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Summary of PhD thesis titled

Visions of the Protestant family in the writings of 19th century American suffragists

When thinking about the history of the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the first things that come to mind are the Gold Rush, the Industrial Revolution, the economic crisis, the War with Mexico, the Civil War, or finally – the Great War. This period was also a time of democratization of social and political life, the influx of immigrants and the expansion of settlement into the western areas of the American continent. It is also in the 19th and early 20th centuries that the events in women's history – their path to civil rights and, in particular, the right to vote in federal elections and state elections. It was in the mid-nineteenth century that American women began to push ever more boldly to legally obtain the full rights that men had in this country. Despite the important role they played in family and social life, they faced numerous legal restrictions. Lack of the right to vote, restrictions on access to education and control over property and finances were among the many obstacles to their full participation in public life. In the second half of the 19th century, the first organized women's rights movements in the US[1] began to form. The suffrage movement, made up of various organizations and individual female activists, sought to change the existing legal order based on the Bible and Protestant tradition.

The purpose of this work is, through an analysis of the writings of selected female leaders and organizers of the suffrage movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States, to show their views and the evolution of the women's rights movement against the socio-political background of the United States. This work focuses on analyzing the image of American suffragists as a collective and presenting the motives of individual female activists, which is supplemented with analyzing their biographies. As women activists used to say, "personal is

[1] The territory of today's United States differs from the area the country covered in the 19th century. At that time, the borders of the forming state were in the process of dynamic formation, expanding as a result of treaties, territorial purchases and westward expansion. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this work, the term "USA" and "United States" is also used to refer to the historical borders of the country.

political." In other words, personal experiences influence the actions of individuals in the legal and political spheres[2], so learning about the biographies of female activists is important to understand the suffrage movement as a whole. The questions the author asks are, first, what was the activists' approach to religion? To what extent were Protestant values important to them for spiritual reasons, and to what extent did they turn out to be a quick and simple strategy for effectively communicating of women's values in a Puritan society? Did education have a significant impact on shaping their views? What were the triggers for their activities outside their own homes? Was the subject of the Protestant family an important part of their argument, or did they focus more on political rights because it was too early to question women's responsibilities in the private sphere? Was the suffragists' agenda forward-looking, or more appropriate to 19th century values? Were they aware of their privileged position in American society as white Protestant women, or did they feel they were a discriminated minority, identifying with other politically and socially disadvantaged groups? Answers to the above-mentioned research questions are presented by analyzing content from biographies, correspondence, articles and speeches by activists of the American women's rights movement. In order to understand their motivations and arguments, it is necessary to study their history – childhood, background, family history, upbringing or education, taking into account the background of the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States.

In the work *Visions of the Protestant family in the writings of 19th century American suffragists*, in five chapters, introduction and conclusion, the author tries to show, through the biographies of the most important female leaders of the movement, the desires and demands of the majority of ladies belonging to Protestant churches, living in cities and agricultural settlements, who were able to read and write (which was not common among the many Catholic immigrants settling in the US, such as the Polish or Italian group, and later the Mexican group) to have the same rights as men in this country. These rights include the right to vote in local and federal elections, the right to divorce, education and schooling, to decide for themselves and to be paid equally for their work, i.e. to act according to the slogan of self-responsibility. Some of the demands proclaimed by the suffragists were fulfilled first in individual states and later at the federal level. Often only after

[2] T.A. Thomas, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Feminist Foundations of Family Law*, New York University Press, New York 2016, p. 3.

World War II, but also at the beginning of the 21st century, especially when it comes to changing the position of women in the private sphere.

