

Women of Two Countries

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Women of Two Countries

*German-American Women,
Women's Rights, and Nativism
1848–1890*



Michaela Bank



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Duisburg, May 2011

Abbreviations



AERA	American Equal Rights Association
AWSA	American Woman Suffrage Association
ECS-SBA-Papers	Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Papers
<i>FD</i>	<i>Freidenker</i>
<i>HWS</i>	<i>History of Woman Suffrage</i>
ICW	International Council of Women
KH Papers	Karl Heinzen Papers
MFA Papers	Fritz and Mathilde Franziska Anneke Papers
NAWSA	National American Woman Suffrage Association
NWSA	National Woman Suffrage Association
<i>NZ</i>	<i>Die Neue Zeit</i>
<i>PWRC</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention</i>
WCTU	Women's Christian Temperance Union
<i>WJ</i>	<i>Woman's Journal</i>

Introduction



In her correspondence with leaders of the US-American women's rights movement, the nineteenth-century German-American feminist Mathilde Franzika Anneke was frequently urged to support the reform cause.¹ During the 1860s until her death in 1884, this German expatriate was well-known among the community of early feminists throughout the northeast United States. Despite periods of ill health when she was unable to travel and was forced to remain at her home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the US-American feminist leaders made it clear how much they needed her. We can see this, for example, in Paulina Wright Davis's letter, which addressed Anneke as a "woman of two countries" and asked her: "I hope you will come officially as a delegate if your society are not afraid of the Union. If they are, come yourself as the representative woman of two countries as you are, and help us" (MFA Papers, no date). More dramatically, Mary Livermore also appealed to Anneke's support of the Cleveland convention in 1869: "The Germans are wholly against us, and you have the power to make an impression on them that no one else can. I do hope you will come. I cannot now change the advertisements—everybody expects you, and will be disappointed if you don't come" (MFA Papers, 6 September 1869). Davis's and Livermore's letters reveal Anneke's dual role in the US women's rights movement: She was considered to be a representative of German-Americans and spoke on their behalf, while at the same time she was called on to introduce the women's rights movement's interests to the German population. In another letter by Mary Wiley Bentley, representative of the Marathon Woman Suffrage Society in Wisconsin, the writer left no doubt that communication between Germans and the women's rights movement was urgently needed: "We know your name is a power among the Germans and since you find it impossible to appear before them personally can you not prepare an 'address' in your language which will embody the principle points and send it to us" (MFA Papers, 10 September 1880).

These appeals to Anneke are representative of the complex and ambivalent situation in which she found herself. She was a member of the women's rights movement in the US as well as a member of the German-American com-

munity, which, as Livermore states, was “wholly against” the women’s rights movement. The main reason for this opposition among Germans in the US was the assumption that US-American women’s rights reformers advocated nativism and temperance.² As foreigners, German-Americans’ ethnic pride was insulted by the nativist rhetoric of the leaders of the women’s rights movement and thus opposed the movement. German-American women like Anneke, Mathilde Wendt, and Clara Neymann, all of whom are the focus of my study, were put into the position of mediators and negotiators between the two antagonistic groups. How did they realize such complex roles as women between these opposing poles, and in what ways did this special relationship between ethnic community and social reform movement influence the role of German-American advocates for women’s rights in the reform movement? How were they able to make themselves heard when nativism would seem to have excluded them entirely from the discourse of women’s rights, and instead appeal to a “universal sisterhood” that guaranteed the solidarity of all women? This study proposes answers to these questions and intends to illuminate the power of nativism in the women’s rights movement. Nativism, as my case studies reveal, was more than a mere political tactic, as is often argued: nativism had a real impact on the relationship between ethnic groups in the United States and created a hierarchical sociocultural order in a transatlantic space. Paradoxically, however, nativism also became a source of power for Anneke’s, Wendt’s, and Neymann’s roles in the US women’s rights movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, as it enabled them to speak publicly in order to oppose and fight back against nativism.

