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Introduction: The Complex and Reciprocal Relations between Suffrage and Other Forms of Activism

Claire Delahaye and Fatma Ramdani

- 1 This edited issue of *Transatlantica* proposes to look at two different, yet closely intertwined questions. First, it will explore cross-currents, connections, and links between the campaigns for women's suffrage and other forms of activism led by women in the United States from the early nineteenth century to the 1970s. Second, it will reflect on women's struggles and some of the political venues used by women who could not vote, before or after 1920.¹ Therefore, it aims at reframing the long battle for women's voting rights, shifting away from the perspective of a single issue and a history of one path to success that led to the Nineteenth Amendment, to analyze women's multitudinous political and organizational struggles. This issue will thus focus on the mobilization for enfranchisement in the United States in the manner it was and still is related to questions of racial justice, the labor movement, and the fight for other economic, social, political, and reproductive rights for women and other minorities. By including gender, race, class, geographical, and cultural perspectives to the long history of the vote, the articles in this thematic dossier offer new narratives to the complex and reciprocal connections between the key grassroots movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These articles highlight that the history of US democracy goes beyond voting patterns and electoral politics, and that the history of suffrage is deeply connected to the long history of activism and protest in the United States.
- 2 In *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, Lisa Tetrault explains that after the Civil War, suffragists and women's rights activists organized in many different directions, and women's demands included much more than suffrage:

For a time, it was not clear what women's rights cause, or what version of suffrage activism, would most successfully vie for women's limited resources. The birth of a

divided and chaotic suffrage movement—*within* a rapidly expanding women's movement—left prominent suffragists scrambling to persuade other activists they represented the “true” version of women's rights. (7)

Tetrault demonstrates that by making Seneca Falls the origin story of the women's rights' movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony gave “a sense of order and inevitability onto the whole of nineteenth-century women's rights, onto what was actually a world full of contest and contingency” (9).² These remarks highlight that by writing *The History of Woman Suffrage*—and not the history of the women's movements—Stanton and Anthony chose to make suffrage the main focus of women's activism, a decision which has deeply affected the representation of women's struggles.³

- 3 This is not to say, however, that suffrage was not pivotal to women's claims. As many scholars have underlined, in the 1850s, suffrage “quickly became a demand central to women's equal citizenship” (Quanquin 84). But the history of women's suffrage is deeply intertwined with women's efforts to dispel all kinds of legal, political, economic, ideological, and cultural constraints rooted in gendered representations, that intersected with issues of race, ethnicity, class, or disability. This highlights that the road to suffrage was a complex one. “Suffrage was not a self-evident truth,” Isenberg reminds us, “but a complicated political goal infused with political and cultural ramifications of legal standing, civic personality, consent of the governed, and the legacy of imposed statuses derived from inherited political identities” (xv).
- 4 Following Isenberg's 1998 claim that “[t]he suffrage issue must no longer be isolated and privileged above all others,” scholars have expanded the scope of research on women's activism and argued that the story of women and the vote is much larger than the story starting in 1848 at Seneca Falls and ending in 1920 with the Nineteenth Amendment, while underscoring that the vote has also remained a central question of women's struggles for their rights (Isenberg xviii). Such recent scholarship includes Cahill's analysis of Indigenous, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic women, who linked the battle for the vote with other issues, such as tribal self-determination or the fight against segregation and lynching. Hanzlick's study of women's activism in Kansas shows how women pursued a variety of reform projects at the same time. Prescott and Thompson's article on the connections between women's suffrage and the birth control movement shows how the two issues involved similar arguments and assumptions about bodily freedom and citizenship.
- 5 Such an approach to the history of women's mobilizations calls attention to the fact that women's fight for suffrage often included, and converged with, the struggle for other political, social, economic, and reproductive rights. As women's activism took many forms, such a perspective allows for a more inclusive model, encompassing diverse actors, organizations, ideologies, and experiences. It furthermore illuminates women's quest for self-determination and sheds light on various practices of citizenship without the vote. Women were active in many social and political movements, participating in street assemblies, parades, riots, conventions, and signing petitions, exploring the many different ways they could express their voices. They also sought participation in local governance, engaging in political campaigns, supporting candidates, and, when they could, electing representatives or running for office. Their experience of self-determination was at the crossroads of collective organizing and individual activities, from very informal to more conventional practices. They discussed their social justice agenda in their homes and churches, on the markets, in parks, at meetings, conventions, and picnics. They debated issues, discussed strategies,

elected delegates, speakers, or leaders; they lectured, developed argumentations, wrote, and published. They took on the roles of journalists, lecturers, chairwomen, leaders, and community organizers.