In choosing the topic for this dissertation, the author initially aimed to show the role that the Protestant family played in the thought and activities of suffragists, but in the course of analyzing sources and literature related to the suffrage movement, it became clear that the vision of the family was not central to their interests. The limited amount of source material dealing specifically with this issue, as well as the wide range of other topics raised by the activists at public meetings, influenced the final form of the work, which considers the Protestant family and a woman's place in it only as one aspect of the suffragists' activities and writings. The surviving writings of American suffragists from the 19th and early 20th centuries featured many topics that were central to their struggle for their rights. Although these authors addressed issues concerning the role of women in the family, it was not the subject of the Protestant family that dominated their thought and propaganda – the suffragists were equally focused on issues related to women's equality in the public space, that is, topics concerning the labor market, access to education and, above all, political rights. It should also be noted that while the issue of the role of women in the family was not completely ignored in the suffragists' agitation, it appeared in the context of other, more pressing issues of the time. The suffragists' agenda on voting rights and equality in the public sphere dominated their rhetoric, but this did not mean that issues related to private life were irrelevant to them. Family was not a major theme in the activists' writings, and there was insufficient material on the subject to fully devote this dissertation to them. The issue of the Protestant family therefore appears in the work, both when citing excerpts from the biographies of the suffragists and when analyzing their writings, but not as a leading topic. The development of issues related to the family and the role of women in the private sphere in the United States did not fully take place until the 1960s. At that time, women whose ancestors had won political rights forty years earlier were able to focus more on issues related to inequality in the private and professional spheres.

The purpose of this paper is also to show the differences between the suffragists analyzed. In the scholarly literature, the women's rights movement is often presented as a monolith – a tight-knit group of ladies focused on one most important goal, which was for women to obtain legal suffrage. This topic was important, but not to the same degree for all female activists. Other issues that activists addressed in their agenda, such as a woman's place in the family, in the labor market

or education, are often overlooked by researchers and scholars of suffrage movement. The purpose of this work is to show the views of female activists in these spheres as well. The author also wants to answer the question of whether and how the views of female suffragists evolved over the years, and in what ways they differed from each other in their speeches and writings.

The motivation for this work was the need to create a comprehensive analysis of the arguments of American suffragists and their path to achieving civil rights through legal means, in particular the right to vote. The purpose of the work is not only to show the path of suffragists to emancipation, i.e. legal political participation, but also to show them against the background of key socio-political and economic events of the 19th and early 20th century in US history, as well as concepts such as Manifest Destiny, American individualism, and exceptionalism. These had a significant impact on the formation of the suffrage movement, its strategies, popularity and ultimate success in the struggle for voting rights and social equality. An analysis of these contexts is crucial to a full understanding of the motivations, actions and achievements of suffragists in the United States in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The primary sources used in this dissertation include available printed materials found in Polish and American libraries: historical documents, letters, diaries, newspaper articles, Internet sources, encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, speech records, as well as scholarly works, studies and monographs on the suffrage movement. In this dissertation, the author primarily used the translated works of American researchers listed in detail in the following paragraphs, as well as studies of the history of the United States by Polish historians such as Zbigniew Lewicki and Krzysztof Michałek. Research methods include historical analysis, archival research and interpretation of primary and secondary sources. This work aims to enrich the knowledge of the suffragists of the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in the Polish context, as it is the first such comprehensive analysis of the American women's rights movement in Polish science. In the author's opinion, the Polish historical literature to date lacks synthetic studies that discuss both the biographies and activities of the most important members of the women's rights movement and their impact on the formation of civil rights.

The period of the 19th and early 20th centuries in women's history analyzed in this work is referred to as the so-called first wave of feminism[3], but in the following chapters the author does

[3] First-wave feminism was a period of activity of women's rights movements in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the Western world. It focused on legal issues and granting women the right to vote in elections, but also education,

not use the word "feminism", because in the period described, this word did not exist in the popular consciousness, and the activists did not describe themselves as such.

By the word "suffragists" which means a woman who fought specifically for the right to vote in elections (mainly in Great Britain and the United States), the author refers to all the ladies described in this work, even though they were not always closely associated with suffragism[4], that is, advocating specifically for legal voting rights for women. However, they all fought for political rights, to assemble and speak publicly, which consequently led to claiming suffrage, hence the decision to use the term "suffragist" alternately with the word "activist" in this work. Similarly, the expressions "suffragism," "women's movement," "suffrage movement" are used as equivalents.