Content and Effect of Nineteenth-Century Gendered Nativism

The nativist rhetoric of the women’s rights movement was of a particular gendered kind. It often drew colorful images of gender relations, and it usually reflected a female rather than a male point of view. In this section I will introduce some of the more common nativist arguments and focus on recent interpretations of this nativism to explain why we should hesitate when considering gendered nativism to be a political tactic. Instead, we should view it as a means of maintaining and regulating a hierarchical racial and ethnic order in which the white, native-born US-American was deemed superior. Troubles in interethnic relations provide proof of this.

When speaking of the women’s rights movement I refer to that reform community that first met in Seneca Falls on 19 and 20 July 1848, and continued to organize annual national women’s rights conventions during the 1850s. Its leaders were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia

Mott, Paulina Wright Davis, Lucy Stone, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, and Ernestine Rose. After the Civil War this movement reformed as the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), in alliance with former abolitionists, and in 1868/69 split into two rival camps, one led by Stanton and Anthony on the side of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), the other led by Stone, Livermore, Henry Blackwell, and Julia Ward Howe on the side of the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). Until 1890 the two associations worked side by side and pursued different political goals by different means.³

Stanton and Anthony's NWSA represented a broad feminist agenda including suffrage, education, marriage and divorce reforms, wages, and women's work. Compared to this, AWSA pursued contrary goals as summarized by Henry Blackwell, one of the main critics of Stanton and Anthony's radical approach to women's rights and one of the founding leaders of AWSA. He wrote in the first issue of the *Women's Journal (WJ)*: "In order to command the universal support which is essential to political success, Woman Suffrage must cease to be treated as a symbol of social innovations. It must be urged as a purely political question upon its own merits." Accordingly, he considered "theology, temperance, marriage, race, dress, finance, labor, and capital" inappropriate issues for the women suffrage platform (Blackwell 1870). Moreover, the two associations preferred different strategies for attaining suffrage. After the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869, the NWSA focused on petitioning for a sixteenth amendment, which would finally abolish any suffrage restrictions on account of sex. This strategy contrasted with that of the AWSA, which attempted to achieve suffrage on the municipal and state levels first before seeking a federal amendment. In 1877 Anthony presented her critique of the latter strategy and added reasons against it in a letter to Nancy Hall Allen, secretary of the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association:

The two great powers that are now solidly arrayed against the enfranchisement of woman cannot be overcome at the ballot box of any State. ... These forces are, first, what we term the Whisky Ring, comprising not only all the men who want free whisky, but all who want free gambling houses and free brothels, as well. ... And the other power is the ignorant, bigoted, priest-ridden and ruled masses. In Colorado it comprises the native Mexicans, the negroes, and the Irish and German Catholics, who, with a few noble exceptions, voted a solid "No." ... The States' rights process is wholly impracticable as well as wholly unjust. ... National supremacy over the right to the freedom and franchise of every class of United States citizens must be established, above and beyond the power of the several States to abridge or deny on any account, save those of idiocy, lunacy and crime. (Gordon 2003, 328–29)

Anger and rage seem to direct Anthony's critique. In her eyes, the principle of achieving the vote state by state would have to fail because of the incapacity of the electorate across the states, who were dismissed as ignorant, indifferent, and immoral opportunists. Ethnic—e.g., Mexican, Irish, and German—and African-American voters were included among such opportunists. This assumption in turn justified the demand of a national solution through federal amendment. Not the ignorant masses but the intelligent political elite would make the right decisions. Overtly, NWSA's political tactic of choosing the federal level over the state to achieve women's emancipation expressed their view of the vote as a citizen's right that could only be protected by the US constitution. Yet, Anthony's arguments in the quoted letter undermine and destabilize this seemingly universal concept because they introduce the vote as the privilege of an intelligent, disinterested, and morally superior elite.