- 6 The movements for women's suffrage, from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries, were protest movements *by definition*, as they expressed organized dissent from, and opposition to, women's political disenfranchisement and were disruptive of political order, since protest symbolizes a rupture with established politics. Women organized public demonstrations of disapproval, which could have disruptive potential. Such transgressive agitation points to the fact that, despite some of its ideological ramifications, women's suffrage remained a radical demand that challenged traditional gender roles and political norms.
- 7 In this introduction we offer a short presentation of thematic issues connected to the topic of women's protest and activism in the history of the women's suffrage movement, and briefly present the articles selected for this edited issue.

The Influence of Reform on the Development of Suffrage Agitation

- 8 There is a historiographic consensus on the role played by reform movements in the development of women's suffrage agitation in the nineteenth century, since women's suffrage historians have long acknowledged that the history of American women's struggle for the vote was deeply intertwined with the history of other reform movements (Parker). This multifaceted, intricate history deserves more research to uncover all its complexity, as activists simultaneously engaged in many campaigns. Historian Mary Hershberger, for instance, has exposed the links between women's activism against Cherokee removal and the mobilization of women for the fights against slavery in the 1830s. Catharine Beecher initiated the first national campaign against the Indian removal policy of the 1830s and flooded Congress with anti-removal petitions, making a bold claim for women's place in national political discourse (Hershberger 25). Following the ratification by the Senate of the Treaty of New Echota in 1836, 206 women, many of whom belonged to the recently formed Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society, submitted their own petitions to Congress to protest the deportation of the Cherokees. The anti-removal movement staged by women reveals a more complex picture of women's work in antebellum politics, and points at the interwoven connection between anti-removal campaigns and antislavery sentiment (Sklar, 2004).
- 9 The reform movements led by women included benevolence, abolitionism, temperance, and the reform of general and mental health institutions, as well as prisons. Reform movements could be catalysts for women's rights, yet not all women engaged in reform chose to join movements for women's rights.⁴ After the Civil War, women's organizations multiplied and built national and transnational networks more than before. The work of women's clubs and philanthropic societies prompted growing awareness of inequality (Blair; Johnson). Their concerted activism pushed for broad-based economic, political, and social reform, and fueled discourses on women's equality. In addition, the development of female reform organizations and the debates over women's suffrage were affected by the changes in the roles of government. Indeed, at the turn of the twentieth century, local, state, and federal governments

became more involved in the regulation of economic and social issues, which all impacted women's conditions without their consent.

- 10 The centennial celebrations of the Nineteenth Amendment incited critical reflections and reassessments of the prevailing narrative in terms of time, space, and the complex influences between suffrage and reform. Consequently, recent historiography has furthermore explored how reform movements intersected with suffrage. This sheds light on women's significant political, social, and economic roles as organizers, volunteers, and donors (Johnson). New stories have demonstrated the crucial development of women's activism in the western states (Egge, 2018; Hanzlick). As Alison Parker has noted, however, if the demand for suffrage emerged from a variety of other movements, "it was not necessarily clear that suffrage would become the preeminent issue" (21). Indeed, making suffrage the prime and sole reform concern was a concerted effort made by activists at the end of the nineteenth century, which created tensions and divisions among different activists, constituencies, and organizations. As Wendy Rouse reminds us in the introduction of her book focusing on the queer history of the women's suffrage movement, Mary Edwards Walker was furious at suffragists for restricting women's struggles to suffrage and refusing to include broader social reform. The exclusive focus on suffrage thus marginalized and even silenced many activists, and it participated in the invisibilization of women of color in the suffrage movement, since women of color could not, would not, and did not concentrate solely on the right to vote. They had a more complicated view of intraorganizational politics.

