The American Equal Rights Association, 1866-1870: Gender, Race, and Universal Suffrage

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Abstract

This thesis studies the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), 1866 to 1870, and argues for its historical distinctiveness and significance. The AERA was the only organisation in nineteenth-century America that explicitly campaigned for the rights of men and women on the same platform. Formed in the immediate aftermath of the American Civil War, the AERA joined the discussion of how to reconstruct the war-torn nation, demanding political rights to be extended to all American citizens based on their common humanity.

As the first academic study to focus purely on the AERA, this thesis presents a series of new findings and interpretations about the association. It studies the creation, exploits, and demise of the AERA, highlighting and analysing key aspects of the association's character, from its membership and ideas, to its campaigning and organisational dynamics. It also broadens the source base beyond the two figures of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, who have long dominated writings on the woman suffrage movement. Instead, the thesis examines the AERA membership as a whole. In so doing, it argues three main points: first, the association was more than just the vehicle for the woman suffrage movement at this time; second, the association worked well and was not constantly beset by divisions and disputes, and third, the final collapse of the association was due more to the actions of individuals than to wider historical or contextual forces.

Besides arguing for the historical distinctiveness and significance of the AERA, this focus on the association itself provides a new angle on wide-ranging questions, concerning Reconstruction history, political relations between men and women and the role of men in movements for gender equality.
Contents

Abstract..............................................................................................................................................i
Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................iv
Abbreviations...............................................................................................................................vi

Chapter 1........................................................................................................................................1
Introduction

Chapter 2......................................................................................................................................19
‘The Time Has Come for ... Universal Suffrage’: The Formation of the American
Equal Rights Association

Chapter 3......................................................................................................................................48
Structures, Ideas, and Members: A Tripartite Definition

Chapter 4......................................................................................................................................80
‘All We Need Now is to Ask and Receive’: The American Equal Rights Association’s
Campaigning, 1866-1867

Chapter 5....................................................................................................................................111
‘So Much Trouble With Men’: Gender, Race, and Political Culture

Chapter 6....................................................................................................................................138
An Inevitable End? The Collapse of the American Equal Rights Association

Chapter 7....................................................................................................................................168
‘Recreancy to its Principles’: The Undermining of Equal Rights

Chapter 8....................................................................................................................................186
Conclusion
Appendix..............................................................................................................................198

The Membership of the American Equal Rights Association

Bibliography..........................................................................................................................224
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Abbreviations

AASS – American Anti-Slavery Society.

AD Papers – Anna E. Dickinson Papers, MSS18424, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

AERA – American Equal Rights Association.

AWSA – American Woman Suffrage Association.

BFP/L – Blackwell Family Papers, 1759-1860, MSS12880, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

ECS – Elizabeth Cady Stanton.


GS Papers - Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

GFP Smith – Garrison Family Papers, MS 60, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

HBB – Henry B. Blackwell.


Kansas WSCH – Woman Suffrage History Collection, no. 656, Kansas Historical Society, State Archives & Library.

LS – Lucy Stone.

NASS – *National Anti-Slavery Standard*.


Post Family Papers – Post Family Papers, University of Rochester.

SBA – Susan B. Anthony.

SNW – Samuel N. Wood.

UFA – Universal Franchise Association.
1

Introduction

This thesis takes for its subject the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), the one and only example in nineteenth-century American history where the political rights of men and women, black and white, were explicitly linked in the same reform campaign. Formed at the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention on 10 May 1866, just thirteen months after the Civil War had ended, this association came together as the nation was deeply engaged in questions of post-war reconstruction. As others debated the re-integration of the Southern states, or what should be done with the four million emancipated slaves, the AERA took the opportunity to focus American minds on more fundamental questions.

The expressed aim of the association was simple: ‘to secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex.’¹ As such, it attracted supporters of suffrage for black men and for women of all complexions. Although the AERA was formed at a women’s rights convention, and the impulse for the move was catalysed by opposition to the Fourteenth Amendment, which had introduced the word ‘male’ into the Federal Constitution when defining voters, this association was more than just a vehicle for woman suffrage. It was led by key figures of antebellum reform – Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, Theodore Tilton, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Henry B. Blackwell, Charles Lenox Remond, Frances Watkins Harper, Parker Pillsbury, and Stephen Foster, among others. These were some of the leading lights of the antebellum women’s rights and abolition movements. Their intention in creating the AERA, however, was not so much the uniting of the two pre-existing campaigns of woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage, but to create a space for the promotion of a fundamentally different approach to Reconstruction, where rights would not be based on race or sex, but on the shared humanity of all adult American citizens.

Despite this unique situation, the AERA has never been the focus of a book-length study. Historians have mostly used elements of the association’s history as case studies to examine larger debates about race or gender, or to address wider questions about American society or the development of the woman suffrage movement. As a result, the true significance of the AERA, in and of itself, remains little understood. The association has also been relatively ignored by mainstream political and Reconstruction historians, despite its importance for gaining a holistic understanding of debates about rights and citizenship that were taking place in the tumultuous years of the early-Reconstruction era. This thesis will argue for the historical importance and distinctiveness of the AERA. Although it took its place within wider trends in American associational and political-cultural history, there was much that distinguished it from its surroundings, from its membership to its ideas.

This work is not primarily a narrative of the life of the AERA, but that narrative will be important for the overall picture, and is highlighted in the chapters that follow. It begins with the founding of the association in New York City in May 1866. Between this time and November 1867, the AERA focused on campaigning for universal suffrage in a number of contexts, but particularly in New York State and Kansas. After the Kansas campaign, however, Stanton and Anthony turned increasingly to arguments that undermined black men’s right to the ballot and prioritised the enfranchisement of educated women. They also took financial support for the notorious racist George Francis Train. Stone, Blackwell, and the rest of the AERA leadership were repulsed by Stanton and Anthony’s behaviour, but this dispute was by no means the death knell of the AERA, which continued to work on a state level through 1868 and early 1869. However, concerns for securing the legacy of the women’s rights movement for two competing visions of the movement led to the ultimate collapse of the AERA, and a split in the membership between Stanton and Anthony’s National American Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Stone, Blackwell, and others. The AERA, and its ideas, were abandoned in favour of the new organisations as they competed to secure the inheritance of the women’s rights campaign, and the AERA itself was eventually merged into the NWSA by a feat of procedural chicanery.
While highlighting elements of this narrative, this thesis, however, will concentrate on important themes that this narrative and this unique organisation generated, always taking an analytical approach with each chapter based around key questions. How and why was this cross-race and cross-sex organisation formed? How can we define the AERA? How successful was it? How did men and women, black and white, interact within its boundaries? How and why did it eventually collapse?

The central focus on the AERA will not only be essential for understanding its historical importance and distinctiveness, it will also help to properly illuminate those other themes of American history raised by the uniqueness of the association. Although not just a vehicle for woman suffrage, the AERA can tell us about how that particular movement developed at this time, and how and why there came to be two woman suffrage organisations in the 1870s. This thesis also sheds new light, and offers a new angle, on political participation in nineteenth-century America. The AERA presents the opportunity to study race and gender in political organisation and attitudes towards citizenship and the vote. These types of issues can be instructive in discussions of the viability of cross-race and cross-sex alliances, and men’s place in campaigns for the equality of the sexes.

This thesis will draw on, and contribute to, two main strands of historiography: that relating to the woman suffrage movement, and that of the wider trends of women’s political history. Traditionally, woman suffrage historians were concerned with questions of politics and the progress of liberalism and democracy, and dealt only with the white, middle-class leadership. In more recent years, influences from ‘new social history' and ‘new political history’ have given scholars a way of understanding the suffrage movement in broader terms. The story of suffrage is now a story of citizenship and how women viewed their place in society. It is also now a story of all women, revealing similarities and differences across race, class, ethnic, religious, and regional divides.²

This shift in woman suffrage historiography benefited from the resurrection of political history in the 1990s, in which scholars sought to broaden definitions and understandings of politics to bring in the full variety of women’s political actions – not just their attempts to gain the vote. Contrary to earlier women's history, which studied women in the private sphere, this scholarship has examined women as participants over all the public sphere and engaging with political and partisan systems, showing that the suffrage campaign was just one aspect of women’s political work in the nineteenth century.3

The earliest histories of the woman suffrage movement were written by those engaged in the struggle. Primary among these is the History of Woman Suffrage, compiled and edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage.4 From 1881 to 1922, six volumes were published and this collection has become a staple of woman suffrage historiography. A mixture of primary material and secondary commentary, it is a political narrative of organisational change and the actions of the movement’s leaders. The volumes were largely written as propaganda for the campaign, and, as such, tend to concentrate on the conservative and respectable elements of the struggle, glossing over controversies and conflicts, and understating the influence of the more notorious figures. Regardless of these weaknesses, the History of Woman Suffrage has been vital for ensuring that woman suffrage was never forgotten.5

These volumes, along with some other participation histories, have formed what Ellen DuBois has called a ‘master narrative’ of woman suffrage. According to this narrative, the demand for women’s rights sprang out of a dissatisfaction with women’s role in the abolition movement, suffrage was the main goal, and the whole campaign was a glorious crusade, carried out by valiant, principled, and uncompromising leaders. In the first half of the twentieth century, women’s rights leaders suffered little criticism of the movement and blocked several attempts to write more critical histories.6

4 Who, as shown above, were leaders in the AERA.
The first scholarly treatment of women’s rights history was Eleanor Flexner’s *Century of Struggle*, first published in 1959. In what has become a classic text, Flexner surveyed the struggle for women’s emancipation as a whole, from its earliest manifestations to the securing of woman suffrage in the Nineteenth Amendment. This work focuses on the national campaign and its leaders, but also pays attention to regional variations, and places the suffrage campaign within the wider context of women’s rights. Although it concludes by considering what the vote failed to bring women, the book concentrates on the achievements of the campaign. The focus stayed on the national campaign throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, with O’Neill, Sinclair, and Smith-Rosenberg treating the suffrage movement as a single-issue reform, concluding more critically and questioning why the vote did not bring women the changes they had sought.

As a counter to these more critical works, Ellen DuBois published *Feminism and Suffrage* in 1978. In this study, DuBois employed her earlier theories on the radicalism of the suffrage movement and its attempts to move women out of the domestic sphere and into the public realm, and studied the post-Civil War movement as part of the history of feminism as much as part of the history of woman suffrage. Her conclusions centre around the idea that the women’s rights advocates’ experiences of this time were vital for the creation of an independent women’s movement, separate from other reform agendas, and that the radical nature of the demand for suffrage was inseparable from this development.

Interest in the suffrage movement waned in the 1970s and 1980s, however, reflecting wider trends in the development of women’s history as a field. Influenced by, and contributing to ‘new social history’, women’s historians began to concentrate on new questions for historical research. Out would go traditional questions of war, politics, and legal and constitutional change, and in would come...
the routine, the ordinary, the mundane – in short, the everyday experiences of ordinary women. This paradigm was forged around the idea that the sexes occupied distinct social spaces – or ‘separate spheres’ – with women solely occupying the ‘private sphere’ of the home, the family, and personal relationships. Barbara Welter, Nancy Cott, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg all pioneered in this paradigm, creating a framework for future study. The following years saw a great proliferation of works looking into women’s private lives.11

In this environment, suffrage histories quickly became seen as redundant. Critics were unhappy with the assumption that women were only significant to history when they were acting like men – that is, seeking their place in the political world. To women’s historians, suffrage history seemed nothing but a remnant of traditional political history, concerned only with ‘great men’ and ‘great events’, or part of a triumphalist ‘Whiggish progressivism’, that saw nothing more important in the campaign than its contribution to the move from aristocracy to democracy.12 Furthermore, the work of black historians, particularly, showed the problems with the extant suffrage histories’ concentration on the campaign leaders – predominantly white, middle-class women – failing to take into account class, race, ethnic, and regional differences, or fully appreciate the racist, anti-immigrant, and elitist tendencies of the suffrage leaders.13 As Tetrault argued, where suffrage had once been ‘a vital area of study’, it now seemed ‘outdated’ and the triumphalism and homogeneity of early works seemed even ‘embarrassing’.14

The 1990s, on the other hand, saw a resurgence in interest in the suffrage movement. Again, this move reflected wider trends in women’s history. The

analytical concept of separate spheres was increasingly questioned, especially its implication that women should be studied in isolation. Instead, argued critics such as Michelle Rosaldo and Linda Kerber, women’s historians should be concerned with understanding ‘how men and women both participate in and help to reproduce the institutional forms that may oppress, liberate, join, or divide them.’\textsuperscript{15} This move was reinforced by works like Mary Ryan’s \textit{Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880}, which, contrary to earlier ideas that women were excluded from the public sphere, found many examples of women’s public roles.\textsuperscript{16}

The resurrection of political history in the 1990s was both a response to, and acted as a catalyst for, the questioning of separate spheres. However, this was not to be the old-fashioned political history that women’s historians had so long criticised. Rather than a focus on Congress and the President, parties and elections, the new political history would take into account ‘any action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government of the community.’\textsuperscript{17} Out went the concentration on suffrage, and in came the myriad different ways women attempted to influence and change government and society.

This shift in emphasis was part of a larger development in political history, perhaps most definitively displayed both in the title and content of \textit{Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic}.\textsuperscript{18} The goal of this edition was to look deeper and wider, beyond the actions of the political elite in revolutionary America, and understand the wider context of American political life. One of the ways this was done was to think more about political culture – that is, as Gustafson put it, ‘the values and beliefs, as well as symbols and ideologies, that underlie and inspire political action.’\textsuperscript{19} This angle proved vital for understanding women’s political actions, and there was a great

\textsuperscript{15} M.Z. Rosaldo, ‘The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross-Cultural Understanding,’ \textit{Signs}, 5, no. 3 (Spring, 1980), pp.409,417; Kerber, ‘Separate Spheres’.
\textsuperscript{17} This broader definition of politics is Paula Baker’s. P. Baker, ‘The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,’ \textit{The American Historical Review}, 89, no. 3 (June, 1984), p.622.
\textsuperscript{18} J.L. Pasley et al (eds), \textit{Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic} (Chapel Hill, 2004).
proliferation of works that were built on these foundation, forever condemning to history the idea that women were not politically active in nineteenth-century America.\textsuperscript{20}

This return to fashion of political history extended to the suffrage movement. Bolt, Lumsden, and Graham all utilised overtly political frameworks in their studies.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, in response to criticisms that the existing scholarship focused too narrowly on the national campaign, or on the movement’s white, middle-class leadership, historians broadened their scope to include studies of African-American and working women, and the regional elements of the suffrage campaign, bringing greater diversity to the overall picture. These studies highlighted the complex nature of the continental push for suffrage, showing that the ‘master narrative’ was just too simple in its analysis.\textsuperscript{22}

The most recent studies have concentrated on questioning the ‘master narrative’ further. In Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited, edited by Jean Baker, the essays re-assess some of the key moments in the struggle, widening the scope, broadening the vision, and deepening the analysis. In Baker’s own words, the story of suffrage stops being one of an oppressed group struggling for rights, and becomes one of ‘nation-building and citizen-making’.\textsuperscript{23} Judith Wellman, Lori Ginzberg, and Nancy Hewitt have questioned the historical importance of the Seneca Falls convention of 1848, long thought to be the origin of the suffrage movement.\textsuperscript{24} Lisa Tetrault has further questioned the ‘master narrative’, by focusing on an analysis of the History of Woman Suffrage itself,

\textsuperscript{20} See pp.12-14 below.
\textsuperscript{21} C. Bolt, The Women’s Movements in the United States and Britain from the 1790s to the 1920s (London, 1993); L.J. Lumsden, Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly (Knoxville, 1997); S.H. Graham, Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy (New Haven, 1996).
\textsuperscript{22} For African-American women, see, for example: R. Terborg-Penn, African-American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920 (Bloomington, 1998); M.S. Jones, All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African-American Public Culture, 1830-1900 (Chapel Hill, 2007); A.M. Parker, Articulating Rights: Nineteenth-Century American Women on Race, Reform and the State (DeKalb, IL., 2010). For working class women, see, for example: E.C. DuBois, Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage (New Haven, 1997). For regional variations, see, for example: R.J. Mead, How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914 (New York, 2004).
showing its historical creation and highlighting its contradictions in light of the documentary evidence. Such works will doubtless continue to emerge as the centenary of woman suffrage approaches and as a new generation of scholars turn their critical eyes to the histories that have dominated the previous century.

Despite this resurrection of suffrage as a vital area for scholarship, the AERA has yet to be the focus of an academic study. This is perhaps not surprising given that early suffrage histories were criticised for focusing too much on political organisations. The limited membership of the AERA further compromises the usefulness of the association as an example of broader trends in women’s history. As will be seen in chapter three, the association consisted of less than 500 members, in a nation of some 30 millions. It has never, however, been entirely ignored. As a key moment in the struggle as a whole, the AERA period has often been studied in relation to other issues. Earlier works used this period to examine the split between the two wings of the woman suffrage movement in 1869, but included in this analysis events of later years, which served to cement the split, undermining the ability to conclude on the AERA period in and of itself. Others have used the AERA as a site in which to study other issues, such as the changing arguments of the woman suffrage movement, and the discussion of whether or not the movement was based on a racist understanding of American society and politics.

Three scholars have examined the AERA period in detail, but their studies have focused on a different set of questions from this thesis. DuBois’ *Feminism and Suffrage* covered this period, with a predominant focus on the AERA’s place in

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25 Tetrault, 'Memory of a Movement'.
26 Indeed, as Tetrault argued, the Reconstruction period as a whole remains an understudied aspect of the suffrage movement. Tetrault, 'Memory of a Movement,' p.10.
the history of feminism and its contribution to the creation of the NWSA. DuBois focused on the political and intellectual development of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, particularly, showing the transition of woman suffrage from its links with abolitionism to its development as an independent movement. As such, the AERA represents, for her, the ‘fullest and finest expression’ of feminist abolitionism, and a step on the path from abolitionism to independent feminism.\(^{31}\)

In an article for Wheeler’s 1995 collection of essays on the suffrage movement, *One Woman, One Vote*, Andrea Moore Kerr studied the AERA period, offering an alternative view to DuBois. Rather than focusing on the establishment of the NWSA, Kerr examined the foundation of the other wing of the movement, the AWSA, arguing that the controversy over the Fifteenth Amendment and the scandals concerning Victoria Woodhull in the early 1870s contributed to the AWSA’s intention to establish itself as a more moderate force for woman suffrage. However, Kerr argued that the split between the NWSA and the AWSA was little more than Stanton and Anthony betraying their principles and breaking off from mainstream suffragism.\(^{32}\)

More recently, Faye Dudden offered a revisionist account of the AERA period. Where DuBois referred to the AERA as neither a ‘stable organization or a viable political strategy,’\(^{33}\) this revised account emphasised the more positive aspects of the association’s campaign for universal suffrage. Dudden focused on the likelihood that woman suffrage would be secured in these years, arguing that women had a ‘fighting chance’ to gain the vote. Like DuBois, the main characters in Dudden’s work were Stanton and Anthony, and this volume showed their conflict with Wendell Phillips, the AASS, and other supporters of black (male) suffrage over strategy and resources.\(^{34}\)

This particular thesis will differ in focus from these earlier works on the AERA in a number of ways, each contributing something new to the scholarship. It will treat the AERA as the central focus, rather than employing it to answer

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\(^{31}\) DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*.


\(^{33}\) DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, p.77.

questions of why the suffrage movement developed in the way that it did. It will examine the association’s internal relations and dynamics, rather than how it related to other organisations or to the more general issue of whether or not suffrage was a realistic hope at this time. Furthermore, it will concentrate on the years 1866 to 1870 to avoid bringing in developments that occurred outside the specific timeframe of the AERA that could distort an understanding of the association’s life and significance. In so doing, it will reveal more positive aspects of the association’s history than have emerged from earlier studies and avoid a teleological approach that can imply that the collapse of the AERA was inevitable.

The AERA is also largely absent in the historiography of Reconstruction more generally. Where historians have referred to it, it has received little more than a few pages.\(^{35}\) When it does receive a mention, the association is seen purely as the site where woman suffrage was discussed.\(^{36}\) Tetrault argued, when it comes to Reconstruction historiography, woman suffragists are ‘present within, yet segregated from the main narrative, not yet integrated into the story of which they were decidedly a part.’ This is equally true of the AERA more specifically. Although small, lacking in sufficient political clout to effect the changes it desired, and not engaged with more concrete issues of Reconstruction, such as Southern state governments, the freedpeople’s employment rights, tariffs, and railroads, the AERA does have a place within the historiography of Reconstruction. This was a site where important and nationally-renowned individuals were engaged in a real debate about citizenship and rights at a time when significant changes were being contemplated in American democracy. If a holistic understanding of Reconstruction is to be achieved, examples like the AERA cannot be left out.\(^{37}\)

\(^{35}\) For example, Foner’s definitive study of Reconstruction includes just one index reference. E. Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, 1988), p.656. In her study of women’s rights in African-American public culture in and around Reconstruction, Martha Jones, too, devotes a single page to the AERA, asserting that ‘debates over the rights to vote...were framed in terms that pitted the interests of black men against those of white women,’ overlooking the complexity of the AERA platform. Jones, *All Bound Up Together*, p.141.

\(^{36}\) See, for example, H. Davis, *We Will Be Satisfied With Nothing Less*: The African American Struggle for Equal Rights in the North during Reconstruction (Ithaca, 2011), pp.67-69. Davis devotes just three pages to the AERA in his study of the “equal rights” campaign for black men, in a subsection entitled ‘The Question of Woman Suffrage’.

This study will also contribute to and benefit from developments in the field of women’s political history. As seen above, women’s historians in the 1970s and 1980s held little interest in questions of politics, war, and ‘great men’. The studies that were undertaken into women’s public work, such as Melder’s *Beginnings of Sisterhood*, Hersh’s *Slavery of Sex*, and Hewitt’s *Women’s Activism and Social Change*, tended to focus on their social and domestic activism and the personal relationships between the women involved, reflecting women’s historians’ concern for the private sphere.\(^{38}\)

Lori Ginzberg’s 1986 article, “‘Moral Suasion is Moral Balderdash’,” marked something of a transition point between earlier histories of women’s public roles, with their focus on benevolent works and the reform of society, and the more overtly political studies. In this article, and in her expanded 1990 monograph, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, Ginzberg showed how antebellum women became increasingly frustrated with their limited opportunities to influence society through their domestic, private, moral, and religious roles, and sought to expand their influence by engaging with government and the political system. This work became a model for women’s political study by showing that any analysis of women’s role could not be confined to the private sphere.\(^{39}\)

As interest in women’s public roles re-surfaced in the early 1990s, studies in women’s activism began to take on a more overtly political focus. Vital in this development was Paula Baker’s article, ‘The Domestication of Politics,’ in which she argued that women were not excluded from politics – they just experienced a different political culture from men. Whilst the male culture centred on elections and parties, the female culture was focused more on voluntary associations, benevolent works, and shared beliefs concerning women’s role.\(^{40}\) Historians have found women’s political culture displayed in a variety of sites. Susan Zaeske found


it in the numerous great petition campaigns in the antebellum period; Anne Firor Scott found it in women’s voluntary associations; Jeffrey, Salerno, and Robertson found it in women’s anti-slavery work; and Giesberg found it in women’s Civil War work in the Sanitary Commission.41

While the historians above have concerned themselves more with a wider definition of politics, to include public activism of all kinds, other historians have shown that women were deeply involved even in what was assumed to be the most masculine aspect of politics – the partisan system. Breaking the ground in this area, Elizabeth Varon examined women’s partisan activities in antebellum Virginia. In a similar way to Ginzberg, Varon has shown women actively engaging with government for the provision of poor relief and moral reform, but goes further by showing women’s ‘active, distinct, and evolving’ participation in partisanship. Indeed, the Whig party positively encouraged women’s engagement with politics.42 Other historians have shown women’s partisan engagement in a variety of other locations and contexts.43

The above-mentioned works have been vital for showing the importance of women’s political history, but their focus is still largely on a distinct women’s political culture. Other works have gone further, showing that women did not act or think in isolation.44 In Parlor Politics, Catherine Allgor has shown that women acted alongside men in the development of Washington, D.C., as a national capital. Although there were sometimes differences in the way the two sexes carried out political work, it was mostly done together, and certainly not in two separate

spheres. In her history of the relationship between women and the Republican Party, Melanie Gustafson concentrates on the political interactions between women and men, showing that women acted independently through clubs, but also acted in concert with men. Rebecca Edwards reaches the same conclusion in *Angels in the Machinery*, and yet goes further, arguing that women repeatedly worked through party mechanisms. Edwards asserted that she found ‘no evidence of a separate “women’s political culture” in the Gilded Age.’ Furthermore, it was not just in the partisan arena that women and men acted in unison. In her study of women abolitionists during the Civil War, Wendy Venet has shown that women campaigned for and thought about abolition in much the same way as their male counterparts. Such works will doubtless continue to emerge as historians seek to achieve a holistic picture of nineteenth-century politics.

This thesis will weave together these two areas of scholarship, using insights from both woman suffrage historiography and women’s political history. Reflecting trends in the woman suffrage historiography, attention will be given to the wider membership of the AERA, especially the black members. Furthermore, the story of suffrage will be shown in the wider context of women’s political history, and not as a single-reform movement. Echoing the women’s political history scholarship, this thesis will seek a proper understanding of the relations between the sexes and the boundaries of political culture in the mid nineteenth century. Most importantly, it will question some of the conclusions of those who have studied the AERA and argue that the association needs to be studied in its own right.

With reference to these issues, questions of the representativeness of the AERA will doubtless be raised, given that there were less than 500 members. The association was also overwhelmingly white, professional, Protestant, and North-Eastern in character, with only a handful of black members. However, the larger uniqueness of this situation and the opportunity it offers outweigh these potential deficiencies. This thesis will adopt the argument of Chris Dixon in *Perfecting the*

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45 C. Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville, 2000).
Family: Antislavery Marriages in Nineteenth-Century America. Drawing on the theoretical assertions of Aileen Kraditor, Dixon argued that small groups of radical reformers can be useful for studying larger environments if one examines what they were rebelling against or sought to change. Radicals can become representative of wider society because they can show what was possible in a given set of circumstances, meaning that cultural and social restrictions on their behaviour could not be held entirely to blame for the uniqueness of their example.49

The lack of black voices in the association, making up only a handful of the 500 members, is more of a limitation. However, these black members, few as they were, occupied positions of note in the association. The words of leading black men in the AERA, Frederick Douglass, Robert Purvis, and Charles Lenox Remond, appear frequently in the documents and were indispensable to this study. In the case of black women, the evidence is more sparse, with only a few words of Sojourner Truth and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper surviving. However, close attention to what is extant, accompanied by evidence taken from other studies of these women, can help to make up for the fragmented nature of this material.

This lack of evidence for the black membership of the AERA is indicative of another concern. While it was established as an organisation that sought to influence Reconstruction as a whole, and took, for its programme, universal suffrage, the extant documentary evidence for the AERA mostly concerns its place in the history of the woman suffrage movement. Therefore, it is inevitable that the woman suffrage movement will predominate in this study, particularly when it comes to the collapse of the association and its legacy. That also is reflected in the historiography of the AERA. While the association’s contribution to the woman suffrage movement is perhaps its primary historical significance, this thesis will prove that it was not just a woman suffrage vehicle. By showing its wider remit and its broader membership, it will assert that the AERA has a historical distinctiveness both within and beyond the suffrage movement.

In addressing the questions of this study, this thesis will deal almost exclusively with documentary evidence from 1866 to 1870. This is an important

point to raise in a study of the woman suffrage movement because of the amount of material written by participants, including AERA members, at a later date. The reliance on these sources, particularly the *History of Woman Suffrage*, has been common in the historiography. However, the vast collections of documents in the *History of Woman Suffrage* has obscured its true form – it is not truly primary material, but, as Tetrault has effectively shown, each document was edited and included to argue a particular thesis – that is, the editors’ view of the history of the movement. Such works will not be treated as primary material for the purposes of this thesis. Assertions in these pieces will be treated with extreme caution and excluded if they are not supported by other AERA-contemporary evidence. As will be seen, several key issues will, thus, be shown in a new light. Examples include the commitment of Charles Lenox Remond to the equal rights cause, often used as a key piece of evidence for tensions in the AERA in 1866 and 1867, and the question of the role of men.

Furthermore, this thesis will expand the primary source base that has been used to study the AERA in the past. Rather than concentrate on the exploits, and the private papers, of Stanton and Anthony, as other studies have, this study will spread the net wider. The collected papers of Stanton and Anthony, edited by Holland and Gordon, have been incredibly useful to this study, especially for the many newspaper reports of AERA activities. These two key AERA leaders will have a prominent role in the following chapters, but this evidence will be balanced with other manuscripts and correspondence from various archives scattered across the AERA’s heartland in the North-East U.S. Although some of this evidence is fragmentary, piecing together these fragments will give a fuller picture of the AERA.

This fuller picture will be given in six main chapters. The following chapter, chapter two, will study the formation of the AERA. Where other historians have seen the formation as a reaction to post-Civil War circumstances, and in particular to the failure to convert the American Anti-Slavery Society to a programme of truly

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50 See, for example: I. Kugler, *From Ladies to Women: The Organised Struggle for Women’s Rights in the Reconstruction Era* (New York, 1987), a work which heavily relies on the primary material in the *HWS*.
51 Tetrault, ‘Memory of a Movement,’ pp.3-4.
universal suffrage, this thesis will argue that the move was a more progressive one, building on the traditions of the women’s rights and abolitionist movement, and offering a place to those who sought a broader vision of Reconstruction rather than simply extending white men’s political rights to freedmen.

Chapter three will provide a detailed definition of the AERA, which is something that historians have not yet done. It will show the defining characteristics of the association in three main forms. First, the organisational structures; second, the ideas of the association; and third, the organisation’s membership. It will show an under-developed but definite organisational structure, having much in common with voluntary associations throughout American history. It will show an association uniquely committed to equal rights and universal suffrage. Furthermore, it will show a membership united in its commitment to a broader vision of Reconstruction than that proposed elsewhere, despite certain differences over strategy and timetables. It is only by examining these three aspects of the AERA’s definition that we can understand just what the association was and show its historical distinctiveness.

Chapter four will look at the work of the AERA between its formation in May 1866 and November 1867. Focusing particularly on the canvass of New York State, where the association campaigned for universal suffrage ahead of the state’s constitutional convention in the summer of 1867, it will show that the association was working well in this period and its membership shared a commitment to equal rights and universal suffrage. This chapter will also question conclusions of the existing scholarship that the association, and especially its 1867 anniversary convention, was beset by problems and arguments, and that there was something of a binary division between those favouring woman suffrage and those favouring black (male) suffrage.

Chapter five will vary the analysis, by dealing with the question of gendered political cultures. Echoing developments in the women’s political history scholarship, this chapter will examine the political culture of AERA members – men and women, black and white – and show that neat distinctions between male and female political culture, across all races, were not so definite. Rather, the picture was of fluidity not rigidity, in the ways that the AERA members thought about and engaged with the political system.
Chapters six and seven will deal with issues surrounding the collapse of the AERA and question key assumptions of the existing scholarship. In the past, historians have implied a certain inevitability in the division and end of the AERA, seeing it as the conclusion of a dispute between woman suffragists and black (male) suffragists that dated from the association’s foundation, and was made permanent by the Fifteenth Amendment. Offering an alternative view, chapter six will build on the previous chapters of this thesis that have shown that there was no neat division along these lines to argue that there was much reason for hope in 1868 and 1869. Further, it will assert that, rather than being an inevitability, ending the AERA was a conscious decision taken by the association’s leaders, who were principally concerned with securing their power and ensuring that their vision for the future of the women’s rights movement prevailed. In this analysis, the Fifteenth Amendment controversy is better understood as an occasion when this wider dispute came to light, rather than being the basis for the dispute.

Chapter seven will then examine the collapse of the intellectual dimension of the AERA, showing that, along with the demise of the organisational and membership structures of the association, its ideas were also abandoned. This aspect of the association’s demise will further bolster the argument for the historical distinctiveness and importance of the AERA as the only location in American history where the suffrage rights of women and men were campaigned for on the same platform.

Chapter eight will then amalgamate the diverse strands of this argument in a conclusion, as a culmination of the thesis that the AERA deserves a historical study of its own. It provides a new angle on wider-ranging historical questions, from the woman suffrage movement, to a holistic picture of Reconstruction, and the political relations between men and women in movements for the equality of the sexes. More importantly, it will bring together all the aspects that show the historical significance and distinctiveness of the AERA.
‘The Time Has Come for ... Universal Suffrage’:
The Formation of the American Equal Rights Association

Introduction
On 10 May 1866, the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention was held at the Church of the Puritans in New York City. At the end of the morning’s session, veteran abolitionist and women’s rights campaigner, Susan B. Anthony, introduced the following resolution: ‘By the act of Emancipation,’ she began, ‘the negro and woman now hold the same civil and political status, alike needing only the ballot ... [and] the time has come for an organization that shall demand UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE ... [H]ereafter we shall be known as the “AMERICAN EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION”.’ The resolution was seconded by Martha Coffin Wright and adopted unanimously by the convention. A constitution was drafted, officers were elected, and a date set for the first meeting of this new association – 31 May, in Boston.1 Caroline M. Severance chose to celebrate the formation with a pun: ‘A new ERA has come’.2

Why was the AERA formed? The established scholarly explanation argues that it was primarily a response by women’s rights leaders to post-Civil War circumstances. By the Thirteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1865, slavery was ended, but the rights held by the freedpeople remained unclear. While Congress and the Presidency debated how to re-integrate the seceding Southern states into the Union, abolitionists of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), under the leadership of Wendell Phillips, turned their attention to black (men’s) rights. Phillips declared his intention to fight to secure suffrage for black men by ending suffrage restrictions based on ‘race’. By declaring, however reluctantly, his intention not to argue for an end to suffrage restrictions based on ‘sex’, Phillips left

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women’s rights leaders in an uncertain position. Should they continue their campaign, or hold their demands at a time of such uncertainty for black (men’s) rights? Some thought they should postpone their cause. Those who did not first tried to convert the AASS to the cause of universal suffrage, hoping that their close relationship with abolitionists in the antebellum period would encourage unity. When that move failed, they created their own universal suffrage organisation – the AERA.3

This chapter will not so much overturn this narrative as reveal more detail. Where there are concerns with this narrative, they are mainly to do with focus. DuBois focused on the AERA as the creation of women’s rights leaders.4 To the extent that the AERA owed much to the antebellum women’s rights campaign and was itself founded at a women’s rights convention, this focus is understandable, but it tends to overlook the association’s roots among abolitionists. Dudden’s focus was on the AERA creation as a response to the failure of women’s rights leaders to convert the AASS to universal suffrage.5 Again, there is truth in this assertion. If the AASS had been converted, the AERA would probably not have been created. The problem with this focus, however, is that it gives the impression of the AERA as a poor, second-best option, rather than being a progressive move in itself.

This chapter will answer the question of why the AERA was formed. It will look at: the role suffrage played in the women’s rights convention movement of the 1850s; the link between women’s rights and abolitionism in the antebellum years; and how abolitionists themselves had moved closer to the women’s rights position in the Civil War – the opinion that suffrage was the most important right of a citizen. More importantly, as women’s rights leaders took steps to re-organise their convention movement after the war, they built on widespread demands for a more comprehensive Reconstruction settlement that looked beyond the re-integration of the Southern states and towards a more fundamental re-casting of the American polity. Finally, this chapter will show wider cultural trends that

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4 For example, she referred to it as ‘their [women’s rights leaders] own organization’. This is in keeping with DuBois’s study of the AERA as part of the move towards an independent woman suffrage movement. DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, p.64.

influenced the formation of the AERA as a united voluntary association, national in scope, and political in focus. By showing all these wider trends coming together at the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, this chapter will argue for a broader understanding of why the AERA was formed.

**Women’s Rights**

One of the major sources of the AERA was the women’s rights convention circuit of the 1850s, as recognised in the preamble of the association’s constitution: ‘[W]e, to-day, assembled in our Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, bury the woman in the citizen, and our organization in that of the American Equal Rights Association.’ Intended to advance women’s position across a broad range of fronts, the antebellum convention movement soon came to focus on suffrage as ‘the corner-stone of this enterprise,’ as the 1851 Worcester convention resolved.

At one of the earliest of those conventions, at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, later a key AERA leader, argued that it was ‘the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.’ Some others at Seneca Falls thought this demand too radical and believed it would undermine their attempt to secure more tangible reforms. Stanton, along with another future AERA leader, Frederick Douglass, argued that the ballot would be the best way for women to secure their other demands. This argument convinced enough of the convention for the resolution to pass.

Suffrage was, indeed, a radical demand. Although two decades of historiography have shown that women were not confined to the domestic sphere as contemporary rhetoric demanded, that rhetoric was still widespread and reflected a belief that women were dependent beings – dependent especially on their husbands for support, subsistence, and protection, including his ability to vote. To demand suffrage was not just to demand a voice for women, but a voice

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7 *Proceedings of the Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, October 15th and 16th, 1851* (New York, 1852), p.11.
for a woman over and above her husband’s. However, in a campaign of such diverse and general aims, suffrage provided a single cause behind which women could unite. But why suffrage specifically? As was shown in the debate at Seneca Falls, the ballot could be the very weapon with which women could secure the other demands they had made. This argument centred on the concept of self-protection, which would, in the first place, provide real and tangible gains for the average woman. It also went deeper. The demand was not ‘to protect woman, but rather to place her in a position to protect herself.’ By associating the ballot with self-protection, women’s rights advocates sought to re-define the relationship between women and the state, by giving them a means to seek a redress of their grievances and removing their reliance on voting men.

Besides the ballot being a means to achieve their goals, suffrage could also be an end in itself. In nineteenth-century America, suffrage was not widely seen as an inalienable and natural right. Rather, it was predominantly viewed as a gift bestowed, by society at large, on those fit enough to be entrusted with its power. As such, certain standards were expected of voters, including holding adequate mental and moral sensibilities. Even when the franchise was extended to non-propertied white males in the first half of the nineteenth century, this rationale was still employed to exclude women, slaves, free blacks, paupers, and others.

Paramount among these standards was the notion of independence. Voting was to be carried out by individuals entirely in control of their own will, conscious of their duty and fully able to fulfil it. As women were dependent on their husbands, economically and otherwise, they did not possess the independence necessary, and were therefore categorised alongside children, slaves, and paupers, dependent on parents, masters, and charitable citizens, respectively. If women were ever to be recognised as independent, moral beings, not merely the property of their husbands, capable of their own protection and in control of their own

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12 Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at Worcester, p.11.
destinies, they required the legitimacy offered by the holding and exercising of the ballot. Only then could women’s position in society be re-defined.\textsuperscript{15} This dual argument for suffrage appealed to a large spectrum of reforming women, and helped to unite what in many other respects was a diverse campaign.