Although divided by a deep ideological rift, the NWSA and the AWSA both represent strands of the women's rights movement on which I concentrate in this study, in terms of the women they attracted and the political programs they invented. I will deliberately avoid mention of the successful, however conservative, women's temperance movement.⁴ My interest is in the radical feminist movement that promoted suffrage and women's rights on the foundation of an egalitarian human rights approach, while simultaneously basing its case on nativist arguments, as the above quote from Anthony's letters demonstrates. The tension between inclusive human rights and exclusionary nativist ideas became crucial for German-American women's rights reformers, and this is the subject of my study.

My key sources for learning about and understanding the women's rights movement are the first three volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage (HWS)*, edited by Stanton, Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage in 1881 and 1886. Precisely because of the rifts in the movement, the sources have to be read with care. Written by only one-half of the movement, *HWS* represents a biased selection of its activities and the people involved. Although Anthony and Stanton encouraged Lucy Stone to contribute the AWSA's side of the story to *HWS* she declined the offer. The chapter about the American Woman Suffrage Association in volume two of *HWS* takes up just a small part of the work—only 106 pages—and was written by Harriot Stanton Blatch, Stanton's daughter. In her latest Stanton biography, Lori D. Ginzberg remarked on *HWS*: "In that story, Stanton alone articulated the demand for woman suffrage, and Anthony led the charge; there was only one major organization (theirs); and the differences of principle that led to division brooked no debate" (2009, 154). Having been intended as the first official text documenting the history of the women's rights movement, *HWS* is particularly interesting. What and who became part of this official story displayed the editors'—the women's rights movement's

leaders’—politics of inclusion and exclusion. It is exactly those politics that are relevant and significant for my subject of nativism and German-American women in the women’s rights movement.

To further elucidate the particular gendered form of nativism that resulted in immigrants rejecting the movement, I will analyze Stanton’s first speech given in the summer of 1848 at Seneca Falls. Much has been written about this historical event and its pioneering character for women’s public roles. The adopted Declaration of Sentiments was read—because it imitated the 1776 Declaration of Independence—as a document that introduced an “inclusive definition of political equality” (Marilley 1996, 47) while revealing the prejudiced nature of Jefferson’s thought.⁵ Women quoted the major premise of the natural rights law, namely, the individual’s pursuit of happiness, and applied this fundamental assumption to women without references to innate or acquired differences between women and men. Despite this assumed gender equality, the Declaration of Sentiments still stressed the uniqueness of women’s experiences in contrast to men’s and declared women to be “one-half the people of this country” who would form a natural alliance with each other.

In her speech, Stanton suggested that she spoke for all women in the world by positing that women were universally degraded and regarded as inferior to men. This also encapsulated the idea of women’s “sisterhood” as a union deriving from their shared political powerlessness and it implied “spiritual bonds” that united women on gender grounds.⁶ As Angelina Grimké Weld put it in a letter to the 1852 Woman’s Rights Convention in Syracuse, New York, “[w]e are bound together by the natural ties of spiritual affinity. We need no external bonds to bind us together, no cumbrous machinery to keep our minds and hearts in unity of purpose and effort; we are not the lifeless staves of a barrel which can be held together only by the iron hoops of an artificial organization” (Stanton, Gage, and Anthony 1889, 540–41). Her use of terms like “spiritual affinity” and “natural ties” resonated with the phrase that was commonly used later, “universal sisterhood,” a concept that was promoted in order to establish a broad constituency of women united by common interests.