The biographies and writings of six mainstream women activists, whose peak of activity was between 1835 and 1920, is analyzed in this work. All of these ladies were active in the in the north-eastern part of the USA and most of them belonged to or were active with the largest women's organizations: The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) active between 1869 and 1890, and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in existence between 1890 and 1920, formed from the merger of the aforementioned NWSA and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) active between 1869 and 1890. The exceptions were sisters Angelina Emily Grimké Weld (1805–1879) and Sarah Moore Grimké (1792–1873), who ceased their public activities before the first women's organization was formed in 1869. In this work, the author focuses on the so-called White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASP), as they were the backbone of the suffrage movement in its early days and were the most numerous women's organization in the 19th century, having the greatest political influence. Between 1890 and 1920, more than 75 % of NAWSA members identified themselves as WASP, and by 1915 the

labor and property ownership. In the United States, it was closely associated with the abolitionist movement. "First Wave Feminism," Literary Theory and Criticism, https://literariness.org/2017/10/27/first-wave-feminism/ (accessed October 20, 2020).

[4] Suffragism (from the Latin word *suffragium* meaning suffrage) is an activist movement active in Great Britain and the United States that aimed to fight for women's suffrage in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Suffragists were mainly members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), founded in 1903 in Great Britain. The suffrage movement sought full or partial suffrage for women and was a key part of the first wave of feminism that ended up achieving these goals. In Great Britain, suffragism was first mentioned in Mary Wollstonecraft's book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). "Women's Suffrage," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/woman-suffrage (accessed 25.07.2024).

organization numbered some 2 000 000[5]. By comparison, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC) had 100 000 members in 1924.[6]

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there were other important women's movements in the US that contributed to American women's civil rights. These included immigrant and black women's associations. Both wings of the suffrage movement were strongly associated with opposition to slavery, but their female leaders sometimes expressed views that reflected the racial attitudes of their era. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) believed that a long process of education would be necessary before those she called the "lower orders" of former slaves and immigrant laborers would be able to participate meaningfully as voters in US political life.

The author realizes, following the work of Angela Davis, that the black American women's movement has been marginalized by the mainstream activists. Davis' book, *Women, Race, and Class*, is a collection of thirteen essays on the American women's liberation movement from the 1960s until the book's publication. It also touches on the subject of slavery in the United States. Davis uses Marxist analysis to examine the relationship between class and race and capitalism in the United States. She criticizes the women's liberation movement for being led by and exclusively for white middle-class women, to the exclusion of black women, other women of color and other social classes. In her book, Davis also comments on white women's participation in the abolitionist movement and describes the women's club movement. The author also examines the role of black women slaves in the US economy. She writes that slave women performed similar work as slaves, both groups shared manual labor tasks and participated in abolitionist activities. Black women, however, were additionally required to do housework, as were women of other races. In her analysis, Davis argues that women's liberation should also include their participation in wage labor.[7]

When writing about the women's rights movement, it is impossible to ignore the issue of the anti-suffragists, who were an important but lesser-known part of the story, opposing the granting of suffrage to women, believing that their social role should remain in the domestic and family

[5] A.M. Scott, A.F. Scott, *One Half the People, The Fight for Woman Suffrage*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1982, p. 39.
[6] R. Gavins, *The Cambridge Guide to African American History: the National Association of Colored Women*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016, pp. 208–209.
[7] A.Y. Davis, *Kobiety, rasa, klasa*, Karakter, Krakow 2022.

sphere. They argued that politics was too violent and demoralizing for women, and involvement in it would destroy the established traditional social order. The main organization of anti-suffrage women in the US was the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS), initially led by Josephine Dodge (1855–1928) and Minnie Bronson (1863–1927), and from 1917 by Alice Hay Wadsworth (1880–1960). The issue of anti-suffrage women is not described in detail in this work, but their presence shows that the struggle for women's rights was more complex than is often assumed, and they themselves were not unanimous on the issue.

Publications on the suffrage movement (and the feminist movement more broadly) in the United States are virtually absent from the Polish scholarly literature. The known studies on women's history in Polish are micro- and macro-historical analyses written mainly in the last half-century, especially in the last six years, since the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Polish women gaining suffrage after World War I. They focus both on women from particular social groups (peasant women, landowners) and on a holistic account of women's history, but only of Polish women. On the subject of the so-called first wave of feminism, i.e. the suffrage movement, there is a need for additional research on the independent voting rights of previously overlooked racial, ethnic and class minorities, but this is increasingly being undertaken. While black women's struggle for the right to vote has already been fairly thoroughly researched, the activities of white working-class and immigrant women remain largely undiscovered.