Throughout the 1850s, national conventions dominated women’s rights advocacy. Suffrage continued to be a primary goal, but it was still only one aspect in the general campaign for the emancipation and elevation of women. Advocates would concentrate on different goals at different times. Towards the end of the decade, marriage and divorce reform became a greater source of interest.\textsuperscript{16} But suffrage was always present at discussions and conventions. Even during the Civil War it remained a visible issue, contrary to the traditional view that saw women putting their demands on hold during the conflict. Activists chose to concentrate their efforts on helping the Union win the war, holding no women’s rights conventions.\textsuperscript{17} Suffrage was kept on the agenda, however, by the Women’s National Loyal League (WNLL). The WNLL was primarily formed to support the Union cause, gather petitions for the abolition of slavery, and campaign for rights for the freed slaves. However, at the 1863 anniversary convention, when a resolution was introduced to demand full civil and political rights to all, regardless of ‘race’, Stanton and Anthony sought to include ‘sex’ as well, and, despite heated discussions and strong opposition, secured this amendment. In doing so, they ensured that WNLL would begin their work of re-defining emancipation to include ‘sex’ as well as ‘race’. This helped to ensure that, in future, a demand for the ballot would be a consistent and recognisable demand.\textsuperscript{18} When national attention turned to questions of citizenship and suffrage in the post-Civil War years, the women’s rights campaign was well placed.

\textsuperscript{16} Parker, ‘Reform Antecedents,’ pp.38-39.
\textsuperscript{17} W.H. Venet, \textit{Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War} (Charlottesville, 1991), p.156.
\textsuperscript{18} Venet, \textit{Neither Ballots nor Bullets}, pp.105, 134-135; Dudden \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.51.
Abolitionism and Black (Male) Suffrage

The AERA was, of course, not merely a woman suffrage organisation. By focusing on universal suffrage, supporters of black (male) suffrage were attracted to, and contributed to, its programme. An answer to the question of why the AERA was formed cannot be found purely in women’s rights. The link between the women’s rights convention movement and the abolitionist cause was rooted in the history of antebellum reform. By the end of the Civil War, the two campaigns had come to a common position, with both arguing that suffrage was the most important reform for their respective constituencies. While women’s rights activists had argued for suffrage throughout the 1850s, abolitionists were converted to that cause by the experience of war and the difficulties of Reconstruction.

Although historians no longer assume that women’s rights grew essentially out of abolitionism, there was still much that the two movements shared. Abolitionists provided women’s rights activists with important support in the early years, forming a considerable portion of the attendance of women’s rights conventions. Anti-slavery newspapers, such as William Lloyd Garrison’s Liberator and the National Anti-Slavery Standard (NASS), devoted significant amounts of space to women’s rights activities. More importantly for the case of the AERA, there was a significant cross-over among the personnel of each movement. Most of the leading advocates of women’s rights were strong abolitionists, and many of those began their reform careers in abolitionism, including Anthony, Lucy Stone, and the Grimké sisters, whose anti-slavery work was central to the development of an idea of gender equality within abolitionism. Not only did this provide the women’s rights leaders with a ready source of support and strength, but the personal friendships between advocates of the two causes enabled a high degree of co-operation. This close relationship was essential to the later formation of the AERA.

There was also much in the anti-slavery movement itself that strengthened the woman suffragists’ belief that the two campaigns were united. Garrisonian

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19 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp.31-32.
21 Ibid., pp.84-85.
22 Parker, ‘Reform Antecedents,’ pp.29-31; DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, p.39.
abolitionists had long been the keenest supporters of enlarging women’s role in the public sphere, actively encouraging them to speak and act in behalf of slaves. The language of bondage and emancipation, and the concept of the moral equality of individuals, put the two campaigns on a similar platform, by implication if not by design. This moral equality was a key argument of many abolitionists, as activists sought to convince Northern whites of the humanity of the slaves, and that there was no essential difference between those in chains and those who were free. This argument became important for the equal rights discourse of the AERA and it seemed logical that these two causes could become one in the right conditions.

Abolitionists had not always been so ready to advocate suffrage for the slaves, however. The AASS constitution did make mention of a secondary commitment to the elevation ‘of the character and condition of the people of color’, but concerned itself only with their ‘intellectual, moral, and religious improvement.’ Abolitionists tended to look down upon African-American attempts at organisation and activism, seeing them as distractions from the main goal of ending slavery. The AASS offered little support to the National Negro Convention movement of the 1830s or other attempts to secure political rights to free blacks. Nonetheless, suffrage demands remained an important part of black activism, and by the end of the Civil War, numerous black organisations had developed for this end.

It was not until 1862 that abolitionists began to discuss seriously the question of suffrage, and this desire only intensified through 1863 and 1864. This demand was engendered primarily as a response to President Lincoln’s preliminary plans for the re-integration of the seceding Southern states, by which former Confederates would have only to swear allegiance to the Union, offering no commitment to republicanism or racial justice, to regain their own rights. Without a parallel development of the rights of the slaves, the freedpeople would be at the

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23 DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, p.32.
24 Ibid., pp.35-36.
mercy of their former masters. It would be like ‘giving lambs to the nurture and admonition of wolves,’ argued the NASS in December 1863.\textsuperscript{27} Like women’s rights advocates, supporters of black (male) suffrage argued that the ballot was the most important right of citizenship, for its ability to influence all other rights, and would also be the best way of symbolising the equality of black and white men.

Abolitionist support for suffrage continued to grow as President Lincoln and Congress announced more plans for Reconstruction that all fell short of extending suffrage to former slaves.\textsuperscript{28} Work was clearly still needed if the abolitionists’ plans for Reconstruction were to be secured.

The nature of that work was confirmed at the 1865 anniversary convention of the AASS, held in New York in May. Many members, including the society’s president William Lloyd Garrison, favoured dissolving the organisation now that slavery had been abolished. Wendell Phillips led the fight to maintain the society and assumed its presidency. He convinced those present to vote for his resolution to continue until the former slaves were secure in their rights, by making the enfranchisement of the freedmen the central pillar in any post-war settlement. ‘No State shall ever make any distinctions in civil privileges ... on account of race, color, or condition!’ Phillips declared to rapturous applause. Until such an amendment was made to the Federal Constitution, ‘we leave him [the freedman] at the mercy of the race that has hitherto victimized him.’\textsuperscript{29} Regardless of the lack of any previous clarity on the issue of black (male) suffrage, the AASS was now four-square behind the motion.

There were firm grounds for optimism in the spring of 1865. Lincoln’s assassination, just three weeks before the AASS anniversary, had resulted in a wave of outrage in the North, calling for vengeance against the South. It also brought forth a new president in Andrew Johnson, who had, just the year before, declared himself to be the ‘Moses’ of the slaves, and the one who would lead them to freedom. According to Phillips, Johnson had also declared himself in favour of black (male) suffrage. Victory seemed imminent for abolitionists.\textsuperscript{30}


\textsuperscript{28} McPherson, \textit{Struggle for Equality}, pp.242-246.

\textsuperscript{29} ‘Thirty-Second Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 13 May 1865.

\textsuperscript{30} J.M. McPherson \& J.K. Hogue, \textit{Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction} (New York, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed., 2009), pp.536-537; E. Foner, \textit{Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877} (New
This optimism proved unfounded, however, as it soon became clear that Johnson harboured little affection for the freedpeople. The president initially concerned himself more with punishing the former Confederate leaders, but eventually worked to secure white rule in the South, handing out pardons to all but the most treacherous Southerners and setting lenient terms for the former Confederate states’ re-entry into the Union. Under Johnson’s plan, the seceding states would merely have to accept the abolition of slavery, nullify their secession orders, and repudiate the Confederate debt. By the end of 1865, all but Texas had acquiesced. Abolitionists and some radical Republicans in Congress continued to protest at the Republican president’s actions, but most in that party sought to avoid confrontation and division in their ranks, and were willing to be patient with their new president to avoid driving him into the Democrats’ camp.31

Through the winter of 1865 to 1866, the situation for the freedpeople deteriorated. Although the Southern states had accepted Johnson’s generous terms for re-admission, there was no sign that they were changing their position in relation to the freedpeople, imposing harsh and uncompromising ‘black codes’, victimising African-Americans and denying them access to basic rights and amenities. This put the Republican-controlled Congress in a more confrontational mood when it met in December 1865, for the first time since Lincoln’s assassination. The focus for the House and Senate was largely for a Reconstruction plan that would guarantee the security of the Union’s victory in the war, but progress was made on the question of freedpeople’s rights. Congress instituted the Freedmen’s Bureau and passed the Civil Rights Bill, declaring African-Americans to be citizens. These two bills were vetoed by Johnson, who claimed he was defending states’ rights against encroaching and unconstitutional congressional power. For many Republicans, these vetoes gave final proof that Johnson was not an ally.32

The tension in the Republican Party highlighted the major problem for black (male) suffrage supporters. Radicals favoured an extension of the franchise,

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but they were in a minority in the party in Congress. The moderate majority were concerned primarily with the party’s hegemony over the Democrats and the triumph of their free-labour ideology throughout the nation. The Republicans’ lack of commitment to the freedpeople, and the overriding concern with their vision of competitive capitalism, can be seen in Congress’s attitude to land reform. Most Republicans argued that Confederate plantations should not be confiscated and simply handed to the freedpeople, but that the former slaves should instead be encouraged to work for themselves.33

The key issue for moderates was the fact that emancipation had invalidated the original representation clauses of the Federal Constitution, which counted the slaves as three-fifths of a person when apportioning congressional representation to the states. With former slaves now counting as whole persons, the Southern states would return to the Union with increased representation in the House, threatening Republican dominance. There were several options for Congress. One was to enfranchise the male former slaves to create a Republican constituency in the South, but most Republicans feared that any form of black suffrage was too unpopular. Indeed, the issue had seen referendum defeats in Connecticut, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the District of Columbia in the autumn of 1865, and many moderate Republicans feared suffering similar electoral setbacks if they fully supported the demand.34

A second option was to penalise any state that disfranchised its black males by reducing their congressional representation in proportion to the number of males excluded from the electorate. This plan would prevent the Southern states from capitalising on the end of the three-fifths clause and is what became the Fourteenth Amendment, which also declared that all persons born or naturalised in the United States were citizens. By the time of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention in May 1866, this amendment was still under discussion in Congress, but the drafts had already caused outrage among abolitionists, who saw it as legitimising the disfranchisement of former slaves. They saw it as a poor compromise, even with its guarantees of citizenship for all. For abolitionists, anything short of black (male) suffrage was a betrayal of the freedpeople.

33 Foner, Reconstruction, pp.236-238; McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, pp.546-550.
34 McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, pp.559-560; Foner, Reconstruction, pp.223-224, 240-242, 251-253, 257; Richardson, West from Appomattox, pp.52-53.
However, in the spring of 1866, the only hope for securing their ends was to step up the campaigning and increase the pressure.\textsuperscript{35}

\textit{The Fourteenth Amendment and Women’s Rights}

Women’s rights leaders continued to press their demands throughout 1865, building on the attempts in the WNLL to keep the woman suffrage demand in the minds of Americans during the Civil War. These attempts were galvanised and accelerated by the early drafts of the Fourteenth Amendment, which angered woman suffrage supporters by introducing the word ‘male’ into the Constitution, which had hitherto contained no explicit distinction between the sexes. By penalising states for disfranchising their males, the amendment gave tacit acceptance to discrimination on grounds of sex. Women’s rights leaders laid several plans to combat the Fourteenth Amendment, including petitions, lectures, and the founding of a newspaper or journal. But it was clear by spring of 1866 that a new strategy was needed, and a permanent organisation could serve that end.

While the Fourteenth Amendment galvanised many into action, the work of the women’s rights leaders was not solely reactive. The importance of the campaign for women’s rights before the Fourteenth Amendment was even contemplated was reflected in Wendell Phillips’s speech at the AASS anniversary in May 1865. While he pledged to work to remove suffrage discrimination based on ‘race’, Phillips expressed a hope that one day he would be able to work to end distinctions of ‘sex’. ‘[T]his hour,’ he said, however, ‘belongs to the Negro. As Abraham Lincoln said “One war at a time”; so I say one question at a time.’ Phillips, knowing the relevance of the woman suffrage demand, ‘went out of his way’, as Dudden put it, to explicitly prioritise black (male) suffrage.\textsuperscript{36}

Opposition to this position grew through the year. In July, Stanton wrote to Phillips’s wife Ann, asserting that ‘women had been so deserted.’ Writing to Wendell himself, she asked if he believed that ‘the African race is composed


\textsuperscript{36} ‘Thirty-Second Anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society,’ \textit{NASS}, 13 May 1865; Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.62.
entirely of males?’ In November, angered that the NASS made no report of U.S. senator Benjamin Gratz Brown’s speech on woman suffrage, Frances Dana Gage sent segments of it to the paper, with an accompanying letter. ‘Can anyone tell us,’ she asked, ‘why the great advocates of Human Equality, such men as Wendell Phillips and W[illia]m. L[loyd]. Garrison, who a few years ago were bold champions for equality before the law for women ... now wholly ignore that part of the subject?’ For her part, Susan B. Anthony began to gather her strength for what she saw as the coming battle, seeking advice from a variety of other women’s rights veterans.

Stanton’s most coherent arguments against Phillips’s ‘Negro’s Hour’ strategy came in an exchange in the NASS in December 1865. Her argument was very much aimed at the radical community, asserting that the Republican Party had already taken on the question of black (male) suffrage, leaving black men ‘in a political point of view, far above the educated women of the country.’ Not only did the women of the country now need the support and attention of the radical polity, but to do so would secure the rights of all classes. ‘Would it not be wiser,’ she went on, ‘when the Constitutional door is open, [to] avail ourselves of the strong arm and blue uniform of the black soldier to walk in by his side, and thus make the gap so wide that no privileged class could ever again close it against the humblest citizen?’ But Phillips would not be moved. In a replying editorial, the AASS president argued that ‘thirty years of agitation and four years of war have created this costly opportunity [for black (male) suffrage],’ but there had been no such crisis over women’s position. The two causes were ‘certainly not identified in the public mind,’ he finished. Phillips’s ultimate fear was that to combine the two campaigns was to unite, in their opposition, those who objected to either cause. With black (male) suffrage going down to defeat in referenda, the sheer radicalism of woman suffrage would, in Phillips’s eyes, only cost the black (male) suffrage campaign more votes.

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39 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.66.
40 “This is the Negro’s Hour”, NASS, 30 December 1865.
41 “Woman’s Rights”, NASS, 30 December 1865.
These demands from women's rights leaders that woman suffrage be included in any Reconstruction settlement grew as the drafts of what would become the Fourteenth Amendment were reported from Congress at the turn of the year. Stanton led the charge against this attempt to, as she put it, 'turn the wheels of civilization backward.' Stanton took the fight to radicals like Phillips and her cousin Gerrit Smith, but also took a new approach, appealing to women directly. These proposals, she argued in the NASS, 'should rouse every woman in the nation to a prompt exercise of the only right she has in Government, the right of petition.'

Petitioning was the first strategy employed by women's rights leaders. Anthony and another veteran of reform causes, Lucy Stone, spent Christmas Day of 1865 writing the petition, which was printed in the NASS on the 30 December. It appealed to Congress not to put any obstacles in the way of woman suffrage, and asked for a constitutional amendment that would prohibit restrictions on the franchise on account of sex. This petition campaign also appealed directly to women for support, seeking to go over the heads of the politicians. 'As the question of suffrage is now agitating the public mind, it is the hour for woman to make her demand. Proposals have already been made ... to exclude Woman from a voice in Government ... [so] let the Women of this nation now unitedly [sic] protest.'

This petition campaign faced many problems. At first, many women were reluctant to sign it. Martha Coffin Wright and Lucy McKim Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison's daughter-in-law, were two such non-signatories. Other women signed only reluctantly, including the erstwhile staunch supporters of women's rights Jane Grey Swisshelm and Lucretia Mott, who favoured woman suffrage but thought it would be best to devote their efforts to working for the freedmen. There was also conflict between Stanton and Anthony on the one hand, and Caroline Dall and Caroline Severance of Massachusetts on the other, with the latter couple favouring...

42 ECS to Gerrit Smith, 1 January [1866], Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries [hereafter GS Papers]; 'Joint Resolutions Before Congress Affecting Women,' NASS, 6 January 1866; 'Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Wendell Phillips,' NASS, 3 February 1866.

43 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.68; 'A Petition for Universal Suffrage,' NASS, 30 December 1865.

44 ECS to Wendell Phillips [hereafter WP], 12 January 1866, Phillips Papers.

a more supplicating approach by protesting only against the inclusion of the word ‘male’.

Even when Stanton, Anthony, and Stone did manage to gather together up to ten thousand signatures, they faced problems getting their petitions to the floor of Congress. Some Republican congressmen presented them, but many were reluctant, with the otherwise uncompromising radical Charles Sumner declaring, as he presented the petition sent to him, that this was not the time to discuss such matters. Democratic congressmen were only too happy to introduce them instead, with James Brooks in the Senate particularly keen to embarrass the Republicans by highlighting logical flaws in their campaign to give suffrage to freedmen while continuing to discriminate against women. All in all, the petition campaign achieved little of concrete worth. Indeed, Free has even argued that it led to a hardening of Congress’s resolve to include the word ‘male’ in the Constitution, to avoid the question of woman suffrage disrupting plans for black (male) suffrage. Women’s rights leaders clearly needed a new strategy.

Another plan was for a series of lectures to be held in New York City. An organising committee, formed of Stanton, Stone, Anthony, Abby Hopper Gibbons and Elizabeth Neall Gay, invited Carl Schurz, Wendell Phillips, Senator Gratz Brown, and Henry Ward Beecher to give a lecture each. Stanton argued that the nation was ‘befogged’ on the question of suffrage, and ‘a little light might dissipate the thick clouds.’ Stanton was particularly concerned that terms such as ‘universal’ and ‘equal’ were being applied to suffrage extensions to black men only. A word from a leading thinker, such as Wendell Phillips, and everything would be made clear on the issue. Beecher promised that he would speak on 30 January, but Phillips declined. Despite Stanton’s mix of cajoling and flattery, nothing could convince the AASS president to come to New York and speak for them.

46 SBA to Caroline Healey Dall, 26 December 1865; SBA to Caroline Healey Dall, 30 January 1866; Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society; SBA to WP, 28 January 1866, Phillips Papers.
47 Thomas Treadwell Davis to Matilda Joslyn Gage, 7 February 1866, Matilda Joslyn Gage Papers, MC 377/M-133, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College; ECS to Charles Sumner, 15 February [1866], Charles Sumner Correspondence, MS Am 1, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
48 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p. 78.
50 SBA to WP, 9 January 1866, Phillips Papers; SBA to Carl Schurz, 30 December 1865, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11; ECS to Anne Greene Phillips, before 9 January 1866, Phillips Papers; WP to ECS.
The next idea on the agenda was to work towards a paper for women’s rights. Although there had been antebellum newspapers and journals supportive of the women’s cause, the leaders of the convention movement had never had a paper under their control for permanent agitation.\footnote{Hoffert, When Hens Crow, pp.73-90.} It soon became clear, however, that there was no money for such a venture. Therefore, Stanton approached the NASS with an offer to buy a permanent column. Not only would this give the woman suffragists regular access to the public, Stanton argued that it would increase the circulation of the NASS, helping both causes. But Phillips was not convinced. He desired to keep the paper ‘as an Antislavery organ’.\footnote{ECS to WP, 7 April [1866], Phillips Papers; WP to ECS, after 7 April 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.} Facing a hostile situation, with the Fourteenth Amendment not only overlooking their demands but placing new barriers in the way, and with hopes for petitions, a lecture series, and a paper failing, Stanton, Anthony, Stone and other women’s rights leaders needed a new plan, and a permanent organisation was to be their answer.

**A Broader Basis for Reconstruction**

The work of the women’s rights leaders in 1865 and early 1866 may have been the primary contributing factor to the creation of the AERA, but there were others. Throughout this period, there is much evidence that many reformers were unhappy with the single demand of black (male) suffrage as the *sine qua non* of Reconstruction, let alone the reluctance of Congress to enact that demand. Where many Republicans seemed more interested in securing Union victory and their party’s dominance over Democrats when discussing plans for the re-integration of the Southern states, many reformers yearned for a more fundamental re-organisation of politics and society. Women’s rights leaders built on this feeling and it assumed an expression in the AERA in its demands for the enfranchisement of black men and all women throughout the nation.

As abolitionists debated the dissolution of their societies in the aftermath of emancipation, they considered the very rationale of their reform programme.
Their organisations were anti-slavery organisations, committed in their constitutions to ending chattel slavery and only secondarily committed to the elevation of the freedpeople. Most abolitionists saw no problem with such an association making the transition to demand the suffrage for black men. ‘Slavery is not abolished until the black man has the ballot,’ argued Frederick Douglass, expressing his conviction that suffrage was an abolitionist issue. ‘While the Legislatures of the South retain the right to pass laws making any discrimination between black and white,’ he concluded, ‘slavery still lives there.’

Others, however, were more uneasy about the basis of their arguments – even those otherwise committed to working for the enfranchisement of freedmen. This reflected a longer-term discussion in the anti-slavery movement, about whether they should work purely for the end of slavery, or commit themselves to uplifting society in general to a position where it would abandon slavery of its own accord. Future AERA member, Aaron Powell, was one who struggled with this dilemma. ‘I cannot, with my own convictions, look to any organization, as yet, where I should feel myself entirely at home,’ he said at the AASS anniversary of 1865. ‘May not this Society agree to a dissolution, and ... wisely come together in a capacity covering the ground of the still not wholly abolished slavery, and the still broader ground of human rights?’ Theodore Tilton was another who favoured a broader ground for the AASS. ‘I am opposed to negro suffrage; I am opposed to white suffrage,’ he wrote to Lydia Maria Child. ‘I am in favour of simple suffrage.’

Even if they did not see the need themselves, most abolitionists saw ample room, or even a necessity, for other organisations to campaign for suffrage. ‘Leave no stone unturned,’ said Abby Kelley Foster. ‘Leave no measure untried, to educate the public mind ... mass meetings and conventions must be held ... and all the various agencies for influencing the public mind put in requisition.’ Even Wendell Phillips himself kept up at

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53 ‘Business Meeting,’ NASS, 20 May 1865.
55 ’Business Meeting,’ NASS, 20 May 1865.
56 ‘Theodore Tilton to Lydia Maria Child,’ NASS, 4 March 1865.
57 Thirty-Second Annual Meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 27 May 1865.
least a rhetorical support for other organisations. ‘Our friend wants an Equal Suffrage Association. In heaven’s name, let him have it. There is not reasons [sic] why he should not have one,’ he declared, even whilst arguing that this question should not be discussed at Anti-Slavery meetings. Though not all of these assertions can be definitely shown as support for woman suffrage, as the terms ‘universal suffrage’ and ‘human rights’ were simultaneously used to mean just manhood or all of humankind, these examples still show that there was room in the radical polity for an association that would base itself on the broadest ground, and that there was a constituency of advocates to be drawn upon in that event.

Stanton joined this debate. At this time, she was keeping her more specific opposition to Phillips’s ‘Negro’s Hour’ strategy in private, and devoted her public voice to an attempt to question fundamentally the range of abolitionists’ goals. In a series of letters to the NASS in the summer and autumn of 1865, she set out her universal suffrage position. ‘We have tried class legislation,’ she wrote, ‘and found it a dead failure. No country ever has had or ever will have peace until every citizen has a voice in government.’ When criticising the established political parties, she complained that neither had promised ‘to secure the inalienable rights of man.’ ‘Our “everything” consists of the inalienable rights of man, the true natural condition of man himself,’ she asserted. Rather than talk of granting suffrage for white men, or black men, ‘let us legislate for men.’ While not speaking directly for woman suffrage on this occasion, Stanton was preparing the ground and tapping into this underlying desire, attempting to ensure that the post-war settlement would be built on the broad ground of individual rights and natural justice, not class legislation.

As 1865 turned into 1866, those previously-held sentiments for a new organisation among many abolitionists and radicals grew into maturity. At the annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in November 1865, Alfred H. Love proposed the society change its name to the Pennsylvania Equal Rights Society, but this was rejected. Furthermore, at the end of December, Tilton

58 ‘Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 11 November 1865.
59 McPherson, Struggle for Equality, p.327; Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.63-64.
60 ‘Universal Suffrage,’ NASS, 29 July 1865; ‘The husking bee and who got the corn,’ NASS, 14 October 1865; ‘Our Everything,’ NASS, 25 November 1865.
61 ‘Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Meeting,’ NASS, 4 November 1865.
proposed to Anthony the creation of an “Equal Rights” Committee or Society, and the “National Standard” as its organ. Future AERA member John T. Sargent, whilst arguing that anti-slavery societies should be dedicated to black (male) suffrage only, still suggested that there remained a chance for a more general reform movement, arguing that ‘these several great interests grow as naturally out of the great question of social reform as the leaves on a tree,’ giving hope and encouragement to the woman suffragists. These feelings were nurtured and found expression, first of all, in a New York State Equal Rights Association. This was little more than an organising committee, consisting of Tilton as president, Frederick Douglass and Stanton as vice-presidents, Anthony as a general agent, and Aaron Powell as secretary and treasurer. What this committee showed, however, was the direction of organisation-building among equal rights workers. Douglass praised ‘the launching of the good ship “Equal Rights Association”’ and Samuel J. May, likewise, gave his assent to the association. But problems emerged very quickly in this committee. Stanton soon became impatient with Tilton’s lack of commitment, and, as a result, no conventions were held, no lectures organised, and no membership structure established. Something larger, more stable, and more permanent was needed.

Woman suffragists hoped that something larger and more permanent would come directly from the existing anti-slavery societies, but it was not simply a case of converting them to the cause of woman suffrage. Throughout the attempts to unite the two campaigns, Stanton, Anthony, and others, focused their arguments on what they called the ‘true principles of Republicanism.’ In this way, woman suffragists attempted not just to convert the abolitionists, but to re-focus the entire Reconstruction agenda around true equal rights. ‘On what ground do you claim suffrage for the negro?’ Stanton asked Phillips. ‘Because he is a negro, or because he is a man and a citizen?’ She went on to argue that an equal rights campaign was the natural successor to abolitionism. ‘Have we labored thirty years

63 John T. Sargent to ECS, 29 January 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
64 Frederick Douglass to ECS, 16 February 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11; Samuel J. May to ECS, 27 February 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
65 ECS to WP, 4 March [1866], Phillips Papers.
but to add two millions more to a privileged order [black men to the ranks of voting white men], or to educate the people into the first principles of human rights – the sacredness of the individual? Convinced it was the latter, Stanton finished: ‘the only question worth the consideration of all true men and women is the rights of citizens in the reconstruction.’

This discourse was evident at the first formal attempt to convert an anti-slavery society, at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in January 1866. Stephen S. Foster brought the question of converting the society to ‘equal rights’, arguing that the two causes were one because suffrage was a universal right, they all shared a ‘common enemy’, and combining their forces would prove more efficient. The proposal was defended by Tilton. ‘He spoke ably on various branches of the great subject,’ reported the NASS’s Boston correspondent, ‘and asked the co-operation of the Society, and of all friends of freedom and reform, in a movement shortly to be commenced in New York for the advocacy of Universal Suffrage.’ Anthony and Stone, too, argued the case, but many abolitionists would not be moved, and the ultimate fate of the proposal to convert to equal rights was scuppered by the procedural manoeuvrings of Wendell Phillips, who ruled that to convert would be to change the constitution of the organisation, which required a notice period of three months. The question of converting the anti-slavery societies would have to wait until the AASS anniversary meeting in May.

In the mean-time, Phillips hoped that Stanton and Anthony would be convinced to drop their demands at a face-to-face meeting. ‘Half an hour’s talk will open your ideas more than any letters will suffice,’ he wrote. That meeting was held in early February, and Phillips brought Tilton in to help his argument. They asserted that woman suffrage was still a ‘distant’ hope, and that black (male) suffrage was the only realistically achievable goal. As he had argued earlier, Phillips was convinced that the two causes ‘are certainly not identified in the public mind.’ Stanton argued that it was the abolitionists’ job to convince the

67 ‘Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Wendell Phillips,’ NASS, 3 February 1866.
68 ‘Our Boston Correspondence,’ NASS, 3 February 1866.
69 ‘Special Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 3 February 1866.
70 WP to ECS, [between 9 and 12 January 1866], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
71 ECS to Anne Greene Phillips, [15 February 1866], Phillips Papers.
nation that the two were not separate questions, but all bound up in the basic principles of republicanism. But Phillips was not convinced, fearing to jeopardise all that had been gained for black (male) suffrage by giving their enemies more reason to oppose them – by blocking ‘wheels that are only too willing to be blocked’, as he put it.72

Despite the demoralising meeting, Stanton and the other equal rights advocates were not willing to give up. They continued to hope that they would be able to convince the wider membership of the American Anti-Slavery Society to follow their course. Their chance came when Aaron M. Powell introduced a resolution at the AASS anniversary convention, arguing that the upcoming constitutional convention for the state of New York would be a chance to remove any suffrage restrictions based on ‘race’. Stanton moved to amend that resolution by adding restrictions based on ‘sex’. This set off a larger debate, with Phillips ruling that this move was not consistent with the society’s constitution. ‘This [is] not a suffrage society alone,’ added Abby Kelley Foster, ‘it [is] an anti-slavery society. The negro is still a slave in fact, and at present, while the civil rights of negroes cannot be protected, we [are] still an anti-slavery society.’ Stephen Foster and Robert Purvis, supported Stanton’s position. ‘It [is] the business of this society to resist all oppression,’ argued Purvis. For Purvis, the oppression of women was just as serious a problem as the oppression of the freedpeople, but these arguments were for nothing, as supporters of the conversion of the AASS to equal rights could not secure enough support in the meeting, and Phillips was sustained by a vote.73 Equal rights workers, and woman suffragists, would have to return to their New York State Equal Rights Association, and expand it into a national association of their own.

When they formed this national association, women’s rights leaders built on a widespread feeling that Reconstruction should be a more fundamental process of re-organisation and regeneration after the Civil War – more than simply the re-integration of the Southern states or the extension of white men’s political rights to black men. Indeed, as will be seen in the next chapter, many abolitionists

72 ECS to WP, 15 January [1866], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11; ‘“Woman’s Rights”,’ NASS, 30 December 1865; WP to ECS, [between 9 and 12 January 1866], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
directly cited this desire to see a broader vision of Reconstruction as a reason for joining the AERA even while considering black (male) suffrage to be a priority.

**Political-Cultural Forces**

As shown above, the AERA was very much a product of the unique historical circumstances of the spring of 1866. However, this association was also a product of its political-cultural heritage. The formation drew on the history of voluntary associations and reflected trends that saw reformers become more concerned with politics and focused on the federal stage. Where before the Civil War, women’s rights leaders had been content without an organisational structure, their experience of war and the developments in mainstream political culture made the development of such a structure more important.

The AERA was the first national organisation to declare a primary concern for the enfranchisement of women, but it owed something in its creation to the tendency among Americans to come together and form voluntary associations. This tendency was noticed, perhaps most famously, by de Tocqueville during his tour of America in the 1830s.⁷⁴ Such organisations had been of vital importance in the American colonial experience, but it was the Revolution and the Second Great Awakening that saw a dramatic increase in the number, scope, and power of voluntary associations. Religious revivals spawned Bible and tract societies, missionary societies, temperance groups, and benevolent associations. The democratisation of American religion, in particular, gave opportunities for engagement by those excluded from traditional political sites. This became particularly true of women, who formed the backbone of most of these organisations.⁷⁵ Furthermore, it was through such organisations that a large group of women first got their experience of politics.⁷⁶

Women’s rights advocates, however, were reluctant to form an organisation of their own before the Civil War. A number of attempts were made in the early

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1850s to form such a body, with those in favour arguing that it would make the campaign more systematic and efficient, and facilitate networks across state boundaries. But a majority of activists were opposed. ‘I hate organizations,’ confessed Paulina Wright Davis. ‘They cramp me. I never like to work for their machinery.’ Angelina Grimké Weld echoed this view: ‘We need no external bonds to hold us together,’ she argued. In Weld’s view, a permanent organisation would crush the spirit of individualism on which the whole campaign was based.77

This distrust of organisation, Hoffert argued, stemmed from the anti-institutional bias that women’s rights leaders brought from their experiences in restrictive, hierarchical churches. The reform networks that characterised abolition, temperance, and women’s rights, on the other hand, gave these women independence and meant they could overcome personal differences and avoid organisational struggles for power. Without a national focus to the campaigning that characterised the post-Civil War period, the need for a national organisation was less important. Furthermore, as Marilley argued, women’s rights leaders chose not to establish an organisation because they preferred to use their yearly conventions as a forum for refining their arguments. With a free platform, reformers could discuss their goals and work out their strategies before developing a national structure.78

An important milestone before the creation of the AERA was the WNLL. This organisation recruited many stalwart women’s rights advocates, exhibited, according to Venet, a strongly ‘feminist’ agenda, and gave women’s rights leaders vital organisational experience and greater opportunities for the creation of personal networks for activist women. After the war, as women’s rights leaders came to miss this structure, the WNLL became an organisational blueprint for the AERA, with a similar national structure of offices and officers, and yearly anniversary conventions.79 Universal suffrage ‘will never be realized by us,’ said Stephen Foster at the founding meeting of the AERA, ‘unless it is from a united, persevering effort, giving a new impetus to the Woman’s Rights movement. I think

it necessary that we should have a more perfect organization'. Such a move would give them focus, direction, order, and control in a political-cultural context that had changed significantly since the early 1850s.80

The first of these changes was the growing importance of politics and political action to social reform. This was a trend, as Ginzberg has shown, that began in the antebellum era but intensified in the post-war years. Where an older generation of female benevolent activists had seen their reforming ability dependant on the moral suasion of society, reformers in the 1850s, dispirited by their lack of success, came to focus more on the limitations of this power. 'Moral suasion is moral balderdash,' wrote one contemporary.81 As politics came to be dominated more and more by electoral and partisan activity, old avenues of influence that many women had traditionally exploited were closed off. The new political movements of the 1840s and 1850s, the Liberty Party and the Free Soil Party, while absorbing social reform energies, came to focus more and more on specific goals rather than wholesale societal transformation. Additionally, traditional benevolent women sought responses to specific social problems that would have more immediate and tangible results, building individual charitable institutions, often with the help and support of men, forcing their focus onto a more local stage.82

Women reformers were forced to adjust to the new circumstances. They sought more and more opportunities to engage with the partisan system, expressing partisan beliefs, discussing detailed issues of electoral politics, and attending political rallies. Through this work, many women developed a strong sense of partisan identity, as well as a strong awareness of their own political identity.83

They developed their tactics, too. Rather than focus on the transformation of society, groups that sought such widespread changes as the abolition of slavery and temperance, looked for, in Ginzberg’s words, ‘shortcuts to reform,’ turning to

80 Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, p.49.
81 Quoted in Ginzberg, Work of Benevolence, p.98.
83 R.J. Zboray & M.S. Zboray, Voices Without Votes: Women and Politics in Antebellum New England (Hanover, 2010). See also: E. Varon, "We Mean to Be Counted": White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1998); S.M. Robertson, Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest (Chapel Hill, 2010), particularly ch. 2.
the help of the government. The Civil War continued this trend, with women activists looking to more concrete and tangible gains for their efforts, in search of more efficient and ordered means to carry out benevolent works, this time with the focus being the relief of Northern soldiers. This gave those activists a pressing need to look more closely at the structure and workings of their organisations, and this trend is very evident in the early considerations of the leaders of the AERA. In a period in which political change came to rely more and more on organisational structure and electoral and partisan engagement, the lack of a formal organisation would have been detrimental to universal suffrage advocates.

Linked to this specific development in the work of women activists over the war years was the increasing national focus of American politics, and the growing power of the Federal Government up to and during the Civil war. ‘Up to this hour, we have looked to State action only for the recognition of our rights,’ declared Anthony at the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention. ‘But now, by the results of the war, the whole question of suffrage reverts back to Congress and the Constitution.’ By the war’s end, the federal budget had increased more than fifteen times, to $1 billion, and 53,000 people were now employed directly by the central government. This created, in Foner’s words, ‘a broad constituency committed to maintaining the integrity of the national state’ – it was more than just suffrage that became the interest of the Federal Government. The war also contributed to the creation of a stronger sense of national identity, with more and more Americans identifying themselves in relation to the nation rather than to their home state. Furthermore, in more practical terms, the Federal Government, by creating this massive patronage machine and integrated tax system, had come to control more and more areas of American life.

This growth in scope was mirrored by the belief that the Federal Government was now the greatest hope for the security of rights. In a reversal of Revolutionary sentiment, it was now the states that posed the greatest threat to individual freedoms, and it was the duty of Congress to legislate against this. This

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84 Ginzberg, Work of Benevolence, p.97.
87 Foner, Reconstruction, pp.23-24.
was particularly the belief of many abolitionists after seeing the government, which had before the war been so dominated by what they saw as the Slave Power, make the *volte face* and abolish slavery itself. The government was now, seemingly, on their side.\(^8^8\) This was reflected more broadly in the post-war work of a wide variety of women activists, who now saw government as the context for benevolent work. By seeking roles in federal-based institutions, such as the Freedmen’s Bureau or Sanitary Commission, or even the demand for suffrage itself, activists made the connection to a more national system of activism.\(^8^9\)

The increased importance of the national focus is first seen in the WNLL. As Venet argued, ‘[w]hereas prewar women had formed regional antislavery, women’s rights, benevolent, and temperance societies, the league was a national feminist-abolitionist movement.’\(^9^0\) The formation of the AERA continued this trend, as equal rights leaders sought to focus their campaign on the national level and prove the truly national nature of their organisation.

*The Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention*

All the forces shown above came together in the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention of May 1866, in which the AERA was formed. Existing scholarship, in focusing on the failure to convert the AASS to universal suffrage, presents this formation as somewhat of a second-best option. Furthermore, it has been argued that this convention was supposed to be a celebration of that aforementioned conversion and therefore aimed at confronting wealthy women’s indifference to suffrage.\(^9^1\) However, the 1866 Convention was not just a reaction to the previous failure, and was, in many ways, reflective of the growing demand among abolitionists and radicals for a more solid and republican base for Reconstruction, as it focused squarely on equal rights and universal suffrage, rather than just on the single demand of suffrage for women.