Race, Class, and Activism

- 11 Race structured women's efforts and opportunities in activism, as stated by Sklar:

Reform efforts by black and white women rarely overlapped, partly due to racist beliefs that excluded black women from white women's organizations, partly due to the crippling effects of black disfranchisement, partly due to the concentration of African Americans in the South, where ninety percent lived in 1890. Between 1890 and 1920, most white women focused their reform activism on the effects of industrialization in the north, usually implementing programs that required the cooperation of municipal, state, or federal governments. Since black workers, male and female alike, were excluded from industrial work until World War I, and since African Americans generally did not have access to state remedies for social problems either in the North or the South, black women reformers followed a different path, pursuing voluntary activity exclusively, and expressing more concern over issues affecting life in the rural South, especially lynching (Sklar, 1993 43-44).

She concludes: "So the story of white women's reform activism is a race-specified story in which their access to the resources of the state expressed their relatively privileged position in a race-segregated society" (44). This access to resources is best exemplified by the role played by the white women, privileged in race and class, who used their financial power to promote suffrage, women's education, and birth control (Johnson). At the turn of the twentieth century, while white women took a very visible and energetic reform role in US society, segregation, discrimination, racial violence, and injustice against black people intensified. White suffragists accommodated racist policies, and for some, the reinforcement of white supremacy was seen as an opportunity for women's enfranchisement (Spruill). Women of color had to confront

and navigate racism in reform movements dominated by white women, and often chose to start their own organizations. Black and white women worked within segregated and integrated organizations.

- 12 Drawing upon their long tradition of local activism and benevolent work in churches, schools, and even their homes, black women agitated for racial integration in key reform movements, including the white women's suffrage movement. The General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), which was founded in 1890, applied segregationist practices, of which the membership refusal of Fannie Barrier Williams from the Chicago branch of the GFWC in 1894 is a compelling example. Fourteen months of debate reversed the decision of Williams's exclusion (Lerner 447). Such exclusionary principles encouraged black women to mobilize on the national and international fronts and gave rise to a strong black women's club movement with the creation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in 1896 and the National Congress of Negro Women (NCNW) in 1935. Both Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the NACW, and Mary McLeod Bethune, the founder and first president of the NCNW, embraced women's suffrage, which they viewed as essential to elevating the conditions of black women and, consequently, to the advancement of the entire race (Cooper; Terborg-Penn). Thus, access to the ballot was viewed as one means of changing the status quo.
- 13 Working both within and on the margins of black male and white female organizations, women race leaders like Mary Church Terrell and Mary McLeod Bethune put their respectability on the center stage and agitated for social, economic, and political change. Terrell was never reluctant to express her radical ideas on women's suffrage in the black press. Nor did she avoid the circles of white women's suffrage organizations, like the National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA), where racism was rampant, and she did not hesitate to praise Elizabeth Cady Stanton's work (Jones, 2020 157-158). She also regularly attended the National Woman's Party's Silent Sentinels with her daughter Phyllis in 1917. Historian Paul Ortiz argued that Bethune utilized her school—the Daytona Educational & Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, which she founded in 1904 with just \$1.50—as a space to bring together black ministers and activists to strategize about how to mobilize the community to vote. Bethune held night classes for local community members, teaching them to read in order to pass literacy tests for voting. She was never deterred by the Ku Klux Klan's threats on her campus and was even bold enough to confront them. Stories of Bethune riding her bicycle across town to collect money to pay poll taxes show her fierce determination to encourage black people to vote and the significant contribution she made to the politicization of the African American community (Robertson 37). Until the end of her life, Bethune continued to rally support for black politicians. Black women's activism for the ballot encompassed a broader social justice framework.
- 14 Recent historiography has helped uncover the complex history of American democracy and minority women's grassroots efforts to fight for their political rights, which had long been obscured by a whitewashed narrative of the Nineteenth Amendment (Jones; Cahill). As Cathleen D. Cahill's recent work highlights, putting women of color in the foreground of the fight for suffrage reconsiders the suffrage movement as an unfinished struggle. The perspective of women of color also presents other views of national construction and US citizenship, as was the case for Chinese American or Japanese American women for example. Hence reframing the history of the vote in the

United States allows for a new understanding of US politics, as Martha Jones underlines: “The story of African American women and the vote overturns basic assumptions about the history of American political culture and women’s suffrage” (2019 30).