Traditional narratives about the so-called first wave of feminism focus on the activities of national women leaders and their campaigns for the right to vote in federal elections and state legislatures. What is lacking, however, are local studies, analyses of state campaigns and different perspectives, such as those of black Americans, ethnic minorities, immigrant women or women from lower social classes. There is a lack of conducted research on the reasons for the stagnation of the women's rights campaign after 1920. The main narratives are dominated by a description of the movement's activities as a monolith from the perspective of two of its best-known activists, namely Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), which detracts from the grassroots activities of many female state activists and makes their experiences often underutilized in research. Focusing on the struggle led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony concerning primarily voting rights obscures other important aspects of women's activism in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States, such as the family, the labor market, education and women's economic conditions. Too many studies focus on describing the

suffrage movement as an institution, portraying it as a monolith and the activists as similar women with virtually identical demands, or limiting their agenda to describing mainly the struggle for suffrage. Therefore, in this work, the women's rights movement is not analyzed from a macro perspective, but through the lens of its activists as individuals.

In chapter one of this work, the author focuses on the aforementioned Angelina Emily Grimké Weld and Sarah Moore Grimké, who were among the first women in the US to speak out publicly among people of different genders, backgrounds and skin colors. These activists are best known for their abolitionist activities (and they came from the from the US South), but they also spoke out on women's rights. They ended their public activities around 1838, ten years before the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. They did not work closely with the other suffragists described in this work, but it was to the Grimké sisters that they dedicated their publication on the history of the women's rights movement, the 6-volume *History of Women's Suffrage*. The Grimké sisters found their field of activity in abolitionist organizations and religious organizations. They used their faith and religion to justify the need to give women civil rights. Their attention was not focused on getting women the right to vote, but they were the first women to address legislative bodies on this issue in the form of petitions.

Chapter two focuses on Victoria Claflin Woodhull (1838–1927), the first woman stockbroker on Wall Street[8], owner of a magazine dedicated to women's issues, "The Revolution," and the first-ever female candidate for US president. Victoria Claflin Woodhull can be considered one of the more controversial figures in the women's rights movement, mainly due to events in her private life and her advocacy of the idea of so-called free love[9]. Woodhull was active in the New England region, but she was the only one of the suffragists analyzed here not from the eastern part of the country, but from Homer, Ohio, and her family was not wealthy. The suffragists never fully accepted her views. She worked with the emerging labor unions and believed that women's right

[8] Wall Street – a financial district in the Manhattan borough of the city of New York in the United States, home to the country's most important financial institutions, including the New York Stock Exchange, numerous investment banks or brokerage firms. The Wall Street Stock Exchange itself was founded in 1817 and still exists today. "Wall Street," Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Wall-Street-New-York-City (accessed September 15, 2021).

[9] "Free love" – a social movement that accepted all forms of love. The original goal of the movement was to separate the state from the private affairs of citizens, such as marriage, birth control and adultery. The movement assumed that such issues should be the concern only of committed individuals, and not of the state apparatus. In the United States, the idea was popularized in the 19th century by Christian socialist John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886). W. McElroy, *The Free Love Movement and Radical Individualism*, "Libertarian Enterprise," 1996, p. 1.

to vote would not change women's fate unless they gained economic freedom. Toward the end of her life, she disavowed most of her views related to "free love" and turned to faith.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan Brownell Anthony are, in turn, the protagonists of the third and the fourth chapter of this work. They are undoubtedly the most widely known activists associated with the American women's movement. The ladies worked closely together. Susan B. Anthony was responsible for organizing the national women's movement, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote and gave good speeches. Together they set up the structures of the women's rights movement, including international ones. It was Elizabeth Cady Stanton who was responsible for organizing the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls in 1848. Susan B. Anthony, towards the end of her activities, turned mainly towards the topic of women's gaining the right to vote, but she was also involved in the temperance movement and was close to women's education because of her profession. Both suffragists participated in the abolitionist movement at the very beginning of their activities, but moved away from it when leading American abolitionists announced that the liberation of slaves was more important than giving women the right to vote, and asked the suffragists to stop lobbying for their cause.