In planning for the event, Stanton was keen to recruit speakers firmly grounded in the radical abolitionist tradition, including Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, to show that this convention would be more than just

\(^{88}\) Ibid.


\(^{90}\) Venet, *Neither Ballots Nor Bullets*, p.149.

\(^{91}\) Dudden, *Fighting Chance*, p.83.
about women’s rights. The Call for the convention also made it clear that this convention would be set in the discursive boundaries of a more fundamental approach to Reconstruction, not just for women’s rights. ‘The question now is,’ read the Call, ‘have we the wisdom and conscience, from the present upheavings of our political system, to reconstruct a government on the one enduring basis that has never yet been tried – EQUAL RIGHTS TO ALL.’

Stanton opened the convention in this radical fashion. ‘Now in the reconstruction is the opportunity ... to base our Government on the broad principle of equal rights for all.’ This commitment to equal rights and republican principles is evident throughout the convention. Tilton spoke of the ballot ‘which belongs equally to all citizens.’ He did not claim ‘the ballot for women as women, but for women as citizens.’ Henry Ward Beecher added ‘we are not discussing merely the question of the vote for the African, or of his status as a newborn citizen. This is a fact which compels us to discuss the whole underlying question of government.’ Such was the belief, among equal rights workers. Anthony, in her address to Congress, declared that she ‘will not rehearse the oft-repeated arguments on the natural rights of every citizen.’ Underlying the opinion that the question now at hand was one of universal principles, Anthony argued that she had nothing to add to Senator Sumner’s arguments for black (male) suffrage; each point Sumner raised applied equally to women, and every citizen. ‘We propose no new theories,’ Anthony went on. ‘We simply ask you to secure to ALL the practical application of the immutable principles of our government, without distinction of race, color, or sex.’

Republican principles remained important throughout the convention. As Dudden has shown, Stanton devoted much of her speech to criticising the wealthy women of society for their indifference towards suffrage. But these arguments still displayed a larger concern for republican principles, in that indifference to suffrage not only imperilled the rights of less fortunate women but also left the

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92 ECS to Anne Greene Phillips, 27 March [1866], Phillips Papers; Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, p.3.
94 Ibid., pp.14, 16, 33, 35.
95 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.83-84.
nation open to corruption. Only equal rights, and an equal interest in government for all, could safeguard republicanism.\textsuperscript{96}

The resolutions of the convention, too, retained a focus on equal rights. ‘Liberty and Equality are the inherent rights of man in civilization,’ read one, ‘and no constitution or code should be accepted as law that does not secure them to every citizen.’ ‘Disfranchisement in a republic is as great an anomaly, if not cruelty, as slavery itself,’ claimed another, attempting, once and for all, to unite the cause of women to the former slaves. The same went on to conclude that ‘[i]t is, therefore, the solemn duty of Congress ... to see that there be no abridgment of suffrage among persons responsible to the law, on account of color or sex.’\textsuperscript{97}

This attempt to assert the unity between the two causes was aided by the presence on the platform of black activist Frances Watkins Harper. Although she spoke forcefully of her support for black enfranchisement, and the particular importance that the ballot had to the former slave communities, she still asserted that we ‘are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul.’\textsuperscript{98} In calling attention to the plight of African-Americans in a country that persecuted them for the colour of their skin, Harper ensured that there was to be representation for that community in the founding meeting of the AERA, and that this association was not to begin \textit{solely} as a woman suffrage organisation.

This rhetorical commitment to equal rights was maintained in the resolution that brought about the formation of the AERA itself. ‘By the act of Emancipation and the Civil Rights Bill,’ it read, ‘the negro and the woman now hold the same civil and political status, alike needing only the ballot ... The same arguments apply equally to both classes, proving all partial legislation fatal to republican institutions’. ‘Therefore,’ Anthony, the resolution’s sponsor, continued, ‘that we may henceforth concentrate all our forces for the practical application of our one grand, distinctive, national idea – UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE – I hope we will unanimously adopt the resolution before us, thus resolving this Eleventh National

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention}, pp.6-9; ECS to Anne Greene Phillips, 27 March [1866], Phillips Papers.
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention}, pp.5-6.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p.46.
Woman’s Rights Convention into the “American Equal Rights Association”. The resolution was seconded by Martha Coffin Wright, and was adopted unanimously. A short recess was taken for the purpose of writing the new organisation’s constitution, and when the convention re-assembled, the AERA was born.\textsuperscript{99}

\textit{Conclusion}

The creation of the AERA was a significant development in American history, being the first national organisation that sought the extension of the franchise to all adults, regardless of race or sex. The site of the creation – the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention – reflects the importance of the women’s rights convention movement to the organisation’s founding. However, as this chapter has shown, the AERA was far more than just a women’s rights creation, drawing in as it did on feelings among reformers for a broader basis for Reconstruction than just the re-integration of the Southern states or the extension of white men’s rights to black men. It was also far more than a negative reaction to the failure to convert the AASS to a programme of universal suffrage. On the contrary, it should be seen as a progressive move, building on a variety of trends that found expression in this new organisation.

The AERA saw the coming together of the causes of woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage, but it was more than the uniting of two causes for expediency’s sake. The association sought to re-shape the debates of Reconstruction, moving from the questions of the rights of races, to the rights of individuals. In doing so, it built on antebellum reform movements, specifically in the cases of women’s rights, with its focus on the importance of the ballot, and the abolitionist movement, with its focus on the moral equality of all individuals. As abolitionists moved towards a position of suffrage as the corner-stone of their campaign, the two causes, which already shared so much, now shared a primary goal.

This new movement was spurred on by the national political context in 1865 and early 1866 as woman suffrage supporters began to question the ‘Negro’s Hour’ policy of Wendell Phillips and the AASS. Proposals for what became the Fourteenth Amendment galvanised and enhanced these woman suffrage demands,

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., pp.48-52.
with nearly ten thousand women signing petitions protesting the word ‘male’ entering the Federal Constitution. The particularly uncertain position of black (male) suffrage at this time, with President Johnson growing increasingly hostile to radical Republican plans, and moderate congressional Republicans unwilling to risk their power by advocating a measure that they believed was unpopular with the electorate, allowed women’s rights leaders to place their campaign within a wider context, building connections with those who argued for a more comprehensive and more stable basis for the reconstruction of the nation after the Civil War.

In addition to this, the AERA took its place within much wider forces in American political and cultural life in the mid-nineteenth century. These trends encompassed the move away from moral suasion and benevolent societal improvement to a more dedicated engagement with electoral politics and national government structures. The adoption of a voluntary associational structure with a national focus further reflected political trends that had been developing before and during the Civil War. It is this associational structure that will be the focus of the next chapter as it provides a tripartite definition of the AERA.
3

Structures, Ideas, and Members: A Tripartite Definition

Introduction

With the passing of the relevant resolutions, the affirmative vote for the constitution, and the selection of officers, the AERA officially came into being.\(^1\) The gathered convention – those who paid into the coffers and voted for its resolutions – were formally made one. In so doing, they joined the extended list of voluntary associations that had been so prevalent in the U.S. polity since the Revolution.\(^2\) But what were the main characteristics of the AERA? And how can we define the association properly? Was it, as one contemporary press report described it, nothing more than a talking shop?\(^3\) Was it a clearing house for correspondence? Or just a paper organisation? Or was it something more than that? Historians have yet to focus on this question.\(^4\) This chapter will argue that the AERA had a discrete organisational structure, was united behind a simple demand, and had a membership that shared common characteristics and a commitment to equal rights, giving an overall tripartite definition.

The first section will deal with the organisational and structural aspects of this argument. The AERA was never a massive national organisation, with tens of thousands of members and hundreds of local auxiliary societies. Efforts to form such a network of grass-roots organisations, to provide strength and depth, were only at the earliest stages when the association split. However, the AERA was more than just simply a paper organisation – a name, a list of officers, and little else. In structural terms, there was a distinct definition to the association, however fragile and underdeveloped. Elements of this – albeit weak – structure can be seen within


\(^2\) See ch. 2.

\(^3\) ‘Having no work to do,’ reported the article, ‘it is done it admirably. Talk has been the word from the start.’ 'Equal Rights,' World (New York), 22 November 1866.

\(^4\) Kugler gave a description of the constitution and officers, but offered no analysis on the point: I. Kugler, From Ladies to Women: The Organised Struggle for Women’s Rights in the Reconstruction Era (New York, 1987), pp.48-49.
the context of association-building in nineteenth-century America and this points to the definition of the AERA as a discrete part of the polity.

Second, the AERA will be defined by its ideas. In the simplest terms, the AERA was committed to equal political rights for all. Distinctions would not be made on the grounds of sex or race. Instead, humanity would be the basis for political representation. By dedicating itself to this definition of citizenship, the AERA established itself as a distinctive force in American history, differentiating itself from other reform efforts.

The final part of this tripartite definition will be a study of the membership of the AERA. The focus of this section will be to question DuBois’s argument that the tension between supporters of woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage was ‘structured into’ the AERA, and that these activists had ‘divided loyalties’.\(^5\) Rather, the members of the association shared a great deal, including socio-economic backgrounds, reform histories, and a commitment to equal rights. Where there were differences, these were complex and not merely split into the two camps of black (male) suffrage and woman suffrage. Instead, the members held a myriad of attitudes towards the tactics and timetables, whilst always sharing a commitment to equal rights. Furthermore, these members recognised the importance of the association itself, seeing their membership as more than just a name on a list or a dollar on a collection plate.

**Organisational**

The first element of this tripartite definition of the AERA concerns the organisational structures. This section will argue that the AERA, while underdeveloped and far from robust, was more than just a paper organisation. It will do this by showing that the association had much in common with the traditions of voluntary associations in American history on a number of fronts. Theda Skocpol and Johann Neem have offered the most detailed studies of American nineteenth-century voluntary associations. Together, they have highlighted several key aspects of the culture: a clear organisational plan with a constitution, officers, and a series of committees, each responsible for business, finance, or nominating

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officers; a clear adherence to these organisational structures from the membership; a federal level focus with regional auxiliaries bound to the central body; and an established means of communication, with great importance attached to print culture, be it a newspaper, pamphlets, the publishing of an annual report, or correspondence. These aspects are all found, in varying degrees, in the workings of the AERA and while these factors are not necessarily a measure of strength, they do point to a discrete definition for the association. ⁶

Established standards of organisation and procedure were particularly important to the AERA. A constitution was drawn up, drafted by Parker Pillsbury, and organisational aspects were contained in Articles IV, V, VI and VIII, which set out the numbers and types of officers, the powers of the Executive Committee, the procedures for holding anniversary conventions, and the process required to amend the constitution. ⁷ Article V, ascribing powers to the Executive Committee was particularly important as it reserved an enormous amount of control for that body. It had the ‘power to enact their by-laws, fill any vacancy … employ agents, determine what compensation shall be paid to agents … direct the Treasurer in the application of all moneys, and call special meetings of the Society.’ ⁸ Yet this was not altogether unusual. Jeffrey, Ryan, and Tyrrell all asserted the importance of small groups of individuals in the running of voluntary associations in a variety of reform contexts. ⁹

In the case of the AERA, the enormous amount of power vested in the leadership was exercised by different individuals at different times. Although nominally President, Lucretia Mott never asserted control. This task fell to whoever took on the mantle of leadership, whoever among the officers had the

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⁷ Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, p.52; Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the American Equal Rights Association: Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 9 and 10, 1867 (New York, 1867), p.70. As Jeffrey argued, a constitution was a vital document for an association, as it summed up the campaign and acted ‘as a statement of belief to be used with outsiders.’ J.R. Jeffrey, The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement (Chapel Hill, 1998), p.56.
⁸ Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.70.
time and attention to devote to the organisation. In practice, this was largely Susan B. Anthony, whose role as corresponding secretary gave her the authority to communicate with external partners. Yet the executive committee always maintained ultimate control, albeit in a more reactive form. For example, when Anthony took it upon herself to associate the AERA with notorious racist George Francis Train, the committee was quick to distance itself from such a move. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were forced to declare that their association with Train had always been a personal one.

The holding of the anniversary convention, in keeping with Article VIII of the constitution, was also dominated by procedural compliance. A Call was drafted, signed by the leadership, and distributed, in order to advertise the meeting. An annual report was prepared and read, including a report of the organisation’s financial position. Various committees were organised within the convention: a finance committee to arrange for the collection of donations; a business committee to draft resolutions; and a committee of nomination to propose a new list of officers. Such procedural forms are very much evident in the only extant set of minutes from an AERA business meeting, from 8 June 1868. In this meeting, suggestions for changes were ‘moved’; agreements were ‘carried’. It was even necessary for Theodore Tilton to propose a motion to request that Edward S. Bunker be officially made secretary for the day in order to take the notes, yet allowing him no ‘constitutional authority to take part in its proceedings’.

There was a point to all this procedural compliance and insistence on organisational forms. An organisational structure gave several benefits to groups like the AERA. As Ryan argued, an association could be a forum for public debate, a medium through which views could be expressed, individually and collectively, and, as Jeffrey argued, this could bring publicity. In a nation of ‘joiners’, where

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10 See ch. 4 for Anthony’s control of the AERA canvass of New York State.
12 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.3, 5-6, 17, 52 62-63.
13 Unpublished minutes of AERA business meeting, 8 June 1868, American Equal Rights Association Subject File, National American Woman Suffrage Association Records, MSS34132, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter NAWSA Records].
there was a high level of recognition of associational behaviour and culture, such an organisational structure could also bring legitimacy to the campaign. This is clearly seen in the adherence to procedural formalities. Doyle has highlighted the widespread compliance with parliamentary procedures among nineteenth-century American voluntary associations, which can be, in part, attributed to the highly legalistic nature of the wider organisational culture, as delineated by Novak. This appears to be particularly relevant among groups who were in some way excluded from the political process. Historians have found such emphasis on organisational structures and procedural formalities in organisations of women, African-Americans, and Jews, as they attempted to assert that they were fully able to take their place in the wider polity. It could also give such individuals a sense of access to the political system, and a political education.

As well as legitimising a cause, an organisational structure enabled members to speak with greater authority. When the accumulated membership of the AERA sent a memorial to Congress in the winter of 1866, protesting against the Fourteenth Amendment, they began: 'The undersigned, Officers and Representatives of the American Equal Rights Association,' and signed off 'in behalf of' the AERA. Petitions were presented to congressmen and state politicians from the AERA. Furthermore, when dealing with politicians directly,

19 'Memorial of the American Equal Rights Association to the Congress of the United States,' National Anti-Slavery Standard [hereafter NASS], 22 December 1866.
20 'Petition,' State Journal of the Senate (New York), 9 January 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
members would use the collective force of the AERA behind them to impress upon their correspondent the weight they held, as Josephine Griffing did when she warned Senator Ben Wade that ‘the women of the American Equal Rights Association ... have resolved that they will not support a candidate for office ... who does not’ guarantee the rights of all.21 Letters would be written on AERA stationery, with return addresses for correspondence.22 By speaking on or in behalf of the AERA, members could utilise the power of organisation and attempt to overcome the difficulties of disfranchisement and exclusion from established partisan structures. As Scott put it: ‘As organisations they could ask and gain.’23

Forming as an association enabled a clear vision of where this pressure would come from and how it could be accommodated, offering a point of contact for correspondents.

In more practical terms, members could use the name of their organisation to raise money.24 In the case of the AERA, this was done from many sources. General collections were instituted during the meetings25; two special funds, which had been set up for the purposes of advancing anti-slavery and women’s rights campaigns – the Jackson and Hovey Funds – were drawn on26; and funds were sought directly from wealthy individuals.27 Without the organisational apparatus behind them, there was no accountability for the money, and no authority to ask for it. It also allowed the members to contract debts to be paid later.28 This money was then spent by the leadership on paying lecturers, printing promotional material, and other activities. Indeed, money was of vital importance

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22 SBA to Charles James Folger, 6 June 1867, Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC04360.034; Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History; Amy Kirby Post to Isaac Post, 7 July 1867, Post Family Papers, University of Rochester [hereafter Post Family Papers]; Parker Pillsbury to 'friend', 26 September 1867, Alma Lutz Collection, A-110; M-133, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.
23 Scott, Natural Allies, p.175.
24 Jeffrey, Great Silent Army, pp.85-86.
25 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.43.
27 Lucy Stone [hereafter LS] and Henry B. Blackwell [hereafter HBB] to Charles Sumner, 8 November 1866, Charles Sumner Correspondence, MS Am 1, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
28 Susan B. Anthony [hereafter SBA] to Gerrit Smith, 6 March 1867, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries [hereafter GS Papers].
to the AERA. Without it, campaigning would be very difficult, and as new sources of funds were sought, arguments would develop among the membership.\textsuperscript{29}

The name of the AERA gave its members a reference point for external relations, but it also provided a centralised focus for workers and supporters for the cause. The mobilising power of voluntary associations has been found in a number of reform contexts, with formal organisations providing individuals with mutual support and vital encouragement in difficult and unpopular campaigns.\textsuperscript{30} It also provided a practical central focus. When the Kansas legislature promulgated woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage referenda in 1867, local supporters of the campaign turned to the AERA for support, pleading for help. ‘Can your National Convention send us the speakers?’ asked Samuel Wood, state senator and leader in the Kansas Impartial Suffrage Association.\textsuperscript{31} The AERA also solicited correspondence from John Stuart Mill, British Member of Parliament and well-known supporter of suffrage extension.\textsuperscript{32} Furthermore, the annual conventions were flooded with letters of support from around the country. For distant workers, in the US or abroad, the AERA was a focal point and represented the cause of universal suffrage in their minds.\textsuperscript{33}

In more practical terms, the AERA was an organising body. Meetings were held under its auspices and special committees were established to carry out certain tasks. A committee was established, consisting of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Ward Beecher to petition and memorialise the New York constitutional convention in 1867.\textsuperscript{34} In accordance with Article V of the constitution, the AERA also acted as the central employer, taking on agents to carry out its campaigning work.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, and perhaps more subtly, the association had an organising and encouraging effect on its own supporters. Caroline Severance wrote to Lucy Stone that she had no money to spare the cause, but through the AERA she could ‘serve by standing and waiting – my old painful

\textsuperscript{29} See chs 4 and 6 of this work on the issue of finance.
\textsuperscript{31} Samuel N. Wood [hereafter SNW] to SBA, 9 April 1867, Phillips Papers.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, pp.71-77.
\textsuperscript{35} SBA to Gerrit Smith, 6 March 1867, GS Papers.
service – or, as before, try to atone for my own deficiencies by loosing the purse
strings of other more-favored mortals.’36 This was all backed up by a permanent
office at No. 37, Park Row, New York City, run mostly by Mary E. Gage, the
daughter of veteran women’s rights advocate Frances Dana Gage. When Frances
fell ill, causing Mary to have to leave the office and devote her full time to her
mother’s care, Parker Pillsbury took over. The change was announced in the
*National Anti-Slavery Standard (NASS)*, demonstrating the importance which the
AERA considered the office to have. Indeed, there was a ‘constant call here for
tracts and information’, said Anthony.37

The way the AERA reached out from its central focus also shows
congruence with nineteenth-century associational culture. Skocpol argued that a
common strategy for spreading the organisational plan was to mirror the federal
structure of the nation, with a national-state-local scheme, and she called this:
‘casting wide nets’. An association would become established in one region, or at
the national level, and then spread by sending out workers to convert local people
and use organisational templates to help them to form their own auxiliary
associations.38 The AERA’s national network was uneven and relatively shallow,
but its attempts to spread the word clearly reflect wider cultural practices. It
began locally, with a New York State Committee in January 1866. ‘We decided to
make ours a special state association,’ wrote Stanton to Caroline Dall, ‘because our
immediate work must be in and for our own state.’ But the plan was always there
for a national organisation: ‘We should have a National and then state and county,
and still smaller district organizations, so that the National voices could fill the
State halls, and the State, the County and the district’.39 The national structure was
then established in May 1866, as shown in chapter three. That umbrella structure
was intended to be truly national. Article I of the constitution determined the
name to be the American Equal Rights Association, with the word ‘American’
declaring the national pretensions of the organisation.40 This is also seen in the

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36 Caroline M. Severance to LS, 16 November 1866, NAWSA Records.
37 SBA to SNW, 23 August 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12; SBA to ‘Unknown’, c. Aug 1867, in ECS-
SBA Papers, Reel 12; ‘Personal,’ NASS, 7 September 1867.
39 ECS to Caroline Healey Dall, 31 January 1866, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082,
Massachusetts Historical Society.
40 *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, p.70.
offices of Vice-President. One historian argued that, by electing seventeen vice presidents in 1867, the AERA set itself up for organisational incoherence, but these seventeen officers were in place to ensure that as many states as possible had a vice president to give the impression of national representation.\textsuperscript{41} As an illustration of this, in the 1867 anniversary convention proceedings, the only officers listed with their state of origin were the vice-presidents. In total, fifteen states, plus the District of Columbia, were represented, from Kansas in the west to Massachusetts in the north-east.\textsuperscript{42} By 1869, 31 states (plus D.C.) provided vice-presidents, including as far west as California and Nevada, and south into the Carolinas and Texas.\textsuperscript{43} By promoting itself as truly national, the AERA could take on greater authority and attempt to spread its appeal.

Beneath the national level, state and local organisations added depth to the movement, albeit uneven and under-developed. New York saw most of the activity on a local level. As AERA workers went through the state on their canvass in the winter of 1866-67, attempts were made to form local organisations at every stopping point. ‘We propose to organize Equal Rights clubs or committees in every city, town and village,’ wrote Parker Pillsbury in an appeal to the people of New York, ‘to hold meetings for discussions and lectures, to circulate tracts and petitions, and to raise funds to enable the Association to carry forward its work for educating the popular sentiment.’\textsuperscript{44} Some of these attempts were successful, as at Utica, where a business committee of local men and women was formed, and a permanent Equal Rights Club established thereafter.\textsuperscript{45} And some were not so successful. Despite her best attempts at enthusing neighbours, Martha Coffin Wright could not persuade them to form an Equal Rights Club in Auburn, New York.\textsuperscript{46}

Everywhere, the goal was to get the local people involved. In the club established at Utica, the officers were entirely local. In Rochester, Anthony

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, p.62.
\textsuperscript{43} ‘Women of the Period,’ \textit{World} (New York), 13 May 1869.
\textsuperscript{44} ‘State Constitutional Convention.’ \textit{NASS}, 8 December 1866.
\textsuperscript{45} ‘City and County,’ \textit{Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette}, 11 December 1866, in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 11.
\textsuperscript{46} Martha Coffin Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, 23 December 1866, Garrison Family Papers, MS 60, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College [hereafter GFP Smith].
employed Amy Kirby Post to organise her own town and county. Anthony left it in Post’s hands to take care of advertising and securing press support. Furthermore, these organisations did not just develop in places where the canvassing agents of the AERA visited on their campaign. The membership lists of the AERA indicate that James C. Jackson, an AERA member, represented a Dansville, New York, club, which donated $105 dollars to the central funds. Edwin Studwell, another AERA member, did likewise for a Westchester, New York, club, and Edward Lawrence represented the South Salem, New York, Equal Rights Association at an AERA Fourth of July picnic in 1867.

Other states were targeted as well. Again, levels of success varied from place to place. In Pennsylvania, a separate organisation was established, and contributed $28 to the national coffers. As with New York, local Pennsylvania people were recruited, rather than parachuting in AERA leaders from the national organisation. Resolutions at the founding meeting spoke of forming 'Equal Rights Clubs in every county, township and ward'. A similar organisation was formed in New Jersey in December 1867, with the impetus coming from Lucy Stone, among others, and in the District of Columbia in 1868, with Josephine Griffing taking a lead. Failed attempts were also made to organise Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Maryland.

By moving out across the country and putting special emphasis on organising the local people, the AERA spread its message and tried to organise a nationwide coalition for the advancement of its campaign. In most places, it failed to make a lasting impression. Little evidence of the activities of the various local organisations listed above remains extant, if any records were ever kept. According to Lucretia Mott, the Pennsylvania association was galvanised by the considerable efforts of veteran abolitionist Sarah Pugh. 'Several intelligent colored

47 SBA to Amy Kirby Post, 2 December 1866, and 9 December 1866, Post Family Papers.
49 'Equal Rights Association,' Philadelphia Enquirer, 18 January 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
50 'Woman Suffrage in New Jersey,' NASS, 7 December 1867; 'Women's Rights in New Jersey,' NASS, 14 December 1867; 'Woman Suffrage in the District of Columbia,' NASS, 20 June 1868; 'Affairs in the District of Columbia,' NASS, 22 August 1868.
51 For Massachusetts, see: SBA to Caroline Healey Dall, 14 March 1867, and Caroline M. Severance to Caroline Healey Dall, 18 April 1867, both Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society; for New Hampshire, see: Parker Pillsbury to Benjamin Cheever, 17 June 1867, Alma Lutz Collection, A-110; M-133, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College; for Maryland, see: 'Equal Rights,' NASS, 9 March 1867.
young men and women were drawn in,’ and ‘They got Frances Harper to deliver one lecture for us.’ But Mott concludes that the organisation was a ‘sham’, did little of note, and dissolved before the end of the year.\textsuperscript{52} There is little evidence about the other state and local associations, but the evidence we do have shows the AERA’s attempts at ‘casting wide nets’, following the pattern that previous voluntary associations had set before it, reflecting the associational culture of nineteenth-century America.

A further tactic employed by the AERA in spreading its associational base was the plan to establish a newspaper. Skocpol and Neem have drawn attention to the special importance that a society newspaper or newsletter could have for nineteenth-century Americans.\textsuperscript{53} In this same way, the AERA hoped to use a newspaper to act as a means of promotion and to communicate with its local branches. At the national anniversary in 1867, Lucretia Mott lamented the lack of a paper in helping to keep the members up to date with developments in the campaign.\textsuperscript{54} After turning down the offer of a column in the NASS, citing fears of ‘editorial revisions’, the AERA looked for a paper of its own.\textsuperscript{55} In August 1866, Anthony, writing to Edwin Studwell, mentioned an ‘Equal Rights paper’, possibly a paper solely for the New York State campaign, and requested that Studwell begin to source advertisements and funding whilst she would source the content.\textsuperscript{56} There was even talk of using Studwell’s own paper, the Quaker-orientated The Friend, but this came to nothing.\textsuperscript{57}

The idea of a New York campaign paper was soon supplanted by the attempt of Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell to secure pledges to the amount of $10,000 to fund a permanent organ for the AERA. ‘We propose jointly to establish and edit a weekly political newspaper to be called “the American Citizen”, or “the Republic”, or “the Ballot”, to advocate the extension of the suffrage to Women and Negroes,’ began Stone and Blackwell’s appeal for funding, which was sent to

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, p.7.
\item Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.143.
\item SBA to Edwin A. Studwell, 20 August 1866, in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 11.
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Charles Sumner, among others. They sought twenty ‘earnest friends of Freedom’ to supply $500 each, or arrange for the collection of $500 among trustees, ‘contingent on the whole sum being raised.’ If it was not raised, the venture would not be undertaken. The money raised would then only be used to cover any losses if the paper was not self-supporting.\footnote{LS and HBB to Charles Sumner, 8 November 1866, Charles Sumner Correspondence, MS Am 1, Houghton Library, Harvard University.} George William Curtis indicated that up to $4,000 had been pledged by February 1867, but the lack of any developments in this area suggests that the full amount was not forthcoming, despite Stone’s best efforts.\footnote{George William Curtis to Caroline Healey Dall, 15 February 1867, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society; LS to Emma Stone, 14 January 1867, Blackwell Family Papers, 1832-1981, MC 411, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.}

In the absence of a paper, the AERA used printed tracts to disseminate information. A series of twelve tracts were printed and distributed, all carrying AERA stationery and all associated directly with the cause. Some were a re-printing of older material, including speeches by Theodore Parker, Clarina Nichols and Wendell Phillips. Re-printing older tracts with AERA stationery shows the importance that the association attached to spreading its own name as much as its principles. Contemporary speeches were also chosen for distribution, including George William Curtis’s endeavour to convert the New York constitutional convention to woman suffrage, and the AERA anniversary speeches of Henry Ward Beecher and Parker Pillsbury.\footnote{Full list of tracts in G.F. Train, The Great Epigram Campaign in Kansas (Leavenworth, 1867) – the final tract published by the AERA.}

Tracts would become extremely important to the AERA, just as they were for earlier voluntary associations.\footnote{Scott, Natural Allies, p.39.} Copies were sent out to legislatures across the Northern states.\footnote{ECS to Gerrit Smith, 6 August [1867], GS Papers.} Tracts were one of the main weapons used in Kansas, with local leader Sam Wood appealing constantly for more material. Anthony had to send him a box of copies from before the Civil War to keep him going.\footnote{SNW to SBA, 9 April 1867, Phillips Papers; SBA to SNW, 21 April 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.} Over the following months, Anthony kept Wood informed with news about what was being printed, including that of Curtis’s speech and John Stuart Mill’s speech in Parliament.\footnote{SBA to SNW, 13 July 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.} According to Stanton, the AERA spent more than $1,000 on printing in this time, and with Anthony’s estimate at $20 per thousand copies, that gives...
somewhere in the region of 50,000 tracts printed in this period alone. They were also disseminated locally, among friends and relatives, as testified by Martha Coffin Wright. They provided an important resource for the AERA, representing the association, through its stationery, to parts of the country that could not be reached by the members themselves. This, along with the other aspects of associational culture shown above, show that, although the AERA’s national organisational structure was under-developed and fragile, the association had a clear definition, consistent with wider trends in nineteenth-century associational culture, that points to the discrete position of the AERA in the wider polity.

Intellectual

Another means of defining the AERA is an analysis of its ideas. For this reform association, its intellectual basis was its *raison d’être*. This basis was a commitment to equal rights, and to bringing into the polity those who had been cast out or excluded. Furthermore, for the AERA, equal rights means a greater level of equality than was advocated in any campaign in nineteenth-century America. Though other organisations campaigned for what they referred to as ‘equal rights’, it was only the AERA that sought to extend that definition to include all men and all women. This gave the association a distinct identity in the post-Civil War polity.

In some ways, the AERA’s ideology represented a continuation of the antebellum women’s rights convention movement, with intellectual roots in a number of traditions. These ranged from the rights and liberties of classical liberalism, to the duty and virtue of civic republicanism, and the gender-specific arguments of the Scottish Enlightenment and Romantic philosophies. Such language can be seen at various times in the AERA discourse, particularly in convention speeches upon the association’s free platform. However, the strand that dominated the discourse, especially in the official pronouncements of the association – the constitution and the conventions resolutions, for example – was a

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65 ECS to Maggie, 24 June [1867], in *ECS-SBA Papers*, Reel 12; SBA to SNW, 13 July 1867, in *ECS-SBA Papers*, Reel 12.
66 Martha Coffin Wright to Parker Pillsbury, 17 September 1867, GFP Smith.
68 For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s speech to the 1867 AERA anniversary convention contains these different strands in one speech. *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, pp.8-17.
liberal language of equal rights and liberties. Furthermore, it is this heavy concentration on equal rights that marks the distinctive nature of the AERA’s ideology in the history of the women’s rights movement.

This ideology was made evident in the organisation’s succinct constitution. The preamble spoke of a demand for ‘equal rights to all’; the second article stated that the focus would be on securing ‘the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color or sex.’ The preamble also spoke of ‘bury[ing] the Woman in the Citizen’. In this phrase lies the key to the idea. The goal was to seek rights for all, women included, because they were *citizens*, not because they were *women*. By burying the term ‘woman’ in the concept of a ‘citizen’, it was not a denial that women were women, but that they should be given their rights as citizens. Furthermore, it made this idea the single test for membership, with the third article of the constitution declaring that ‘[a]ny person who consents to the principles of this Association … may be a member, and be entitled to speak and vote’.70

Resolutions from convention after convention spoke of natural justice and a citizen’s right to the ballot, all grounded in traditional liberal language. ‘We have inaugurated this National Equal Rights Association [*sic*] to complete the work of the American revolution, to give broader meaning to the Declaration of Independence,’ resolved the first official AERA convention in Boston at the end of May 1866, further resolving that ‘we demand of Congress in the name of a “republican form of government”, that it … secure Equal Rights to a voice in the legislation and administration of the government to all men and women who are held amenable to the laws, and are taxed for their support and execution.”71

This official line of equal rights continued into the canvass of New York State in the winter of 1866 to 1867. The convention that opened the canvass, in Albany, resolved ‘that if liberty and the pursuit of happiness are natural and inalienable rights, so also is the right of suffrage,’ that ‘universal suffrage is the first truth and only basis of every national republic’ and that ‘the only legitimate human government is self-government’.72 This convention also approved a memorial to

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69 Resolutions and constitutions can be more useful than speeches in ascertaining the official line of an organisation, because they are voted on by the membership at large.
70 For a copy of the AERA Constitution, see: *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, p.70.
71 ‘Resolutions,’ *NASS*, 23 June 1866.
Congress that was fully grounded in arguments from the Declaration of Independence, and spoke of all people as citizens entitled to the ballot.\textsuperscript{73} The adherence to equal rights language continued into the national anniversary convention resolutions in 1867 and 1868.\textsuperscript{74} Such was the way that the AERA chose to characterise its campaign for universal suffrage, in New York and in the wider nation.

The significance of the classical liberal tradition lay in the importance attributed to having the ability to influence government and protect one’s rights.\textsuperscript{75} This would be achieved by seeking guaranteed access to the political rights enjoyed by white men – voting, standing for election, serving on juries – for black men and all women.\textsuperscript{76} These rights would represent equality but also would be the means by which all citizens could guarantee their voice in the legislation and administration of the nation. It was first and foremost equality of suffrage. The ballot had a symbolic power but the AERA believed, as the women’s rights and black (male) suffrage campaigns had before, that this power was central to the plight of those who lacked the rights of citizenship. It was the clearest symbol of equality and it became the rallying point around which a demand for equal rights and equal citizenship could be achieved.\textsuperscript{77}

Just like the AERA itself, the commitment to equal rights had multiple dimensions and multiple foundations. First, it was grounded in the realities of the post-Civil War political context. ‘By the war, society is once more resolved into its original elements,’ began the constitution’s preamble, ‘and in the reconstruction of our government we again stand face to face with the broad question of natural rights’.\textsuperscript{78} For Stanton, it was the right time to speak of black men and women as citizens, and unite women’s rights and abolitionism ‘in the broader work of

\textsuperscript{73} ‘Memorial of the American Equal Rights Association to the Congress of the United States,’ \textit{NASS}, 22 December 1866.
\textsuperscript{75} J. Hoffman, \textit{Liberalism} (Deddington, 2006), pp.7-18.
\textsuperscript{77} An oft-repeated resolution at Equal Rights meetings was that ‘the ballot, alike to the woman and the negro, means bread, education, intelligence, self-protection, self-reliance, and self-respect.’ ‘Equal Rights,’ \textit{NASS}, 15 December 1866. For the importance of the ballot to the antebellum women’s rights movement and the black suffrage movement, see ch. 2 of this work.
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, p.70.
reconstruction’. Martha Coffin Wright and Sojourner Truth were more specific about the timeframe. Wright argued that the change from women's rights to equal rights was because ‘we feel at this hour our highest claims are as citizens, and not as women.’ Truth argued that, '[t]here ought to be equal rights now more than ever, since colored people have got their freedom.' As shown in the previous chapter, the particular political context allowed the AERA to frame its ideas in terms that could be swiftly understood and easily applicable. The idea would be to take advantage of this particular historical situation to re-lay the foundations of American democracy.

However, it would be overly simplistic to conclude that the AERA’s plan was little more than to exploit the situation, cynically tacking woman suffrage onto the question of rights for the freedmen. This was, in principle at least, to be a genuine campaign for democracy and republicanism. As such, it appealed to timeless conceptions of individualism – or 'everlasting principle', as Charles Lenox Remond put it – as codified in the American Declaration of Independence, and other sources sacred to the American political tradition. The first official meeting of the AERA, in Boston in June 1866, resolved: '[t]hat we have inaugurated this National Equal Rights Association [sic] to complete the work of the American revolution, to give broader meaning to the Declaration of Independence, [and] a new definition to republicanism'. The AERA’s memorial to Congress in December 1866 paraphrased Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, praying ‘that our government may be republican in fact as well as form: a government by the people, and the whole people, for the people, and the whole people.'

A strong theme running through this discourse was individual rights, not rights based on classes of race or sex. 'In thus relaying the foundations of government,' argued Stanton, 'we settle all these side issues of race, color, and sex' and while others talk 'of the rights of races, we exalt the higher, the holier idea proclaimed by the Fathers ... [which is] individual rights.' ‘I have demanded the

80 Ibid., p.58.
81 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.60.
82 'Resolutions,' NASS, 23 June 1866.
83 'Memorial of the American Equal Rights Association to the Congress of the United States,' NASS, 22 December 1866.
84 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.8, 16.
freedom of the slave the last thirty years,’ argued Stephen Foster, ‘because he was a human being, and I now demand suffrage for the negro because he is a human being, and for the same reason I demand the ballot for woman.’ It was their humanity that Foster exalted, not their membership of one class or another. Parker Pillsbury spoke with more direct reference to the ballot. ‘The right of suffrage is as old, as sacred and as universal as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ he argued. ‘If we have our neighbor’s right of suffrage and citizenship in our keeping, no matter of what color, or race, or sex, then we have stolen goods in our possession.’ According to the AERA, suffrage was the inherent right of all individuals – sacred property, even – and to withhold it from anyone was theft.

One attempt to combine these two strands – the time-specific and the eternal – was to focus the AERA campaign on the position of black women. Black women were consistently at the centre of AERA rhetoric, although, as DuBois points out, hardly at the centre of the association’s membership structure. Such attention was used to show that it was a false choice between races or sexes, between enfranchising black men and white women. ‘Who is going to save the black woman from slavery?’ asked Stephen Foster at a New England Anti-Slavery convention in May 1867. Foster argued that no one could protect her but herself, but she needed the ballot to do that, which was a right derived ‘from God’. The intention here was not to disparage the black husband, argued Anna Dickinson on another occasion. Dickinson recognised the increased support there was for white women’s rights, and so chose to concentrate her appeal on black women, lest their humanity be lost in the debate. By focusing on black women’s rights as individuals, she kept the debate on individual rights, applicable to all.