- 15 Class also impacted the ways women engaged in reform and activism. As Claire Delahaye argues, suffrage history was linked to women’s economic power, the history of capitalism and labor history, as well as the history of the unpaid work women have done at home in the name of domesticity (2021 25). Class dynamics influenced women’s degree of involvement in activism, the ways they chose to carry out their work, and their goals. Working women protested their working conditions and organized for change in their daily lives as laborers and exploited workers. As a self-conscious social group, they organized in trade unions and mobilized around protective and welfare measures. Their skills, tactics, and experience were valuable to many suffrage organizations. Middle- and upper-class women usually had more time and money to devote to reform. Some suffragists attempted to build alliances with the labor movement. In the late 1860s, Stanton and Anthony sought to collaborate with the budding labor movement, but their effort failed, partly because of their ignorance of class antagonism, partly because of the trade unions’ hostility to women’s entry into their trade (Keyssar 179). In the early twentieth century, Harriot Stanton Blatch tried to “fuse women of different classes into a revitalized suffrage movement” (DuBois, 1987 35). Further research is also needed to uncover local dynamics between different groups of women, in the footsteps of Susan Englander’s analysis of class conflict and coalition in the California suffrage movement.

Practices of Citizenship without Suffrage

- 16 This edited issue investigates the political nature of activism and explores the processes through which women constructed themselves as civic agents without suffrage. Many women were indeed performing and practicing citizenship without the vote (Spires; Jones, 2018), thereby creating a rich and vibrant political culture, which unfolded in different contexts and organizations, before and after 1920. It included the efforts made not only by black women, but also Native women, Asian American women, and Latina women to struggle for the vote after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which did not offer protection for women of color.⁵
- 17 Women’s contributions to politics took many forms: they were organizers within political parties, social and economic movements, and religious communities. They formed their own labor unions and also organized autonomous institutions, exploring and shaping new paths to political rights. As historian Kathleen McCarthy argued in her 1990 *Lady Bountiful Revisited*, women “most often turned to nonprofit institutions and reform associations as their primary point of access to public roles. In the process, they forged parallel power structures to those used by men, creating a growing array of opportunities for their sisters and themselves” (1). Since the eighteenth century, women had written and published works about their political rights, debated them in meetings and conventions, and in many ways had exercised political rights without possessing the right to vote. Philanthropy played a great role in shaping political practices, including creating public policies and services. In the Progressive Era, women worked in municipal reforms, settlement houses, led beautification, public

health, and education campaigns, and fought for labor legislation. Women thus influenced national legislation and institutions even when deprived of voting rights, as noted by Paula Baker: “Indeed, from the time of the Revolution, women used, and sometimes pioneered, methods for influencing government from outside electoral channels. They participated in crowd actions in colonial America and filled quasi-governmental positions in the nineteenth century; they circulated and presented petitions, founded reform organizations, and lobbied legislatures” (621).