However, in addition to this inclusive definition of women’s rights at the beginning of the movement, the Declaration of Sentiments and Stanton’s 1848 speech contained exclusionary and illiberal elements as well. These nativist and nationalistic biases are often overlooked. Judith Wellman’s interpretation of the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 points out the exclusions upon which the new feminist movement was based at the very moment of its inauguration, even as it appeared to question the meaning of such limiting practices:

This document is remarkable for what it excludes as well as for what it includes. Just as many male abolitionists had tried to sidestep the question of woman’s

rights, so these woman's rights advocates did not mention the question of race. Did they mean that all women, not only native-born white women but also black women, Native American women, and immigrant women, should be citizens of the United States? The Declaration of Sentiments certainly suggests so. (2004, 200–1)

But did the Declaration of Sentiments really suggest this? My reading of this document as well as Stanton's speech on 19 July to the all-female audience is that it is rather ambivalent toward the question of who they meant by the term "woman." I agree with Suzanne Marilley, who concludes that "[j]ust as Jefferson defined the rights and standing of men in universal terms but intended them only for native-born white men, so the authors of this early feminist tract also defined women's rights universally but meant them only for native-born white women" (1996, 50). Let me support this judgment by elaborating on Stanton's 1848 speech.

In its opening, Stanton's speech illustrated a concept of "universal sisterhood" and the universality of women's experiences in the following list of examples. She claimed that:

in every country and clime does man assume the responsibility of marking out the path for her [woman] to tread. In every country does he regard her as a being inferior to himself, and one whom he is to guide and control. From the Arabian Kerek, whose wife is obliged to steal from her husband to supply the necessities of life; from the Mahometan who forbids pigs, dogs, women and other impure animals, to enter a Mosque, and does not allow a fool, madman or woman to proclaim the hour of prayer; from the German who complacently smokes his meerschaum, while his wife, yoked with the ox, draws the plough through its furrow, from the delectable carpet-knight, who thinks an inferior style of conversation adapted to woman; to the legislator, who considers her incapable of saying what laws shall govern her, is the same feeling manifested. (DuBois 1992, 28–29)

This series of international examples can be understood as intended to universalize women's experiences and demonstrate their shared subjugation. However, it also suggested a hierarchy of cultures, with the Arab at the bottom and the democratic legislator (of the United States) at the top of society. We see how a nationalistic bias traversed the idea of "universal sisterhood" and changed its conception.

Throughout her speech, Stanton referred back to and elaborated on these hierarchical relationships between different cultures and nations. She gave examples of the physical equality of men and women and recalled women from India and Croatia who were subject to hard physical labor before she con-

tinued with a derogatory image of German men and women: “[A]nd it is no uncommon sight in our cities, to see the German immigrant with his hands in his pockets, walking complacently by the side of his wife, whilst she bears the weight of some huge package or piece of furniture upon her head” (DuBois 1992, 31). The humiliation and subjugation of foreign nationals culminated in the following statement:

We should not feel so sorely grieved if no man who had not attained the full stature of a Webster, Clay, Van Buren, or Gerrit Smith could claim the right of the elective franchise. But to have drunkards, idiots, horse-racing, rumselling rowdies, ignorant foreigners, and silly boys fully recognized, while we ourselves are thrust out from all the rights that belong to citizens, it is too grossly insulting to the dignity of woman to be longer quietly submitted to. The right is ours. Have it we must. Use it we will. (DuBois 1992, 32)

Though couched as a plea for oppressed women everywhere, Stanton’s speech ultimately reveals that the women who mattered most to her, as the collective subject of the reform movement, were the “American” ones, like her citizens of the United States. This view contradicted the initial concept of “universal sisterhood.” Her references to Noah Webster, Henry Clay, Martin Van Buren, and Gerrit Smith served to define a uniquely US-American identity. Male voters were judged against this standard of proto-US-Americans and it is interesting how Stanton introduced a rhetoric that mocked the rhetoric she quoted before, namely that of relegating Muslim women to the category of “pigs, dogs, women and other impure animals,” or, as she stated in a later speech of 1854, in the same group “with idiots, lunatics, and negroes” (DuBois 1992, 45). Those she did not consider “apt” US-Americans were those “drunkards, idiots, horse-racing, rumselling rowdies, ignorant foreigners, and silly boys,” whom she then lined up against those she did consider apt: Webster, Clay, Van Buren, and Smith. In doing so she expressed her own position as a woman and an US-American: her US-American citizenship raised her (even as a woman) above those men who were not considered “apt” citizens. Claiming women’s rights, and in particular the vote, by including negative stereotypes of non-US citizens suggested, deliberately or not, that native-born white Americans should be privileged above all foreign-born—male and female. The women’s rights movement was grounded equally in the ideas of women’s solidarity and of US-Americans’ solidarity, that is, in the exclusiveness of the movement for US-Americans.