Foster’s and Dickinson’s appeals on behalf of black women at anti-slavery meetings highlights the uniqueness of the AERA’s intellectual position. There was much talk in the U.S. at this time of ‘equal rights’. In October 1864, a free black convention in Syracuse, New York, founded the National Equal Rights League, with branches in every state, to pursue abolition, equality before the law, and suffrage,  

87 DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, pp.68-70.  
but only for black men. State auxiliaries grew up around this national League in the coming months.\textsuperscript{90} White abolitionists, too, used such terms as ‘equal rights’ and ‘universal suffrage’ without making the connection to women’s rights.\textsuperscript{91} One of their number, George L. Stearns, proposed his own organisation – a “Universal and Equal Suffrage Association” – which, again, only supported suffrage for black men.\textsuperscript{92}

This adoption of equal rights language for black men alone was seen in the speeches of the leading politicians of the time. In February 1866, Charles Sumner stood for five hours in the Senate, delivering a speech entitled ‘The Equal Rights of All’, but said nothing of woman suffrage. Indeed, when reluctantly introducing a petition for woman suffrage that same year, Sumner declared he was opposed to the measure, lest ‘their claims ... compromise ... the great question of equal rights.’\textsuperscript{93} In June 1866, Thaddeus Stevens, in the House of Representatives, called for the remodelling of the nation’s institutions ‘so as to have freed them from every vestige of human oppression, of inequality of rights.’\textsuperscript{94} ‘I believe in equality among citizens,’ declared Massachusetts senator Henry Wilson. ‘Equality in the broadest and most comprehensive democratic sense.’ As Foner has pointed out, however, definitions of the vague word ‘equality’ were very hard to come by at this time. What is obvious, though, is that none of these included the rights of women, or rights based on humanity rather than manhood.\textsuperscript{95}

The AERA was well-aware of this limited language, and knew that it faced a struggle in trying to get women included in ‘equal rights’. Stanton wrote into the NASS to protest against the establishment in Washington of a ‘National Equal Suffrage Association,’ – yet another that bore such a name – in January 1866. ‘The proper title should have been “National Male Suffrage Association” – if, indeed, the term national may be justly assumed by a society that works only for one half the nation.’\textsuperscript{96} Indicative of wider abolitionist and black (male) suffrage thinking, Henry

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., pp.327-328.
\textsuperscript{93} D.H. Donald, Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man (New York, 1970), pp.245,251-252.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., p.231.
\textsuperscript{96} ‘National Equal Suffrage Association,’ NASS, 6 January 1866.
C. Wright argued that he saw no ‘antagonism’ between Wendell Phillips and Stanton and their respective campaigns. He saw the AERA as little more than a woman’s rights campaign. Susan B. Anthony, however, clarified the situation from the AERA’s point of view: ‘The question is not is this or that person right, but what are the principles under discussion. As I understand the difference between Abolitionists, some think this is the harvest time for the black man, and seed-sowing time for woman. Others ... think we have been sowing the seed of individual rights ... and that this is the harvest time for all citizens.’ In December 1866, Anthony further clarified the idea of the AERA, and differentiated it from all else around her. ‘We occupy a position above that of any other organization in the country ... This association is for the express purpose of reminding the American nation that women form a part of the people.’ The AERA refused to be drawn into using a language in which equal rights applied only to black men. They faced a battle to convince the rest of the nation that their vision of equal rights was the truest, but, as Stanton argued, it was the only way they could become ‘masters of the situation’.

In this way, we can see that the AERA was unique in the post-Civil War U.S. There was also something exceptional about it in the history of reform movements. As seen in the previous chapter, the AERA inherited much from antebellum reform movements, but none of these, including abolitionism, ever embraced women’s rights as a primary goal, even when abolitionists were willing to see their association split over the question of women’s right to speak, as happened in 1840. Indeed, suffrage for black men only became a primary goal of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) after the Civil War.

Likewise, suffrage was never the only goal of the antebellum woman’s rights movement. It was one in a programme of reforms. Additionally, these goals were always aimed primarily at women. Although there was a consistent stream of natural justice and individual rights arguments, the connection was never made to overtly campaign for the rights of all humanity. The 1850s saw ‘Woman’s Rights

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97 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.60.
98 'Shall Women Vote,' World (New York), 7 December 1866.
100 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp.55-56.
Conventions’, not equal rights conventions. Indeed, Anthony argued at the formation of the AERA that they wanted to ‘broaden our Woman’s Rights platform’ into a ‘Human Rights platform’. The antebellum woman’s rights movement also had a tendency to declare itself as being antagonistic towards the male half of the population. The Declaration of Sentiments, of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, for example, is full of references to the usurpation of female rights by males, especially in the rights of suffrage. It complained of enfranchised ‘ignorant and degraded men’ who were being given rights, while women had none. There was nothing of this language in the constitution of the AERA. It was to be founded on wider principles of equality and justice, of individual rights and suffrage invested in citizens rather than in males and females, black or white.

The previous chapter has also shown the influence that the Civil War-era Women’s National Loyal League (WNLL) had on the AERA. But, again, there were key distinctions. The WNLL was primarily an abolitionist society, and so mirrored the AASS in its primary concern for fighting slavery. As Venet argued, it was a feminist-abolitionist network, rather than an equal rights movement. It did maintain a commitment to equal rights, however. At the 1863 anniversary convention, Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell argued for slaves’ freedom based on their rights as human beings. Additionally, resolutions were introduced declaring that self-government was an inalienable right, and demanding that civil and political equality be extended to all Americans, regardless of race or sex. In that respect, it anticipated the AERA’s post-war demand for civil and political equality for all, but where the AERA differed was that it brought these into the centre, declaring them the primary goals of the association in its constitution, and making that demand the question by which it recruited its membership. This declaration that equal rights was to be the primary goal, for all men and all women, is another marker of the uniqueness and historical distinctiveness of the AERA.

103 *The First Convention Ever Called to Discuss the Civil and Political Rights of Women, Seneca Falls, N.Y., July 19, 20, 1848* (Seneca Falls, 1848), p.3.
105 Ibid., p.105.
Membership

A further way the AERA can be defined is by reference to its membership. An
association would not exist without the individuals who contributed time, effort,
and money to the cause. DuBois argued that, because the association was made up
of abolitionists and women’s rights activists, the ‘tension between black suffrage
and woman suffrage was structured into the Equal Rights Association through its
membership.’ She argued that ‘some of these women and men had a primary
commitment to black (male) suffrage. Others suffered divided loyalties.’ Overall,
DuBois gives an assessment that pits ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’ against each
other.106 This section, however, will show that, far from the tension being
structured into’ the AERA, there is a much more complex picture. There was no
simple dichotomy between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’. Instead, there was a
united and committed membership, who shared much – including their
backgrounds – and, at least in the early years, differed only in their tactics and
timetables.

Article III of the AERA constitution defined the membership, thus: ‘Any
person who consents to the principles of this Association and contributes to its
treasury, may be a member, and be entitled to speak and vote at its meetings.’ This
article followed the template of other associations; for example, Article IV of the
AASS constitution was practically the same.107 It was also a fairly loose definition,
designed to include a maximum number of people. Overall, the research for this
projects has found the names of 484 individuals who donated to or worked for the
AERA, and biographical information on 252 of these people found in a variety of
sources.108 There were probably many more whose names were not recorded, and
inaccurate and illegible record-keeping makes identification of others more
difficult.109 However, by studying the extant biographical material for the 252

106 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp.67-68, 73.
107 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.70; Constitution of the AASS, p.18.
108 For a table of the membership, including relevant biographical material and the sources used,
see Appendix A. All statistical conclusions in the following paragraphs are drawn from the material
in this table.
109 For example, names that include a first initial or just the title only – for example, M. Parish, Mrs.
Baker, S. Brewer.
identified members, elements of a larger picture can be built up to give a broader understanding of the AERA membership.

An inter-sex alliance was always intended to be a feature of the AERA. ‘Early in the proceedings [of the first Boston meeting in May 1866], it was announced that every member of the audience, male or female, is entitled to speak on the topics under debate, and will be made welcome,’ reported the Boston correspondent of the *NASS*.\textsuperscript{110} Indeed, of the identified members, 141 were female and 107 were male, reflecting a balanced sex divide. A cross-race alliance was always intended, too, and while there were only a handful of African-American members, with only ten definitively identified as black, they were brought to the fore, with five of those ten serving as officers at one time or another. It must also be remembered at this point that black participation in white associations was not common.\textsuperscript{111}

Of the 136 individuals whose ages could be determined, the average age of members was 47, with a modal age of 56. Just over half of those were aged between 40 and 60, suggesting a mature audience. In 1866, at the foundation of the AERA, the states of residence of 162 of the members could be determined. Twenty states, plus the District of Columbia, were represented, with 62 coming from New York and 55 from New England, including 40 from Massachusetts. By the 1869 convention, the AERA had expanded to represent 32 states, plus the District of Columbia. Still, the largest single contributors were New York, with 71, and Massachusetts, with 44. If we count New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey along with the New England states as a loosely-defined North-East, we can see that more than three-quarters of the total membership from 1866 to 1869 – 159 of 203 – came from that region, confirming the association as predominantly North-Eastern.

The biographical data also confirms that the association was predominantly middle-class, loosely-defined, with reference to occupation. Commonly held occupations were physician, journalist or writer, lawyer, minister, teacher, and clerk. Protestant religions, too, were represented heavily. Of those identified, the largest denominations were Quaker, Unitarian, Congregational, and Spiritualist. A

\textsuperscript{110} ‘Our Boston Correspondence,’ *NASS*, 9 June 1866.
\textsuperscript{111} DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, pp.69-70.
large amount declared themselves to be non-denomination Christian, or adhering to a ‘free’ religion.

One particularly interesting conclusion that is confirmed by the use of the biographical material is the heavy preponderance of supporters of anti-slavery. Many of these names make an appearance in the pages of the *NASS* over this period, especially in lists of donations to the AASS’s coffers. This data allows us to do something quite particular, although not entirely conclusive. The list of donations printed in the back of the proceedings of the 1867 AERA anniversary can be compared with donor lists that were printed in the *NASS* for the same period, showing that 83 of the 252 members of the AERA were identified as donors to the AASS. Some gave considerably more to one organisation or the other. Giving more to the AASS were: Richard P. Hallowell ($131 more); Edward M. Davis ($65 more); and Mary Grew ($46 more). Giving more to the AERA were: Anna Dickinson ($100 more); Dioclesian Lewis ($54 more); and Ebenezer D. Draper ($47 more). In total, 38 gave more to the AASS than they gave to the AERA. But, overall, if we look at the percentages of money donated in this period to the two causes, we can see that 40 per cent of those who donated to both causes gave more money to the AERA than to the AASS. Whilst this data is probably incomplete, and does not take into account donations to other causes, this does suggest that AERA members did not see support of the AASS and the AERA as mutually exclusive.

One other key statistic that comes from the collected biographical data concerns the familial links between the members. This, along with the friendship networks, was an important aspect of this particular reform work, which has already been asserted in the case of the 1848 Seneca Falls convention. In total, 83 members were determined to have attended an AERA meeting or donated money to its coffers with a family member. Some families attended conventions together, such as the Wilcoxes, the Posts, the Motts, and the Hallowells, and many husbands and wives donated together.

Inter-personal connections also derived from previous reform work. A majority of AERA members were not new to reform. They hailed from similar reform traditions from before the Civil War, and so had a history of agitation

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together, in the women's rights, anti-slavery, temperance, and other reform movements.\textsuperscript{113} Two particular friendships are indicative of this phenomenon. The one between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony has been well documented.\textsuperscript{114} Another was seen between Stanton and Frederick Douglass. They had both been at the Seneca Falls convention, and had both argued for suffrage since then. Stanton had stood by Douglass as he faced racial discrimination, and despite Stanton's turn to race-based language in later years, Douglass refused to condemn Stanton personally.\textsuperscript{115} Familial and personal relationships were vital for mutual support and for spreading the word of the AERA. Members, such as Martha Coffin Wright, would update their children on the organisation's doings.\textsuperscript{116} These connections also provided a more practical benefit, by giving travelling agents somewhere to stay whilst campaigning.\textsuperscript{117}

Overall, a clearer picture of the AERA emerges from the data. This was a predominantly North-Eastern, middle-class, religiously unorthodox association, with a mature membership, including many with a strong history in a variety of reform projects – anti-slavery and women's rights foremost among them. These conclusions, of religious unorthodoxy, mature age, and North-Eastern geography not only show the shared background, but also reinforce the argument of chapter two, which showed that the AERA came from a long reform tradition. The majority of AERA members were old enough to have participated in antebellum reform work. The north-eastern areas of the U.S., especially around Boston, New York City, and in upstate New York, have been shown to have been particularly prominent in reform work, as have the religious affiliations that many in the AERA harboured.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{114} See, for example, A.S. Rossi, 'A Feminist Friendship: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony,' in M.S. Wheeler (ed.), \textit{One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement} (Troutdale, 1995), pp.45-60.
\textsuperscript{115} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, pp.177-178.
\textsuperscript{116} See, for example, Martha Coffin Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, 23 December 1866, and Martha Coffin Wright to William Pelham Wright, 10 January 1867, both GFP Smith.
\textsuperscript{117} SBA to Anna Dickinson, 6 December 1866, Anna E. Dickinson Papers, MSS18424, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter AD Papers]; Martha Coffin Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, 23 December 1866, GFP Smith; 'Equal Rights Meetings in Central New York,' \textit{NASS}, 5 January 1867.
\textsuperscript{118} For the geographic locations, see: Friedman, \textit{Gregarious Saints}, pp.1-7. For the relevance of religious affiliation on antebellum reform, see: E.J. Clapp & J.R. Jeffrey (eds), \textit{Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865} (Oxford, 2011).
Through these early reform works, strong friendships had been built up, creating a network of support and assistance that could be utilised to build up an association with a shared commitment to equal rights and to each other.

This picture was reflected in the association’s leadership, with figures such as Stanton, Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Parker Pillsbury, Charles Lenox Remond, and Theodore Tilton all hailing from a similar reform background. A closer look at these leaders, and their attitudes towards equal rights, will further show that this association was not divided between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’. Rather, a more complex picture emerges.

What united these leaders and activists, and what explains their decision to join this association, was a general desire for a broader vision of Reconstruction than was being offered elsewhere. As seen above, where other organisations supported male suffrage or were concerned solely with Reconstruction as the re-integration of the seceded states into the Union, the AERA members shared a commitment to something more fundamental. This conviction was put into words by Stanton in an article in the NASS in the summer of 1866. She wrote of the desire to ‘build a new house’ rather than re-decorating the old, decaying one. This house would be a new government and a new polity, based on equal rights.¹¹⁹ Others shared these sentiments. In May 1865, the AASS had debated whether or not to dissolve in the wake of the Thirteenth Amendment. Future AERA members Aaron M. Powell and Anna Dickinson, among others, both spoke of their desire to see a broader movement for reform than simply to abolish slavery. ‘I cannot ... look to any organization, as yet,’ Powell said, ‘where I should feel myself entirely at home, and free to do the kind of work which I believe still needs to be done.’ Dickinson argued that, throughout the anti-slavery struggle, she had been working as a ‘public educator, to teach this nation justice and the rights of man.’ Stephen Foster and Theodore Tilton echoed these points.¹²⁰ These abolitionists continued to work in and through the AASS, but they had a parallel membership of the AERA, demonstrating that they had a commitment to equal rights.

This commitment to equal rights, however, took many forms, although these differences were mostly over timetables and tactics, rather than principles.

¹¹⁹ ‘Build a New House – by ECS,’ NASS, 21 July 1866.
¹²⁰ ‘Business Meeting,’ NASS, 20 May 1865; ‘Special Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 3 February 1866.
or strategies. Evidence shows that there were multiple variations in attitudes of AERA members, and not just a simple binary between black (male) and woman suffrage.

There were some who took a strongly woman suffrage stance, arguing that black men should not be enfranchised until women could be given the vote at the same time. Stanton was one of these. But there were other woman suffrage supporters who took a less extreme line. Martha Coffin Wright, Josephine Griffing, and Lucy Stone all made strenuous efforts to argue that women should be included in the Reconstruction settlement, but stopped short of arguing that black men should not be enfranchised first. Of these three, Wright and Griffing would go on to join Stanton’s NWSA, despite its official opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment.

Among those prominent abolitionists who supported black (male) suffrage primarily, there was still much commitment to equal rights. Aaron Powell, who argued for a broader vision of Reconstruction, often spoke in favour of woman suffrage, despite making it clear that he favoured black (male) suffrage at this particular time as a realistic goal. Wendell Phillips Garrison, the son of the anti-slavery pioneer William Lloyd Garrison, was another supporter of black (male) suffrage who had much to say on equal rights, demonstrated by his holding of an office in the AERA. When AERA leaders tried to bring the woman suffrage question onto the AASS platform, and Wendell Phillips ruled it out of order, this Garrison argued that they should not be silenced. All they were doing was taking the advanced position. ‘The [National Anti-Slavery] Standard must coddle them,’ he argued. Abby Kelley Foster was another who, though arguing that black

121 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.53-55.
122 For Griffing’s support of black male enfranchisement, see: Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.62. For Stone, see: ‘Woman of the Period,’ World (New York), 13 May 1869. For Wright, see: Martha Coffin Wright to David Wright, 20 May 1869, GFP Smith.
125 Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, p.53; SBA to Edwin A. Studwell, 20 August 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
(male) suffrage must be a priority, spoke often in support of woman suffrage. Indeed, she made it clear that her joining of the AERA was directly linked to her desire to see women enfranchised. She admitted that if she favoured black (male) suffrage alone, the AASS was where she would have stayed.\textsuperscript{127} This is a clear example of someone who had a joint commitment to both reforms, rather than a divided loyalty.

Black men themselves were divided over their level of support for woman suffrage at this time. Frederick Douglass never argued that women should not be enfranchised. He continued to speak positively on the issue, but always made sure that his primary argument was for black (male) suffrage.\textsuperscript{128} Robert Purvis, on the other hand, argued that as ‘deeply as he felt the degraded position occupied by the colored man, he would not to-day exchange it for the position of the whitest woman in the land.’ He went on to argue that he did not expect woman to have to campaign for black (male) suffrage if they were not to be arguing for their own rights at the same time.\textsuperscript{129} Charles Lenox Remond occupied something of a middle position. He, like Douglass, always displayed his primary commitment to black (male) suffrage. But support for woman suffrage was never far from his lips. His record in the AERA’s canvass of New York State in the winter of 1866 and 1867 stands testament to this.\textsuperscript{130} Also, at the association’s 1867 anniversary convention, he argued that principle dictated that he should support women’s claim to the ballot at the same time as his own.\textsuperscript{131} The black women of the AERA, as few as there were, were also divided. While Sojourner Truth argued strongly that women must be included in the suffrage extensions, for fear that they would fall into a form of slavery under their husbands, Frances Watkins Harper argued that she was willing to put aside the claims of sex in pursuit of the power of suffrage for her racial community. Truth never said that black men should not have the vote, nor

\textsuperscript{127} Abby Kelley Foster to LS, 10 February 1867, NAWSA Record; ‘Business Meeting,’ NASS, 25 May 1867; ‘Proceedings of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention,’ NASS, 15 June 1867.
\textsuperscript{129} ‘Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 8 December 1866. See also: M.H. Bacon, But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis (Albany, 2007), pp.164-165.
\textsuperscript{130} See ch. 4 of this work.
\textsuperscript{131} Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.53-54.
Harper that white women should be disfranchised – their dispute was over priority and timing.\textsuperscript{132}

There were still others who occupied a more strident position on equal rights, refusing to be drawn into a debate about priorities, instead sticking to equal rights arguments. Samuel J. May, Henry Ward Beecher, and Stephen Foster were three who continually argued for woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage with equal passion and fervour.\textsuperscript{133} While Foster did occasionally admit that black (male) suffrage was a more attainable goal, he worked hard to ensure that woman suffrage was a question constantly on the mind of the American people. He spoke for women’s enfranchisement at anti-slavery conventions, and even arranged his own set of lectures and meetings in his home town of Worcester, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{134} Foster is a clear example that a dichotomy between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’ is too simplistic a way to characterise the AERA membership. In this association, there was a multiplicity of attitudes and opinions on how and when equal rights should be extended to all. What the members who harboured these attitudes shared was a common commitment to equal rights.

Membership of the AERA also meant more to these people than just attending a convention or dropping a few coins into a collection hat. The lack of extant evidence does not help in determining the attitudes of some of the lesser-known members. However, there is some strong evidence that the membership saw more to the AERA than a paper organisation or a talking shop. When Amy Kirby Post was not given an officer’s role in the association, Mary Robbins Post, Amy’s sister-in-law, questioned this. She thought this was ‘strange’, which gives clear evidence of the importance that such a post held.\textsuperscript{135} On another occasion,

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{133} Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, p.16; Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.17-20, 55-60; Samuel J. May to the AERA, 12 May 1866, NAWSA Records.

\textsuperscript{134} ‘Proceedings of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention,’ NASS, 15 June 1867; ‘Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society,’ NASS, 1 February 1868; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 4 April 1868; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 11 April 1868.

\textsuperscript{135} Mary Robbins Post to Isaac and Amy Kirby Post, 1 January 1867, Post Family Papers.
\end{footnotesize}
Theodore Tilton wrote to Anna Dickinson after they both missed the 1867 anniversary convention. ‘Some of its [the AERA’s] managers are talking about all the people who did not participate in the late anniversary as if we were renegades,’ he wrote. ‘My indignation has been roused in an unwanted degree.’ The offence that Tilton took makes clear his concern for the association. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, too, showed profound concern for the organisation when he wrote to Henry B. Blackwell in April of 1869, with several questions about procedures. After receiving the Call for the 1869 anniversary, Higginson wanted to know why the name of the president had been changed from Martha Coffin Wright to Lucretia Mott, despite the fact the office for president had been largely ceremonial in the AERA; he asked when several different names had been added to the Executive Committee; who fixed the time and place of the meeting; and who drew up the call. ‘You as Recording Sec[retary] will of course know these things,’ he finished. These are not the questions of an unconcerned onlooker. It might be asserted that Higginson was concerned with his own reputation and did not want a document sent out which could incriminate his own behaviour. But Higginson’s name was not even on the Call, suggesting that he cared for the good of the association and its procedures.

Perhaps the member who showed the most concern for the AERA was Lucy Stone. By the end of the association’s life, Stone’s concern had grown in the face of attacks, and she had become somewhat possessive of the association. This began when Stanton and Anthony declared that they would hold a lecture tour with the notorious racist George Francis Train under the auspices of the AERA in the winter of 1867 to 1868. Stone was indignant, and the Executive Committee sent a card to the press to separate themselves from the tour. ‘I felt the brunt of this action of theirs,’ Stone later wrote to William Lloyd Garrison, ‘as tho[ugh] it had been a blow to my own child.’ But this was not just a personal defence against Stanton and

136 Theodore Tilton to Anna Dickinson, 16 May 1867, AD Papers.
137 Thomas Wentworth Higginson to HBB, 13 April 1869, NAWSA Records.
138 For the Call, see ECS to Benjamin F. Wade, B.F. Wade Papers, 1832-1886, MSS44263, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
139 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.138.
140 LS to William Lloyd Garrison, 6 March 1868, Abolitionist Papers, Ms.A.1.2 v.36 p.11b, Boston Public Library.
Anthony. Stone even protested against attacks on the AERA from those who opposed Stanton and Anthony’s actions.

In June 1869, in the Woman’s Advocate, a monthly paper, affiliated with the NASS, editor William P. Tomlinson, long-time abolitionist and woman’s right supporter, wrote that the AERA ‘stands dishonored’ by its refusal to throw Stanton off of its board of officers. ‘We shall in no wise regard the American Equal Rights Association as loyal either to its charter or the claims of humanity,’ unless Stanton was removed, for her association with Train and her favouring of the enfranchisement of educated women before black men.\footnote{Shall There Be Unity?} Tomlinson anticipated that such an article would ‘cost me the cooperation of several very good friends’ and so it was to be. He recounted the following events to Caroline Dall. Stone and her husband, Henry B. Blackwell, came to see him, ‘very much disturbed, saying that I had misstated the action of the Convention, that my article was ill-timed, unjust, calculated to give a wrong impression, etc., etc.’ They asked for the article to be withdrawn, but it was too late, and so they demanded an article of their own be printed as a response. Tomlinson announced there was no room in the current issue, and offered space in the next, but this offer was refused. ‘More disturbed than I could have supposed possible, they shortly left,’ Tomlinson wrote to Dall, ‘and since then, now more than two months ago, I have had no communication.’\footnote{William P. Tomlinson to Caroline Healey Dall, 21 June 1869, 19 July 1869, 29 July 1869, 2 August 1869, all Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society.}

That Stone and Blackwell were willing to defend the AERA when attacks were made against those who were themselves undermining the association’s principles goes to show their depth of feeling, which knew no sectional conflict.

Stone’s defence of the organisation continued until the last moment when she sought to rally support to stop what was left of the association being merged into Stanton and Anthony’s National Woman Suffrage Association.\footnote{See ch. 6.} Rather than see the organisation fall into the hands of those who were opposed to her position, she favoured its dissolution, referring to the AERA as ‘our good old Equal rights soc.’\footnote{LS to Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 22 March 1870, Blackwell Family Papers, 1784-1944, A-77; M-35, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.} Again, she showed her incredible affection for an organisation that was, by
now, stripped of all usefulness. Added to these examples above, Stone’s attitude demonstrates the significance that the AERA held to many of its members.

**Conclusion**

What exactly was the AERA? Establishing a working definition aids the understanding of this misunderstood body and helps to show its importance and distinctiveness. Despite weaknesses in its structure, and a shallow and uneven development of a national network, the association had a clear definition beyond a name and a list of officers. This is shown by how the AERA fitted into a wider model of voluntary associations. Its succinct and professional constitution set out the plan of organisation. Standards of procedure were constantly kept up, even in the smallest of meetings. Traditional channels of communication were employed. Although the state and local organisations were incomplete, their establishment and attempts to reach out to local people show that there was more to the AERA than just the national conventions.

Equal rights, meaning an equal demand for citizenship rights, was the most important intellectual definition of the AERA. It was argued that the vote should be guaranteed for women and black men because they were citizens, not because they were special cases. The AERA combined the demands of a particular moment of history – the post-Civil War situation in the U.S. – with timeless demands for equality, and from those sources came a united demand. This was given its most succinct definition in relation to black women, who stood at the intersection of discrimination on race and sex lines. This position placed the AERA in a unique place in Reconstruction America, offering the broadest definition of equal rights, which gave the association a strong and distinct identity.

The association’s membership shared regional, religious, and professional affiliations, and there were strong personal connections between them and their reform histories. There was no binary separation between supporters of woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage – instead there was a more complex picture, with a myriad of differences over tactics and timetables, but all, at least in the early years, shared a commitment to equal rights. A strong commitment to the AERA as an organisation is also seen among the members, showing further evidence that
this association was more than just a paper facade for a group of like-minded individuals.

This tripartite definition – the organisational structure, the ideas, and the membership – aids a fuller understanding of the significance of the AERA and its place in the tradition of American voluntary and reforming associations. Furthermore, the importance of this tripartite definition will come into even greater focus in chapter six, which examines the collapse of all three aspects of the definition and the end of the association. But it is first to the AERA’s campaigning work in 1866 and 1867 that the next chapter turns its attention.
‘All We Need Now is to Ask and Receive’: The American Equal Rights Association’s Campaigns, 1866-1867

Introduction

The formation of the AERA was a cause for great celebration and enthusiasm for its members. ‘A new E.R.A. comes to meet us,’ wrote Caroline Severance. ‘It is, in all soberness and truth, the dawning of a new era ... of woman and the negro – of justice for all races and classes.’¹ The convention ‘far outstripped our most sanguine expectation,’ added Frances Dana Gage. Gage wrote of a battle already half won: ‘all we need now is to ask and receive.’²

This enthusiasm became the basis for the work of the AERA over the following eighteen months, but, according to the existing scholarship, this good feeling was overly optimistic. DuBois’s analysis gave us a picture of an association that was ‘never ... very stable’, and beset by arguments and adversity.³ Flexner simply argued that their positivity was ‘unfounded’.⁴ Dudden has provided a revised analysis, challenging DuBois and emphasising the positive outlook for the association, arguing that its cross-race and cross-sex alliance was ‘real, albeit sometimes flawed.’⁵ But, even in this revised account, much evidence is overlooked, and Dudden’s focus is often on the tensions that did develop among AERA members.⁶

² ‘Letter from Frances D. Gage,’ NASS, 26 May 1866.
⁶ In Feminism and Suffrage, DuBois’s focus is on the formation of the NWSA as the first feminist organisation in the U.S. In this case, the AERA acts as prologue, perhaps explaining why her focus is on the disputes and divisions within the AERA rather than the signs for hope. In Fighting Chance, Dudden’s analysis argues against the idea that the 1866 and 1867 disputes in the AERA were leading to an inevitable collapse, but still overlooks much that was positive.
This chapter will reinterpret important aspects of the equal rights campaign and argue that its outlook was more positive than previous scholarship has recognised. When this chapter speaks of positivity, it does so with reference to the hope there was that the AERA could remain united behind the goal of universal suffrage, rather than specifically the hope there was for the achievement of that goal. In keeping with the rest of the thesis, and anticipating chapter six, this chapter will add to the argument that the AERA was not doomed to disputes and division from the beginning; that there was no inherent division between supporters of black (male) suffrage on the one hand, and woman suffrage on the other, and the split that was to come in the course of 1869 was by no means inevitable.

This chapter is devoted to four areas that show that the AERA was united and doing some good work for the cause of universal suffrage in 1866 and 1867. These areas challenge the argument that the association was on a downward trajectory towards dispute and division. First, this chapter will examine the enthusiastic beginnings of the AERA, as its members sought to build the association up, securing funding and seeking allies. Second, it will examine the canvassing of New York State over the winter of 1866 and 1867 and highlight the success of this work in contrast to the hitherto accepted picture of tensions and strained relations. Third, this chapter will argue that much that is positive has also been ignored in the analyses of the 1867 AERA anniversary convention, with signs of hope and reconciliation among the disputes. Fourth, it will question the prevailing view that organised abolitionism – in the forms of the anti-slavery societies and the National Anti-Slavery Standard (NASS) – was hostile to, or dismissive of, the equal rights campaign. All this evidence will challenge the view of the AERA as beset by disputes and divisions, and provide a greater balance in the overall analysis. It will then, in the final section, show how certain members of the association squandered this positivity in the Kansas campaign in the summer of 1867, by failing to heed the lessons learned over the previous twelve months, and undermining the association from within.
Laying Foundations

In its first six months, the AERA leaders capitalised on the enthusiasm and optimism of the association’s founding, and used this period to spread the word of equal rights, gather support, and lay plans for the coming year. Susan B. Anthony, in particular, exemplified this mood. ‘Our [founding] meeting was splendid,’ she wrote to Anna Dickinson, ‘and the new association is going to be the movement of the hour.’7 Anthony, as general secretary of the AERA, set about laying the plans for the coming work, fuelled by this enthusiasm. The work itself was to be delayed until after the 1866 elections, but the plans were laid early. ‘We are going to have a course of lectures in the larger cities of N[ew] York State,’ she wrote to Dickinson on another occasion. An equal rights paper was to be set up. And, showing the extent of this optimism, teams of speakers were to be sent all over the country to convert the people to universal suffrage. ‘We must now push our demand wherever the constitutional door opens,’ Anthony concluded.8

New York State was to be the focus. The upcoming constitutional convention gave the AERA the perfect opportunity to launch its campaign, working to end the state’s suffrage restrictions based on sex, and the discriminatory $250 property qualification for African-Americans. The plan called for lectures and conventions in all the major cities and, to rally sympathetic New Yorkers, local Equal Rights committees would be set up throughout the state. With enough support, sufficient pressure could be brought to bear on the constitutional convention to secure universal suffrage.9

While the plans were laid for future work, the AERA devoted the rest of this period to gathering all the support that it could muster, from a variety of sources. It attempted to branch out from its New York City headquarters by holding an

8 SBA to AD, 1 September 1866, Anna E. Dickinson Papers, MSS18424, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter AD Papers]; SBA to Wendell Phillips [hereafter WP], 4 November 1866, Wendell Phillips Papers, MS Am 1953, Houghton Library, Harvard University; SBA to Caroline Healey Dall, 2 September 1866, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society.
9 SBA to AD, 6 August 1866, AD Papers; SBA to AD, 1 September 1866, AD Papers; SBA to WP, 6 November 1866, Phillips Papers.
Equal Rights convention in Boston at the end of May.\textsuperscript{10} Representatives were also sent to meetings of a host of other organisations to look for allies. Anthony herself did most of this work, attending the Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends at Longwood in June, and a Colored Men’s convention in Albany in October. At Longwood, Theodore Tilton, Frances Dana Gage, and Aaron Powell joined Anthony in making a plea for ‘the enfranchisement of all classes irrespective of color or sex.’\textsuperscript{11} At the Colored Men’s convention, Anthony protested against the Fourteenth Amendment as a ‘wicked compromise’, arguing that only by universal suffrage could the rights of freedpeople be secured beyond repeal.\textsuperscript{12} For her part, Elizabeth Cady Stanton used correspondence to publicise the cause, writing to the NASS, the Longwood meeting, and a host of other contacts. On every occasion, the focus was on spreading the doctrine of equal rights. For Stanton, ‘[t]he question for this hour is a broader one than the rights of sex or race … the foundation principles of government [are at stake]’.\textsuperscript{13}

The AERA would also need money for the upcoming canvass of New York, and that was sought from the two main funds available for equal rights work. From the Hovey Fund, Henry B. Blackwell requested $3,000, and from the Jackson Fund, Anthony and Lucy Stone drew $500.\textsuperscript{14} ‘Of course, our hands are tied unless we can get the means to start,’ Anthony wrote to Wendell Phillips, who was one of the trustees of the Hovey Fund.\textsuperscript{15} With the expectation that this funding was now secured, the work could begin.

Throughout this period, from May to November of 1866, the AERA leadership laid the groundwork for the upcoming New York canvass, all the time keeping the focus on equal and universal rights, and fuelled by a great enthusiasm

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Our Boston Correspondence,’ \textit{NASS}, June 1866; ‘Equal Rights Meeting in Boston – by CMS,’ \textit{NASS}, 16 June 1866.
\textsuperscript{11} SBA to AD, [4 June 1866], in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 11; ‘The Longwood Meeting,’ \textit{NASS}, 23 June 1866; ‘Letter from Mrs. Frances Dana Gage,’ \textit{NASS}, 21 July 1866.
\textsuperscript{14} These two funds had been bequeathed to the cause of women’s rights by wealthy supporters in the antebellum period. Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, pp.22-23.
\textsuperscript{15} SBA to WP, 6 November 1866, Phillips Papers; Henry B. Blackwell [hereafter HBB] to the Hovey Committee, 25 October 1866, Phillips Papers; SBA to WP, 15 November 1866, Phillips Papers.
and optimism – enthusiasm and optimism that would even spill over into Stanton running for Congress. But the real AERA work would start after those elections, in later November 1866.

*The Canvass of New York State*

The first major campaign the AERA embarked on was the canvass of New York State over the winter of 1866 and 1867, to gather support in advance of the constitutional convention the following summer. There were many reasons why the AERA focused on New York at this time. On the national political stage, attention had moved away from federal constitutional amendments and directly onto the question of what to do about the unreconstructed Southern states. The Fourteenth Amendment had passed from Congress for ratification by the states. The Republican Party had made the amendment the basis for its campaign for the 1866 elections, and had won a landslide victory, maintaining large majorities in Congress and control over most of the states in the Union. Moderates in the party feared defeat if they made black (male) suffrage a definite part of their programme, so the issue remained in the background at the national level.17

After the elections, Congress turned its attention to the governing of the Southern states, and, through the Military Reconstruction Acts, reverted them to the status of territories under military rule, mandating that they must accept black (male) suffrage when forming their new state constitutions. As a national issue, however, suffrage remained in the background. No Northern states were required to institute black suffrage. Indeed, although Congress had mandated black (male) suffrage for the Southern states, this was to be implemented through their own constitutions. Ultimate authority over the rules for voters remained very much the prerogative of the individual states. If the AERA wanted to secure its goal of universal suffrage, it would have to convert individual states.18

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16 ECS to WP, 12 October 1866, Phillips Papers.
One of the most significant and influential states in the Union, New York had been a target for those who would become AERA leaders since at least 1860.\textsuperscript{19} As shown in chapter two, the association had its origins in a New York State Equal Rights Association, and many among the leadership of the AERA, including Anthony, Stanton, Tilton, and Frederick Douglass, resided in the state. As determined by its constitution, New York held a popular convention every twenty years to consider amendments to its fundamental governing document, making this a once-in-a-generation opportunity. As Dudden has said, New York could serve as a ‘bellwether state’ for the AERA, demonstrating that universal suffrage could be won, and won in a major state. More importantly, it would counter Wendell Phillips’s argument that black (male) suffrage would be defeated if combined with woman suffrage.\textsuperscript{20} By canvassing the state, the AERA hoped that it could rouse the populace and bring enough pressure to bear on the convention to see the introduction of universal suffrage.\textsuperscript{21}

According to DuBois, this campaign was marked by tensions and strained relations.\textsuperscript{22} Even Dudden’s revised account, which argues that, in New York, ‘[t]eamwork across race and gender lines ... was real, albeit sometimes flawed’, still overlooks much that was positive.\textsuperscript{23} Both texts use the example of one man – Charles Lenox Remond – as evidence of the negativity that supposedly surrounded the canvass.\textsuperscript{24} In her memoirs, published 40 years later, Olympia Brown, asserted: ‘We could seldom get through a meeting without some bitter words from Mr. Remond ... He seemed to have no patience with the presentation of our claims.’\textsuperscript{25} However, the historical record disagrees profoundly with such an accusation. Overall, a closer look at the New York canvass reveals four elements: first, a strong commitment to equal rights; second, that disputes could be, and were, overcome through the collective responsibility of the membership; third, that Remond was not the source of tension that he was later accused of being; and fourth, that contemporary reporting of the campaign testified to its wider success.