- 18 These forms of activism show that despite the survival of a rhetoric of separate spheres, many American women were indeed involved in politics. Furthermore, women’s organizations often took on many tasks that governments neglected. The many different ways American women were participating in institutional politics and the many different forms of suffrage complicate the picture. Women interacted with political institutions, parties, and government, as they lobbied elected politicians and candidates to pass legislation, supported political parties and participated in their activities, attending parades, meetings, and social celebrations; they were also elected to local positions.⁶ Partial suffrage gave some women only local electoral rights, allowing them to vote on school matters, taxes, or for municipal government. Others could vote only in presidential elections. Thus, the political contrasts induced by federalism and sectionalism shaped US women’s political experiences.
- 19 Women’s voluntary associations also played a central role in the vitality and practices of US democracy. For instance, the process of debates, deliberations, and decisions within these movements could accustom women to the exercise of democracy, including the right to vote. Furthermore, reform organizations gave women some power over social and political life, and a sense of participation in public affairs and political processes, even though they encountered many limitations. These organizations staffed and led by women provided a social site to discuss, experiment with, and implement change in a society in flux. They constituted structures of negotiations between individuals and governments. These women’s organizations participated in nation-building and the rise of the welfare state.
- 20 Women’s political and public roles were made very visible during the Civil War, the First and Second World Wars, since wars systematized and bureaucratized some of women’s voluntary efforts. Through the Civil War Sanitary Commission, Northern women built a network of volunteers that raised money for the war effort and conscripted nurses for the battlefields. Sociologist and political scientist Theda Skocpol has argued that the US welfare state was created in the late nineteenth century by women. As the Civil War Pensions started to be curtailed, middle-class women took the lead in the emergence of what Skocpol describes as an embryonic “maternal” welfare state with the creation of mother’s protection pensions by state governments. Suffrage organizations actively cooperated with the US government during the First World War. During the Second World War, the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), which was originally created as a volunteer division in 1942 and authorized the training of 440 women from all socioeconomic backgrounds as officers, proved to be an empowerment space. Mary McLeod Bethune, then the only woman in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Black Cabinet, who served as an advisor for the WAC, played an influential role in the selection of forty black women. In the midst of World War II, while American society was marked by the persistent unfair racial policies, including in the army, and when most African Americans were prevented from voting, such leadership gave black women an active

voice in the double V campaign, promoting them as first-class citizens fighting for democracy at home and abroad.

The Influence of Activism on Women's Political Empowerment: Crosscurrents, Interconnections, and Alliances

- 21 How did women's forms of activism influence their demands for suffrage? Through their involvement in reform, women could experience both opportunities and limitations. When participating in mixed organizations, many women felt that they were confined to secondary roles or excluded from high positions. Moreover, it has often been said that women's suffrage appeared necessary when women realized that their power without the vote was limited. As underlined by Rebecca Mead writing about women in Minnesota in the 1880s and 1890s: "When involvement in reform activity quickly revealed the practical limits of indirect influence, women demanded the enforcement power of the vote" (3). Involvement in reform movements shaped women's organizational skills, political experiences, and ideas and practices about democracy and citizenship. Indeed, reform movements circulated ideas about political rights, including freedom, justice, and equality. Thus, women's involvement in reform movements furthermore helped redefine gender roles and build women's consciousness, confidence, competence, and sense of self-worth. In short, women's organizing and activism actually gave women power. Such dynamics are epitomized by women's engagement in the abolitionist movement in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. These women were bold enough to reject conventional gendered standards and speak out in the public sphere. But more specifically, the abolitionist model of radical agitation became an inspirational tool to obtain complete change and advance their own struggle for equality (DuBois, 1978 38-39). Black and white women collected signatures on petitions calling for the abolition of slavery, toured the country—some even traveled abroad to lecture against slavery—, and raised funds for campaigns. Reform tied women together, creating a community of women, as they were more successful in creating their own organizations than trying to exert influence on existing institutions. Those networks were central to the success of suffrage by allowing alliances and cooperation between different women of different social and racial backgrounds.
- 22 The reciprocal influences between women's organizations also played out across borders. Bonnie Anderson contends that it is impossible to think about the Seneca Falls Convention as a purely American event. More specifically, the abolitionist movement helped extend the network of allies to include a community of male allies and women solidarities across borders working towards framing true democratic ideals. Looking at the transnational connections broadens our understanding of the dominant national narrative of the women's suffrage movement and other demands (Rupp). As regards men and women's alliances, they had started and consolidated during the early stages of the transatlantic abolitionist movement. Men's ally activism, as defined by Hélène Quanquin, influenced the debates within and outside the movement. Men like Frederick Douglass were key promoters of women's suffrage and allies that fueled the conversations on social justice and American democratic ideals. In terms of transnational activism, key American female suffragist leaders were the founding