Nativism of that kind was not uncommon in public discourse on women’s rights and can be found repeatedly in the speeches of Stanton and her co-workers in the cause. At times, the nativist prejudices and populist stereotypes

that were presented led to turbulent relationships between ethnic communities and the reform movement. Members of the ethnic communities who found themselves the targets of the women's rights reformers' nativism felt insulted and degraded. Their reaction often led to their refusal to support the issue of women's emancipation, not for reasons that had to do with their ideal of a gender order, but because of the nativist impetus accompanying the reform. Immigrant women who were active members of the US-American women's rights movement as well as members of an ethnic community served an important function in this situation. Their position as "women" and as "non-Americans" reflected the tension between "universal sisterhood" and nativism.

Until today, nativism has been defined first and foremost as an anti-Catholic sentiment that was primarily directed at the Irish poor and some of the German immigrants. Secondly, it has been viewed as an anti-Asian sentiment that was followed by an anti-all-immigrant sentiment that took hold in the 1880s. John Higham's *Strangers in the Land* (1955) and Ray Allen Billington's *The Protestant Crusade 1800–1860* (1952), which have become classics in the study of US-American nativism, both stressed the historical specificity of this ideology of mid-nineteenth-century xenophobia. Nativism, as Higham put it, translated the cultural antipathies against foreigners "into a zeal to destroy the enemies of a distinctly American way of life" (1981, 4). Nativism's core characteristic was the fear of any kind of disloyalty to this lifestyle on the part of newly arrived, non-American immigrants. In the dogmatism and centralist structure of Catholicism, nativists suspected a threat to the republican political system of the United States. Later in the century, poor new immigrants in particular were viewed as threats to the labor force and labor union interests of US-American workers. Preventing immigrants from holding office and from the ballot was the central goal of the American or Know-Nothing Party during the 1850s. The party's restrictive nativist proposals never gained enough support to enforce legislation, but nevertheless, as the century gradually drew to a close, nativist antipathies continued to grow.

Although it is rarely mentioned, women had particular nativist interests as well. They feared being overruled by the supposedly contrary interests of naturalized immigrant men in regions with a dense immigrant population. Their nativist images often depicted hierarchical gender relations among ethnic groups. Thus, immigrants were not only represented as a threat to established political institutions but also to the reform interests of the women's rights movement. While nativism in the women's rights movement resonated within a broader context of nativist prejudices, it also stood on its own grounds. For my purposes here, then, I will consider this type of nativism as a particular gendered subset of the broader phenomenon. In employing nativism, women also stressed their reproductive qualities and established themselves as the

ones who had given and would give birth to the US-American population. This notion was veiled in the rhetoric of “republican motherhood” that further highlighted the intellectual and moral superiority of Anglo-Saxon women.⁷ Their nativist mind-set elevated them to the social and moral summit of society and relegated nonnatives to the social and moral bottom. It was the interdependence of their US-American birth and their gender position as women that led these campaigners for women’s rights to create their own form of gender-specific nativism.

So far, interpretations and explanations of this specific nativism have highlighted its strategic value for those who applied it. Accordingly, nativism was understood as a political tactic that strengthened the women’s rights cause in certain historical moments, particularly during the era of Reconstruction. By propagating it, these interpretations neglected the real offense it caused and the power it had in determining both the relationship between the women’s rights movement and ethnic communities, and in the formation of a sociocultural order. Therefore, I argue that nativism was not a tactic, but an ideology. It powerfully determined a person’s position and undermined an ideology of equal rights and women’s rights as human rights, replacing it with an ideology of rights as privileges. It directly interfered with people’s lives, their desires to belong to and participate in society, and their desires to matter. In provoking the opposition of ethnic communities such as that of the German-Americans, nativism also even tended to weaken the women’s rights movement.