\textsuperscript{19} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, pp.40-45. \textsuperscript{20} Some black men could already vote in New York, but only those worth more than $250. Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.40. \textsuperscript{21} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.89. \textsuperscript{22} DuBois, \textit{Feminism and Suffrage}, p.70. \textsuperscript{23} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.89. \textsuperscript{24} DuBois, \textit{Feminism and Suffrage}, p.70; Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.93. \textsuperscript{25} O. Brown, \textit{Acquaintances Old and New, Among Reformers} (Milwaukee, 1911), p.41.
The convention that marked the campaign’s beginning was held in the state capital, Albany, and its proceedings proved to be representative of what was to come. Many of the AERA leaders were there – Anthony, Stanton, Remond, Douglass, Lucy Stone, Parker Pillsbury, and Henry Blackwell. The theme throughout was strongly geared towards equal rights. Elizabeth Jones, AERA member and veteran reformer, introduced resolutions that demonstrated this commitment, declaring that suffrage was an inalienable right; that universal suffrage was ‘the only basis of every national republic’; that all people needed representation in government; and that disfranchisement meant an abrogation of natural rights. Letters from Samuel E. Sewall and George Willis Curtis spoke strongly for equal rights, and Douglass argued that ‘we do not construct a government because we are male or female, but because we are human.’

There were also signs of disputes, but these were effectively overcome. Henry Blackwell proposed a resolution suggesting an educational qualification for the suffrage, but this was strongly opposed by all. Taking heed of this antagonistic response, Blackwell withdrew his resolution and instead advocated universal education. A more serious dispute arose over whether or not the convention should praise the Democrats for their support of woman suffrage in Congress. Stanton criticised the Republican congressmen for their refusal or reluctance to present petitions for women’s enfranchisement, and then praised Democratic Congressman James Brooks for doing so. Douglass, however, argued that Democratic support for woman suffrage was nothing more than a trick to undermine black (male) suffrage. A compromise was achieved by Henry Blackwell and Parker Pillsbury, who argued that the AERA should concentrate its effort on asserting that both parties were falling short of republican ideals. This issue would

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27 Demands for educational qualifications for the suffrage were not uncommon in the American polity at this time, but, for the AERA, this would base people’s right to the franchise on their intelligence and not on their humanity, so was not fit for the programme. For a discussion of educational qualifications to the suffrage, see: Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, particularly chs 3 and 4.
come up again in the New York canvass, but for now the dispute had been overcome.29

Charles Lenox Remond’s behaviour in Albany was also representative of his conduct throughout the canvass. He praised Jones’s resolutions, asserting that ‘this Convention to-day was the inauguration of a great movement for general enfranchisement.’ He was also credited by the New York Tribune with criticising those in the audience who shied away from donating money to the cause, asking if those men who had fought ‘Rebels’ would now run away from women.30 All told, the Albany convention showed much of what was to come in the canvass – a commitment to equal rights, disputes arising and compromises being found, and commitment to the cause from Remond.

As the Albany convention drew to a close, Anthony proposed a resolution to remind the association of its work. ‘[W]e will proceed to organize Equal Rights Clubs,’ she promised, ‘in every city, town, and village of the State, for the purpose of holding meetings and lectures, circulating tracts and documents, getting up petitions, raising funds, and generally to create and concentrate public sentiment in behalf of the disfranchised classes.’31 The AERA canvass spread out from Albany, visiting more than 30 locations throughout the winter and spring. Anthony herself was the main organiser, providing strong central leadership. Other AERA members – Pillsbury, Remond, Olympia Brown, Bessie Bisbee, and Louisa Jacobs – accompanied the travelling campaign, ensuring that, through collective responsibility, the association’s membership could exert a control over the proceedings.32

As at Albany, these meetings throughout the state retained a strong commitment to equal rights. Parker Pillsbury’s ‘Appeal to the Men and Women of New York’ acted as a campaign sheet for the tour. It traced the association’s heritage back to the natural rights arguments of the Declaration of Independence,

32 For a complete list of the towns visited, see Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.231, note 6. For SBA as main organiser, see, for example, SBA to Amy Kirby Post, 2 December 1866, and 9 December 1866, Post Family Papers, University of Rochester [hereafter Post Family Papers]; SBA to Gerrit Smith, [8 December 1866], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11; SBA to AD, 2 December 1866, AD Papers.
and argued that women had as much right to claim this heritage as men. Pillsbury spoke of the association rescuing ‘long-lost rights,’ in language reminiscent of the inalienable rights of the nation’s founders. The AERA also, at this time, submitted a memorial to Congress, deeply anchored in the same tradition. Restrictions on suffrage ‘violate the principles of Republican government’, it argued.

The proceedings of the canvass meetings themselves also testified to this strong commitment. In New York City, at a meeting at the Cooper Institute, Stanton, Tilton, Remond, Anthony, Brown, Frances Dana Gage, Henry Blackwell, and Emma Hardinge all spoke in equal rights terms. Gage drew her argument from the concept that ‘Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.’ Blackwell ‘insisted that this was not a woman’s rights movement, nor a negro’s rights movement, as such ... but it is a movement of rights for all.’ This meeting resolved accordingly: ‘that, in a representative government, professedly based upon consent, every citizen, man or woman, white or black, being of mature age and sound mind, and not legally convicted of crime, is rightfully entitled to a vote.’

In Utica, Stanton argued that the essential element of government is equality, and Remond supported her, arguing that reconstruction would not be complete ‘until the principles enunciated by Mrs. Stanton were made good.’ In Rochester, Remond argued for the ‘perfect equality of every human being so far as natural rights is concerned’ and that ‘every person amenable to law should have a voice in making the law’. In Troy, Anthony, again, argued with strong reference to the nation’s founders. Throughout this canvass, these arguments remained prominent, and this testifies to the strong commitment to equal rights that all the AERA activists shared.

33 ‘State Constitutional Convention, NASS, 8 December 1866.
34 ‘Memorial of the American Equal Rights Association to the Congress of the United States,’ NASS, 22 December 1866.
36 ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 15 December 1866.
37 ‘City and County,’ Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette, 11 December 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
Just as at Albany, the New York canvass meetings witnessed disputes, but, again, it was shown that these disputes could be overcome. It was an important part of AERA business that resolutions or arguments could be challenged and new positions found, and it was in this method of collective responsibility that the membership ensured the maintenance of the commitment to equal rights. When someone drifted, others brought them back into line. For example, at the Cooper Institute meeting, Pillsbury read the AERA’s memorial to Congress. Lucy Stone raised an objection. She feared that overly-harsh terms could alienate those congressmen who sympathised with woman suffrage, so proposed softer language. Her revised motion was carried.40

The most significant dispute, however, came in response to the actions of Senator Edgar Cowan in the recent Congressional debates over suffrage extensions in the District of Columbia. Radical Republicans favoured extending the vote to all black men in the District, but Cowan, a Republican but an opponent of black (male) suffrage, proposed extending it to women as well, in an attempt to undermine the entire endeavour.41 At the Rochester equal rights meeting, on 11 December, Parker Pillsbury introduced three resolutions, calling for universal suffrage in New York, supporting women’s right to elect delegates for the constitutional convention, and praising Cowan for his move to strike ‘male’ from the D.C. suffrage bill. There was much opposition to this third resolution, with opponents denouncing Cowan as an ‘insincere’ opportunist. Anthony, for her part, defended the resolution and praised Cowan for driving ‘the Republicans to logical conclusions’, although she admitted that she had no love for Cowan personally. The debate then became a question of whether the association should support either political party, with Anthony leading the charge against the Republicans for betraying their republican principles. Pillsbury argued that this association would have ‘nothing to do’ with ‘indications of partisanship’. He continued: ‘we ought to rejoice at any good deed done or word spoken, no matter what might be the intention.’42

40 ‘Shall Women Vote,’ New York Tribune, 8 December 1866.
41 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.90-91.
A compromise was proposed by an unidentified AERA member, who argued that the convention should censure Republicans directly, if that was what it wanted, ‘and not indirectly by praising opponents.’ This proposal was acted on, with the original resolution edited to ‘express satisfaction that Sen[ator] Cowan’s move had been made, but without according praise to any individual.’ Anthony concluded by saying that she ‘believed in approving every good work done.’ The lesson had been learned, and the Cowan resolution was not seen at the next large convention, in Troy, where Pillsbury stuck to the resolutions regarding universal suffrage and the election of delegates. By remaining above the partisan fray, and maintaining a focus on and a commitment to universal suffrage, the AERA managed to overcome a dispute, thereby preserving a united front. For Pillsbury, the issue of central concern was to remain non-partisan. Originally he argued that this would mean the freedom to praise Cowan, or anyone else, for their good work, but learning from the dispute, he came to accept that this could equally be done by focusing on the principle, not the design – the message, not the messenger.

As stated above, one of the chief pieces of evidence of discord in the New York canvass comes from Olympia Brown’s memoirs, accusing Charles Lenox Remond of betraying the equal rights cause. The historical record, however, shows far more evidence of Remond’s fidelity to the AERA. As shown above, Remond praised Elizabeth Jones’s resolutions at Albany, and rebuked those in the audience who shied away from donations to the cause. At the Cooper Institute meeting, he rebuked the Colored Men’s convention – the same one attended by Anthony in October – for refusing to give the AERA leader a seat on the platform. Throughout the campaign, there is constant reference to his defending of women’s

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43 ‘Equal Rights Meeting,’ *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, 12 December 1866; ‘The Equal Rights Convention,’ *Rochester Democrat and American*, 12 December 1866; ‘Equal Rights Convention,’ *Evening Express* (Rochester, New York), 13 December 1866, all in *ECS-SBA Papers*, Reel 11; The unidentified AERA member was named as Mr. Orvis.
right to the ballot. In Utica, he argued that the principles enunciated by Stanton were the only basis for Reconstruction. In Rochester, ‘[h]e advocated female suffrage as a right due to females, and upon the same ground that he claimed suffrage for the black man.’

Correspondence shows Remond’s impact on the audiences of these conventions, from inside the AERA leadership and among its local members. Joseph Post, brother-in-law of veteran abolitionist and women’s rights activist, Amy Kirby Post, reported that ‘Stanton delivered the best speech I ever heard her [give] ... Remond too was very good,’ indicating a concordance between them. Martha Coffin Wright reported that ‘Susan and Mr. P[illsbury], and Remond also did well.’ Anthony’s was the loudest voice praising Remond. ‘Remond never did better work,’ she wrote to Amy Kirby Post, and also to Gerrit Smith, and called him ‘fully a match for [Frederick] Douglass’ to Kansas politician Sam Wood, suggesting they recruit him for the later campaign in that Western state. These reports do not suggest that Remond was a problem on the campaign – indeed, Anthony recommending him for more work suggests he was an asset.

On top of the positive coverage of Remond’s work, the reporting of the entire canvass does not suggest the tour was rife with tension. Disputes there were, but there was little or no reference to these in the reports that emanated from the state. This questions the overall significance of those conflicts. As seen above, Joseph Post and Martha Coffin Wright only had good reports for the conventions they attended. Anthony described the Albany and Cooper Institute conventions as ‘excellent’, and other meetings as ‘the very best kind’, ‘capital’, and

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47 ‘City and County,’ Utica Morning Herald and Daily Gazette, 11 December 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
48 ‘Equal Rights Meeting,’ Rochester Union and Advertiser, 12 December 1866, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
49 Joseph Post to Isaac Post, 25 December 1866, Post Family Papers.
50 Martha Coffin Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, 23 December 1866, Garrison Family Papers, MS 60, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College [hereafter GFP Smith].
51 SBA to Amy Kirby Post, 17 February 1867, Post Family Papers; SBA to Gerrit Smith, 6 March 1867, GS Papers; SBA to Samuel N. Wood [hereafter SNW], 21 April 1867, Woman Suffrage History Collection, no. 656, Kansas Historical Society, State Archives & Library [hereafter Kansas WSHC].
52 Joseph Post to Isaac Post, 25 December 1866, Post Family Papers; Martha Coffin Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, 23 December 1866, GFP Smith.
‘splendid’. Louisa Jacobs, the young black speaker, and daughter of abolitionist and writer Harriet Jacobs, earned special praise from Anthony.53

Writing to the NASS, Pillsbury, Remond, and Elizabeth Kingsbury all reported their meeting’s successes. ‘This movement is decidedly and rapidly [moving] onward,’ wrote Kingsbury.54 ‘The word fail finds no place in our vocabulary,’ reported Remond.55 ‘There is no real obstacle in the way of its speedy success,’ argued Pillsbury, except local indifference. But even that was being won over, with ‘a whole winter of cold of indifference’ becoming ‘a thaw’ and then the frosts ‘broke up ... The last evening the stream of a generous humanity and liberality flowed, clear and beautiful as the river of life.’56

The NASS itself highlighted the quality of the meetings held. Regarding the Cooper Institute meeting, the paper reported ‘the attendance was moderate, but the audiences were intelligent and appreciative.’57 Indeed, meetings were ‘of much interest’ and had ‘given much satisfaction’.58 As the canvass drew to a close, it was reported that the tour had been ‘very successful ... Everywhere the attendance has been gratifying numerically and highly intelligent and respectable in character.’59 These reports offer nothing to suggest that the tour was wracked with tension and dispute.

In the end, it was not a dispute that brought the AERA canvass of New York State to a close, but a lack of money. Despite seemingly agreeing to extend the $3,000 from the Hovey fund as requested by the AERA, the Hovey committee reneged on its promise in March 1867. Dudden argued that Wendell Phillips feared that black (male) suffrage was in jeopardy in the face of increased Southern intransigence and President Johnson’s willingness to veto Congressional policies for Reconstruction. He therefore reserved Hovey money entirely for the black (male) suffrage campaign and sought to avoid the promotion of woman suffrage as an extraneous issue. The money was gone, despite the fact the AERA had assumed

53 SBA to AD, 9 December 1866, AD Papers; SBA to Amy Kirby Post, 17 February 1867, Post Family Papers.
54 ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 9 March 1867.
55 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 9 February 1867.
56 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 26 January 1867. The letter was a re-print from an article in the Yates County (New York) Chronicle.
57 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 15 December 1866.
59 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 20 April 1867.
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debts during the campaign. Remond and Pillsbury returned home, unable to cover the costs of the tour themselves. Anthony continued to hope that the Hovey committee could be convinced to relent, but it was not to be. All the good work that had been accomplished through the tour was jeopardised.60

Despite this financial setback, the AERA continued on its quest to convince the New York State constitutional convention that suffrage should be extended to all. The collective, organisational work was not as prominent as it had been in the state-wide canvass – the task was left to a few members who had the personal resources to continue. Stanton and Anthony answered the questions of the suffrage committee in a special hearing. Responding to the argument that only those who could fight for the nation should be entrusted with the ballot, Anthony argued that, in that case, women had an equal duty to serve their country in times of war, so had an equal claim to the ballot. Another delegate wondered why sex should not be a suffrage restriction when age and residency were. Anthony argued that these two restrictions could be overcome – but sex could not, meaning she did not have an equal chance with any man to gain the ballot.61 Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell also spoke before the convention at large, in July, arguing for equal rights and universal suffrage.62

The most significant impact on the convention from an AERA member, however, came from George William Curtis, a convention delegate for Richmond County. ‘I do not mean to be dumb upon the Woman question,’ he wrote to fellow AERA member Thomas Wentworth Higginson before the convention.63 Curtis moved to strike the word ‘male’ from state suffrage restrictions, and his speech in defence of that move, entitled ‘Equal Rights for All’, was littered with references to natural justice, inalienable rights, and other aspects of the Declaration of Independence tradition. ‘I urge the enfranchisement of women on the ground that

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60 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.94; SBA to Gerrit Smith, 6 March 1867, GS Papers; SBA to AD, 24 March 1867, AD Papers; Elizabeth Kingsbury to Amy Kirby Post, 17 March 1867, Post Family Papers.
62 Amy Kirby Post to Isaac Post, 7 July 1867, Post Family Papers; SBA to Charles James Folger, 7 July 1867, Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC04360.034; Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History; SBA to AD, 12 July 1867, AD Papers.
63 George William Curtis to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 13 June 1867, Thomas Wentworth Higginson Correspondence, MS Am 1162.10, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
whatever political rights men have, women have equally,’ he declared. ‘The amendment I offer is merely a prayer that you will remove from women a disability, and secure to them the same freedom of choice that we enjoy.’ His focus was squarely on equal rights, even criticising suffrage committee chairman Horace Greeley for speaking of women ‘as a class’. However, despite the work of Anthony, Stanton, Stone, Blackwell, and Curtis, and the strong commitment to equal rights, the AERA could not overcome the conservative prejudices of the convention delegates, and the suffrage rules remained unchanged.

Free argued that this meant the AERA had failed – failed to convert the New York constitutional convention delegates to universal suffrage and equal rights. But, in other ways, the canvass had not been the divisive failure it has previously been seen as. Successful and productive meetings had been held across the state on a very tight budget; throughout, the association had stuck to its principles, arguing strongly for universal suffrage and equal rights; disputes did occur, but their impact was minimised through collective responsibility. Contemporary reporting attributed little significance to any disputes that did occur, and, contrary to previous scholarship, Charles Lenox Remond was not a source of tension, questioning the argument that the AERA campaign in New York was, as Dudden put it, ‘flawed’. Overall, it was clear that the root of the split in the AERA was not in New York.

The 1867 AERA Anniversary Convention

The 1867 AERA anniversary convention, held in May in New York City, shows a similar overall picture to the New York canvass. The historiography of this event has been even more assertive of disputes and divisions. In DuBois’s words, ‘abolitionists and feminists fought openly.’ Even Dudden’s revised account fails to recognise the convention’s positive features, arguing that the AERA’s ‘co-operation across race and gender lines ... came to a screeching halt’ when its

65 George William Curtis to William O’Connor, 3 October 1867, George William Curtis Correspondence, Ms Am1124, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
67 Ibid., p.282.
68 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, p.73.
funding was cut.\textsuperscript{69} Regarding the convention, Dudden argued that the AERA members had a proper chance to ‘discuss among themselves how best to combine the two causes’, but, instead, the convention led to ‘polarised positions’.\textsuperscript{70} However, these two accounts fail to take into account many of the positive signs for the association that are made evident by closer study of the contemporary record. The dispute, taking place on the morning of the second day, concerned a few members only. The first day remained free from divisiveness. Even after the next morning’s dispute, other members worked for reconciliation and sought to move the debate on.

By the time Stanton called the convention to order, it was already known that the association’s main source of funding, the Hovey fund, had been cut off, but the convention’s first day was anything but pessimistic. Anthony delivered a positive annual report, celebrating the success of the New York canvass, and noted a variety of other signs of progress for the equal rights cause.\textsuperscript{71} The resolutions proposed were strongly committed to equal rights, resolving that ‘republican institutions are based on individual rights’; that contemporary claims of “equal,” “impartial,” and “universal” suffrage when only applying to males were a ‘cruel abandonment’, a ‘fraud’, and an ‘insult to women’; and that ‘class and caste’ legislation is ‘cruel and proscriptive’.\textsuperscript{72}

Parker Pillsbury delivered the keynote speech, entitled ‘The Mortality of Nations’, which concentrated on the dangers posed to a nation that failed to secure universal and equal rights to all. ‘The right of suffrage is as old, as sacred, and as universal as the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ he argued. Pillsbury reminded the audience that ‘the Woman’s Rights Society contemplated suffrage only for woman. But we, as an EQUAL RIGHTS Association, recognize no distinctions based on sex, complexion, or race.’\textsuperscript{73} Former slave and long-time abolitionist and women’s rights activist, Sojourner Truth, also spoke, concentrating on the plight of black women, in a speech that the \textit{New York Tribune} called ‘one of the most pointed, clear, chiseled arguments we ever heard in favor of

\textsuperscript{69} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.94.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., pp.96-99.
\textsuperscript{71} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the American Equal Rights Association: Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 9 and 10, 1867} (New York, 1867), pp.5-6.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p.17.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p.38.
"Equality, without regard to race or sex". The day was filled with speeches that eschewed conflict and sought to concentrate on what the association had in common – a commitment to equal rights and universal suffrage.

The next morning, however, saw an argument, chiefly between Stanton and black abolitionist George T. Downing. The lead up to this debate was complex. Samuel J. May had introduced a resolution calling on supporters of black (male) suffrage 'to demand a constitutional guarantee for woman's rights as earnestly and persistently as they do demand it for the colored man's rights.' Remond favoured striking out of it the word 'colored' to avoid implying black men would not do such a thing anyway. Lucretia Mott supported the original resolution, arguing that women had 'a right to be a little jealous' of black men getting the vote before them, for she suggested that black men might oppose woman suffrage.

Downing stood up to seek clarification. He forced the issue, by asking directly if Mott was unwilling to see black men enfranchised before any women. Stanton answered him, arguing in the first instance for universal, individual rights, but then saying that, if one class must be enfranchised first, intelligent women were more worthy and capable of responsible voting. Downing then pushed the issue to a vote, by proposing a resolution 'rejoicing' at black (male) suffrage. He asked Stanton if she would not rejoice if black men were enfranchised. Stanton repeated her earlier reply, arguing first for equal rights, going on to say that if class legislation must be considered then educated women should be enfranchised first. 'Why ask them [educated women] to stand aside while two million ignorant men are ushered into the halls of legislation?' she asked.

As Dudden argued, these two positions were polarised. By forcing the issue to a vote, Downing made no attempt to find a conciliatory position. By calling all black men 'ignorant', Stanton undermined her own demands for equal rights for all. But these were not the only two voices in this disagreement. Dudden argued that Anthony's was the only conciliatory voice, as she attempted to re-orientate the debate around individual rights, but many more spoke before her attempt at

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75 *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, pp.5-52.
76 Ibid., pp.53-55.
reconciliation. Immediately, Stephen Foster rose to ‘smooth over the slight matter of difference,’ in the words of the New York Times. He argued that ‘if suffrage was a natural right, then there can be no denying it to anyone.’ For his part, and continuing his commitment to woman suffrage beyond the New York canvass, Remond stood and declared that ‘if he were to lose sight of expediency, he must side with Mrs. Stanton, although to do so was extremely trying’, given the troubled state of black men in the South. Samuel J. May, whose resolution had sparked the dispute, argued that he would rejoice at black (male) suffrage, ‘and believed that Mrs. Stanton would’ too, but that the best way to secure the franchise for the freedmen would be to rest it on a foundation of universal suffrage.

The most comprehensive attempt to foster peace and move the debate on came from Henry Ward Beecher. ‘I hope the friends of this cause will not fall out,’ he said. ‘If there is such a division of opinion in respect to mere details … I shall regret it. I shall regret that our strength is weakened, when we need it to be augmented most’. Here was exactly the kind of argument that shows the collective responsibility of the New York canvass. Beecher went on to attempt to re-instil some optimism by reminding the association how significant an opportunity they faced in the aftermath of the Civil War. Universal suffrage – ‘that is the question. You may just as well meet it now as at any other time. You never will have so favorable an occasion, so sympathetic a heart, never a public reason so willing to be convinced as to-day.’ ‘Let us put under it no political expediency,’ he concluded. Here was a speech that the AERA could truly unite around, rooted in equal rights, and focusing on the special role of a voluntary association, outside the constraints of partisan expediency, to constantly call the ‘public reason’ to a higher level – to stick to equal rights and universal suffrage, despite the pressures from outside.

This speech received some positive feedback. Parker Pillsbury added that ‘Mr. Downing presented an unnecessary issue. Government is never going to ask us which should enter into citizenship first.’ Pillsbury attempted to begin a

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78 Ibid. On p.100, Dudden also argued that, other than Anthony, Sojourner Truth was the only one to attempt to smooth over the troubles, which she did in her speech that afternoon. Again, this overlooks all the other evidence presented here.


80 Henry C. Wright was a further voice for conciliation. Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.53-54.

81 Ibid., pp.56-60.
discussion of what should be done next. ‘We should now be only “a committee of ways and means”,’ he argued. Anthony obliged by reading two telegrams from Kansas, where the campaign was just getting under way. Josephine Griffing then took up the reins and attempted to create a plan of action for the coming months. She argued that this plan should concentrate on work for the District of Columbia. Following on from this, the resolutions were passed and the officers returned by unanimous votes.\textsuperscript{82}

Downing’s resolution, rejoicing at black (male) suffrage, was not seconded, so never came to a vote, demonstrating the limits of his influence at the convention and his lack of representativeness among the attendees.\textsuperscript{83} Indeed, Dudden argued that he made a habit of attending women’s rights meetings to coerce them into conceding that this was the ‘Negro’s Hour’.\textsuperscript{84} On the other side, Mott did not speak up again to defend her original statement – perhaps it was merely an internal question meant to provoke discussion. This seems more likely coming from a life-long committed abolitionist, who was, in fact, a stronger supporter of black (male) suffrage than woman suffrage at this time.\textsuperscript{85} This left Stanton on her own, defending the extreme position that exalted educated women above ‘ignorant’ black men. So instead of a ‘polarised’ convention, at which ‘abolitionists and feminists fought openly’, we have almost a personal dispute between Stanton and Downing – the latter a serial contrarian – within a convention that was unified and conciliatory.

Indeed, in the coming months, there was little sign of the polarised positions that had emerged at the anniversary convention. Remond, for one, continued to support universal suffrage, speaking at the Fourth of July picnic in Westchester County, New York, organised by the AERA. Here, as at the anniversary convention, the equal rights arguments continued to dominate, showing that the 1867 anniversary, like the New York canvass, was not the point at which the split in the association took root.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., pp.60–61.
\textsuperscript{84} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.98.
Organised Abolitionism and Equal Rights

Another issue that has been distorted in the historiography of this period is the relationship between the AERA and organised abolitionism. The argument goes thus: that at anti-slavery meetings, equal rights talk was silenced. When there was talk, the NASS did not cover it, seeking to smother the debate. The NASS also closed its pages to supporters of equal rights and gave their activities no coverage. In DuBois’s words, ‘organized abolitionism yielded no ground to equal rights appeals.’

This narrative of betrayal arguably stems from that which is seen in the History of Woman Suffrage, where abolitionists are seen as consubstantial with the Republican politicians who gave no support to woman suffrage. But, once again, a closer look at the historical record shows another side to this story: there was much support for equal rights in the abolitionist community, including from the NASS, and the dichotomy between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’ needs revising.

Either side of the 1867 AERA anniversary were two anti-slavery meetings that demonstrated that there was some support from abolitionist circles for equal rights. At the anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), held shortly before the AERA anniversary, Higginson, Stephen Foster, Samuel J. May, and Anna Dickinson, and Lucretia Mott all spoke on equal rights. Never were they prevented from speaking. Even Wendell Phillips, who opposed bringing the question of female enfranchisement onto the AASS platform, called woman suffrage one of the ‘momentous questions of the hour.’

In addition, at the end of May, at a meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, considerable attention was drawn to equal rights. Lucretia Mott and Aaron Powell both spoke in support of woman suffrage. Stephen Foster introduced a resolution urging support for ending suffrage restrictions based on sex. Pillsbury supported this position, but Abby Kelley Foster rose to speak against

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87 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp.71-76; Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.143.
88 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, p.71.
90 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, p.73.
it, arguing that this society was dedicated to the rights of freedpeople alone.\textsuperscript{92} Again, this whole question was ruled out of order for discussion, but again it was not silenced. This is demonstrated in the coverage given the question by the \textit{NASS} – the paper gave full details of these debates. Indeed, this coverage was representative of its support for the AERA throughout 1866 and 1867.

There was, in truth, some contemporary criticism of the \textit{NASS}, which has doubtless influenced the historiography. Anthony complained that they could not get a hearing from the paper. \textquoteleft[T]he gate is shut, wholly\textquoteright, she argued, when a letter written by Stanton was not published.\textsuperscript{93} Later, she expressed a wish that \textquoteleftthe good old Standard might take the lead in this new gospel [of equal rights]; but if it can\textquoteright t, it can\textquoteright t.\textsuperscript{94} The strongest contemporary charge was that the \textit{NASS} had failed to give notice that equal rights advocates had proposed a change in the AASS constitution in 1866. When Anthony and Lucy Stone proposed that the AASS adopt a universal suffrage platform in January 1866, Phillips argued that three months\textquoteright notice was needed, so they directed Aaron Powell to post a notice in the \textit{NASS}, but this was not done.\textsuperscript{95} Additionally, the \textit{NASS} later gave no advertisement for Stanton and Anthony\textquoteright s newspaper, the \textit{Revolution}.\textsuperscript{96} All together, this evidence appears to substantiate the argument that the \textit{NASS} did not support equal rights during the time of the AERA. However, the \textit{Revolution} omission comes from 1868, not 1866 or 1867. Furthermore, the concern with the story of Powell\textquoteright s refusal to post a notice for the AASS constitutional change is that the only extant reference for it is Harper\textquoteright s biography of Anthony, which famously does not contain clear citations.\textsuperscript{97} In such circumstances, the totality of the \textit{contemporary} historical record must be considered in order to achieve a more accurate picture of whether or not the \textit{NASS} was closed to women\textquoteright s rights issues.

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\item[\textsuperscript{92}] \textit{Proceedings of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, NASS}, 8 June 1867; \textit{Our Boston Correspondence, NASS}, 8 June 1867; \textit{Proceedings of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, NASS}, 15 June 1867.
\item[\textsuperscript{93}] SBA to Edwin A. Studwell, 20 August 1866, in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 11.
\item[\textsuperscript{94}] SBA to AD, 24 March 1867, AD Papers.
\item[\textsuperscript{95}] Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.82.
\item[\textsuperscript{96}] Ibid., p.110.
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There was much in that contemporary historical record showing support. From the beginning of the AERA, the NASS published articles giving backing to equal rights. There were articles and letters from AERA members, reports of AERA conventions, lists of resolutions from those meetings, and editorials in support of equal rights goals. The appearance of equal rights articles does decline over the summer, as has been argued, but not entirely for the reasons hitherto suggested. DuBois asserted that the NASS ‘ceased reporting on equal rights activities altogether in the months before the crucial elections of 1866.’ While this could be construed as an attempt to starve the AERA of publicity, it could also be explained by the lack of equal rights activities in this period. As mentioned above, Anthony had already declared that the AERA campaign would wait until after the 1866 elections. Additionally, there were still a few articles referencing equal rights at this time, including backing for Stanton’s attempts to secure election as a congressman for New York.

The New York canvass received particular attention from the NASS. Its coverage was wide-ranging, giving notices and details of all the meetings, and publishing letters sent by Pillsbury, Remond, and Kingsbury, as well as lists of resolutions. The above-mentioned ‘Appeal to the Men and Women of New York’ by Pillsbury, and the AERA Memorial to Congress were both published, and countless lines of editorial encouragement were given. The paper frequently editorialised on the New York constitutional convention itself. It strongly supported the AERA plan to allow women to choose delegates for the convention. Supporters of equal rights should ‘flood the

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98 Indeed, the NASS contains far too many articles in support of equal rights to include here, so the following are illustrative examples – this resulting list is by no means exhaustive.
100 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp.73-74.
101 For evidence of the lack of activity, see the ‘Itinerary for 1866,’ in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 11.
102 ‘The Negro Compromised,’ NASS, 22 September 1866; ‘State Constitutional Convention,’ NASS, 6 October 1866; ‘Should Radical Abolitionists Go to Congress?’, NASS, 6 October 1866; ‘Elizabeth Cady Stanton for Congress,’ NASS, 13 October 1866; ‘Mrs. Stanton for Congress,’ NASS, 20 October 1866.
104 ‘State Constitutional Convention,’ NASS, 8 December 1866; ‘Memorial of the American Equal Rights Association to the Congress of the United States,’ NASS, 22 December 1866.
legislature with tens of thousands of petitions demanding suffrage for women on
equal conditions with men in the election for delegates to this Convention.’ The
same article drew attention to the work of Pillsbury, Remond, Anthony, Bisbee,
Jacobs, and Brown in canvassing the state, urging New Yorkers to support this
movement.105 Even after the Hovey Committee cut the AERA funding in March, the
NASS continued its editorial encouragement for the New York drive.106 It also
editorialised strongly in favour of equal rights throughout the proceedings of the
constitutional convention. ‘While we should have been much pleased if Mr. Curtis’s
amendment extending the ballot to women could have been adopted,’ the editorial
ran on 27 July, ‘we are gratified that the measure was supported by even so much
strength.’107

This mix of coverage and editorial support was not limited to the New York
constitutional convention. Details of other AERA meetings, including the 1867
anniversary, meetings in Pennsylvania, and the Fourth of July picnic in
Westchester were published.108 Letters from AERA members, including Pillsbury,
with continual references to equal rights and woman suffrage, were printed.109
Notices and reviews of Stanton’s lectures on Reconstruction were given.110 In
January 1867, the paper published a historical essay on woman suffrage in New
Jersey, written by Stone and Blackwell.111 Furthermore, notice was given of the
tracts that were available for purchase from the AERA.112

Even during the Kansas campaign, the NASS gave coverage and editorial
support for equal rights, which undermines the conclusion of the History of
Woman Suffrage that this campaign saw no support from abolitionists in the

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105 ‘State Constitutional Convention,’ NASS, 16 February 1867. Dudden does draw attention to this
support, by referencing just one of the editorials, from October 1866, but gives the suggestion that
this support ended with the cutting of the funding in March 1867. Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.89.
106 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 20 April 1867; ‘The State Constitution,’ NASS, 4 May 1867; ‘The State
Convention,’ NASS, 8 June 1867.
107 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 27 July 1867. For examples of coverage support, see: ‘The State Constitutional
Convention,’ NASS, 6 July 1867; ‘Personal,’ NASS, 20 July 1867; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 10 August
1867; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 24 August 1867.
108 ‘First Anniversary of the American Equal Rights Association,’ NASS, 3 March 1867; ‘The
Mortality of Nations,’ NASS, 13 July 1867; ‘Mass Convention in Westchester County, New York,’
NASS, 20 July 1867; ‘Philadelphia Correspondence,’ NASS, 26 January 1867; ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 2
February 1867.
109 ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 9 March 1867; ‘The Prospect,’ NASS, 23 March 1867; ‘Present Danger,’
NASS, 30 March 1867; ‘What Has Been Done?’ NASS, 4 May 1867.
110 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 16 February 1867; ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 23 February 1867.
111 ‘Women and the Ballot in New Jersey,’ NASS, 5 January 1867.
112 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 28 September 1867.
North-East. Articles covered Stone and Blackwell’s early tour of the state. Letters sent in by Anthony were printed; articles were re-printed from Kansas newspapers; and full prints of the three appeals directed to the people of Kansas from various dignitaries – first, from radicals of the North-East; second, from prominent Kansas men; and third, from prominent Kansas women – are all to be found in the pages of the NASS. Editorial support was also forthcoming. ‘We hope all possible effort will be put forth to make the ratification of the proposed amendments [to end suffrage restrictions based on race and sex] certain,’ an editorial declared on 30 March. ‘We hope the earnest men and women of Kansas … furnish by their action in November the first example of a real, unqualified Republican government, which shall know no distinctions of either color or sex,’ an editorial of 14 September declared. This support remained right up to election day. Reporting that Kansas senator Samuel Pomeroy feared the ‘sex’ referendum would be defeated, the paper hoped ‘he will be proved by the voters of Kansas to be mistaken … and that this important amendment, with that enfranchising colored men, will be triumphantly adopted.’

The contemporary historical record is full of examples showing that organised abolitionism – and the NASS in particular – gave support to the equal rights campaign. This attention has previously been overlooked, but it is important because it shows a more complex picture than the simple dichotomy between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’, adding to the argument of the previous chapter, which showed that there was no such binary split in the membership. While there was always more that North-Eastern radicals and abolitionists could have done to support equal rights, it is an overstatement to argue, as DuBois did, that ‘organised abolitionism yielded no ground to equal rights appeals’.

114 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 13 April 1867; ‘Personal,’ NASS, 8 June 1867.
115 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 16 March 1867; ‘The Campaign in Kansas,’ NASS, 14 September 1867.
116 ‘Suffrage in Kansas,’ NASS, 5 October 1867; ‘Suffrage in Kansas [2],’ NASS, 5 October 1867.
117 ‘Suffrage for Women,’ NASS, 5 October 1867; ‘To the Voters of Kansas,’ NASS, 12 October 1867; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 19 October 1867.
118 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 30 March 1867.
119 ‘Kansas,’ NASS, 14 September 1867.
120 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 26 October 1867.
121 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, p.71.
**Kansas**

The success of, and positivity surrounding, the equal rights campaign in 1866 and 1867 is thrown into sharp relief by what happened in Kansas in the autumn of 1867. In February that year, the Kansas legislature had submitted two separate referenda to the people for the November election – one proposing to end suffrage restrictions based on race, and the other on sex.\(^{122}\) State Republican Samuel N. Wood wrote to the AERA for support, asking it to send speakers and literature to ensure that both measures passed. Stone, Blackwell, Brown, Bisbee, Stanton, and Anthony visited the state over the next six months. A significant point of the campaign, as far as the AERA was concerned, was the arrival, in October, of George Francis Train – a maverick figure and known opponent of black suffrage. Stanton and Anthony, who were representing the AERA in Kansas at this time, chose to accept his offer of help, and Anthony stumped the state with him. This move upset other AERA members back in the North-East. In taking on Train, Stanton and Anthony undermined equal rights principles by seeking to push woman suffrage ahead of black (male) suffrage.\(^{123}\)

As DuBois argued, Kansas was supposed to be the perfect opportunity for the AERA to prove that its principles and strategies were the firmest foundation for Reconstruction. It was another chance to show that black and woman suffrage could be achieved together. But, as DuBois argued, the Kansas campaign did not strengthen the AERA, but savagely undermined it.\(^{124}\) While, as Dudden has effectively shown, the eventual defeat for both referenda owed more to the machinations of the State Republican Party and a widespread indifference towards any suffrage extension, the reason for the damage done to the AERA was a failure to stick to the principles and strategies that had, so far, enabled the association to face and survive disputes and defeats.\(^{125}\) Kansas left a profound sore at the heart of the AERA and, after this, the association was deeply affected by a division in the leadership and the undermining of its equal rights ideology.

The relationship between the AERA and the Kansas campaign is more complex than that which characterised the New York canvass. Where in New York

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\(^{122}\) ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 2 March 1867.


\(^{124}\) DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, pp.79-80.

the AERA had been the controlling agent, in Kansas the campaign was controlled and organised primarily by local forces. A State Impartial Suffrage Association had been established in April 1867, and the aforementioned Samuel Wood became its controlling influence. It was Wood who originally wrote to Anthony to ask for the AERA to send speakers, and it was he who dealt with all the correspondence that came into Kansas, and organised the tours that would be undertaken by its speakers, including those sent by the AERA. This would become an important issue later in the campaign. When Wood fell ill, control of the campaign slipped and the cause drifted.

