particularly active in the club movement. This cross-fertilization of groups was more typical of the American association, which tended to meet women where they were intellectually and gently prod them into greater politicization. That was not the style of the National, whose leaders were more impatient with the temporizers. To a fairly large extent during the 1870s and 1880s, the American association reached out to mainstream women and men across the country through its *Woman's Journal* and its popular writers and lecturers—Howe, Stone, Livermore, Stowe, and others. Meanwhile, the National concentrated on political action, especially in Washington, where they became adept at lobbying the nation's most powerful men. Susan B. Anthony headquartered herself at the Riggs Hotel in Washington D.C. where the owners

hosted her without charge partly because they believed in her cause and partly because she attracted other guests. In 1878, at the request of the National association, Senator A. A. Sargent of California introduced a slightly reworded version of the Sixteenth Amendment: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." This would be the lobbying target until its language finally was adopted by Congress in 1919. It came to be known as the "Susan B. Anthony Amendment," as other topics used up numbers 16, 17, and 18 before the "Sixteenth Amendment" finally passed. Senator Sargent became a hero to the women as year after year, he pushed for adoption, albeit unsuccessfully.

Literally millions of petitions would support the amendment—but at the same time, women also spoke against it from the beginning. In the same 1878 congressional session that Isabella Beecher Hooker and Dr. Clemence Lozier led the lobbying for the National Woman Suffrage Association, Madeleine Vinton Dahlgren, the well-pensioned recent widow of a Navy admiral and leader of the Anti-Suffrage Association, testified against the Sixteenth Amendment. Her objections, she said:

> ...are based upon that which in all Christian nations must be recognized as the higher law, the fundamental law upon which Christian society… must rest…. When women ask for a distinct political life, a separate vote, they forget or willingly ignore the higher law, whose logic may be condensed: Marriage is a sacred unity…. Each family is represented through its head…. The new doctrine…may be defined: Marriage is a mere compact, and means diversity. Each family, therefore, must have a separate individual representation, out of which arises…division and discord.

Dahlgren's supporters, although privileged enough that they were permitted unusual access to congressional chambers, remained few. Many more testified in favor of the Sixteenth Amendment, and they came year after year. This amendment and the city of Washington became the focus of the National association: its annual meetings were held there in January because, as Anthony said, "Congress is then in session, the Supreme Court sitting, and…

[it is] the season for official receptions, where one meets foreign diplomats.... Washington is the modern Rome to which all roads lead."

In 1880, however, the National emulated the American and took its show on the road. The suffragists held mass meetings in Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois—where they met in Chicago during the Republican Party's convention. It offered excellent networking opportunities, and the women even had an unusual rallying point when the Arkansas delegation to the Republican convention came prepared with this resolution: "Resolved, that we pledge ourselves to secure to women the exercise of their right to vote." It was a happy surprise, for not only was this resolution proposed by Southern men, but also its wording assumed the applicability of the Fifteenth Amendment—women had a right to vote, and the party merely was asked to enforce it. Not surprisingly, however, the resolution was referred to a convention committee, where arguments by Belva Lockwood and Susan B. Anthony failed to move it forward.

The National also sent representation to the convention of the Greenback Party, a party aimed at improving the economy by ending the gold standard, which limited the circulation of paper dollars. Although a suffrage resolution was presented by a female delegate, it was not even spoken to in committee. "Women were better treated by the Democrats at Cincinnati," according to Anthony, "than by the Republicans at Chicago." The Democrats gave the suffragists seats "just to the back of the regular delegates" and even a room "was placed at their disposal." Although the final outcome was the same, Anthony was pleased that the resolution committee placed no time limit on the women's appeals, even though adjournment waited until two in the morning.