Early historiography in the field of women’s history built on an awareness that after women had won the vote in 1920 they neither voted as a unified block nor exclusively for emancipatory and egalitarian politics. We are well aware of the fact that gender is merely one position that a person assumes, and that a person’s social and political situation is conditioned by a multiplicity of factors—class, nationality, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, work, etc.—and that solidarity for political goals is founded on these different and at times changing aspects of subjectivity. Women since 1920 have realized their differences and accordingly destabilized the notion of a powerful political collective subject “woman.” Kimberlé Crenshaw summarized this revelation of the simultaneous interplay of multiple differences in the term “intersectionality” or “intersectional analysis.” She urged feminist, legal, and political research to highlight “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (1995a, 358). Intersectionality has since become an accepted paradigm not only in gender studies but also in the humanities and social studies. Beginning with the articulation of differences between women in the context of black feminism in the early 1980s and continuing with the critique of the women’s movement’s white, middle-class constituents and programs, the discussion of a collective subject “woman”

culminated in its total denial and the denial of the integrity of gender itself by Judith Butler. In pointing out the historical changes gender has undergone as a category of identity, Butler argues against the assumption of its coherence and consistency. Moreover, Butler states that “gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (1999, 6). As a result, the separation of gender from political and cultural intersections is impossible, or, as Elizabeth Spelman remarked:

Selves are not made up of separable units of identity strung together to constitute a whole person. It is not as if there is a goddess somewhere who made lots of little identical “woman” units and then, in order to spruce up the world a bit for herself, decided to put some of those units in black bodies, some in white bodies, some in the bodies of kitchen maids in seventeenth-century France, some in the bodies of English, Israeli, and Indian prime ministers. (1988, 158)

These assumptions about gender as an intersectional category in systems of classifications are a necessary condition for a critique of the nineteenth-century women’s rights movement, because they enable us to understand the differences within the assumed community of women and in turn help to advance any critique of the exclusiveness of the women’s rights movement, as well as its racist, nativist, and elitist mechanisms. They allow us to see that a cohesive and consistent identification as “woman” was impossible then, because any “woman’s” position continuously intersected with other simultaneous identifications.

An investigation of the critical literature in the field of historiography of the women’s rights movement gives the impression that such an awareness only mattered in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist circles. Ideas of the universality of the female experience and of mutual sisterhood supposedly characterized the first phase of the movement. Aileen Kraditor’s and Suzanne Marilley’s studies from, respectively, 1965 and 1996 both concentrate on the period from 1890 to 1920, shattering the image of the radical egalitarian feminist project by drawing the attention to elitism, racism, and ethnocentric prejudices. But what of the years prior to that period? From its beginnings on, as I showed in my analysis of Stanton’s 1848 speech, the movement harbored such elitist, racist, and in particular nativist prejudices. The period between 1848 and 1890 thus requires further investigation in order to counter the impression that feminism was then made up of thoroughly different ingredients.

The interpretations Kraditor and Marilley offer appear reasonable at first glance, yet, when considering the experiences and perceptions of immigrant