The AERA’s role became one of assistance. Wood asked that speakers be sent to support the campaign. He also made repeated calls for tracts and other literature, and Anthony spent a considerable amount of time arranging for the printing and distribution of these. Additionally, the AERA would serve as a fund-raising body. In May, it sent out an ‘Appeal from the American Equal Rights Association to the People of the United States,’ to ask for donations for the Kansas fund. Pillsbury, running the AERA office, became the fund-raising focus. Martha Coffin Wright was one respondent to appeals for money. She sent $10 from her own pocket, and forwarded $10 each from her two daughters, Eliza Wright Osborne and Ellen Wright Garrison. In this way, the AERA gave radicals in the North-East a way of engaging with the Kansas campaign, happening so far away. By the end of September, the AERA was able to send an extra $1,000 dollars to the field. It was vital work, but this distance was the first way that the Kansas campaign differed from New York, as it resulted in a lack of strong central control by Anthony and the rest of the AERA leadership.

126 SBA to Albert Everett Macomber, 8 August 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.
127 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 16 March 1867; SNW to SBA, 9 April 1867, Phillips Papers. For evidence of Wood’s organising, see, for example: H.B. Norton to SNW, 8 April 1867; George J. Martin to SNW, 9 April 1867; J.C. Hebbard to SNW, 20 May 1867, all from Kansas WSHC.
129 SNW to SBA, 9 April 1867, Phillips Papers.
130 Ibid. See also: SBA to SNW, 12 June 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12; SBA to SNW, 13 July 1867, ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12; SBA to SNW, 2 October 1867, Kansas WSHC.
131 ‘Appeal from the American Equal Rights Association to the People of the United States,’ May, 1867, GS Papers.
132 Lucretia Mott to Martha Coffin Wright, 3 September 1867, GFP Smith.
133 Martha Coffin Wright to Parker Pillsbury, 17 September 1867, GFP Smith.
134 Henry Blackwell to SNW, 27 September 1867, Kansas WSHC.
The campaign started brightly. Stone and Henry Blackwell arrived in the state in April. By this point, the New York canvass had finished but universal suffrage had not yet been defeated at that state’s constitutional convention. On the back of the work in New York, hopes were high that equal rights would be secured. Indeed, Stone and Blackwell sent back reports of the campaign to the AERA anniversary convention that they were being received well and were converting many to the cause. Brown and Bisbee followed Stone and Blackwell and covered considerable ground all over the state.

By this point, infighting in the State Republican Party was becoming clear. Those supporting both black and woman suffrage, led by Wood, were in a minority. The majority supported black (male) suffrage only, choosing to remain neutral on the question of woman suffrage. Displaying similar feelings to Wendell Phillips, this majority faction feared that the cause would be used to undermine their own campaign for black (male) suffrage. This neutrality on woman suffrage did not last, however, with many Republicans soon coming out against female enfranchisement. The press attempted to drive a wedge between the two causes by accusing Brown of speaking against black suffrage, but, contrary to these inflammatory and accusatory reports, Brown stayed true to equal rights arguments.

Stanton and Anthony followed Brown, arriving in September and bringing a new impetus to the campaign. They, too, originally stayed true to equal rights arguments, arguing forcefully for both propositions. By the time they had arrived, though, opposition to woman suffrage had reached its apogee, with the formation of the Anti-Female Suffrage State Committee in early September. Partisan newspapers opposed to woman suffrage hounded AERA workers, and a strong campaign was undertaken to pit woman suffrage in direct competition with black (male) suffrage. Some supporters of black (male) suffrage had argued from

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135 The narrative elements of this section come from Dudden, Fighting Chance, ch. 5.
136 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 30 March 1867.
137 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.61, 71-72, 74.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid., p.125.
the beginning that woman suffrage was a trick – nothing more than a tool to undermine the black (male) suffrage referendum by rousing women to oppose the enfranchisement of black men. They now sought to validate this accusation by putting anti-black suffrage words in the mouths of the AERA speakers.\textsuperscript{142}

Facing such provocation, the AERA speakers initially stayed true to equal rights. However, Stanton and Anthony soon chose to turn to arguments that would undermine the campaign for black suffrage. In the last two weeks of the campaign, George Francis Train, wealthy financier and known opponent of the enfranchisement of any freedpeople, arrived in Kansas. He had been invited by a number of different persons, but it was Anthony who took the liberty of organising his speaking engagements and the two of them toured Kansas together in the last few weeks of the campaign.\textsuperscript{143} It was with Train that Anthony turned her back on equal rights arguments. Train repeatedly argued for woman suffrage in preference to black suffrage. ‘Woman first and the negro last is my programme,’ announced Train. In one of his trademark epigrams, Train summed up his argument:

\begin{center}
Woman votes the blacks to save  
The Black he votes to make woman a slave  
Hence when blacks and “Rads” unite to enslave the whites  
‘Tis time the Democrats championed woman’s rights.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{center}

By touring with Train and sharing a platform with him, Anthony threw her lot in with an opponent of black suffrage. The justification Anthony gave was that Train had brought money to the cause when it was desperately short of funds. In this way, Stanton and Anthony blamed the move on a lack of assistance from supposed friends in the North-East, implying they had no choice but to accept this new source of support.\textsuperscript{145} Anthony would later argue that she did not care about Train’s fierce opposition to black suffrage, and Dudden found no evidence that Anthony attempted to ameliorate his racism.\textsuperscript{146} Indeed, Stanton argued that she had as much right to accept the help of an opponent of black suffrage as abolitionists did.

\textsuperscript{142} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, pp.124-127.  
\textsuperscript{143} SBA to SNW, 10 October 1867, Kansas WSHC.  
\textsuperscript{144} G.F. Train, \textit{The Great Epigram Campaign in Kansas} (Leavenworth, 1867), p.32.  
\textsuperscript{146} DuBois, \textit{Feminism and Suffrage}, p.95; Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.130.
to accept help from an opponent of woman suffrage. This only served to demonstrate that Stanton had abandoned the equal rights cause, declaring that her cause was woman suffrage.147

These examples further highlight how the Kansas campaign differed from the New York canvass. Where New York had seen the prominent position of equal rights maintained throughout, and right to the last – that is, Curtis’s speech on the floor of the constitutional convention – in Kansas, arguments based on inequality came to dominate proceedings, and they had the final word.

The way that equal rights was abandoned serves to show another key difference between Kansas and New York. Where New York was characterised by group work, with each convention featuring several key AERA leaders, the Kansas experience was dominated by individual action.148 These individual forays undermined the collective responsibility of the New York canvass, and this was only exacerbated by the distance between Kansas and the AERA heartland in the North-East. There is some evidence of collective responsibility in action, with letters from Stone and Blackwell to Brown, advising her on strategy and tactics, reminding her of her commitments and giving words of encouragement.149 But correspondence was just too slow to be effective. For example, it was not until after the election that Stone and Blackwell wrote to Anthony, questioning her alliance with Train – and by this time, Anthony and Stanton were engaged in their Train-funded speaking tour and preparing for their Train-funded newspaper, the Revolution.150 It is simply conjecture to wonder whether the presence, and influence, of other equal rights workers would have persuaded Anthony to drop her association with Train, although it was always argued later that the sense of abandonment felt by Anthony and Stanton by their former allies was enough of a justification to take on Train.151 Regardless, it is clear to see here the Kansas campaign in stark contrast to the commitment to the cause of the AERA and of

147 ECS to Edwin A. Studwell, 30 November [1867], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12; ‘William Lloyd Garrison,’ Revolution, 29 January 1868; ECS to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 13 January 1868, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.
148 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.121, 125.
149 LS to Olympia Brown, 30 May 1867, Olympia Brown Papers, A-69/M-133, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College [hereafter OB Papers]; HBB to Olympia Brown, 8 June 1867, OB Papers; HBB to Olympia Brown, 12 June 1867, OB Papers; HBB to Olympia Brown, 30 September 1867, BFP/L; LS to Olympia Brown, 30 September 1867, BPF/L.
150 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.244, note 172.
151 Ibid., p.134.
equal rights as seen in New York. Although the commitment to equal rights was there at the beginning, it was eventually abandoned, with Stanton and Anthony concluding that their primary concern was woman suffrage. The abandonment of equal rights was mirrored in other ways that the campaign differed from the rest of that period – the lack of central control, the lack of collective responsibility, and the inability to reconcile disputes. And, as we shall see in the chapter six, it was in the aftermath of the Kansas campaign that the AERA faced its most difficult challenges.

Conclusion
Trouble though the Kansas campaign was, focusing too much on it only serves to distract from the real successes and positives of other AERA campaigning in 1866 and 1867. As the scholarship has tended to focus on what came later, whether it was the arguments that split the AERA in 1868 and 1869 or the later-written justifications for actions that appear to disagree with the historical record, the disputes of 1867 are magnified. The reality, however, was that the AERA campaign started brightly, with a solid ground built up by patient work in the first few months. The New York canvass then showed the AERA at its best, as activists worked together, with a strong central focus, overcame disputes, and stuck to the association’s strong equal rights principles. Tensions reported later and reflected in the historiography were not as prominent as it has previously been believed, especially those surrounding the work and words of Charles Lenox Remond. The 1867 AERA anniversary, too, was far less tainted by argument and division than accounts have hitherto suggested. It was only in Kansas, when the strongest positive attributes failed, that the association suffered.

This chapter has also shown the support and encouragement given to the equal rights campaign by organised abolitionism, contributing to the argument of the previous chapter that there was no neat divide between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’. It may not have been as much support as some equal rights workers would have expected or liked, but it was certainly there. But rather than recognise it and nurture it, working within its boundaries to the greatest effect, some AERA members chose to take a different course. Faced with the difficult circumstances of Kansas, with little money and heavy opposition, Stanton and Anthony made the
choice to abandon their equal rights commitments, undermining all the good work that had been achieved in the previous twelve months. Overall, the AERA was not riddled with dispute and division between ‘abolitionists’ and ‘feminists’, and such a neat division was also not seen between the political culture of the men and women of the association, as will be seen in the next chapter.
Introduction

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony wrote the *History of Woman Suffrage* in the late 1870s, they offered the following conclusion for the AERA period: ‘There had been so much trouble with men in the Equal Rights Society, that it was thought best to keep the absolute control [of the woman suffrage movement] henceforth in the hands of women.’¹ This begs an interesting question: just how much trouble were men, as men, in the AERA? This question can be answered in two ways: first, by looking at contemporary attitudes towards men’s roles, and, second, by examining the differences between the sexes in the working of the association. As an inter-sex and cross-race organisation, campaigning for political rights for both men and women, the AERA offers an important opportunity to study some key aspects of gender history. How did the men and women of the AERA work together? What differences and similarities were there in their engagement with the political system? And what influence did race have on the gender dynamics?

This chapter will concentrate on AERA-contemporary evidence to avoid the discolouration of time on the assessment of the relations between the sexes in the association. First, it will acknowledge that there was much contemporary criticism of the role of men. Second, it will then go even deeper into the evidence, using the theoretical framework of gendered political cultures to look beyond the rhetoric. It will look at some historiographical definitions of this framework and then analyse the actions and attitudes of the AERA members against several aspects of those cultures. Furthermore, it will look at definitions of African-American political culture and how these fit into the larger picture.

This analysis will show that, contrary to the historiographical view that there was a strong distinction between ‘men’s’ and ‘women’s’ political cultures in

nineteenth-century America, men and women, black and white, engaged in the political process in a variety of ways, using different aspects of these gendered cultures at different times. This lack of a strong distinction between the sexes not only undermines the contemporary criticism of the men in the AERA, and the later *History of Woman Suffrage* assertion that the AERA experience proved to reforming women that they would get ‘trouble’ from their male counterparts, it also calls into question the whole framework of gendered political cultures, suggesting that nineteenth-century American politics could be very much ‘a shared experience’.²

These questions, and this argument, are largely absent from the historiography of the AERA, and they have received relatively little attention from other historians of nineteenth-century American politics, despite the calls from pioneers of women’s history that both sexes must be studied in an integrated, ‘holistic’ history.³ The major exceptions here are *A Shared Experience* – a volume of essays edited by Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone, that seeks a more integrated history of gender by focusing on what men and women shared in nineteenth-century American life – and works that look at inter-sex co-operation within the family.⁴ Few historians have followed these leads, however. Most of the scholarship on issues such as these has focused on the differences and distinctions between the sexes. Lebsock, Scott, Dorsey, and Flanagan have all dealt explicitly with the difference between men’s and women’s political cultures in nineteenth-century reform work, particularly in their attitudes towards collective work and towards the rationale of reform.⁵ Other historians, including Venet and Edwards, have acknowledged similarities between the sexes, but the focus of their particular

² The term comes from the title of the following work: L. McCall & D. Yacovone (eds), *A Shared Experience: Men, Women, and the History of Gender* (New York, 1998).
studies has been on women alone. Work has also been done on the role of men in the woman’s rights movement more generally, including Kimmel and Mosmiller, Robertson, and Strauss, but these studies also focus their attention on one sex—the men, in this case. Overall, there is a relative absence of scholarship that studies the two sexes together. This chapter will address this deficiency.

Contemporary Criticism of Men

Criticism of the men in the AERA was not left to the authors of the History of Woman Suffrage alone. Indeed, a look at the historical record shows there was much contemporary criticism of men in the AERA discourse, suggesting the tensions that their involvement in the association had created. These attacks ranged from more general accusations to ones specific to AERA members.

Stanton was particularly scathing in her attacks on men, due particularly to their dominance of the political system. 'Man’s government is civil, religious and social disorganization,' she argued in response to the Fifteenth Amendment. 'The male element is a destructive force, stern, selfish, aggrandizing.' She was particularly scornful of men’s lack of wisdom in legislating for women. Sojourner Truth, too, accused men of looking after their own sex at the expense of women: ‘I was amused how men speaks [sic] up for one another ... they will stand here and take up time in man’s cause.' At the 1869 AERA convention, while arguing that black men’s enfranchisement would not harm the chances of women’s enfranchisement, Antoinette Brown Blackwell asserted that the blame for the

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7 S. Strauss, Traitors to the Masculine Cause: The Men’s Campaigns for Women’s Rights (Westport, 1982); M.S. Kimmel & T.E. Mosmiller (eds), Against the Tide: Pro-feminist Men in the United States (Boston, 1992); S.M. Robertson, Parker Pillsbury: Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist (New York, 2000).
8 'Manhood Suffrage,' Revolution, 24 December 1868; 'Woman of the Period,' World (New York), 13 May 1869.
10 'Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association,' National Anti-Slavery Standard [hereafter NAS], 1 June 1867.
exclusion of women lay with all men.11 Mary Livermore went further, by attacking the men in the convention itself. 'It seems that you are more willing to be pleased than to hear what we women have to say.' The assertion of these arguments was that the men in the AERA were to be held accountable for the difficulties faced in gaining woman suffrage, just as men’s dominance of politics was to blame for women’s disfranchisement.12

Black men received particular attention in the more general assaults on manhood, as they were gaining entry to the male-dominated polity. While it has been argued that this was due mostly to their race, it is difficult to argue that their manhood was an irrelevant factor.13 The racially-motivated language seen in this period has been the subject of many historical woman suffrage studies.14 Throughout 1868 and 1869, Stanton turned again and again to language that questioned the wisdom of giving the vote to black men whilst withholding it from women. She criticised politicians who 'make their wives and mothers the political inferiors of unlettered and unwashed ditch-diggers, boot-blacks, butchers and barbers, fresh from the slave plantations of the South and the effete civilizations of the Old World.'15 In language that generalised and undermined, she questioned the ability of former slaves and immigrants to use the ballot correctly. ‘Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic ... making laws for Lucretia Mott, Ernestine L. Rose, Susan B. Anthony or Anna E. Dickinson.’16 Stanton also consistently referred to black men as of ‘the lowest orders of manhood’.17

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15 ‘Women of the Period,’ World (New York), 13 May 1869.
16 Ibid.
Meanwhile, Lucy Stone, lauded by one historian as a counter to Stanton’s racism, was guilty of such opinions as well.\(^{18}\) While campaigning in Kansas alongside black supporters of black (male) suffrage, Stone reported back to Anthony: ‘These men ought not to be allowed to vote before we do, because they will be just so much more dead weight to lift.’\(^{19}\) She also affirmed her belief, at the 1869 AERA convention, that the nation’s interest ‘would be more promoted by the admission of woman [to the electorate] as an element of restoration and harmony than the other.’\(^{20}\) Even dedicated abolitionist Lucretia Mott questioned the wisdom of enfranchising black men first. ‘Women had a right to be a little jealous of the addition of so large a number of men to the voting class,’ she told the 1867 AERA anniversary, ‘for the colored men would naturally throw all their strength upon the side of those opposed to woman’s enfranchisement.’\(^{21}\)

This criticism of black men was not perpetrated by white women only – Sojourner Truth questioned the ‘quality’ of the newly-enfranchised black men. She complained of black men going ‘about idle … and when women come home, they ask for their money and take it all, and then scold them because there is no food.’ Truth also called black men ‘selfish’, and predicted that ‘colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before [that is, under slavery].’\(^{22}\)

Perhaps surprisingly, men themselves joined the attack on their sex. E.R. Heywood, Charles Lenox Remond, and the Rev. O.B. Frothingham all stood on the platform of AERA conventions and apologised for their presence, as men. ‘[I]t seems against the laws of logic that any man should stand upon the platform’ and speak for this association, argued Frothingham. None of the three gave reasons for why this should be the case, leaving the conclusion to be that it was the fault of all men that these conventions were needed in the first place.\(^{23}\) Dr. William Blackwell joined Mary Livermore in blaming the men for the commotion at the 1869

\(^{19}\) Lucy Stone [hereafter LS] to Susan B. Anthony [hereafter SBA], 9 May 1867, National American Woman Suffrage Association Records, MSS34132, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter NAWSA Records].
\(^{20}\) ‘Women of the Period,’ World (New York), 13 May 1869.
\(^{21}\) Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.53.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., pp.20, 63; ‘Annual Meeting of the Equal Rights Association,’ NASS, 1 June 1867.
anniversary – indeed, he blamed all men everywhere for all disturbances at women’s conventions, perhaps remembering the mob that broke up the 1853 women’s rights convention in New York City.24

As with Sojourner Truth, black men expressed their concern about other men of their race. Frederick Douglass reluctantly admitted that black men were coming up short when it came to campaigning for rights for their wives, sisters and mothers.25 Likewise, Robert Purvis harboured concerns about the fitness of the freedmen to vote.26

Why the strong criticism of men? A clue is in the attitudes of AERA women to others of their sex, placing particular importance on their sororal relationships. There was a strong desire to recruit and empower women to the cause among the AERA’s membership. Mary Livermore wrote that she did not care how ‘educated, executive, intelligent, or influential’ the recruits to the movement were. ‘They are women, and we would like all women to pull together.’27 'We need every woman,' wrote Stanton on another occasion.28 And activists sometimes spoke for all women, as if they did have the support of all women. ‘We women told them [the Republican Party leadership] we should come out of their party if they advocated negro suffrage simply on the ground of expediency,’ asserted Anthony at a Colored Men’s convention in June 1868.29

This feeling can also be seen in more specific examples. In trying to organise speakers for equal rights lectures, Anthony had constantly been let down by those who had previously professed to support the campaign. Such withdrawals had made her furious in Kansas, but with Anna Dickinson, she remained warm and friendly in tone. ‘I still love you and believe in you’, she wrote, after Kansas. ‘If you are not [willing to speak at the AERA anniversary in 1868] ...
still I shall wait, and still I shall believe in you.’ A similar trend can be seen in Lucy Stone’s plea to Abby Kelley Foster. Stone poured incredible emotion into this important letter, but none of it was vitriolic, or ever intended to do anything but elicit sympathy.31

The issue of the role of men in the AERA anticipated feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint theory posits that individual women are better placed to speak for the rights of all women because they share similar experiences. In this case, men can only have a limited role in any movement for gender equality, as they cannot fully represent the female half of the population. Since most movements for gender equality are based on the emancipation of women, standpoint theory raises questions about the role of men in any equality movement.32 Stanton, Anthony, and Stone all exhibited feelings of this nature during the AERA campaign. ‘No man sees or feels as do we,’ Anthony wrote to Anna Dickinson, arguing the need for her to do all she could for members of her sex.33 ‘If Mr. [Frederick] Douglass knows in person the tyranny of slavery, I know the tyranny over women,’ asserted Stone.34 ‘There is a depth of degradation known to the slave women that man can never feel,’ argued Stanton.35

Lisa Hogan has dealt with a similar question, analysing the role of men in women’s emancipation at the time of the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. When the Convention refused to admit female delegates, Wendell Phillips spoke in their favour, although Hogan argued that this actually impeded the cause for women’s rights and that William Lloyd Garrison employed a better strategy, protesting in silence, encouraging women to speak for themselves.36 While this may have been appropriate for the antebellum women’s rights movement, because, up to that point, very few women had spoken up for their own rights, by

30 SBA to AD, 13 February 1868, AD Papers.
31 LS to Abby Kelley Foster, 24 January 1867, Blackwell Family Papers, 1759-1860, MSS12880, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter BFP/L].
33 SBA to AD, 6 August 1866, AD Papers.
35 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.54.
the end of the 1860s women speaking in public was no longer such a novelty.\textsuperscript{37} The goals had changed, too. Now that the campaign called for equal rights, even standpoint theory would argue that men certainly had a place on the platform of the AERA. If suffrage was demanded for all equally, then all should have an equal right and ability to argue the case, regardless of their race or sex.

This AERA-contemporary evidence shows the tension surrounding the role of men in the association. Attempts to empower women and foster a shared sense of consciousness of their position, coupled with an attitude that saw men as dominating over the polity, encouraged these attacks on manhood. However, this rhetorical evidence is not enough to argue that men were a source of trouble in the AERA. A closer look at more detailed evidence, through the lens of gendered political cultures, will help to show that the differences between men and women in reality were not significant enough to justify the rhetorical attacks.

\textit{Gendered Political Cultures}

It was in the 1960s that scholars began to examine ‘the values and beliefs, as well as symbols and ideologies, that underlie and inspire political action,’ giving rise to the concept of political culture.\textsuperscript{38} What was important here was not ideology, but ways in which people engaged with the political system. By going deeper, and examining attitudes and beliefs that would usually have been taken for granted, scholars sought to gain a fuller understanding of political change, revitalise political history, and foster a dialogue with newer forms of social and cultural history.

In her article, ‘The Domestication of Politics’, Paula Baker broke new ground by introducing a gendered dimension to this concept, arguing that the traditional appreciation of mainstream American political culture in the nineteenth century ignored the experiences of women.\textsuperscript{39} Traditional views, that focused on partisan loyalties and participation in the electoral system, ignored

\textsuperscript{37} DuBois, \textit{Feminism and Suffrage}, pp.48-49.


those without the vote or those excluded from leadership positions in the parties. As such, women barely featured in this scholarship.40

Baker’s argument was that women were not excluded from political life, but simply experienced a different political culture from men. Where men’s culture revolved around elections and parties, feminine culture centred on voluntary associations and a mutual belief in women’s special role.41 Women formed voluntary associations to pool their strength and resources, and provide each other with support; they used that collective power to advance their own agendas.42 These agendas were primarily driven by a shared belief that women’s role in society derived from the fact that they were more morally sensitive than men. This idea began as a burden – a lot imposed on the female sex by men as part of the ‘separate spheres’ ideology – but it quickly developed into a rallying cry for women themselves.43 If partisan expediency promoted self-interest and caused conflict, Baker and others argued, women’s political culture tended to be characterised by a dedication to benevolence, that encompassed a commitment to uplift both those less fortunate, and the entire nation at the same time.44 Women’s sanctifying influence would be brought to bear on government, lifting politics out of the ‘muddy pool’ in which many saw it.45 Not only did this shared commitment serve as a standard for women to flock to, it also fostered a feeling among middle-class white women that diminished the differences between them and other classes of women.

This gendering of political cultures encouraged historians of electoral and partisan culture to recognise the masculine influences on what had been seen as

42 Scott, Natural Allies; S. Zaske, Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women’s Political Identity (Chapel Hill, 2003); B.A. Salerno, Sister Societies: Women’s Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America (DeKalb, 2005).
45 These words are Stanton’s. Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.7.
mainstream political culture. Partisan identities were still to be found at the centre, but their more masculine nature was highlighted. Partisan politics ‘created an atmosphere resembling what we might associate today with a fraternity on the eve of the homecoming game,’ as Neely put it. Meetings were characterised by ‘pageantry, noise, fireworks, high jinks, pranks, drinking, swearing, and, at times, fisticuffs.’ On a more fundamental level, politics became inseparable from manhood. Partisan politics was an environment in which men constantly had to assert their independence and manhood, and elections were a chance for men to do this, by taking an independent role in collective government. Politics was also the field in which men could secure their interests, promoting self advancement and independent material gain, two more key features of nineteenth-century American masculinity.

These two cultures are just that – cultures. As such, they are fairly broad-brushed strokes. Neither was hegemonic, even among the middle classes that are the subject of this study. Some men shunned partisan politics – radical abolitionists, for example – and historians are not agreed on the pervasiveness of partisan politics or selfish interest among American men. Furthermore, some women were deeply involved in partisanship. What these cultures do offer, however, is a chance to examine women’s and men’s activities and assess the differences between them.

A further problem for these definitions of political culture, and one that is particularly salient for this study, concerns the place of African-Americans. There was a significant if relatively small population of free African-Americans in the

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46 Neely, Boundaries, p.8; See also, R.H. Wiebe, Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy (Chicago, 1995).
48 Kimmel, Manhood in America, pp.18, 25, 31.
pre-emancipation North, and historians have argued that they, too, demonstrated their own distinct political culture. Some aspects overlapped with white women’s culture. Largely lacking the vote, and excluded from the dominant partisan system, they formed voluntary associations to pool their resources and share experiences; they organised national and state conventions to promote their own agendas; and they petitioned their governments for a redress of their grievances.52

There was some overlap with white men’s culture, too. African-American male culture was heavily influenced by concepts of manhood, defined particularly in the struggle between freedom and slavery. To be a slave, or to be disfranchised, was to be stripped of manhood. Activists often defended their arguments for political and civil rights with the simple phrase ‘we are men’. Manhood meant freedom, independence, and self-rule, much as it did in white masculine culture.53

In other respects, historians have argued that black political culture differed from that of white Americans. In particular, black men and women tended to be far more conscious of race, and, as a result, their culture tended to be characterised by a commitment to community advancement.54 Black men and women consciously sought the material and intellectual advancement of their own community, placing them between the supposedly white feminine commitment to uplifting the entire nation, and the more masculine white commitment to pure self advancement.

With these historiographical definitions in place, we can now begin to measure the thoughts, words, actions, and experiences of the AERA, and assess the association’s place within this framework. This will be done by analysing some important themes in these definitions of the political culture of women and men. For women’s culture, the three aspects of focus will be: the tendency for women to form voluntary organisations to pool their strength, the notion that women had a special role in benevolent and reform works, and the belief that women had a


53 Young, Antebellum Black Activists, pp.57-59.

54 S.J. Yee, Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1880 (Knoxville, 1992), particularly pp.1-11.
special influence over their male relations and counterparts. For the male culture, the three will be: the tendency to work through partisan structures, the predominant importance of elections and voting, and the association of politics with individualism, as opposed to the pooled strength of the women’s culture. These six aspects are the most salient in the extant evidence of the AERA, and all six will show a complicated picture of the roles and attitudes of the sexes. Finally, the particular debate about the rationale of reform will also be discussed. The above-discussed definitions suggest three reasons for reform: the advancement of the whole of society, self-advancement, or the uplifting of a particular community. By looking at this debate, we can see that all three answers were given by different AERA members at different times.

That men and women were committed to joining and working in the AERA is a simple yet clear sign of the importance of voluntary associational activity to their political culture.\(^{55}\) This was not to be a segregated society with a male leadership and a female auxiliary, or a male-led organisation usurping the prerogative of a formerly female-only cause, as was seen in other examples of American associational life.\(^{56}\) As seen in chapter three, women and men shared leadership positions and influence within the association. Additionally, both sexes attributed equal importance to the association. ‘We have not got a million of dollars,’ said Ernestine L. Rose at the 1867 anniversary convention. Instead, she said, ‘we want a million of voices.’ Without money, or the independent power of the ballot, Rose recognised that the AERA would need to harness collective strength.\(^{57}\) Susan B. Anthony was often keen to press this point home to her supporters, arguing that organisation was the best thing ‘for practical work’.\(^{58}\) Importantly, men recognised the importance of association-building too. At the founding convention of the AERA in May 1866, Stephen Foster argued for an effective organisation. Universal suffrage ‘will never be realized by us,’ he said, ‘unless it is from a united

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\(^{55}\) Ryan also finds this propensity in antebellum Oneida County, New York. See: Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, pp.136-144.

\(^{56}\) See Salerno, *Sister Societies* for information on the female auxiliaries in the abolitionist movement, and Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, pp.198-232 for information on the process of male associations coming to dominate female causes.

\(^{57}\) *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, p.43.

persevering effort' requiring 'a more perfect organization'. In a letter to the Equal Rights convention in Albany in November 1866, Samuel Sewall also spoke of the importance of organisation-building, and readily declared his desire to be considered a member. Perhaps the best example of this united commitment to the AERA's work as an association is the main group of activists that toured New York together during the canvass. This party consisted of males and female, black and white – Stanton, Anthony, Parker Pillsbury, Charles Lenox Remond, Olympia Brown, Bessie Bisbee, and Louisa Jacobs, the daughter of the more famous Harriet Jacobs.

Yet not everyone shared this belief. Despite being the AERA's president, and contributing much to its treasury, Lucretia Mott expressed her misgivings about forming such an organisation. 'The several [women’s rights] Conventions held before the Civil War were far more effective and all that we ought to have attempted,' she wrote to her sister, Martha Coffin Wright. For Mott, the question of equal rights was always a wider campaign, and forcing activists into a narrow channel of action through an organisation would only dampen the spirit that led to the formation of such a movement in the first place.

Scott, in her wide-ranging study of women's associations, argued that one of the main differences between the reforming work of men and women was that men were more likely to operate independently of an organisational structure. There is some evidence of this in the AERA experience. Henry Ward Beecher, whilst consenting to being a vice-president of the association, was one who preferred to do his work alone. 'It is true that I do not work in your organization and to identify myself with you, as to take praise or blame, for the whole movement,' he wrote to Stanton. 'I have always let others work [in] this way and I

60 'Equal Rights,' New York Tribune, 21 November 1866.
61 See ch. 4.
63 Scott, Natural Allies, p.23.
[in] mine. I think there is a touch of wildness in my blood.\textsuperscript{64} Parker Pillsbury, too, was often seen to operate independently. He often travelled and spoke on his own, paying his own expenses.\textsuperscript{65} In a similar way, some women worked independently. Elizabeth Kingsbury travelled New York State on her own during the canvass for the constitutional convention of 1867.\textsuperscript{66} Clarina Nichols did likewise in Kansas, undertaking her own speaking tours and petition-gathering campaigns, and paying her own expenses.\textsuperscript{67} These discontinuities all demonstrate that there was no neat divide between men and women over their attitudes towards voluntary association-building and the pooling of strength. What was the case for one sex was also the case for the other.

A similar picture was seen relating to the idea that women shared a belief in their own special role as advocates and deliverers of beneficence, which was another key aspect of women’s political culture. ‘There is no other name given,’ wrote Lucy Stone to Abby Kelley Foster, ‘by which the country can be saved, but that of woman.’\textsuperscript{68} Frances Dana Gage elaborated on this at the 1867 anniversary: ‘God gave her [that is, woman] the holiest mission ever laid upon the heart of a human soul – the mission of the mother.’\textsuperscript{69} With the vote, women would be able to prevent war,\textsuperscript{70} cure intemperance,\textsuperscript{71} and, more generally, clean up politics. ‘Talk not of the “muddy pool of politics”, as if such things must need be,’ Stanton counselled at the AERA anniversary in 1867. ‘Behold, with the coming of woman into this higher sphere of influence, the dawn of the new day, when politics ... are to be lifted into

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 9 March 1867; ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 16 April 1867; Elizabeth Kingsbury to Amy Kirby Post,’ 17 March 1867, Post Family Papers, University of Rochester [hereafter Post Family Papers].
\item[67] Clarina Nichols to Samuel N. Wood [hereafter SNW], 19 June 1867; Clarina Nichols to SNW, 21 June 1867; Clarina Nichols to SNW, 18 July 1867, all Woman Suffrage History Collection, no. 656, Kansas Historical Society, State Archives & Library [hereafter Kansas WSHC].
\item[68] LS to Abby Kelley Foster, 24 January 1867, BFP/L.
\item[69] \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, pp.49-51.
\item[70] Ibid, p.45.
\item[71] ‘Convention of the State Temperance Society,’ \textit{Kansas Daily Tribune}, [25 September 1867], in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 12; Etta Souls to AD, April 1869, AD Papers.
\end{footnotes}
the world of morals and religion ... when our elections shall be like the holy feasts of the Jews at Jerusalem."  

Furthermore, many AERA members saw reform work in general as women’s work. Susan B. Anthony argued that she learned this while working towards the elimination of intemperance, and argued that this was particularly true in the case of equal rights. ‘If we [that is, women] fail to speak the one word of the hour, who shall do it?’ Anthony asked Anna Dickinson. ‘No man is able – for no man sees or feels as do we,’ Anthony finished. It was the duty of women to push for equal rights, and the more of them involved, the better. Yet this was more than simply calling on women to work for their own cause. ‘No man yet seems to see that it is the nation’s duty to lay anew its foundations – they only propose to re-adjust the old ones with a little chiselling,’ Anthony further argued in correspondence with Dickinson. She believed a greater moral power enabled women to see the problems in the country after the Civil War, and it would be women’s role to ensure that the necessary reforms were carried out.

Men also shared this understanding of women as more moral and sanctifying; this was not a belief shared by females alone. ‘Did you ever know woman to go into any dirty place that she did not leave cleaner than she found it?’ asked C.C. Burleigh at the 1867 anniversary convention. Henry Ward Beecher had spoken along similar lines at the AERA founding meeting, the year before. ‘Woman has more interest than man in the promotion of virtue and purity of humanity ... And the character of a true woman is such that it may shine everywhere without making her any poorer. She is richer in proportion as she gives away.’

Despite the fact that this reform would benefit those who advocated it, there was much in the AERA campaign that spoke to a much older tradition of women’s benevolent works. The support among AERA women for black men to gain their rights first is one example. Indeed, there was much gratitude within the

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72 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.9.
73 ‘Convention of the State Temperance Society,’ Kansas Daily Tribune, [25 September 1867], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12; SBA to AD, 6 August 1866, AD Papers.
75 SBA to AD, 1 September 1866, AD Papers.
77 Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, p.46.
AERA for emancipation and the developments towards black (male) suffrage. ‘I am thankful with all my heart and soul that the people have at last consented to the enfranchisement of the two millions of black men’, said Josephine Griffing.78 ‘I will be thankful in my soul if any body can get out of this terrible pit [of disfranchisement],’ said Lucy Stone.79 ‘Have we any sense of justice? Are we not dead to the sentiment of humanity if we shall wish to postpone his [the freedman’s] security ... till woman shall obtain political rights?’ asked Abby Kelley Foster. Postponing black men’s cause would make her, in her words, ‘a monster of selfishness.’80

Again, benevolence was not just the preserve of women. Several men exhibited such behaviour. Henry Ward Beecher devoted a considerable portion of his speech at the 1867 anniversary to the importance of this reform in taking care of the ‘lowly’. ‘I do not despise the lowly,’ he said. ‘I labor more willingly and more earnestly for the fallen and the oppressed, that I may lift them up.’ Giving the ‘fallen and the oppressed’ the ballot was his way of working for them.81 Stephen Foster and Parker Pillsbury demonstrated this concern, as well, advocating the ballot for African-American women at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in May 1867. ‘Who is going to save the black woman from slavery?’ asked Stephen Foster. When a voice answered ‘her husband’, Foster replied ‘God pity her then!’82

The subject of influence was another that saw no monopoly for one sex. Traditionally, through their more moral natures, women were seen to have a special role in influencing the thoughts and behaviours of their male counterparts and relatives.83 Traces of this idea can be found on several occasions in the records of the AERA. At the 1867 anniversary, Samuel J. May argued that women should vote precisely because it was their job to influence men. ‘Women cannot influence their husbands or educate their sons, as they should do, because they are not

78 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.61.
79 ‘Women of the Period,’ World (New York), 13 May 1869.
80 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.55; Abby Kelley Foster to LS, 10 February 1867, NAWSA Records.
83 Allgor has shown the importance of women’s influence in the building up of Washington as a city and as a government. See: C. Allgor, Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government (Charlottesville, 2000).
properly informed, and have no inducement to become informed.’ The ballot would be their teacher, and with it their influence would become more refined. On her way to Kansas, Olympia Brown was counselled by Henry B. Blackwell about the importance of influencing the white men of the state to vote for woman suffrage. This was, of course, vital when the question was put before the people in a referendum.

Stanton’s attitude towards this aspect of political culture is particularly instructive in this case. Earlier, she had written that she doubted ‘it was our business in life to “manage men”.’ However, during the AERA campaign, she turned to this method, and with Anthony, sought to influence potential male supporters through their wives. They wrote to Anne Greene Phillips, wife of Wendell Phillips, asking her, sometimes subtly, and sometimes forcibly, to encourage her husband to support them. ‘Will you order him to speak for us?’, Stanton wrote. They also sought to strike at Horace Greeley through his wife, Mary Cheney Greeley, by arranging for her to present a petition to the New York constitutional convention signed as ‘Mrs. Horace Greeley’. Clearly a political calculation, intended to embarrass Horace, it also reveals a willingness to use a marital connection to influence policy. While they were probably not hoping that Mary would be able to convince her husband to change course, they would have hoped Horace would have been sufficiently affected by it to reconsider.

Influence was not something reserved just for women, however. Parker Pillsbury, Charles Lenox Remond, and John T. Sargent all spoke of the importance of their ability to influence others in advocating universal suffrage. Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell hoped that ‘some good man’ in the New Jersey legislature would ‘be moved by his sense of justice ... and by respect for his own historic credit, to use every proper influence’ to secure universal suffrage.

Finally, Stanton, ever flexible on the question of influence, called on men and

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85 Henry B. Blackwell [hereafter HBB] to Olympia Brown, 8 June 1867, and HBB to Olympia Brown, 12 June 1867, both OB Papers.
86 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.31-32.
87 ECS to Anne Greene Phillips, 1 May 1867; ECS to Anne Greene Phillips, [Summer 1866]; SBA to Anne Greene Phillips, [April 1867], all Phillips Papers.
90 ‘Woman’s Rights in New Jersey,’ NASS, 11 April 1868.
women to exert an equal influence on each other. All these discontinuities demonstrate, again, the importance of understanding that these aspects that have been defined as belonging to women’s political culture were by no means their monopoly.