Not surprisingly, the new Prohibition Party, which was formed in 1872, was the most welcoming to women. Even if they did not grant women the sort of full participation that Rev. Antoinette Brown and others had desired so long ago, the party's founders had old and strong philosophical links to the suffrage movement. In adopting the word "prohibition," the new party exhibited greater candor about their old goal, for their objective actually was the same as the "temperance" of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and other, older groups. None of the so-called temperance organizations had ever truly promoted the temperate use of alcohol and other addictive substances; instead, they wanted to enact legal bans or "prohibition" of alcohol.

The fledgling party in Massachusetts reached out to women when it first began by inviting them to participate in the 1876 party caucuses and, most surprisingly, its primary. Although it proved to be a one-time experiment and made little long-term difference, this unusual opportunity to vote in a party election did give some women a taste of political action.

Like the official suffrage organizations, the Prohibition Party would never grow very large compared with other parties, but, unlike the suffragists, its men could vote—and they would provide a bloc just large enough to force the major parties to pay heed to them. In the presidential election of 1884, for instance, the Democratic nominee received approximately 4,875,000 votes, while the Republican won 4,852,000. Had even a portion of the 150,000 that went to the Prohibition candidate gone to the Republican instead, he would have won. The party demonstrated that although it was small, it could be crucial—and women were assumed to be a part of it, for the era's politicos took it as a given that if women could vote, they would vote for prohibitionist candidates.

An engraving from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newsletter:* "A fair voter besieged by canvassers in Boston." (Library of Congress)

The result was that some prohibitionist men encouraged female political participation—as in the Massachusetts experiment—but only tentatively, and for limited purposes. Most male prohibitionists were so fundamentally conservative that they could not bring themselves to wholeheartedly support this change in the status quo, even if it would mean at least a doubling of their political power. Generally unwilling to concede the injustice of excluding women from voting, they were more likely to push for the "half-loaf" (or more accurately, a slice or two), allowing women to vote in municipal elections on liquor questions only. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, better-traveled and more sophisticated than many suffragists, did not completely share the usual temperance views—but even she was so accustomed to this political alliance that she never straightforwardly challenged her sisters on it. Instead, she was

scornful of male prohibitionists who opposed suffrage: "What people might drink," she said, seemed to them "a subject of greater importance than a fundamental principle of human rights." Ultimately, whatever slim support for suffrage that male prohibitionists offered was infinitely less important to women than was the opposition of the liquor industry and all of its powerful allies. Over and over again, women would lose suffrage elections because men were convinced that if women voted, the saloons would dry up. Especially in the West, this belief was devastating to the suffrage movement: already in the Kansas and Colorado referenda—long before the existence of a formal Prohibition Party—suffragists could see the negative effect when men went from the saloon to the polls and back again.

Even in the East, the prohibitionist views that many women held hurt the suffrage cause, and again the problem would grow worse instead of better with time. This was because the movement came of age at the same time that millions of immigrants began changing the national demographics. Prior to the 1840s, when the women's movement began, the United States had been almost wholly filled with Protestant descendants of British colonists. The Irish potato famine and revolutions in Europe began to change all that in the 1840s, as increasing numbers of foreigners began to arrive—many of them Catholic and most of them accustomed to the daily use of alcohol.

The Civil War and its aftermath slowed down immigration briefly, but by the 1880s and 1890s, millions were arriving every year. They came from southern and eastern Europe—from cultures very different from the British, Scandinavian, and German immigrants of the past. Few were Protestant; most were Catholic or Jewish. Virtually all considered a glass of wine to be a routine part of a meal. They were absolutely perplexed by prohibition, and as soon as they could obtain citizenship, their men would vote against it. Add to this the fact that most immigrant men were deeply conservative in their view of women, and a continual clash between these men and the suffragists became a foregone conclusion.

The clash was apparent long before the major wave of immigration and far from the cities usually associated with immigrants. Already in the 1867 Kansas campaign, the immigrant/prohibition factor hurt women. "The Germans in their Conventions," reported the *History of Woman Suffrage,* passed a resolution against liquor restrictions, which they linked directly to women: "In suffrage for women they saw rigid Sunday laws and the suppression

of their 'beer gardens.' " The Irish to whom George Train had appealed in that campaign also were fearful that if American women could vote, they would force an end to their ancient pub habits, and so these men, too, voted against suffrage.