Carrie Chapman Catt is a suffragist whose story is devoted to the last, fifth chapter of this work. The youngest of the activists of the period under analysis, she took leadership in the women's rights movement took over in 1915, barely five years before women were granted suffrage. Therefore, most of her activity is devoted to one goal – winning women the right to vote in federal elections. It was her strategy ("Winning Plan") that contributed significantly to the success of the women's movement. After the adoption of the 19th Amendment to the federal constitution, she played a key role in making women aware of the need for active citizenship, especially in the form of voting in elections. To promote her ideas in this regard, she founded The League of Women Voters in 1920.

In summary, the author concludes that the women's rights movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States was not a monolith, and female activists differed in their pursuit of the goal of obtaining public and political rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The history of the struggle for American women's rights was made not only by white Protestant women from the upper classes of the New England region. The picture should be supplemented by economic and racial divisions among women, as well as the experiences of minorities, including black and immigrant women.

Activists at the forefront of the American women's movement in the 19th and early 20th centuries were typically raised in the ideology of Protestant churches, came mainly from wealthy homes and traditional Quaker and Protestant families. These were women reasonably educated, energetic and resourceful. Two of them (Sarah Moore Grimké and Susan B. Anthony) did not start families of their own, although while caring for the children of their relatives, they recognized the benefits of motherhood. During their public appearances, they tended to avoid touching on topics that could diminish their popularity, but they did address the issue of divorce and the need for gender equality in both family life and social and political life. They noted that women living in the western states were more independent in their views than those from the east coast. They all agreed with the abolition of the marriage formula about a wife's "obedience" to her husband, against which they protested in their churches, claiming that such words had no place in the Bible. They also demanded the right to free speech.

The second half of the 19th century, after the abolition of slavery in the United States, was a time not only of increased immigration from Europe and rapid industrial development, but also of the expansion of secondary education and state universities. Several states began to establish high schools and colleges in addition to free primary education, which contributed to the growth of women's independence and their influence on the cultural and economic life of the country. Universities such as Harvard, Columbia, Yale and Princeton adopted German teaching models, introducing the natural and physical sciences, although Protestantism still played an important role. Technical and social sciences gained in popularity.

Changes were also taking place in the US Congress at the beginning of the 20th century – in 1913 the 17th Amendment to the Federal Constitution was introduced, establishing universal suffrage for senators. Issues related to women's right to vote ceased to be merely the subject of academic discussions and agitation by suffragists roaming the new states. The latter often triggered debates in the U.S. Congress over a proposed amendment to the federal constitution guaranteeing women the right to vote, advocated since 1869.

Seeing little progress in this area, suffragists tried to direct their efforts toward state assemblies. In 1869, the territory of Wyoming granted women the right to vote. In the last decade of the 19th century, the states of Colorado, Utah and Idaho did likewise. Subsequently, women's suffrage was granted by the states of Washington, Oregon, Kansas, Arizona, Nevada and Montana, and Illinois allowed women to vote in presidential elections. Among other things, the victory of Woodrow

Wilson, (1856–1924) a Democrat and the son of a Presbyterian pastor, put pressure on eastern states to support demands for women's rights. In the summer of 1920, the 19th Amendment to the 1787 U.S. Constitution was promulgated, granting women the right to vote. It became part of U.S. federal law.