members of the main women's international organizations, like the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WWCTU), founded in 1884, the International Council of Women (ICW), founded in 1888, and the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), founded in 1904—later renamed International Alliance of Women (IAW)—, or the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), founded in 1915. Within these organizations, women forged solidarities despite their differences. They primarily viewed their fight for the right to vote in America as a transnational struggle in terms of strategies, information dissemination, and methods of militancy. International connections constituted a strong mobilizing tool when the American women's suffrage movement was confronted with what is known as the doldrum era. The tactics of parades, marches, lobbying petitions, and civil disobedience exported from the British suffragettes marked a new step in the legitimization of the American suffrage movement, with women becoming visible public actors (Greenwood; Delahaye, 2011 85-88). As Katherine Marino shows, transnational activism included a Pan-American network, which advocated women's suffrage, equal pay for equal work, maternity rights, and broader self-determination. International activism continues to participate in reframing women's political identity.

- 23 There were ideological intersections, circulations of ideas, and rhetoric interplays between reform movements (Heider). For example, the idea that women were morally superior, or had to endorse a public role as moral guardians, had a long-lasting impact on both the reform and suffrage movements. Such ideology, that was rooted in Republican Motherhood, the Cult of Domesticity, or True Womanhood, had framed women's reform in terms of the fight against immorality or the defense of the home, translating moral authority into political influence. Thus, many reform movements were steeped in what would be described today as the politics of care—or what Baker called “nurturance and compassion” (625). At the end of the nineteenth century, maternalist ideologies influenced women's suffrage movements. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel described maternalist ideologies as “ideologies that exalted women's capacity to mother and extended to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance, and morality” (1079). Suffragists therefore argued that their participation in politics would clean up government or halt corruption. Such representations have had long-lasting impacts on the way women's roles in politics are perceived. Other movements were more radical in their deconstruction and restructuring of gender norms (Rouse). Some women joined radical and anarchist movements to better promote women's emancipation. For example, Emma Goldman was a social and labor reformer, a revolutionary anarchist. Unlike Stanton or Anthony, she did not consider that women's suffrage would relieve working-class women of their daily burdens. As a feminist agitator for free love and free speech and a staunch advocate of birth control, she defied the 1873 Comstock Laws which prohibited the distribution of birth control literature and devices. Goldman was convinced that birth control was essential to women's sexual and economic freedom. In her opinion, women's emancipation encompassed more than political rights, but was part of a broader struggle for justice. Activists debated important concepts such as feminism, maternalism, or citizenship within their organizations, and experimented through their political practices. There were ideological affinities or controversies between reform movements.

Women's Suffrage and Conflictual Ideologies

- 24 The women's suffrage movement was affected by the United States' political environment, which made its ideology more complex, diverse, and even contradictory. Historians have investigated women who were involved in progressive reforms, but not all women's politics were implicitly liberal and some were opposed to reform, women's suffrage, or a more inclusive equality. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt admitted in a letter that only about one-third of women supported suffrage, one-third opposed it, and one-third did not care about it (Peck 353). Women's reactionary politics included anti-suffragists (Marshall), but also activists involved in both the women's suffrage movement and nativist, racist, or imperialist movements (Sneider). The intersection between women's suffrage and conservative politics created complex dynamics, which question the prominence of democratic ideals in the suffrage movement. Indeed, women who supported suffrage could also be involved in undemocratic or reactionary movements. One of the central historiographic issues is whether women supported illiberal movements by convictions, by strategic choices, or both. Some suffragists argued that the political context required them to support racist policies for the Nineteenth Amendment to be passed, but the lack of support for women of color after 1920 would rather imply that they were happy to comply with them. Women's suffrage and American imperialism were inextricably intertwined phenomena. For instance, American women's access to the ballot in western states was deeply rooted in white supremacy and settler colonialism ideologies (Lake). With the view of reinforcing their entitlement to full citizenship and political rights, American suffragists like Carrie Chapman Catt embarked on a civilizing mission of newly possessed territories (Sneider). All in all, the history of white suffrage organizations at the national level is a history of opposition and compromise with reactionary politics, from the failure of the Equal Rights Association after the Civil War to the choice to woo the South for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, to white women's refusal to continue the struggle alongside black women after 1920. Furthermore, suffragists' desire not to alienate American public opinion or politicians led them to sacrifice some of their most radical demands, marginalize voices of dissent, or exclude women who were seen as not conforming to gender and sexual normative ideals (Rouse).
- 25 Suffrage movements were ideologically diverse because of the specific historical context in which they developed. Furthermore, they created numerous alliances with other movements, which could have an impact on their political orientations, strategic choices, but also perceptions. This proved tricky in certain parts of the country. For example, Sara Egge explains that some Minnesotans opposed women's suffrage because they associated it with temperance, all the more since many suffragists belonged to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Egge, 2020 117). Therefore, some reform movements also provoked opposition to women's suffrage, while others were not as inclusive and rejected women's demands.