Partisanship – a key aspect of what has been defined as men’s political culture – was a strong theme running through the AERA discourse, exhibited by both men and women. Women’s interest in partisan activity has been shown by a number of studies in recent years. Where Varon asserted that women displayed a ‘distinct’ culture in this respect, Edwards argued that she found no evidence of a separate women’s partisan culture in the later nineteenth century, arguing that men and women demonstrated similar modes of engagement with the parties. The AERA experience presents a similar conclusion to Edwards, but also takes into account the non-partisanship of both sexes to reveal a more complex picture.

Many AERA members identified themselves as Republicans and saw the Republican Party as the most natural vehicle for advancing universal suffrage, even if that did mean having to concentrate on black (male) suffrage first. But criticism of the Republicans was still widespread. Convention resolutions denounced the party, and individuals attacked their hypocrisy over universal suffrage. And when others, such as Douglass, defended the Republicans, they did so in a very partisan way, by attacking the Democrats. ‘At least, our best advocates are among the Republican party. Where is our friend among the Democratic party?’ Douglass asked at the 1868 AERA anniversary convention.

Despite Douglass’s question, the AERA did seek engagement with the Democrats, with resolutions praising Democratic senator James Brooks for his presentation of a petition for woman suffrage when no Republican could be convinced to carry out the task, and praise for the party generally for always

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91 ‘Female Suffrage,’ Hartford Daily Courant, 11 December 1867, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.
92 Varon, We Mean to Be Counted, p.1; Edwards, Angels in the Machinery, p.8. See also: Zboray & Zboray, Voices Without Votes.
being in the vanguard of suffrage reform.\textsuperscript{96} The willingness to praise Democrats directly, knowing that this would alienate Republican supporters, shows the willingness of the AERA to engage in partisan activity.\textsuperscript{97} Flirtation with the Democrats led to the Executive Committee of the AERA passing a resolution that endorsed Anthony’s attendance at the Democratic National Convention in 1868.\textsuperscript{98} Anthony attended, and a letter from her was read out, to great laughter and cheers, demonstrating the party’s lack of serious interest in her designs.\textsuperscript{99}

Some AERA members, however, wanted to remain aloof from the partisan system, harking back to a traditional position of anti-slavery reformers. Pillsbury, at an AERA meeting on the tour of New York, repudiated resolutions supporting the Republican Party ‘as indications of partisanship, with which this Association has nothing to do. We ought to rejoice at any good deed or word spoken, no matter what might be the intention.’\textsuperscript{100} Henry Ward Beecher, Ernestine L. Rose, and Major James Haggerty expressed similar opinions at the AERA anniversary in 1867.\textsuperscript{101} ‘Although I have been and am identified with the Republican party in politics,’ said Major Haggerty, ‘I will do as the lady who has just spoken said that she would do – not be governed by mere party, but by the moral bearings of the questions that arise’.\textsuperscript{102} With men and women both engaging and remaining aloof from partisan behaviour, it is clear that this was not a distinctly male issue.

A similar pattern can be seen among issues of elections and voting, the second main pillar of ideas about male political culture. Men and women were both active in dealing with these aspects of political engagement. Besides the obvious link between the AERA and voting, that is, calling for universal suffrage, the organisation did engage, or made an attempt to engage, with the electoral system. The Pennsylvania branch of the organisation resolved, in its inaugural meeting, ‘to

\textsuperscript{98} Unpublished minutes of AERA business meeting, 8 June 1868, American Equal Rights Association Subject File, NAWSA Records.
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, pp.47, 58.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p.47. The lady who spoke before him was Ernestine L. Rose.
catechise candidates for all offices, State or National, and to make the extension of suffrage the test question in all future political action.'

Josephine Griffing informed Benjamin Wade, Republican senator from Ohio, of this development and asked whether he was willing to make ‘some tangible admission of your agreement with us,’ and informed him that this would be a condition of them supporting him for re-election.

Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell went one stage further, forming Liberty Leagues across Massachusetts just before the elections in the autumn of 1868, warning that they would target for defeat any candidates not in favour of universal suffrage.

Some went a stage further even than that. Rather than trying to engage with particular candidates, some would attempt to become candidates themselves. In the first official meeting of the AERA, in Boston at the end of May, 1866, resolutions were put forward, recommending that women seek election for local offices, giving them political experience, proving their worth in government, and setting them on a path to higher posts. The same could work in Washington. ‘By sending to Washington men of courage and conscience,’ Stanton wrote in the autumn of 1866, ‘we take the first onward step towards a safe reconstruction of the new nation.’

Stanton wrote these words on the issue of whether or not Wendell Phillips should seek office to lead the abolitionist cause in the nation’s legislature. Phillips declined, arguing that he could have more influence outside the system. But Stanton did not agree, running for Congress herself, in the eighth Congressional district of New York. While unable to secure election, attracting just 24 votes, the move, and the AERA’s engagement with candidates, showed their commitment to an electoral path to reform.

The majority of the male members of the AERA could, of course, vote, although we will never know for sure who voted for whom. Yet we know that members such as Douglass and Dickinson campaigned for the Republican Party across the South in 1867. As shown in chapter four, Douglass often explicitly

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103 ‘Equal Rights,’ NASS, 2 February 1867.
104 JSG to Benjamin F. Wade, 30 June 1867, B.F. Wade Papers, 1832-1886, MSS44263, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
105 LS and HBB to James Freeman Clarke, 22 October 1868, BPF/L.
106 ‘Resolutions,’ NASS, 23 June 1866.
107 ‘Should Radical Abolitionists go to Congress?’ NASS, 6 October 1866.
108 ‘Mrs. Stanton for Congress,’ NASS, 20 October 1866.
defended the Republican Party. Some women voted, as well. In November 1868, equal rights activists set up an alternative ballot box in a polling station in Vineland, New Jersey. Their votes were not counted, but 192 women ‘testified in an emphatic manner their desire to vote’, as the National Anti-Slavery Standard put it. It was a highly symbolic act, and one that demonstrated to the world the importance they attributed to voting, and their engagement with the ballot box, defined by this historiography as of a more masculine world.

In a similar way, as women were voting, there were some men among the AERA membership who turned their back on electoral politics. Stephen Foster, Alfred H. Love, and Robert Purvis all demonstrated this intention. ‘I will never ... approach the ballot box of this country till I take my wife [to the polling booth] in my arms,’ Stephen Foster declared at the 1866 anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society. ‘I will not consent to degrade myself so much as to vote even to give her the right to vote.’ For his part, Love declared at the 1867 AERA anniversary meeting that ‘I put the ballot of to-day under my foot, and say I cannot use it until the mother that reared me can have the same privilege’. Purvis, a black man, declared his willingness to wait for his own enfranchisement until women were included. There was, of course, a strong tradition among abolitionists to shun partisan and electoral politics, and this only goes to further undermine the concept of distinctive gendered political cultures.

The men and women of the AERA equally engaged in some of the more overtly masculine aspects of the historiographical definition of male political culture. As seen above, one of the central elements of nineteenth-century manhood was individualism. To be a man was to be independent, to be able to survive alone, and to have that individualism recognised. It was constantly to be proven, and, through the power of the individual ballot, men could fulfil this desire when the country

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110 ‘Untitled,’ NASS, 14 November 1868.
112 *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, pp.63-64.
113 Martha Coffin Wright to Ellen Wright Garrison, 25 January 1869, Garrison Family Papers, MS 60, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College [hereafter GFP Smith]. Wright describes Purvis’s declaration at a convention in Washington D.C.
came together to choose its leaders. Individualism and the ballot were inextricably linked, and this was reflected in some of the arguments of the AERA.\textsuperscript{115}

As shown in chapters two, three and four, the AERA was endeavouring to change the terms of the Reconstruction debate, and one way to do that was to engage with individualism, which has been defined as a more masculine trait. A considerable portion of the intellectual arsenal of the AERA was devoted to the concept that universal suffrage was inextricably tied to individual rights. Whilst the Republican Party, abolitionists, and others sought to define universal suffrage as synonymous with black (male) suffrage, Stanton boasted: ‘We are the masters of this situation’, because she and her colleagues were the only ones that equated suffrage with ‘the higher, the holier question of individual rights ... While man talks of “equal, impartial, manhood suffrage”, we give the certain sound, “universal suffrage”. While he talks of the rights of races, we exalt the higher, the holier idea proclaimed by the [Founding] Fathers, and now twice baptized in blood, “individual rights”.’\textsuperscript{116} ‘Where does self-government begin? Where does it reside?’ asked Samuel J. May at the 1867 AERA anniversary. ‘In the individual,’ was his answer.\textsuperscript{117} Even Douglass, who did see black (male) suffrage as a priority, admitted that governments are created not by men and women, but by humans.\textsuperscript{118} All round, the commitment was, at least in theory, for individual rights, regardless of any other signifier, as Stanton put it, not ‘of negroes or women, but citizens.’\textsuperscript{119}

Masculine culture was also evident in the way AERA activists sought to define the ballot. As shown above, individualism was linked very closely with independence. Stanton saw independence as the true source of women’s development, and the ‘only way to reclaim the sex [that is, women] from helplessness, frivolity, and in some cases the degradation into which they lapse’.\textsuperscript{120} Stephen Foster, hoping to push the question of true universal suffrage at a business meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May 1867, sought to define the ballot as ‘this essential safeguard of personal freedom.’\textsuperscript{121} The Universal

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, pp.8, 16.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p.18.
\textsuperscript{119} ECS to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 13 January 1868, in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 12.
\textsuperscript{120} ‘Equal Rights,’ \textit{New York Tribune}, 21 November 1866.
\textsuperscript{121} ‘Business Meeting,’ \textit{NASS}, 25 May 1867.
Franchise Association, the District of Columbia branch of the AERA, defined the ballot similarly – the ‘guarantee of freedom’.\textsuperscript{122} Just as with the attempt to link the ballot to individualism, equating it with independence was an attempt to move away from a more feminine notion of dependence and subservience, to a more masculine notion. Again, these definitions were used by both men and women.

\textit{The Rationale for Reform}

This chapter, so far, has given evidence for the interconnectedness of gendered political cultures, and the permeability of the boundaries to each subsection. The following section presents a direct comparison of the different cultures, and this will be done first by looking at whether the reform the AERA proposed was meant to advance individuals, the community, or the society at large. As shown above, historians have characterised societal improvement as part of a more feminine culture, self advancement a more masculine characteristic, and community advancement favoured by African-American activists. An examination of how the AERA activists viewed this debate will go a long way to helping place the association somewhere within the boundaries of gendered political cultures.

The AERA certainly fulfilled certain elements of a more feminine political culture when it argued that universal suffrage would benefit, first and foremost, the nation, and these arguments were employed by both men and women, black and white. Olympia Brown and Frances Dana Gage went so far as to argue explicitly that they were not looking out for their own, personal concerns. ‘I ask the ballot, not because of its individual advantage to myself,’ said Gage, ‘but because I know and feel that individual rights, guaranteed to every citizen, must harmonize the world.’\textsuperscript{123} Brown went further, arguing that this was ‘a question of the life of the nation.’\textsuperscript{124} These two arguments represent two strands of the AERA discourse on societal advancement – positive arguments, showing that universal suffrage would bring the nation rewards, and negative arguments, demonstrating how this reform would ward off danger.

\textsuperscript{122} ‘The Franchise the Guarantee of Freedom,’ \textit{NASS}, 22 August 1868.

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA}, p.51.

At the AERA founding meeting, Frances Watkins Harper argued that slavery had not only inflicted terrible atrocities on black men, but had also threatened the liberties of white men, depriving them of ‘the liberty of speech and the freedom of the press.’ Pillsbury devoted his entire speech at the AERA anniversary in 1867 to the question of why empires and nations fall, arguing that only a nation built on equality and justice could survive, let alone prosper. Universal suffrage would save the nation from war, according to Sojourner Truth, and give it the power to survive such a conflict, should it be forced into it, according to Clarina Nichols.

Not all the arguments were so negative. Frances Dana Gage promised that, once liberated, women ‘will adjust themselves to their convictions of their duties, their responsibilities, and their powers, and society will find harmony within itself.’ Indeed, some predicted a veritable revolution if universal suffrage was adopted, as if it would herald the Millennium. Truth argued that ‘when women gets her rights ... then it will be peace on earth and good will to men.’ Furthermore, Henry Ward Beecher spoke of this reform ‘carrying the nation forward to its great and illustrious future, in which it will enjoy more safety, more dignity, more sublime proportions, and a health that will know no death.

Concerns for self advancement and personal gain, representing a more masculine culture, are a little more difficult to pick up in the discourse of the AERA. There are very few examples in the extant sources of outright selfish arguments. Stanton feared that if women were not enfranchised at the same time as men, her personal rights would be violated. ‘I would not trust him [the black man] with all my rights’. Other examples were selfish concerns wrapped up in a concern for the community at large. Again, Stanton argued that ‘I would not rejoice in a reconstruction that would give suffrage to woman and deny it to the black man,’ which sounds selfless. But she goes on to argue that, in this case, ‘I should still see

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126 *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, pp.32-43.
128 *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, p.50.
129 ‘Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association,’ *NASS*, 1 June 1867.
130 *Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA*, p.60.
the republican idea violated, and I know my rights were not secure’.  

Abby Kelley Foster took a similar line, even when arguing that black men should be enfranchised first. ‘The slave in this country is more deeply wronged than woman,’ again suggesting selflessness, but then concluding: ‘while a nation can be so infernal as to keep him a chattel, it cannot be induced to allow political rights to woman [sic].’

To complicate the issue further, some arguments for self advancement were couched in societal terms. At an AERA meeting in Boston in May 1866, a Mrs. Dr. Young argued that the ‘regeneration of national politics’ was contingent on the enfranchisement of women. Stanton argued on similar lines, attributing all of society’s ills to class legislation, and only universal suffrage, ‘making woman independent, and profitable labour honorable for all,’ could solve such a situation.

Residing somewhere between the ideas of societal uplift and self-advancement is the concern for a particular community, which has been defined as being the preoccupation of African-Americans in the nineteenth century. ToDouglass, and to his racial community, ‘the ballot means something more than mere abstract right – it is a question of life and death to the negro.’  ‘My race is hated,’ he added, and, later, at the 1868 AERA anniversary, spoke of the political isolation of the African-Americans. ‘You women have representatives. Your brothers, and your husbands, and your fathers vote for you, but the black wife has no husband who can vote for her.’ This was not just a concern of African-American males, using their wives’ predicament to further their own demands. As shown in chapter three, Frances Watkins Harper, although a supporter of woman suffrage, chose to put aside her own demands at this time, to work for the good of her race. Sojourner Truth, too, came with a special concern for the freedpeople. ‘I come from another field – the country of the slave,’ she told the AERA anniversary

132 ‘Build a New Home,’ NASS, 21 July 1866.  
133 Abby Kelley Foster to LS, 10 February 1867, NAWSA Records.  
134 ‘Equal Rights Meeting in Boston,’ NASS, 16 June 1866.  
135 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, p.11.  
in 1867. ‘They have got their liberty – so much good luck to have slavery partly destroyed; not entirely. I want it root and branch destroyed.’

Women, too, displayed a concern for their community – but in this case it was a community of sex rather than race. Some AERA members pitched their arguments in terms that would liberate women as a community. ‘A disfranchised class is always defenceless and degraded,’ resolved the Fourth of July AERA convention in Westchester in 1867. ‘Why did woman want the ballot?’ Sarah Norton asked an equal rights convention in Owego in 1869. ‘Not that she might unite and associate with men … on election day … but that by the inherent force of the ballot, she might secure to women her proper place in the political, social and moral working of the world’s machinery.’ Even Harper, who had argued that black men should be enfranchised before any women, still harboured a larger concern for the advancement of her sex, with the ballot uplifting all women. Furthermore, Theodore Tilton employed the advancement of a community as a rationale for universal suffrage, arguing that men would benefit from the enfranchisement of women. The fact that all three answers to the main question are seen at various times, and by members of both sexes, stands testament to the ways in which individual men and women employed aspects of different cultures at different times.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the charge that men had been disruptive in the working of the AERA, and there was much contemporary criticism of the part that they played, or could play. Many of the women of the AERA considered this reform, and reform work in general, to be women’s work, and sought to empower women and foster a shared consciousness among them, and some were a lot harsher on men than they were on other women because of this.

139 ‘Woman’s Rights,’ Owego Times, 1 April 1869, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.
A look through the lens of gendered political cultures, however, shows that this was merely rhetoric. Individuals from both sexes engaged with the political system in ways that have since been described by historians as masculine and feminine. Some individuals engaged with all aspects here studied, at different times. Stanton is a good example. At one time she argued that it was absurd to suggest that women use their influence to manage men, but then turned to that very power to try to convince some male reformers to support them. She also stood for Congress, while at the same time speaking of the importance of moral suasion and pooling strength in a voluntary association. Henry Ward Beecher is another figure who transcended the gendered boundaries. Benevolence and charity were strong motivators for him in his reform work, but he also displayed a preference for working independently from the pooled strength of organisations. Furthermore, throughout the chapter, we have seen that African-American members – Frederick Douglass, Charles Lenox Remond, Robert Purvis, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Watkins Harper – all engaged in the campaign in a number of different ways, demonstrating that they were not limited by their race, in the same way that white men and women were not limited by their sex.

From all this evidence, it is clear that it was possible for individual men and women to access several different areas of political culture at the same time. Not only does this call into question both the idea that men, as men, were troublesome in the AERA, but also the very idea that there were two distinct gendered political cultures in nineteenth-century America. In this example, political cultures were far more fluid entities than rigid boundaries. The AERA was a small case: as seen in chapter three, it contained fewer than 500 members. This calls into question the association’s representativeness across the whole of the American polity. What this small example does, however, is show just what was possible, what the limits to certain types of action were, and how close individuals got to them. By showing this, we can see how such a small organisation can have important ramifications for the study of an entire polity. But while these last two chapters have shown that differences and divisions in the AERA were not as prevalent or significant as heretofore understood, the association still collapsed. The next chapter will examine how and why that happened.
An Inevitable End? The Collapse of the American Equal Rights Association

Introduction

The last official meeting of the American Equal Rights Association (AERA) took place at the New York City mansion of Margaret Winchester on 14 May 1870. Whilst the assembled members deemed the holding of a full public anniversary meeting to be ‘inexpedient’, something had to be done with what was left of the association. Most of the membership had migrated to either the New York-based National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), or the Massachusetts-centred American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). The latter organisation favoured ending the AERA entirely, and in March, at a meeting of the Executive Committee, AWSA leaders Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell had secured a vote to give notice of the dissolution. By May, however, they had been outflanked. The dissolution meeting had been packed with supporters of the New York suffragists and it voted to merge the AERA with the NWSA and with Theodore Tilton’s recently-formed Union Woman Suffrage Association. The measure was carried with only Stone and Blackwell voting against.¹ The dissenters published their response in the Woman’s Journal, asserting the unconstitutional nature of the vote and the underhanded tactics of their opponents: keeping the meeting a secret, and bringing in new members of the association on a whim and paying their membership fees for them. It was a rather ignominious end to the AERA.²

If the previous chapters show the AERA doing some good work, how and why did the association come to such an end? Historians have debated this point for many years. Reasons given for the split include differences over organisational style, strategy and tactics, attitudes towards men, visions of a more radical or more conservative reform programme, personal differences, and geographical

¹ ‘Victory of the Veterans,’ World (New York), 15 May 1870.
distinctions. In recent years, historians have come to focus specifically on the dispute over the Fifteenth Amendment as the basis for the split, between those favouring woman suffrage and those accepting that black (male) suffrage should come first.

Two problems arise in this analysis. First, the focus on the Fifteenth Amendment has led to a sense of inevitability permeating the issue. DuBois traced the history of this dispute, rather than assessing its outcome, locating its origins in the very structure of the AERA. This general tension between black (male) and woman suffrage became a rift in Kansas, and ‘deepened until it destroyed the organization,’ suggesting that the Kansas dispute set the association on an inevitable trajectory towards collapse. Dudden and Free also allow a sense of inevitability by suggesting an essential link between universal suffrage and the AERA. As universal suffrage was not introduced into American democracy in these years, the AERA inevitably failed and collapsed.

Second, the focus on the Fifteenth Amendment masks a more fundamental division between the two wings of the woman suffrage movement. Rather than being the subject upon which the split entirely turns, the amendment becomes an occasion for arguing about larger issues. These larger issues revolve around two competing visions for the woman suffrage movement after the AERA. Tetrault argued that this was a division over political economy and the meaning of the vote for individuals. Yet it was also a division over the image and nature of the woman

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5 In this work, DuBois’s concern was with the establishment of the NWSA, so the AERA acts more as a prologue, perhaps explaining the more teleological aspects of this analysis. Furthermore, her focus on Stanton, Anthony, and their allies overlooks evidence concerning other AERA members that questions the inevitable collapse of the association. E.C. DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca, 1978), pp.73, 77, and chs 4 and 5.


suffrage movement and who that movement should ultimately be for. While the NWSA concerned itself with appealing to women, the AWSA appeared more concerned with proving the respectability of the campaign as a way of appealing to politicians, especially Republicans.

However, even these competing visions do not account entirely for the split, just as the dispute over black (male) and woman suffrage did not inevitably lead to the division. What made this dispute a division was the choice of individuals to reject compromise and reconciliation in favour of asserting their own visions of the movement. This became vital because both the NWSA and the AWSA staked a claim to the inheritance of the AERA and the women’s rights movement more generally. In staking their claim to this inheritance, neither side saw room for compromise for fear that it would entirely undermine their claim.

This chapter will do two things. First, it will show that the disputes emerging from Kansas did not set the AERA on a trajectory of inevitable collapse. There was much hope in 1868 and early 1869 that the AERA could continue its agitation as it had done in 1866 and 1867. Second, it will show that the NWSA and AWSA fought as much over their wider visions for the suffrage movement as they did over whether or not black men or educated women should be enfranchised first. These visions grew directly out of their experiences in the AERA and were used as weapons in a larger fight over the inheritance of the AERA.

It is not the intention of this chapter to deal with the question of the likelihood of woman suffrage in the immediate post-Civil War years. As Dudden and Free have convincingly argued, the fact that truly universal suffrage was not introduced into American democracy in these years owed more to wider opposition than to any shortcomings in the AERA itself. The concern of this chapter will be the breakdown of the association itself, and so will attribute more importance to individual agency. When this chapter speaks of hope, it does so in reference to the notion that some part of the AERA could survive in its original form – a united organisation with a membership dedicated to universal suffrage. As we shall see from this and the next chapter, however, ultimately, all three aspects of the tripartite definition of the AERA from chapter three – the organisational structures, the membership, and the ideas – came to an end.

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1868 to 1869 – Hope or Despair?

There were many signs of both hope and despair in the final two years of the AERA, but whatever hope there was faded as individuals made conscious decisions to pursue paths of confrontation rather than conciliation. The winter of 1867 and 1868 was a particularly difficult time for the AERA. In November, Stanton and Anthony had announced in the *New York Tribune* that they would be joining George Francis Train on a lecture tour of major cities as they returned to New York from Kansas. The notice they sent to the *Tribune* announced that this tour would be held under the auspices of the AERA, and that Lucy Stone would be accompanying them.9 Stone and the rest of the AERA leadership were incensed. The AERA Executive Committee sent their own notice to the press, denying their endorsement of the tour and distancing their association from Train.10 Stanton and Anthony responded by sending further notices, asserting that they had engaged with Train as individuals. Anthony took responsibility herself, lauding their new partner for his support. Stanton went so far as to issue a thinly-veiled criticism of the AERA for its lack of support in Kansas, which practically forced her to accept whatever help was offered.11

Kansas had also created uncertainty over the finances of the AERA. Anthony claimed that she had personally taken on AERA debts for the campaign and, plus her own expenses, was owed $1,000 by the association. But the Executive Committee, with limited funds itself, refused to pay for any campaigning that had been undertaken with Train. For the good of the cause, Anthony agreed to write off the debt, and the matter seemed settled, but it did nothing to ease the tensions between Anthony and the rest of the committee.12

This affair was exacerbated by two further developments. In January 1868, Stanton and Anthony issued the first number of their new journal, the *Revolution*, which was funded largely by Train. The more they published, the more they

9 'Female Suffrage,' *New York Tribune*, 11 November 1867.
10 A.D. Gordon, (ed.), *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* [hereafter ECS-SBA Selected], vol. 2 (New Brunswick, 2000), p.120, note 3.
advocated the rights of educated women over black males; the more they defended
Train, the more they alienated their AERA friends. Furthermore, Stanton and
Anthony chose to extend their links to the Democrats, and used the occasion of the
1868 Democratic National Convention to encourage the party to commit to
‘universal suffrage and universal amnesty’. Anthony saw her best chance in the
possible presidential candidacy of Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, who was known
to favour universal suffrage and universal amnesty for former Confederates. The
hope was to re-cast the Democrats as the new liberal party.\(^\text{13}\) It was a slim hope,
and proved futile in the end. Chase’s candidacy failed to gather enough
momentum, and Anthony’s letter to the national convention, which set out a
programme for universal suffrage, was met with nothing but ridicule and
laughter.\(^\text{14}\)

These developments left a sore at the heart of the AERA. For some, it was
Train himself they opposed, for his Copperhead tendencies. William Lloyd
Garrison was perhaps the strongest critic, calling Train ‘crack-brained, [a] harlequin, [and] semi-lunatic’.\(^\text{15}\) Lucy Stone was also especially repulsed. ‘I cannot
urge any one to join [the AERA],’ she wrote to Anna Dickinson, because of what she
called the ‘Train admixture’.

For others, it was the racism – the direct denigration of black (male) suffrage when the AERA was supposed to be campaigning for the
rights of all.\(^\text{17}\)

More fundamentally, it was Train’s Democratic links and the overtures to
the Democrats throughout 1868 that were the real problem. Appealing to
Democrats for assistance in the desperate situation of Kansas was one thing –
indeed, Henry Blackwell made similar overtures throughout the campaign – but it
was quite another to institutionalise that partnership.\(^\text{18}\) First, the lecture tour with
Train showed that this was not just a partnership of convenience. Second, the
*Revolution* and the appeals to the Democratic National Convention implied that

\(^{13}\) Susan B. Anthony [hereafter SBA] to Anna Dickinson [hereafter AD], 3 June 1868, 14 Jun 1868, 29
June 1868, 8 July 1868, Anna E. Dickinson Papers, MSS18424, Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress [hereafter AD Papers].

\(^{14}\) ‘The Democratic Convention,’ *New York Times*, 7 July 1868; SBA to AD, 10 July 1868, AD Papers

\(^{15}\) ‘William Lloyd Garrison to Susan B. Anthony,’ *Revolution*, 29 January 1868.

\(^{16}\) Lucy Stone [hereafter LS] to AD, 5 Mar 1868, AD Papers.

\(^{17}\) DuBois. *Feminism and Suffrage*, pp.99-100.

\(^{18}\) HBB to Olympia Brown, 12 June 1867, Olympia Brown Papers, A-69/M-133, Schlesinger Library,
Radcliffe College [hereafter OB Papers]; HBB to LS, 29 October 1867, Blackwell Family Papers,
1759-1860, MSS12880, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress [hereafter BPF/L].
this relationship was now permanent. ‘Perhaps Train is not the worst man alive,’ wrote AERA leader Elizabeth Neall Gay to Sarah Pugh, leader of the Pennsylvania Equal Rights Association, ‘but the Democratic Party to which they adhere is infamous.’19 Garrison further questioned Train’s Democratic links. He wrote to Anthony: ‘It seems you are looking to the Democratic party, and not to the Republican ... I should as soon think of looking to the Great Adversary [that is, the Devil] to espouse the cause of righteousness.’20 It was clear that the AERA leadership still considered the Republican Party to be their best hope of securing universal suffrage. At the 1868 AERA anniversary convention, Frederick Douglass was keen to impress this point, arguing that the Republicans were the party of the Union and their only hope for suffrage extensions.21

For their part, as Dudden argued, Stanton and Anthony were only spurred on by this criticism. They were well aware they were damaging their old friendships, but they considered it a worthy sacrifice for the advance they thought they were making for the women’s cause. ‘We have decided that “The Revolution” has already done more to push on our cause than could have been done in the old way in ten years,’ Stanton wrote to Olympia Brown in March. ‘I intend to throw my best powers into it faithfully,’ she had previously written to Thomas Wentworth Higginson.22

On top of the disagreements over Train and the Democrats, organisational developments were pulling Stanton and Anthony and the rest of the AERA apart. Stanton and Anthony’s work on the Revolution not only offended their colleagues. By devoting their agitation to the journal, they took another source of energy away from the AERA. They were also becoming increasingly pre-occupied with building up the Working Women’s Association (WWA), seeking a new constituency for their ideas. Weekly meetings came to dominate their schedule, and, along with the

19 Elizabeth Neall Gay to Sarah Pugh, undated, Sydney Howard Gay Papers, MS#0475, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
Other suffragists were equally responsible in this migration, however, setting up for themselves the New England Woman Suffrage Association (NEWSA) in November 1868. From the beginning, the organisers were conscious of the divisive nature of the move. It would be ‘only for New Englanders,’ according to Caroline Severance, ‘in order to prevent the N[ew] Y[ork] faction from representation’. Anthony was not invited to the founding convention; Stanton was, probably by mistake, and a follow-up message was promptly sent, informing her that her presence was not required. Work for the NEWSA was begun immediately, with petitions circulated and conventions held. Stone and Blackwell embarked on their own project of creating ‘Liberty Leagues’ throughout Massachusetts for the work. In a move that is perhaps most indicative of the migration away from the AERA, the NEWSA began printing its own tracts – the same as those published by the AERA but with NEWSA stationery. From now on, it seemed by this move, the method of choice for spreading the news of woman suffrage would be, for New Englanders at least, the NEWSA, not the AERA.

It would be wrong, however, to say that in 1868 the AERA had ceased to be of any importance at all. Events and personal decisions showed that there was still some hope in the movement, and the anniversary convention itself, despite some arguments, maintained a remarkable degree of harmony. At the convention, Stone and Henry Blackwell presented their reviews of the year’s work, refraining from attacking Train or the Revolution, instead focusing most of their ire against Horace Greeley and the New York Republicans for opposing woman suffrage at the New York constitutional convention, thereby encouraging Republicans around the

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23 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, ch. 5.  
24 Caroline M. Severance to AD, 27 September 1868, AD Papers.  
25 ECS to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 3 November 1868, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13; ECS to Stephen S. Foster, 4 November 1868, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13; ‘The Boston Woman’s Suffrage Convention,’ Revolution, 12 November 1868.  
26 ‘Our Boston Correspondence,’ National Anti-Slavery Standard [hereafter NASS], 12 December 1868; For Liberty Leagues, see, for example: HBB to James Freeman Clarke, 22 October 1868, BFP/L; HBB to Caroline Healey Dall, 22 October 1868, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society.  
27 ‘Our Boston Correspondence,’ NASS, 12 December 1868.
country, including in Kansas, to do the same. Olympia Brown agreed that it was Republican politicians to whom the blame should be apportioned.28

There was a short debate between Brown and Douglass over the wisdom of expecting too much support from the Democrats, but the tone remained cordial throughout, and was reminiscent of the debates on the New York canvass about praising Democratic congressmen – debates that had been overcome before.29

Even an assault on Anthony from what the New York World dubbed the ‘Anti-Train party’ on the issue of her financial mis-management failed to gather much support. For her own part, Anthony gave a positive review of the convention to Anna Dickinson. ‘Lucy Stone made the speech of all the women,’ she wrote. Stone ‘quite outdid her old self, which surpasses any other mortal women ... [and] held the audience breathless’.30 Martha Coffin Wright reviewed the convention for her sisters, giving no indication of arguments.31 It was clear from the tone of the discussions, the words used, the resolutions promulgated, and the rhetorical commitment to universal suffrage that the vast majority of those involved still saw a purpose in the organisation and its convention.32

Attempts to broaden the base of the AERA were also still ongoing in 1868. Equal Rights workers continued to represent their cause on the platforms of the American Anti-Slavery Society, to try to gain new allies and recruit new workers. At the Massachusetts meeting in February, and at the national anniversary and New England conventions in May, Stephen Foster, Stanton, and Anna Dickinson appealed to the abolitionists to broaden their goals. Susan B. Anthony took her cause to the Union League of America in June. Foster was particularly insistent that this was about more than just women’s rights. ‘While we have no party that honest men can support,’ he told the New England convention, ‘we are in the false position of giving our tacit consent to vicious measures and false principles ... This is not the negro’s hour only, but humanity’s hour.’ Thus he continued to espouse

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30 SBA to AD, 22 May 1868, AD Papers. See also, SBA to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 20 May 1868, NAWSA Records.
31 Martha Coffin Wright to sisters, 16 May 1868, Garrison Family Papers, MS 60, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College [hereafter GPF Smith].
the values that helped to forge the AERA in the first place – demanding a much broader vision of Reconstruction.33

The regional activism of the AERA leaders was another sign that hope for the association persisted. Of course, the AERA was primarily a national organisation, and it was always intended for state and local organisations to be built up to supply grass-roots support. Therefore, the work done at lower levels of governance did not necessarily undermine the AERA. Local and state work was merely the continuation of the New York and Kansas campaigns of 1866 and 1867, although on a smaller scale. Stone continued to work across New England and New Jersey, setting up conventions and small-scale organisation wherever she went.34 Elizabeth Kingsbury continued her work from the New York canvass, lecturing across the North-East.35 Stephen Foster, too, embarked on his own campaign to educate the people, organising several meetings in Massachusetts.36 Without this work, the vital task of spreading the word would simply not have been done. It also demonstrates one of the most important elements of the AERA’s political culture in action: the commitment of individual members to give their time, effort, and resources to the cause. Furthermore, even though some members of the AERA saw their priorities in other areas at this time, it would be wrong to categorise the entire organisation in this way.

The continued activism and hope for the AERA continued into the early months of 1869, despite the growing organisational rivalry between the Revolution-WWA-centred suffragists and those in the NEWSA. As the national body of the equal rights movement, the AERA came back into the focus of its workers as national political attention returned to the question of suffrage. After Grant’s Republican victory in the Presidential election of 1868, the Republican party found a new sense of unity on the black (male) suffrage question. Radicals continued to push

34 ‘Shall Women Vote?’ NASS, 4 January 1868; ‘Personal,’ NASS, 4 April 1868; ‘Woman’s Rights in New Jersey,’ NASS, 11 April 1868.
35 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 29 February 1868.
36 ‘Personal,’ NASS, 8 February 1868; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 4 April 1868; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 11 April 1868.
for the measure as a matter of justice, but moderates saw the potential benefits for the party. If black men were enfranchised, they would surely be bound to vote Republican. The issue came to national prominence as a potential constitutional amendment, serving two ends. It would enfranchise Northern black men without having to rely on the lengthy and risky process of submitting separate referenda to the electorates of the Northern states. Furthermore, it would enshrine the rights of Southern freedmen at the moment when Democrats were returning to power in those states. Controlling 25 of the 33 state legislatures, the Republicans had the necessary three-fourths majority to secure ratification.37

The first drafts of the amendment emerged in December 1868, ranging from prohibitions of race-based suffrage restrictions to one which sought to guarantee the vote to all male citizens aged over 21. Delays and procedural wrangling in Congress over the precise language meant that the necessary resolutions were not passed until February. The more moderate proposal was passed, prohibiting suffrage restrictions based on 'race, color, or previous condition of servitude'. The amendment was then sent to the states for ratification.38

Stanton was quick to respond to the early drafts of the amendment. On 24 December 1868, she published her response in the Revolution, protesting against what she called 'manhood suffrage'. She doubted man's ability to govern a nation with equity, but reserved special criticism for what she called 'brutalized, degraded manhood.'39 Others in the AERA, however, supported the measure and so the issue became a point of contention in the woman suffrage conventions organised in the Western states in early 1869. In Chicago, St. Louis, and Toledo, Ohio, Stanton and Anthony continued to oppose the Fifteenth Amendment, offering resolutions condemning it, forcing the conventions to decide. Most

38 McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, pp.590-592; Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.162-165, 173; Foner, Reconstruction, pp.446-470.
39 'Manhood Suffrage,' Revolution, 24 December 1868.
meetings voted such resolutions down, although one was passed in Milwaukee. Every time the issue was raised, there was a heated debate.  

Nevertheless, it was still not inevitable that these debates would lead to a collapse in the AERA. After all, there had been disagreements on the New York canvass that had been resolved. Controversial issues had been raised, protests made, and compromises found. Indeed, in the run up to the 1869 anniversary convention, there was much sign of hope. Despite the disagreements at the Western woman suffrage conventions, those meetings were hailed as a great success, and showed that the AERA was still working to spread its message around the country. For the AERA, the West provided the movement with new recruits and new optimism. For the new Western workers, the AERA provided the central, national focus, and a way to link up with the East. These Western conventions would send delegates to the national anniversary in 1869. This relationship is well summed up by the mother of young Etta Souls, from Cincinnati, Ohio. Etta’s mother wrote to Anna Dickinson in the spring of 1869, telling her that young Etta had asked if she could be taken to the AERA anniversary convention. ‘If taking her to N[ew] Y[or]k to the Convention and allowing her to mingle with the elements ... will be one of the best measures for her education,’ her mother wrote to Dickinson, ‘I shall be present with her.’

It was not just those in the West looking forward to the AERA anniversary. Stanton and Anthony saw much potential for reviving the old organisation. ‘Our Equal Rights machinery seems now all harmonious,’ Anthony wrote to Lucretia Mott in March. Stanton attributed this to the enthusiasm of the West in a letter to Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Lucy Stone’s sister-in-law and key ally, who had sided with Stone in disputes over Train and the Revolution. ‘I wish so much that all petty

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40 'The Women,’ Chicago Tribune, 13 February 1869; ‘Female Suffrage,’ St. Louis Daily Times, 16 February 1869; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ Toledo Blade, 6 March 1869, all in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13; ‘Editorial Correspondence,’ Revolution, 18 March 1869.
41 See ch. 4.
43 ‘The Women,’ Chicago Tribune, 13 February 1869; ‘Woman’s Rights Convention,’ Milwaukee Sentinel, 26 February 1869, both in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13; DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, p.186.
44 Etta Souls and Mother to AD, April 1869, AD Papers.
jealousies could be laid aside for all that our cause needs now’, Stanton wrote.\textsuperscript{45} Stanton and Anthony devoted considerable effort and attention to the organisation of the anniversary meeting, sending out invitations to anyone they considered sympathetic to the movement, attempting to spread the association’s net still further, rather than letting it fall away into disuse.\textsuperscript{46} They believed that harmony and reconciliation could be achieved if all party ties could be broken – presumably meaning the Democrats on their part and the Republicans on the part of the rest of the AERA – and the Revolution and NEWSA could agree to work in their respective geographical locations, with national unity preserved in the AERA.\textsuperscript{47} Lucy Stone, too, still saw worth in the AERA. She aided Stanton and Anthony in their preparations for the convention, working to ensure the anniversary would be a success, and not a cause of further division.\textsuperscript{48} The AERA clearly still held some importance, for the NEWSA suffragists as well as the Revolution supporters.