One of the key conclusions that emerged from this analysis of the collected material is that the suffrage movement was not a monolith, and its participants often differed on issues of strategy and goals. Examples of diversity in the women's movement can be found not only in the separate organizations, but in the National Woman Suffrage Association itself and the differences in views between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Although the two women were close colleagues and played a key role in organizing the women's movement, their views did not always coincide. Stanton sought more than Anthony to link the struggle for women's rights to broader social reforms. Anthony, on the other hand, in her later years focused almost exclusively on the fight for women's suffrage, recognizing that without this basic achievement, other reforms in the country would not be possible. The fact is that Susan B. Anthony began her work for women's rights by advocating for reforms in education, and obtaining suffrage was not initially her goal. However, her views evolved and Susan B. Anthony began to convince numerous NWSA members to focus only on gaining women's suffrage, which brought the organization closer to AWSA's demands. This was a conscious step, as Anthony realized that the more demands the struggle for women's rights included (e.g., a woman's place in marriage, divorce law, education), the fewer supporters the suffragists had, as the main purpose of their action became diluted.

Similarly, Victoria Claflin Woodhull, one of the most controversial figures in the women's movement, had her own unique vision of what should be a priority in the fight for women's rights. Her conviction that the right to vote would not have a significant impact on women's lives without ensuring their economic freedom set her apart from other activists at the time who focused mainly on political issues. Woodhull was involved in labor movements and trade unions, which was unusual for suffragists of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Carrie Chapman Catt, the youngest of the figures discussed, was focused almost exclusively on the struggle for women's suffrage from the very beginning. In a historical context, this is understandable, since she assumed leadership in the suffrage movement at a time when obtaining this right was within reach. Chapman Catt introduced effective strategies that led to the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, and her later efforts were aimed at making women

aware of the importance of their newly gained civil rights, resulting in the founding of the League of Women Voters.

Although they worked for the emancipation of women, the Grimké sisters focused primarily on abolitionism. Their activities were aimed at abolishing slavery, and the subject of women's suffrage was not at the center of their attention. Nevertheless, their courage in speaking before mixed audiences not only in churches and using the Bible to challenge the social norms of the time had a significant impact on the later development of the women's rights movement.

In the course of writing the paper, the author asks herself questions about female activists' attitudes toward religion, education, family, and awareness of their privileged position in society and attitude toward other minorities. In the rhetoric of the suffragists, gaining the right to vote was not the most important goal for all ladies. It was later activists in the women's movement, such as Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt who believed that the movement should focus only on this one issue, so as not to differentiate its message too much. Most ladies (including the two mentioned above) knew that the right to vote was nothing without education and the right to full participation in the labor market and equality with men in the private sphere. They knew that without this, their vote in elections would be worthless.

All of the activists had Protestant roots, and some of them, like the Grimké sisters and Susan B. Anthony, came from Quaker families. Some of them, however, were not practicing, and either criticized the religion they professed (like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who believed it only "darkened" the minds of young women), or used it for their own rhetoric and better understanding of their own equality cause by religious American society (like the Grimké sisters, who were religious and used quotes from the Bible to argue women's equality to their audience).

The activists of the American women's movement came from families ranked quite high on the social ladder. From childhood they were exposed to books, and their families encouraged them to deepen their knowledge, even that reserved only for men. Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt even completed the higher education available to them. Most of the ladies had social activists in their family, most of them abolitionists, so one can conclude that their activism was partly due to the environment in which they grew up and the significant role of education in their lives. The exception was Victoria C. Woodhull, who grew up in a poor family in the state of Ohio and from an early age had to earn her own living by conducting spiritualist séances, which were fashionable at the time. For her, it was poverty that was the main motivator for action. From an early age she

was taught to be resourceful. In addition, the stories she heard during séances from women, often victims of violence, strengthened her conviction that she should take up activism on their behalf. Woodhull was entrepreneurial and placed great emphasis on women's labor rights, even participating in the trade union movement.

After analyzing the writings of the six female activists cited in the paper, one can conclude that their program was not only aligned with the values and social philosophy of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, but also forward-looking. In their writings and speeches, these ladies addressed issues related to a woman's place in the private sphere, her right to decide about her body (such as when to get pregnant), or women's sex work, arguing that sex workers were not the cause of society's woes, but were forced into their activity by the economic situation, often provoked by men. For the most part, the ladies did not speak out on the subject of aborting pregnancies, and if they did, they were against it.