An 1869 lithograph by Currier and Ives depicts many men's fears of women's rights: "The Age of Iron. Man as he expects to be." (Library of Congress)

The innate conservatism of both Irish and German Catholics on women's roles was reinforced by church officials. During their 1877 campaign, for example, Colorado leaders Mary G. Campbell and Katherine G. Patterson wrote that the Denver bishop "preached a series of sermons…in which he fulminated all the thunders of apostolic and papal revelation against women who wanted to vote." Like other clergy, he predicted that female political participation would lead directly to the destruction of marriages and homes. Campbell and Patterson, who like most suffragists were happily married, took particular offense at this attack by an unmarried man whose understanding of women and of family relationships was clearly limited:

> The class of women wanting suffrage are battalions of old maids disappointed in love—women separated from their husbands or divorced by men from their sacred obligations…. Who will take charge

> of those young children (if they consent to have any) while mothers as surgeons are operating…. No kind husband will refuse to nurse the baby on Sunday…in order to let his wife attend church; but even then, as it is not his natural duty, he will soon be tired of it and perhaps get impatient waiting for the mother, chiefly when the baby is crying.

Suffragists returned the antipathy they felt from most foreign-born men with language that would embarrass most Americans today. For instance, while presiding over meetings dedicated to civil rights, Elizabeth Cady Stanton used "ignorant" as an axiomatic adjective for "foreigner," and she unabashedly told a story denigrating Irishmen whose only consolation for their wretched lives was that they could vote while educated women could not. This kind of language was not limited to women of the National association: Julia Ward Howe, the first president of the American, had complained in an 1869 article on suffrage that "the Irish or German savage, after three years' cleansing, is admitted" to the voter rolls. Male liberals were capable of the same language and of even worse reasoning. The literary giant Oliver Wendell Holmes, for example, refused to support suffrage because enfranchising women would include the Irish women who invariably worked as servants in middle-class Boston homes—and Hannah, he said, already had enough power at the breakfast table.

Eastern urbanites were not the only xenophobes. In the 1870 debate on enfranchising women in the Colorado territory, women there had lamented, but nevertheless accepted, legislative objections that if "our intelligent women" were allowed to vote, then the government would be forced to extend the same right to "the poor, degraded Chinese women who might reach our shores—and what then would become of our proud, Caucasian civilization?" That most of these immigrants were men who might already vote seemed un-noteworthy—to say nothing of the fact that xenophobic American women could join their men to easily outvote foreigners of both genders. As in the case of black women and the Fifteenth Amendment, ethnic prejudice was apparently so great that Anglo-Saxon suffragists were unable even to consider an alliance with immigrant women. Instead of joining with these most oppressed groups, most suffragists preferred to blame their own delay on the public's association of them with these minorities. They allowed decades to pass while politicians used black

women in the South and immigrant women in the North as their excuse for the disenfranchisement of all women.

A signed photographic portrait of Abigail Scott Duniway. (Library of Congress)

In 1871, two years after she formed the National Woman Suffrage Association, Susan B. Anthony traveled to the still-wild country of Oregon. Abigail Scott Duniway organized Anthony's West Coast lecture tour in return for "one-half the gross proceeds," which she needed to support her disabled husband and six children. Duniway, who also published the increasingly successful *New Northwest,* founded the Oregon Equal Rights Society in 1870—the same year in which her Wyoming and Utah neighbors first voted and the same year in which the first legislative effort for suffrage began in Colorado.

Mary G. Campbell and Katherine G. Patterson, sisters who wrote Colorado's 1886 report for the *History of Woman Suffrage,* did a beautiful job of describing their land's early history:

> In 1848, while those immortal women…[met] in Seneca Falls… Colorado, unnamed and unthought of, was still asleep with her head above the clouds…. In 1858, when the Ninth National Convention of Women…was in session in New York, there were only three white women in the now rich and beautiful city of Denver. Still another ten years of wild border life…and Colorado was organized into a territory with a population of 5,000 women and 25,000 men.