A Long-Lasting Perspective

- 26 The multidimensional history of the women's suffrage movement and its legacy are evident in the reassessment of women's strategies and involvement as organizers

within political parties, social, economic movements, religious communities, progressive and conservative organizations. It is also worth questioning the impact of women's public engagements on female enfranchisement and other social, economic, and political issues. Such an outlook highlights the diversity of women's political participation and shows that the full suffrage history is both complicated and troubled.

- 27 This edited issue highlights the centrality of excavating the records of ordinary activists and local organizations so as to offer a more complete and complex view of the women's suffrage movement through alternative, silenced narratives. There are still unacknowledged contributions of Native, Asian, and Latina women that need to be identified and included in the complicated history of the reform and women's suffrage movements. Strong gendered political structures have created barriers to women's representations and participation in politics and still constitute obstacles to women's empowerment. Today, voter suppression bills, also known as Jim Crow 2.0 laws, as well as the current backlash regarding women's reproductive health and rights, with the pending reversal of the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, point to the centrality of gender issues to democracy—and explain why anti-democratic forces are so keen to focus on gender issues. In fact, the enforcement of reproductive or voting rights depends on the impact of Supreme Court decisions and the Court has in turn supported or opposed these rights—most often leaving minorities at the mercy of voter suppression and abortion outlaw. This clearly demonstrates that a true American democracy remains an unfinished agenda. As Keyssar argued, the history of suffrage in the United States is, in fact, the story of a struggle still to be won by the country's marginalized groups, whether they be ethnic minorities or women. The history of women's activism and protest in the United States highlights tensions between resistance and emancipation on the road for self-determination. Better understanding this history also questions the possibility of collaborations and concerted action between organizations and individuals in the fight for labor, racial, gender, and climate justice today.
- 28 This edited issue opens with Allison Lange's paper "The Legacy of the Nineteenth Amendment Centennial," which reminds us that the centennial celebrations were an occasion to complexify and share this history in innovative ways. The shift to digital centennial commemorations during the COVID-19 pandemic fostered new conversations within the scholarly community, as well as collaborations with journalists and institutions, thus reaching out to a much broader audience and paving the way for new forms of writing this history.
- 29 Auréliane Narvaez's article, "Défendre le corps des femmes. Libre pensée et féminisme aux États-Unis (1820-1920)," reconstitutes the role anti-conformist feminist activism played in the conceptualization of radical free thought between 1820 and 1920. Female nineteenth-century freethinkers like Ernestine Rose, Juliet Stillman Severance, or Voltairine de Cleyre resorted to a universalist rhetoric to better challenge religious, political, medical, and patriarchal structures. Despite their marginalization within the suffragist movement, these female freethinkers nonetheless managed to gain an authoritative voice in the public sphere as they advanced radical claims about women's political, economic, and sexual rights.
- 30 Virginia Scharff's essay, "Race, Gender, and Empire: The Strange Career of Women's Voting Rights in Wyoming," decenters the narrative from the North to the western state of Wyoming. Virginia Scharff explores how Reconstruction politics and settler

colonialism converged to facilitate the adoption of women's suffrage in the late 1860s in the West. In doing so, she debunks the popular narrative that the granting of suffrage to women was a progressive step in American democracy.