It is difficult to say unequivocally whether the suffragists were fully aware of their privileged social position (affluent, white New England Protestant women), as they did not openly address this issue. Their rhetoric often focused on general demands for the rights of all American women, but in practice they rarely focused on the specific problems faced by women from the social lowlands, ethnic minorities or immigrants. In some cases, the suffragists even criticized immigrants, which shows that their struggle for equality did not always include all social groups equally. Although the activists featured and analyzed spoke of the need to improve the situation of all women, in reality their actions and words indicated that they placed the greatest emphasis on the rights of white, English-speaking women, often overlooking the specific challenges faced by women from lower social classes, ethnic minorities and immigrant women. An example here is Elizabeth Cady Stanton's 1902 letter advocating an amendment to the federal constitution requiring educational qualifications, which stipulated that everyone who votes should read and write with understanding in English. This proposal reveals that although Stanton was an advocate of education for women, she did not fully recognize the inequality in access to it, especially among immigrant or black women. This situation shows that the suffragists' demands, while well-motivated, may not have taken into account the real barriers facing American women who were less privileged than them. Long-term advocacy for women's rights has often led to an evolution of views among women's movement activists in response to changing social and political circumstances and the lessons learned over the years.

The vision of the Protestant family changed under the influence of the activities of the women's rights movement, but without deviating from the patterns of the Protestant church. Thanks to the activities of the suffragists, the position of women in the family began to change – gradually, state by state, they began to obtain, for example, the right to own personal property and divorce. Still, it was still the woman who was supposed to take care of the so-called "domestic hearth" and it was she who was mainly responsible for the upbringing of offspring, despite having earned her place in universities or the labor market. The suffragists the author described drew attention to the problems of the Protestant family, such as infidelity and drunkenness of husbands, neglected and abandoned children, and abortions. They believed that these dysfunctions resulted not only from the legal order in place, but also from the social pressure on women to marry early and the general conviction, stemming from the church's teaching, that a woman should remain in an unhappy and violent relationship just to save the family. The suffragists did not want to persuade women to abandon Protestant ideals about the family, but argued for reforming the institution in order to pursue those ideals in reality. The ladies basically implemented the demands of the Protestant churches and did not undermine the structure or values of the family. They still believed that women, as mothers and wives, had an important function in the family, passing on religious and patriotic values to their offspring. Rather, through their proposed reforms, they wanted to strive to improve the institution of the family and bring it closer to the ideal of the Protestant family as derived from the teachings of the church.

To do this, the suffragists used the Bible and appealed to the teachings of the church. Sometimes they used it to support their arguments, and sometimes they criticized it. All of the women activists the author described grew up in Protestant families and had a relationship with the church at different stages of their lives – some were less, others more religious. But they all knew that in a deeply religious Protestant society, referring to biblical rhetoric would draw attention to their arguments. So, it was a rhetorical device, but also a natural behavior for them, since in the 19th and early 20th centuries it was the teachings of the church that could be their main point of reference, since the existing social order was based on them.

To the agitation of the suffragists, women also owed their entry into the public sphere. It was the activists of the women's rights movement who initiated public women's speeches, negotiations with political parties, petition writing on a massive scale or speeches at various levels of the legislature, both at the local and federal levels. The legal result of these activities was the

introduction of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote in elections at the national and local levels. However, female activists knew that gaining the right to vote was not enough, and at the same time they fought for equal pay and fair employment conditions by getting involved in labor unions. Women's agitation not only led to their greater involvement in the labor market, but also to the admission of more women to universities, which was closely followed later by their employment. The suffragists believed that the right to vote would amount to nothing for uneducated and unemployed women, so these two issues were equally important to them in emancipation.

In terms of legacy and lasting impact, the activities of the suffragists in question had far-reaching effects beyond their immediate achievements. Not only did they contribute to women's suffrage, but they also influenced the formation of the modern civil rights movement in the US. Their actions and writings inspired generations of women's equality activists, both in the United States and around the world. Groundbreaking speeches, such as those given by the Grimké sisters at paid lectures, set precedents that enabled future generations of women to speak freely about their rights. Victoria Claflin Woodhull, through her activism on Wall Street, magazine and her candidacy for the US presidency, showed that women can and should aspire to the highest offices of state and in the job market, and launched the presence of women in the US press market. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, through their long-term commitment and the creation of structures for the women's movement, shaped forms of action that are still used by social movements today. Carrie Chapman Catt, through her activism after women gained suffrage, played a key role in making women aware of their civic responsibilities, which had the effect of increasing their political involvement.