Campbell and Patterson astutely pointed out that women's best opportunity to obtain legal rights was in the territorial stage, for life during such a regency-type government gave men some experience with living in a woman's world. Men

chafed at their loss of democratic rights in territories where governors were appointed instead of elected, and Washington second-guessed every action of the embryonic government. Men who felt they knew best what should be done in their home area instead had to wait for federal approval, and a taxpaying man "could no more enforce his opinion…by a vote than could the most intelligent woman." All of a sudden, these men understood what women were talking about.

Thus, at Colorado's fifth territorial legislative assembly in 1870, frontier men again showed more openness than those in the ossified East. Prompted by his "beautiful, accomplished, and gracefully aggressive wife," Gov. Edward McCook sent the assembly a message:

> It has been said that no great reform was ever made without passing through three stages—ridicule, argument, and adoption. It rests with you to say whether Colorado will accept this reform in its first stage, as our sister territory of Wyoming has done, or in the last; whether she will be a leader or a follower; for the logic of a progressive civilization leads to the inevitable result of universal suffrage.

Colorado's legislative majority that year was "unexpectedly Democratic, and almost as unexpected was the favor shown by the Democratic members." This partisan picture was so much the opposite of what had been expected that the vote for women came to be "characterized by the opposing Republicans as 'the great Democratic reform.' " But not quite enough Democrats fell into the column, and the proposal lost by one vote in the upper chamber. The House rushed to reinforce the loss with a two-thirds margin.

As they had elsewhere, women regrouped and carried on. Talk turned to achieving statehood during the centennial year of 1876, and that became the next target. On what turned out to be a bitterly cold January night in 1876, "a large and eager audience" filled Denver's spacious Unity Church long before the scheduled time. "The Rev. Mrs. Wilkes" of Colorado Springs, who opened the meeting, pointed out that women owned a third of the taxable property in that city, but had no voice in a recent election when men turned down a water system despite pollution that endangered public health. Lucy Stone sent an

encouraging letter to the group, as did Wyoming's Gov. John M. Thayer, who declared "woman suffrage in that territory to have been beneficial."

The women once again gathered thousands of petitions, and the next month the constitutional convention for the new state took up the question. With a large number of women watching, "some of the gentlemen celebrated the occasion by an unusual spruceness of attire, and others by being sober enough to attend to business." After voting down both full suffrage and partial suffrage for school elections, the men put the question on the fall ballot and—ten years after the suffragists' defeat in Kansas—another referendum attracted national attention.

Apparently unaware of the strain between them, Dr. Alida C. Avery, who led the Colorado effort, invited both Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony; both came, along with Henry Blackwell. Colorado women, however, deemed two Pennsylvanians, Philadelphia's Leila Patridge and Pittsburgh's Matilda Hindman, as their most effective campaigners. None were good enough, however, and women were soundly rebuffed in the fall: about 10,000 of the male electorate voted for suffrage, while 20,000 opposed it. Mrs. H. S. Mendenhall wrote an excellent analysis of her experience canvassing at the polls:

> The day led me to several general conclusions.... Married men will vote for suffrage if their wives appreciate its importance. (2) Men without family ties, and especially if they have associated with a bad class of women, will vote against it. (3) Boys who have just reached [adulthood] will vote against it more uniformly than any other class of men. We were treated with the utmost respect by all except [young men]...destitute of experience, and big with their own importance.... I have been to-day tempted to believe that no one is fitted to exercise the American franchise under twenty-five years of age.... The main objection which I heard repeatedly...was women do not want to vote.... Men were continually saying that their wives told them not to vote for woman suffrage.

That no one would drag these conservative wives to the polls and force them to vote against their will, of course, was rarely pointed out. The movement might have met with greater success if it had stressed this point: that it was neither