- 31 The article by Jeanne Boiteux, "The Boston Women's Educational and Industrial Union: When Business Undergirded Claims to Political Participation (1877-1920)," which draws upon the concept of citizenship performance, demonstrates how the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) of Boston used their entrepreneurship activities to participate in local politics, and managed to construct an economic and political identity on their own terms. The WEIU leaders managed to link up their demands for political and economic equality through their cooperation with other businesses, as well as municipal and state governments.
- 32 The paper by Jean-Louis Marin-Lamellet, "Now will someone kindly tell me what is her proper sphere?" Woman Suffrage, Women's Political Participation and the Populist Movement," shifts the focus back onto western states and examines how Populism in the western Plains provided women involved in the Farmers' Alliance with a political space to act as civic agents without suffrage. Its main argument is that female grassroots activists as well as female leaders played a prominent role in the male world of electioneering. The suffragists involved in the populist movement and their support of a radical economic agenda is another demonstration of women's transgressive dynamics in politics. As they mobilized for a broader justice agenda, these women gained valuable political experience in the public sphere while facing a strong backlash from conservative forces.
- 33 The paper by Judy Wu, "Pacific Feminist Imaginaries: The 1977 US National Women's Conference and the Politics of Territorial Representation," shows how women's struggle for political rights can take on different directions and momentum at different times and in different places. Judy Wu contends that such a struggle goes beyond a limited black and white lens. The Pacific Territorial meetings of the 1977 Houston National Women's Conference represented other sites of female political empowerment and self-determination for women from American Sāmoa, Guam, and the Trust Territories. The latter used interregional meetings to express their gendered critiques of their colonial relationships with the US nation, challenge militarized patriarchy, and call for island sovereignty. In addition, they managed to craft their own political agenda on women's issues by reclaiming matrilineality and bringing to the fore reproductive rights, sexual freedom, and bodily integrity, as did the late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century radical women freethinkers examined by Auréliane Narvez. Judy Wu argues that the activism and scholarship that emerged from these groundbreaking conferences shaped Pacific feminism for decades to come.
- 34 All the papers in this edited issue highlight that new histories of women's activism in reform movements and their impact on the suffrage movement are still waiting to be written.⁷

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NOTES

1. Indeed many women could vote before 1920, and many could not vote after.
2. Many scholars have offered a critical perspective on Seneca Falls as an origin story, including Isenberg, Jones, Terborg-Penn, and Wellman among others.
3. Making women's suffrage the main focus of the history of women's struggles was linked to many issues. Among them was the fact that women's involvement and contributions in reform

movements were overshadowed by men's leading agency and visibility (Beard). For instance, in her autobiography, Ida B. Wells complained that W.E.B Du Bois deliberately excluded her from the list of the founding members of the NAACP, thus silencing her actual contribution to the civil rights movement (Duster, 322).

4. Debra Gold Hansen's analysis of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society in the 1830s shows that women abolitionists split over their differing vision of women's roles and rights.

5. Native Americans gained citizenship in 1924 with the Snyder Act, but many states prevented them from voting by using poll taxes, literacy tests, or claiming that living on a reservation did not mean that one was a resident of that state. First generation Asian Americans did not have citizenship until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. All women in Puerto Rico gained the vote in 1935. The 1965 Voting Rights Act aimed at providing nationwide protection for voting rights. The 1975 amendments to the 1965 Voting Rights Act required certain jurisdictions to provide ballots and voting information in other languages than English.

6. See for example Dinkins; Edwards; Gustafson *et al.*

7. Some of the papers selected for this this edited issue of *Transatlantica* were first presented during the international conference "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty? Woman Suffrage and Women's Citizenship in the Long History of the 19th Amendment" organized at the Universities of Lille and Gustave-Eiffel (Marne-la-Vallée) in January 2020.

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