One should also not forget the broad social context in which the suffragists in question operated. Their struggle took place during times of social change and political changes, such as the Civil War, the abolitionist movement and the alcohol temperance movement, which provided the backdrop for their actions. The suffrage movement also played an important role in the mobilization of women during both World Wars, when they were actively involved in the war effort, further emphasizing the importance of their role in society. American women played a key role in the anti-alcohol movement, which sought to restrict and ban the sale of alcohol. For many women, this was one of the few opportunities to engage in public activities in the early 20th century, when they were limited in their ability to influence social and political life. It was they,

organizing themselves into groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), who became the main drivers of the campaign, mobilizing communities and lobbying the authorities. Their involvement stemmed from the belief that alcohol was at the root of many social problems, such as domestic violence, poverty and crime. Through their political activism, women not only influenced politics, but also shaped social norms and values, striving to create a healthier and more just American society. To promote their views, American suffragists used religious meetings (Quakers), women's clubs and local associations. They were active in debates and lectures (e.g., the abolitionist, anti-alcohol movement), sent petitions to state assemblies and the US Congress, trying to influence local and national politicians. The suffragists drew lessons for their activities both from their own reflections, literature, current party propaganda, and the teachings they learned from their religious practices, including the sermons of pastors they listened to both in their youth and adulthood. Indeed, these sermons reinforced in them the need to excel in rhetoric, including Protestant rhetoric, in order to promote their own ideas on women's rights.

The ratification of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, which gave women the right to vote at the federal level, was a landmark achievement in the history of the suffrage movement and inextricably linked to the work of Carrie Chapman Catt. The amendment to the US Constitution gave some 27 million American women the right to vote, including 3 million black American women. Even so, the amendment to the federal Constitution did not guarantee full equality in access to the ballot box, as it did not prohibit voter discrimination, which in many states, especially in the South, meant that black women were effectively deprived of this right. Native American women, who did not formally gain the right to vote until 1924, faced similar difficulties. Puerto Rican women did not gain full voting rights until 1935, and Americans of Chinese descent were prevented from voting in the U.S. by the Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred them from receiving citizenship until 1943. The most egregious discrimination, however, was against black American women, who did not receive full voting rights until after the ratification of the 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1964, abolishing the poll tax, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, which banned all forms of discrimination in elections at the local, state and federal levels.

When the results of the 1920 U.S. presidential election were tallied, the impact of the new women eligible to vote on the outcome of the election proved difficult to clearly describe. Overall, fewer women voted than men, with women's turnout averaging two-thirds that of men. Voter

turnout among women was about 38% in 1920, compared to more than 65% among men. Although women voted less frequently than men, their voter turnout gradually increased over time. After gaining the right to vote in the U.S., however, women had to continue to fight and educate to ensure that more of them exercised this right and voted according to their own beliefs, rather than under the influence of their husbands. However, the broad electoral picture hid a great deal of variability at the state and local levels. Women's voter turnout ranged from 57% in the state of Kentucky to just 6% in Virginia, and the gender gap in turnout ranged from 28% in Missouri and Kentucky to 40% in Connecticut. Everywhere, the political and legal context affected the voter turnout rate.[10] It tended to be higher in states with difficult-to-predict outcomes or in locations with well-organized parties; in areas with a large single-party advantage or with complex voting restrictions, turnout generally remained low.

With the granting of the right to vote to women, new opportunities arose that challenged the traditional role of the housewife. Women who sought greater independence and equality were faced with the need to redefine their place in society. In the years to come, these tensions were to become crucial in the struggle for further social and cultural change that would allow women to take full advantage of the new rights and opportunities they had gained.

[10] For more information on female voter turnout, see J.K. Corder, C. Wolbrecht, *Counting Women's Ballots: Female Voters from Suffrage through the New Deal*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2016, pp. 138–144.