women and men, they seem shortsighted. Let me elaborate on these interpretations. Kraditor distinguished two different and irreconcilable arguments for women suffrage at the time in question. The first was founded on the belief that natural rights, which were the basis of suffrage as an expression of self-government in the United States, applied to women as well as to men. Accordingly, suffragists stressed ways in which women were identical to men, namely their common humanity. At times, even when male voters questioned the validity of the principle of “the consent of the governed”—because it then also applied to the crowds of male immigrants, blacks, and the supposedly inferior population of the Pacific islands conquered by the United States in 1898—women suffragists also began to rethink the meaning of natural rights. Kraditor argued that because men began to argue for the differences between men, common humanity no longer could serve as a core argument for political equality. In turn, women stressed their differences from those men from whom white, native-born, Anglo-Saxon men distinguished themselves, and instead identified themselves with the men of their own class and race for social and political ends. Kraditor labeled this second suffrage argument the argument of expediency, because it demanded the ballot not as a political principle but as a means to gaining other social reforms. These social issues, that is, the curbing of immigrants’ influences, or the purification of US-American politics, supposedly required the Anglo-Saxon, native-born, white woman’s vote (1965, 43–45).

Marilley picked up Kraditor’s criticism of US-American women’s rights advocates’ racism and elitism and argued that “to expect that woman suffragists could have been the vanguard of a radical egalitarian transformation of US-American politics severely underestimates the ideological, organizational, and behavioral obstacles they had to overcome” (1996, 2). Against Kraditor’s either-or opposition between equal rights and expediency argument, Marilley sought to identify those arguments that were incorporated in order to overcome resistance to the women’s vote, instead of focusing on proactive arguments within the movement itself. She stressed that female reformers were forced to direct their appeals to male voters because they needed men’s political support to realize women’s political claims to power. In the process of achieving that support, women’s rights advocates abandoned their radical appeals of universal equality for nativist and racist arguments. However, they did this without losing their liberal potential, Marilley claimed. Both the strategy of convincing opponents and the adoption of nativist and racist arguments resulted in a deliberate mainstreaming of the women’s reform movement around 1890, the time when the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) was founded:

Putting toleration first encouraged “respectable” prosuffrage women from the WCTU or women’s clubs to join. Courting these “respectable” members led suffragists to use nativist and racist themes that denounced the easy political inclusion of new male immigrants, supported educational qualification for the vote, and defended southern white supremacy. In short, the decision to welcome respectable white women was accompanied by disdain for growing numbers of black and working-class suffragists. (1996, 160)

Despite its originality, Marilley’s argument remains difficult because it leaves the overall impression that racism, nativism, and elitism in the nineteenth-century women’s rights movement only served to win men’s votes, and therefore that it was less objectionable.⁸ Similar arguments were made by Suzanne Lebsock (1993) and Ann D. Gordon (2007) in their work. Lebsock criticized southern feminists’ reluctance to give up an ideology of white supremacy. According to her study, women then did so in reaction to the antisuffrage leagues that feared a liberal feminism would result in the reversal of the racial order and the end of white supremacy. Lebsock concluded that although women’s rights activists in Virginia denied this false fear, they never once questioned the legitimization of the ideology of white supremacy. “By local white standards (of which the antis’ poisonous polemics were a good example), the suffragists’ strategy of denial was a moderate approach. To understand just how low the antis would go does not excuse the suffragists, but it helps us locate them on a political spectrum that would have been meaningful to white southerners at the time” (1993, 65).

Ann D. Gordon’s 2007 chapter about Stanton situated her elitist, racist, and nativist prejudices in the broader debate about US citizenship and suffrage. With reference to Stanton’s speech at the AERA convention of 1869 in New York, Gordon interpreted the biased justification for women suffrage as a “tactic in defense of universal suffrage” (2007, 114). Paradoxically, it was only because Stanton was convinced that universal suffrage was the one way to guarantee equal citizenship and citizen’s rights that she at times favored restrictions such as “educated suffrage.” This would have broken the male monopoly on voting and opened the way toward universal suffrage, Gordon concluded. Against the general assumption that “educated suffrage” was a principle propounded by elites to enhance their political power and majorities, Gordon responded that women and African-Americans also advocated this principle “when there was little hope for winning on the grand principle” (2007, 119). Nevertheless, women’s advocacy of educated suffrage was an expression of their self-interest as members of an elite group similar to the ways in which the groups in power sought to secure their own interests as the elite. Gordon