

## Reading Guide –The Birth of Feminism and the Women’s Suffrage Movement

Last week we examined working-class sexuality in rapidly expanding commercial centers, and debates over who should control women’s sexual and reproductive lives. This week we continue our focus on early twentieth-century contestations over sexual order by looking closely at the emergence of feminism as a radical social movement and the political campaign for women’s suffrage. As you read (and watch), try to imagine what it was like to live in this tempestuous era. Keep in mind, too, our earlier conversation about “progress” in history. The achievement of suffrage for American women was anything but inevitable c. 1910. What forces (from individual agencies to large structural changes) helped lead to passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920?

### Required Texts

- Nancy Cott, “The Birth of Feminism,” from *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (1987) 12- 50.
- Christine Stansell, “Modern Times: Political Revival and Winning the Vote,” from *The Feminist Promise: 1792 to the Present* (2010) 149-176.
- Frances Willard Equates Learning to Ride a Bicycle with Opening New Frontiers for Women, in *Modern American Women*, Ware, ed, (1989) 15-19.
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “A Feminist Challenge to the Privatized Home,” in *Modern American Women*, Ware, ed. (1989) 108-113.
- Mabel Dodge Luhan, “Greenwich Village Bohemians,” in *Modern American Women*, Ware, ed. (1989) 127-130
- Suffrage Militant Alice Paul Goes to Jail, in *Modern American Women*, Ware, ed. (1989) 150-156.
- WATCH: *One Woman/One Vote* (1995) 60min.

### Questions to Consider:

Historian Nancy Cott is a familiar figure from week one. This week we read her account of the emergence of feminism in the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century. What historical contexts helped shape the early development of feminism in the US? What kinds of women and men embraced feminism? Which movements/philosophies/figures influenced and inspired early American feminists? As you read, think back to previous weeks. How do familiar themes (essentialized conceptions of gender, racial and class differences between women, notions of publicity and privacy, and so on) play out in Cott’s chapter? What do you think accounts for these changes or continuities?

Christine Stansell is a leading historian of women and gender in the US. This week we read a chapter from her book, *The Feminist Promise*. Stansell, like Cott, discusses the differences between twentieth-century feminism (led by rule-breaking “New Women”) and the older and more genteel nineteenth-century “Woman’s Movement.” What were these differences? What contradictions and challenges (from both outside and inside the movement for suffrage) did these New Women face? Unlike Cott, Stansell focuses more on the political scene in the early decades of the century, and the strategies and tactics embraced by New Women as they fought to achieve suffrage. What were these strategies? Which worked, which didn’t, and why?

*One Woman, One Vote* covers some of the same terrain as Cott and Stansell, but with the added benefit of visual sources. How do images add to the power of the women’s suffrage story? What can they teach us about the tactics suffragists employed to win the vote and the lived experience of

American women before feminism? Read the Alice Paul source alongside your viewing of this documentary.

The Paul text and the other primary sources this week offer a closer look into the lives and ideas of reformers and radicals discussed by Stansell and Cott. What can Francis Willard (aka, Frank)'s account of her adventures with her bicycle (aka, Gladys) teach us about the lives of American women before feminism entered the scene? What does she mean when she claims that (before learning to ride Gladys) her "mental and physical life were out of balance"? What do you think of Gillman's critique of the privatized home? Could her proposal for a socialist alternative form of housing work? What forces prevented this vision from catching on? Drawing on Gillman, and also Mabel Dodge Luhan, consider the role of socialist thought in shaping the early development of feminism in the United States. How did feminists and other radicals navigate between socialism, liberalism, European militancy, free love, temperance, maternalism, and other (often contradictory) movements and ideologies that were "in the air" during the first decades of the twentieth century?

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