This hope was founded on more than just a desire to be successful and was not just a case of mind over matter. Some key aspects of the AERA’s intellectual definition returned to prominence at this time. For her part, Stanton toned down her opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment and concentrated on a commitment to equal rights and universal suffrage.\textsuperscript{49} Anthony also took the opportunity of a lecture in Owego, New York, to reaffirm her commitment to anti-slavery politics, showing that such a link between abolitionism and women’s rights was not essentially dead.\textsuperscript{50} These more abstract ideals were given a more solid form in the advocacy of support for the special plight of black women. The position of freedwomen had always been a rallying call for the AERA, and it remained so throughout 1868 and 1869. The calls for anti-slavery organisations to broaden

\textsuperscript{45} SBA to Lucretia Mott, [after 20 March 1869], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13; ECS to Antoinette Brown Blackwell, 20 April 1869, Blackwell Family Papers, 1784-1944, A-77; M-35, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

\textsuperscript{46} See, for example, SBA to Benjamin F. Wade, 10 April 1869, B.F. Wade Papers, 1832-1886, MSS44263, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; ECS to Clara Barton, 25 April [1869], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.

\textsuperscript{47} SBA to Mary B. Hall, March 1869, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13; ECS to Elizabeth Buffum Chace 15 April [1869], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.

\textsuperscript{48} LS to Benjamin F. Wade, 28 April 1869, B.F. Wade Papers, 1832-1886, MSS44263, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; LS to Caroline Healey Dall, 17 March 1869, Caroline Wells Healey Dall Papers, Ms. N-1082, Massachusetts Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{49} ECS to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 13 January 1868, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12; ‘Suffrage,’ Chicago Times, 13 February 1869, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.

\textsuperscript{50} ‘Woman’s Rights,’ Owego Times, 1 April 1869, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.
their appeals by Foster and Dickinson among others, as seen above, constantly used the plight of black women in their demand.\footnote{‘Thirty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society,’ \textit{NASS}, 30 May 1868; ‘Thirty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the New England Anti-Slavery Convention,’ \textit{NASS}, 13 June 1868.}

Furthermore, there is some evidence that some personal relations were returning to a more harmonious state. Stanton went so far as to predict that even Douglass, that steadfast supporter of black (male) suffrage, was coming around to their idea that only universal suffrage could secure rights to all, including the freedmen. The two met whilst travelling through the West in March, and they had, in Stanton’s words, ‘an earnest debate’. Douglass gave Stanton the impression that the 1869 anniversary would provide the perfect opportunity to have a ‘full and free discussion of the whole question’ and push forward together in a new era of co-operation.\footnote{‘Editorial Correspondence,’ \textit{Revolution}, 25 March 1869.}

The anniversary convention itself initially promised to live up to the high expectations. There was a great amount of interest in the convention throughout New York City, and the audience attracted was far larger than for the Anti-Slavery anniversary for the first time ever.\footnote{‘Women of the Period,’ \textit{World (New York)}, 13 May 1869; ‘May Anniversaries,’ \textit{New York Tribune}, 13 May 1869; ‘Equal Rights,’ \textit{New York Times}, 13 May 1869.} Stone opened the meeting full of praise for the work done and progress made in the past twelve months. Anthony entreated all those present to ‘shake hands, East and West, North and South … [for] we are nearing the attainment of our wishes.’ The officers were all re-elected by a large majority, and resolutions were unanimously adopted.\footnote{‘Women of the Period,’ \textit{World (New York)}, 13 May 1869; ‘Battling for the Ballot,’ \textit{World (New York)}, 14 May 1869.} Despite the hopes and good intentions, however, arguments and controversy soon took over the meeting, but it should not be forgotten that these arguments were precipitated by the choices of individuals. Rather than choose to follow a path of conciliation and compromise, they chose to fight.

Stanton, too, opened with words of encouragement and hope. She described the AERA as ‘a great patriotic movement’ because only the demand of equal rights for all could save the nation. However, rather than concentrate on equal rights, Stanton soon turned her attention to the Fifteenth Amendment, despite the
knowledge gained in the Western conventions that this would be a cause of strife. She lamented what she called the ‘ignorant foreign voters’, and ‘unlettered and unwashed ditch-diggers, boot blacks, butchers and barbers,’ in words that echoed her previous arguments against the amendment. She could have spoken with encouragements for the possibility of a sixteenth amendment for woman suffrage, but Stanton chose to open her contribution to the convention in an aggressive tone.55

Stephen Foster followed her, protesting against the list of officers for re-election, calling for the resignation of ‘certain persons’ because they have ‘publicly repudiated the principles of this Society.’ While the AERA was dedicated to universal suffrage, Foster argued, the Revolution, and Stanton and Anthony’s words, made it clear that they espoused educated suffrage. Foster’s words, indeed, had merit. It was one thing to argue that Stanton and Anthony were free to fraternise with George Francis Train, and at least attempt to convert the Democrats to universal suffrage, but quite another to actively campaign against the goals of a society they were supposed to be leading. Foster and his allies could have left it there, but they then made the decision to force another issue that was supposed to have been settled – the question of Anthony’s handling of the AERA’s finances in Kansas. Rather than let it lie, Foster and his allies forced a division on the issue, clearly intending to undermine Anthony’s credibility. Antoinette Brown Blackwell spoke next in behalf of conciliation, and the officers were successfully re-elected, restoring peace to the convention.56

The convention seemed not to be interested in maintaining the conciliatory atmosphere, however. The second day’s proceedings were marked by tempestuous and almost riotous scenes. The only extended report we have is from the New York World, which, as Dudden has noted, was notorious for exaggerating the disputes between radicals to further its conservative agenda.57 However, the New York Tribune and New York Times offer shorter and, yet, in places, more

55 ‘Women of the Period,’ World (New York), 13 May 1869.
57 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.144-145.
enlightening reports that still attest to the tempestuous nature of the convention.\textsuperscript{58} The World's headline was 'Battling for the Ballot', and it spoke of 'hot and heavy' discussions, 'creating much confusion'. While Dudden argued that the report gives little detail of this 'confusion', we can see that the debate did jump from issue to issue, and the crowd grew restless at times, especially when C.C. Burleigh tried to take the stand.\textsuperscript{59} Douglass sought to bring attention back to the point in hand by forcing a vote on a resolution in favour of the Fifteenth Amendment. It was clear that a section of the audience, led by Stanton and Anthony, was never going to vote for it. However, just like Foster's attack on Anthony over the finances, this vote was forced through as a test case, and while it seems perfectly reasonable for an association dedicated to universal suffrage to vote in favour of an extension of the franchise, forcing the issue smacks only of political posturing, precipitating a collapse in the association and anticipating what might come next. Despite Lucy Stone's attempts to argue that 'we are lost if we turn away from the middle principle and argue for one class,' there seemed little intent to find such a middle position and there was no attempt to work out a compromise. Nowhere is it reported that anyone even asked how a compromise could possibly be achieved.\textsuperscript{60}

The choice to fight was not merely a debate over the Fifteenth Amendment. Organisational developments that occurred after the 1869 anniversary convention also had a role. The very next day, Revolution-orientated suffragists in New York, including Stanton and Anthony, formed the NWSA, in a private meeting in the Woman's Bureau.\textsuperscript{61} The NEWSA suffragists responded at the end of May by passing a resolution that committed them to create a national organisation. In November 1869 they held a convention in Cleveland, Ohio, and from this was formed the AWSA.\textsuperscript{62}

The work then began to build up their respective organisations. Stanton, Anthony, and their allies, put their effort into building up the NWSA, holding


\textsuperscript{59} Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.179.


\textsuperscript{61} 'New Woman's Suffrage Organization,' \textit{New York Tribune}, 17 May 1869.

\textsuperscript{62} 'Editorial Correspondence,' \textit{NASS}, 5 June 1869.
weekly meetings, and planning campaigns, conventions, and canvasses. They focused their summer work on forging links with more affluent sections of society in the summer holiday destinations, such as Saratoga Springs. The NEWSA workers, on the other hand, concentrated on founding more local organisations, building from the ground up in their aims of forming their national delegate organisation. On occasions, the two came into direct conflict. In Maine, Henry Blackwell read of a NWSA convention advertised in the *Revolution*, and discussed with Lucy Stone the possibility of arranging a rival convention before the other had a chance to meet. There were chances for unity and compromise, but both sides chose to promote and defend their own visions for the woman suffrage movement, which they drew from their experiences in the AERA. Furthermore, they fought over who were the true heirs to the AERA and the wider women’s rights movement.

**Competing Visions for the Movement**

Using the tripartite definition for the AERA from chapter three, the differences between the two visions of the post-AERA woman suffrage movement become clear. Both the NWSA and the AWSA had clear visions of the organisational, membership, and intellectual aspects of their associations, and these conclusions were based primarily on their experiences in the AERA itself. For the NWSA, the overriding concern was the empowering of women, individually and collectively, and this is evident in their vision. The NWSA favoured a mass membership organisation, giving all women a voice, favoured restricting the participation and influence of men, and sought to bring women’s emancipation to the very centre of the suffrage demand. For the AWSA, the overriding concern was proving the respectability of the movement, to appeal to politicians and traditional reformers. This is evident in their favouring of a delegate structure, to prevent controversial individuals from taking control, the encouragement of male participation, and the

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64 ‘Woman Suffrage Convention at Newburyport, Mass.,’ NASS, 7 Aug 1869.

65 HBB to LS, 1 November 1869, BFP/L.
exclusion of all controversial side issues from the campaign. On all matters, these visions were drawn directly from their experiences in the AERA.

In organisational terms, there is some evidence that the NWSA considered a delegate system, calling on the counties of New York to send delegates to its state convention in Saratoga Springs in the summer of 1869. But the system eventually adopted was an AERA-style, mass membership structure – one member, one dollar, one vote. Theodore Tilton and Anthony both objected to the AWSA's restriction of voting rights only to delegates. Anthony went further, arguing that the 'red-tapeism' slowed everything down. 'If Lucy Stone ... has to wait till she gets the consent of at least fifteen States before she can do anything, nothing will be done in time.' Anthony favoured the loose and more inclusive structure of the AERA.

From the beginning of the NWSA, the question of the role of men was an important one, creating considerable debate. At the founding meeting, the members discussed the question of male membership. Stanton opposed their participation. She, and others, argued that men should not be allowed to partake in the discussions or votes due to their disruptive behaviour at AERA meetings. 'In our conventions for the last three years,' Stanton argued, 'it has been impossible for any women's resolution to be heard.' However, the New York Times reported that after three votes at this meeting – one of just the women, one just the men, and one of both – strong majorities were found for men to be members. This public acceptance of men was reinforced at a later meeting. Minutes of a previous discussion were altered because Stanton argued that they implied that women only wanted the support of men for their money. As well as financial support, she argued that: 'We must have men's judgement.' A fellow member, named by the

66 'New York Woman’s Suffrage Convention,' Revolution, 17 June 1869.
New York *World* simply as Mrs. Jones, supported Stanton’s view. It was agreed to change the minutes to say that ‘women needed the assistance of men.’

Despite this official acceptance, however, there was much feeling against the inclusion of men. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage were both very opposed to having a male president of their association. Phoebe Couzins accused, specifically, the ‘male advocates of the Fifteenth Amendment’ of failing to understand women’s position, and Paulina Wright Davis argued that men should not be included because they ‘see only party demands.’ ‘Women have been so long subservient to men,’ Davis concluded, ‘that it is not a matter of surprise that even now they think as men think.’ The argument, drawn from the experience of the AERA, was that women needed independence if they were to achieve their aims.

In terms of the association’s goals, the NWSA favoured the exclusion of any issue that was not related to women’s emancipation. The *Revolution’s* editors protested at the idea that disputes about the Fifteenth Amendment should have any place on the women’s platform. It was not to be a focus on woman suffrage alone, however, but include anything that pertained to the emancipation and elevation of women. For example, Anthony argued that divorce was an appropriate topic for the NWSA because a proper, egalitarian settlement for marriage was just as important to women’s freedom as was her right to the vote.

In organisational terms, the AWSA was clear from the beginning what kind of structure it wanted. The national association was to be a federal body, consisting of delegates chosen by each state, according to the system of congressional representation. These delegates would then represent the wider movement in a national convention held in different locations each year. There was some debate about this plan, but Mary Livermore argued that this would prevent ‘a powerful,
magnetic, eloquent speaker [who] can control everyone,' from leading the
dovement astray. Antoinette Brown Blackwell originally opposed the delegate
system, arguing that it would take a voice away from individual members, but soon
came to argue that an entrepreneur would ‘be inevitability educated and
developed into the mighty “I”, consciously wielding autocratic power.’ This view
was perhaps influenced by a story that Lucy Stone once told, about how Susan B.
Anthony had once presumed to take control of the AERA, declaring: ‘I am the
American Equal Rights Association!’

The AWSA had a very different view from the NWSA on the place of men in
the movement. When corresponding about the creation of the AWSA, Lucy Stone
lamented that ‘[o]ur cause suffers today for the lack of the organising talent of
men.’ At the Cleveland convention itself delegates debated placing into the
constitution a quota system to ensure that there was always an equal number of
male and female officers. Mary Livermore argued that ‘[m]en must understand
that a woman’s convention is not an anti-man convention, and does not propose to
interfere with the rights of man.’ This debate ended in a vote against the quota
proposal, but only because the convention did not want to countenance any
discrimination on account of sex.

To prove their point, the AWSA used their newspaper, the Woman’s Journal,
established in January 1870, to continually assert that theirs was not an ‘anti-man’
movement. The Woman’s Journal repeatedly argued that woman’s elevation would
be of benefit to man, too. Therefore, it could not be antagonistic to men’s
interests. In one instance, this lesson was drawn directly from the AERA
experience. Henry Blackwell, while arguing that women should stand up for
themselves, used the same article to urge restraint. ‘When the acting President of
the American Equal Rights Convention announced last May [1869] that “any man
is out of order when he impugns the veracity of a woman at a woman’s meeting,”

74 ‘Woman Suffrage,’ Cleveland Daily Leader, 26 November 1869, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 14.
75 ‘Woman Suffrage Organizations,’ Woman’s Journal, 12 February 1870.
76 LS to William Lloyd Garrison, 6 March 1868, Abolitionist Papers Ms.A.1.2 v.36 p.11b, Boston
Public Library.
77 ‘Woman Suffrage,’ Cleveland Daily Leader, 25 November 1869; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ Cleveland Daily
Leader, 26 November 1869 both in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 14.
78 ‘No Antagonism,’ Woman’s Journal, 19 February 1870; “One or Two Plain Words”, Woman’s
she violated the principle of equal rights. Her ruling showed that “the woman’s movement” is a vicious phrase.  

In relation to the its goals, the AWSA’s vision was similar to the NWSA, in that it objected to having other issues distracting the main campaign. What differentiated them, however, was that the NWSA sought to include anything pertaining to women’s emancipation and the AWSA restricted the agenda to suffrage and suffrage alone. When corresponding about the formation of the association, the organisers made a specific point of saying that they would not be raising ‘side issues’ or ‘outside questions’. This would be vital for the success of the movement, argued Henry Blackwell in the Woman’s Journal. ‘No one can estimate,’ he wrote, ‘the damage the cause of Woman’s enfranchisement has already sustained, by the failure of its advocates to limit themselves to the main question.’ Others ‘insist upon dragging their peculiar views upon theology, temperance, marriage, race, dress, finance, labor, and capital,’ giving ‘a breadth to the discussions … quite incompatible with political efficiency.’ Instead the AWSA would limit itself to suffrage because a ‘certain narrowness and precision are as essential to practical action as are breadth and comprehensiveness to theoretical speculation.’

The AWSA used the Woman’s Journal to give evidence to justify its own prescriptions. William Lloyd Garrison wrote of ‘a highly respectable and intelligent lady’ being repulsed by the suffrage movement because of its attraction to ‘social system innovations.’ The journal continually re-asserted its commitment to a single issue by declaring its reluctance to discuss educated suffrage and divorce, or to give opinions on society scandals. For the AWSA, it would be woman suffrage and woman suffrage alone.

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79 ‘Truth Knows No Sex,’ Woman’s Journal, 28 May 1870 – This ‘acting President’ was Stanton.
80 LS to Lucy Larcom, 20 August 1869, Alma Lutz Collection, A-110; M-133, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College; HBB to James Freeman Clarke, 17 November 1870, BFP/L.
81 ‘The American Woman Suffrage Association,’ and ‘Political Organization,’ Woman’s Journal, 8 January 1870.
82 ‘An Unjust Impeachment,’ Woman’s Journal, 29 January 1870.
These two visions for the suffrage movement clearly show differing priorities and audiences in mind. For the NWSA, everything points towards the empowering and emancipation of women, individually and collectively. The National Association called for all women to have a voice in a mass membership system, a prominent place of women by the exclusion or side-lining of men, and the making of women’s emancipation the sole focus of the organisation. On the other hand, the AWSA vision is clearly designed to keep the movement as respectable as possible. The delegate system was planned to ensure the minimisation of the impact that controversial figures could have. The acceptance and encouragement of men in the association would prevent the alienation of male politicians. Furthermore, the restriction to woman suffrage alone would avoid the charge that the movement was engaged in all manner of, as Garrison put it, ‘social system innovations.’ As DuBois argued, the AWSA had an overriding concern to appeal to politicians, particularly Republicans, as a means of securing woman suffrage. Evidence for this concern is seen in the earlier responses to Stanton and Anthony’s connections with George Francis Train and the Democrats, and it is seen again here in the AWSA’s vision of the future of the suffrage movement.84

_Fighting Over the Inheritance_

These differing visions of the woman suffrage movement are not enough to explain why the individuals of the AERA chose to fight rather than compromise, however. The choice not to seek reconciliation becomes all the clearer by showing what exactly it was they were fighting over. Both sides laid claim to ownership of the inheritance of the woman suffrage campaign, which was passed down from the antebellum convention movement and through the AERA. It is this conflict that lies at the heart of the decision of each side to form organisations of their own and not to re-unite back in the AERA.

_Revolution_ suffragists were claiming their ownership of the woman suffrage inheritance throughout 1868, before the AERA had even collapsed. Indeed, at first, there is somewhat of a distancing from the AERA itself. In mid-1868, the name of a paper organisation, the Woman Suffrage Association of America (WSAA) began to

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84 DuBois, _Feminism and Suffrage_, pp.196-197.
appear in correspondence. Editorials in the *Revolution* asserted this new group’s leadership of the woman suffrage movement, contrasting it with the AERA on a number of occasions. One editorial argued that: ‘The Equal Rights Association speaks through the Anti-Slavery Standard,’ whereas the *Revolution*, ‘holding the ground of universal suffrage ... is specially the organ of the Woman Suffrage Association of America.’ For Stanton, Anthony, and Parker Pillsbury, who had joined the *Revolution*’s editorial team, it was the WSAA that held the inheritance of the antebellum women’s rights convention movement, not the AERA.\(^85\) Calls were sent out to organise especially under the auspices of this organisation, rather than the AERA.\(^86\) This assertion of leadership is made evident in the *Revolution*’s response to the forming of the NEWSA in November 1868. ‘We cheerfully welcome this new and first auxiliary to the field,’ wrote Pillsbury.\(^87\) Stanton was a little more acerbic in her response, wondering why it had taken the New Englanders so long to join the cause.\(^88\) Finally, the *Revolution*’s editors took the chance of the final issue of 1868 to inform its readers that the women’s rights convention movement has spent decades looking for a journal of their own. The *Revolution*, they argued, was the embodiment of this goal and this inheritance.\(^89\)

After the *Revolution* suffragists created the NWSA in May 1869, there is something of a *volte-face* from the journal in its view of the AERA. While before it had been distancing itself from what it argued was an anti-slavery organisation, it now sought to identify with it and draw on the AERA’s inheritance from the earlier women’s rights campaign. A number of articles defended the 1869 anniversary convention from attack and argued that the NWSA sprang spontaneously out of a meeting of delegates from the AERA meeting, showing a direct lineage.\(^90\)

Stanton, Anthony, and Pillsbury also used the pages of the *Revolution* to argue that they were the true heirs to the woman suffrage movement because they stayed true to their principles while all around them fell away. Republican politicians and the American Anti-Slavery Society – ‘a mere tail of the republican

\(^85\) ‘What is the Difference?’ *Revolution*, 9 July 1868.
\(^86\) ‘The Work to be Done,’ *Revolution*, 30 July 1868; ‘Everybody’s Hour,’ *Revolution*, 10 September 1868.
\(^88\) ‘The Boston Woman’s Suffrage Convention,’ *Revolution*, 12 November 1868.
\(^89\) ‘Close of the Volume,’ *Revolution*, 31 December 1868.
kite\textsuperscript{91} — were frequently accused of betraying the women’s cause. Horace Greeley and other Republicans were charged with plotting in advance to undermine woman suffrage at the New York constitutional convention.\textsuperscript{92} Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison, too, came under personal attack.\textsuperscript{93} Abolitionists were even accused of infiltrating the AERA itself to trick the woman suffragists into supporting black (male) suffrage first.\textsuperscript{94} By attempting to show all other reformers betraying the woman suffrage cause, Stanton and Anthony sought to assert that it was they who held the inheritance.

Anthony continued to use this language, referring to those who established the NEWSA and AWSA as secessionists. Indeed, when the AWSA was formed, the Revolution’s official response was protesting but magnanimous. Written by Stanton, it deplored a split in the movement, blaming the new organisation for it. There was no need for a new national association as the NWSA represented many members and eighteen states.\textsuperscript{95} For the NWSA, the blame was very much on the AWSA for the split. When discussing plans to make the suffrage associations of the West auxiliary to the NWSA, Anthony warned of the dangers of those organisations voting ‘itself blindly into secession’ – that is, secession from the NWSA, who held the inheritance.\textsuperscript{96} Anthony also contrasted the ‘silver-slippered, kid-gloved’ suffragists of Boston with the ‘real workers’ in New York. By using this language, Anthony not only denigrated the AWSA suffragists but also built up her own reputation as a ‘real’ worker for the cause.\textsuperscript{97}

The AWSA suffragists were just as concerned with asserting their right to this inheritance. As the NWSA had been created first, six months before the AWSA, the organisers of the newer association had to make it very clear that they were the true heirs of the AERA and the women’s rights convention movement before it, to avoid appearing to be secessionists. They chose to do this, in the first instance, by attacking the credibility of the NWSA. Despite Lucy Stone’s assertion to Stanton that the new organisation ‘shall never be an enemy or antagonist of yours in any

\textsuperscript{91} ‘The American Equal Rights Association,’ Revolution, 27 May 1869.
\textsuperscript{92} ‘Man the Usurper,’ Revolution, 12 March 1868.
\textsuperscript{93} ‘Wendell Phillips on the National Prospect,’ Revolution, 8 October 1868; ‘William Lloyd Garrison,’ Revolution, 29 January 1868.
\textsuperscript{94} ‘The American Equal Rights Association,’ Revolution, 27 May 1869.
\textsuperscript{95} ‘The Cleveland Convention,’ Revolution, 28 October 1869.
\textsuperscript{96} SBA to Isabella Beecher Hooker, [after 16 Sep 1869], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.
\textsuperscript{97} ‘National Woman’s Suffrage Association,’ New York Tribune, 9 June 1869.
way,’ and despite the assertion in the Call for the Cleveland convention that there
was no intention of ‘depreciating the value of Associations already existing’ – that
is, the NWSA – the Call went on to argue that ‘it is yet deemed that an organization
at once more comprehensive and representative than any of these is urgently
called for.’ This argument had geographical connotations. Henry Blackwell, for
example, argued that the NWSA only represented New York. But it also implied
that the NWSA was not truly representative of the woman suffrage movement as a
whole. A new organisation was needed in order to be a suitable vessel for this
inheritance.

This attitude is rife in the correspondence between Henry Blackwell’s and
Martha Coffin Wright in over the winter of 1869 and 1870, in which Blackwell
argued for the importance of establishing this new association. These letters
represented the more detailed defence of why the AWSA needed to be formed at
all. As Wright asked why there needed to be a new organisation, Blackwell argued
that it was the NWSA that was the unnecessary organisation. He argued that, as far
as he and others were concerned, the AERA had concluded its 1869 meeting in
harmonious fashion, electing new officers, passing resolutions, and preparing to
change its name ‘from “Equal Rights Ass[ociatio]n” to “Woman Suffrage
Ass[ociatio]n”’. Blackwell charged Stanton, Anthony, and their allies, however,
with setting up a new and entirely unnecessary organisation at a secret meeting,
without the knowledge of many key AERA members. He went on to assert that the
NWSA was representative only of New York, not of the nation, and was nothing
more than a ‘combination of individuals’. The AWSA, on the other hand, was
formed at a fully-anticipated and widely-supported public convention. Indeed, the
AWSA organisers made a point of including as many members’ signatures as
possible on the Call for the convention and the constitution as a way of proving the
new association’s link to past reform movements. Being based on the federal
system of representation, Blackwell further argued that the AWSA was far more

98 LS to ECS, 19 October 1869, BFP/L; Constitution of the AWSA, OB Papers.
99 HBB to Martha Coffin Wright, 16 December 1869, GFP Smith.
100 Constitution of the AWSA, OB Papers.
representative and respectable than the NWSA was, and so was the suitable vessel for the inheritance.  

Personal reputations also came into question. Dudden has shown the importance of the personal dispute between Anthony and Stone, but reference to the inheritance conflict shows why this dispute was quite so destructive. This inheritance conflict gives a full explanation of Stephen Foster’s attack on Stanton and Anthony at the 1869 AERA anniversary convention. Foster questioned Stanton’s commitment to equal rights principles and then accused Anthony of financial mis-management, despite the fact that the charges against Anthony had seemingly been dealt with. Whatever the truth of those accusations, the fact that Foster chose personal attacks demonstrates his desire to prove Stanton and Anthony unworthy of bearing the woman suffrage inheritance. On the other hand, throughout this period, there is much evidence of AWSA suffragists building up the reputation of Lucy Stone through the National Anti-Slavery Standard and the Woman’s Advocate. One article referred to Stone as ‘the ablest and most convincing advocate of the woman’s rights movement’. Charles K. Whipple, writing for the Advocate, particularly praised Stone’s ‘combination of gentleness with earnestness in speaking,’ asserting not only Stone’s leadership qualities but also her respectability and suitability to hold the inheritance of the AERA in contrast with Stanton and Anthony’s betrayal of the cause.

This fight over the inheritance of the woman suffrage movement is evident in all the struggles between the NWSA and the AWSA in the twelve months between May 1869 and May 1870. As has been argued in much of the scholarship on the issue, the Fifteenth Amendment was a source of conflict between the two sides. It is true that, on one level, this conflict was over priorities for suffrage. Some supported the amendment in the hope that it would clear the way for woman suffrage afterwards. But, in the view of Stanton and others, by enfranchising black men, ‘you multiply the tyrants [and] you make the condition of the subjects more

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101 HBB to Martha Coffin Wright, 6 November 1869; Martha Coffin Wright to HBB, 13 November 1869; HBB to Martha Coffin Wright, 15 November 1869; HBB to Martha Coffin Wright, 16 December 1869, all GFP Smith.
102 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.163-166.
103 ‘Battling for the Ballot,’ World (New York), 14 May 1869.
104 ‘Notes and Comments,’ NASS, 9 January 1869; ‘Woman Suffrage in Massachusetts,’ NASS, 10 April 1869; ‘Gently and Firmly,’ Woman’s Advocate, 1, no. 1 (January, 1869), pp.13-16.
hopeless and degraded.’ Even if the Amendment was only supposed to be a temporary measure, it would, in Stanton’s view, do irreparable damage in the meantime.\textsuperscript{105}

Events soon overtook this particular debate, however. Although the ratification process took far longer than Republicans and abolitionists would have liked, there soon grew a feeling, especially among woman suffragists, that this amendment was inevitable, and that the best thing would be to treat it as such. ‘The Congress of the United States has spoken,’ wrote Frances Dana Gage, in the \textit{Woman’s Advocate}. Keeping the black man out of ‘the palace of suffrage,’ she argued, ‘would not let me in,’ despite her own desire to see all peoples enfranchised together.\textsuperscript{106} Anthony soon recognised this problem, influenced by appeals coming in from around the country to let the matter rest. She proposed at a meeting of the NWSA to withdraw any offending resolutions and not bring up the issue again.\textsuperscript{107} ‘I am not in the habit of shooting dead ducks,’ she told fellow suffragists in Chicago in September, and she did not raise the issue in that Chicago convention or at a convention in Cincinnati the same month.\textsuperscript{108}

There seemed a possibility that some unity could be found after the divisive matter of the Fifteenth Amendment had passed. But some AERA members chose to use the amendment as a means of undermining Anthony’s leadership. At the September Chicago convention, when Anthony agreed not to bring up the divisive issue, Stone and Blackwell brought it up themselves. They introduced a resolution supporting the amendment and calling for a vote on the issue.\textsuperscript{109} As at the AERA anniversary, the Fifteenth Amendment had become a test case – a standard to be held aloft and rallied around. Anthony tried to bring the discussion back to the possibility of a sixteenth amendment for woman suffrage, but Stone accused her of having used the Fifteenth in the past to suit her political purposes – in supporting the Democrats. Blackwell withdrew the resolution once Anthony had agreed to back down, suggesting that he cared more about forcing an opinion out of her and

\textsuperscript{106} ‘The Fifteenth Amendment,’ \textit{Woman’s Advocate}, 2, no. 2 (August, 1869), pp.95-96.
\textsuperscript{107} ‘The Woman’s Suffrage Association,’ \textit{World} (New York), 9 June 1869.
\textsuperscript{109} ‘The Western Women’s Suffrage Association,’ \textit{Agitator} (Chicago), 18 September 1869, in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 13.
embarrassing her in front of other reformers than he did for supporting the amendment itself.\footnote{Ibid.}

The clearest evidence that this fight over the inheritance was the overriding concern for both sides comes in response to any plans to re-unite the suffragists between May 1869 and May 1870. Despite the conflict and rivalry, there were many opportunities for peace and union in these twelve months, but, again, these opportunities were not taken. In August, Mary Livermore proposed a solution to Henry Blackwell, which was to ensure that a good representation of AWSA suffragists was sent to the NWSA convention the following year. Livermore then promised to guarantee sending ‘good’ activists from the West, and have everyone unite under the presidency of Julia Ward Howe, who was at that point the president of the NWSA. Livermore’s desire for unity was driven by her distaste for the conflict at the 1869 AERA anniversary. ‘What plain sailing it could be,’ she finished, ‘if we could harmonize all the workers. I would endure a great deal for the sake of harmony.’\footnote{Mary Livermore to HBB, 9 August 1869, NAWSA Records.} For her part, Stanton had offered on numerous occasions, publicly and privately, to stand down from the presidency of the NWSA, if that would help.\footnote{SBA to Isabella Beecher Hooker, [23 October 1869], in \textit{ECS-SBA Papers}, Reel 14; Mary Livermore to HBB, 9 August 1869, NAWSA Records.} Martha Coffin Wright and Lucretia Mott were two others who favoured making great concessions for the sake of unity. ‘I for one should be glad to see our Association [NWSA] disband, leaving the new [AWSA] to work as effectively as they can’, Wright wrote to Stanton.\footnote{Martha Coffin Wright to ECS, 9 May 1870, GFP Smith.}

The most significant and organised attempt to unite the movement, however, came from Theodore Tilton, the man who had first proposed the formation of the AERA. He now proposed a peace conference, held in New York on 6 April 1870, that would bring together three of his supporters, hastily organised into the Union Woman Suffrage Association, and three members each from the NWSA and the AWSA. Tilton’s plan was to unite all workers in his Union Association, a mass membership organisation like the NWSA, but under his leadership.\footnote{Theodore Tilton to Gerrit Smith, March 1870, Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries [hereafter GS Papers].} All the delegates expressed their desire for unity, but negotiations
went nowhere, due primarily to the fact that the AWSA members – Lucy Stone, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and George William Curtis – said they came to the meeting as individuals, not as representatives of their organisation, so had not the authority to negotiate on behalf of their fellow activists.\footnote{115}

In all these cases, nothing was done to achieve union. The NWSA members were more willing to accommodate the union plan. At a mass meeting of the association in May 1870, the NWSA voted to join the Union Association under Tilton’s leadership. They then invited the AWSA to come and join them. In doing so, they placed the blame for the split fully on the AWSA. They were more willing to do this because the Union Association, based in New York and resembling the organisational structure of the NWSA more completely, would allow them to claim that the inheritance of the AERA still resided in New York. For the AWSA, on the other hand, to join with the Union Association would be to admit that they were secessionists. This is a reason why, despite the personal attacks on Stanton and Anthony, the AWSA members would not countenance Stanton’s offer to retire. Accepting these terms would threaten their vision of what they saw as a more respectable and representative delegate structure, as well as their claim to the inheritance of the AERA. While it seems that the AWSA were the real obstacle to unity, both sides were more concerned with protecting their claim to the inheritance of the AERA than with securing a united movement.\footnote{116}

Both Anthony and Henry Ward Beecher, the new president of the AWSA, privately admitted that they cared more for making a show that they supported union, with Anthony worrying about looking like a ‘factionist’, than they did about union itself.\footnote{117} As with so much of their behaviour since May 1869, responses to hopes for unity were just about playing politics. All that remained to be done was to wrap up the AERA – a symbolic gesture in a way, as the real organisational power now lay in the NWSA and AWSA. But in those deliberations, more wrangling over the inheritance can be seen. Stone wrote to Antoinette Brown Blackwell that

\footnote{115}‘The Peace Conference,’ Revolution, 14 April 1870; ‘Mr. Tilton’s Meeting,’ Woman’s Journal, 9 April 1870.
\footnote{117}SBA to Isabella Beecher Hooker, 2 May 1870, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 14; Henry Ward Beecher to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 11 April 1870, Thomas Wentworth Higginson Correspondence, MS Am 1162.10, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
she did not want their ‘good old’ AERA being besmirched by association with the NWSA. When the AERA was successfully merged into the Union Association, Stanton wrote to Martha Coffin Wright saying ‘Boston is awful sore’ at the outcome.\(^{118}\) The association became nothing more than a trophy, or a gaming piece. It seems an unfitting end to such an organisation founded on such lofty goals four years before, but this petty bickering is representative of the behaviour seen in this chapter – of individuals who seemed more interested in securing their own positions and reputations than in repairing the united coalition for universal suffrage.

**Conclusion**

There were many signs of hope for the AERA in the last two years of its existence. Activists looked to continue the good work done in 1866 and 1867, seeking to expand the association by drawing in new members, and continuing to employ equal rights arguments to make the case for universal suffrage. The path to collapse was not an inevitable trajectory from the Kansas campaign in 1867. However, despite this hope, the AERA had been abandoned in favour of the NWSA and the AWSA by the end of 1869.

The development of Reconstruction politics contributed to this collapse, with the Fifteenth Amendment providing a seemingly irrepressible source of conflict between what became the two wings of the association. The lengthy ratification process of the amendment only made matters worse, as these disputes were stretched out throughout 1869. However, external influences and wider political forces are not enough to explain the total collapse. Disputes had been evident in the AERA throughout its short history, but in the past these had been discussed and overcome through a process of collective responsibility. In the case of the split, individual choices over how to react and respond to the disputes played a much greater role in the eventual collapse of the association. Suffragists on both sides failed to capitalise on hopes for unity. This is particularly seen once the Fifteenth Amendment was accepted by all sides as inevitable. If the Fifteenth Amendment was the debate on which the split turned, why was the unity

of the AERA not restored after the amendment had been accepted as inevitable? Part of the reason for this lies in the differing visions that each side had for the suffrage movement. The NWSA saw the campaign primarily through the lens of empowering and emancipating women, individually and collectively, setting up an organisational structure that would maximise their input and give all women a voice. The AWSA, on the other hand, was concerned more with proving the respectability of the campaign to politicians.

But even these competing visions are not enough to explain why the individuals who held these views chose to fight rather than seek a compromise position. Throughout 1869 and into 1870, these suffragists were more concerned with asserting their own suitability for carrying on the woman suffrage campaign and their right to hold the inheritance of the woman suffrage movement that had come from the AERA. To compromise would be to accept a certain measure of guilt or responsibility for the split and the disharmony, and to do so would be to undermine their own claim to the AERA inheritance. The split between the two wings was entrenched by May 1870. The AERA had gone, and with it had gone its commitment to equal rights, as the next chapter will show.
‘Recreancy to its Principles’: The Undermining of Equal Rights

Introduction

Shortly after the 1869 AERA anniversary convention, William P. Tomlinson, AERA member and editor of the *Woman’s Advocate*, used his paper to give his verdict on the meeting and the association. ‘Its creed,’ he wrote, ‘was broad, simple, unmistakeable. It was not distinctively Woman’s Rights; it was not the Negro’s Rights especially; it was … the WATCHMAN of the Rights of humanity.’ Tomlinson warned that, to no one suffering injustice ‘could it [the AERA] be unmindful without recreancy to its principles.’ But, in Tomlinson’s view, the association had been recreant in its toleration of those opposed to the Fifteenth Amendment, particularly the re-election of Stanton and Anthony as officers. ‘The American Equal Rights Association stands dishonored,’ he concluded.¹

Such ‘recreancy to its principles’ is another key theme of the decline and collapse of the AERA. The previous chapter showed the demise of the organisational structures of the AERA and the splitting of its membership into the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). This chapter will examine the third element of the tripartite definition of the AERA: its intellectual aspects. Opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment was part of this, but there was also a fundamental and more subtle de-centring of the equal rights principles that had characterised the AERA in its early years, with the more widespread use of race- and sex-specific language.

Most of the scholarship on this issue concerns the employment of race- and class-based arguments, particularly by Stanton and Anthony, to counter the demands of black (male) suffrage.² Others have looked at the woman suffrage

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¹ ‘Shall There Be Unity?’ *Woman’s Advocate*, 1, No. 6 (June, 1869), pp.322-323. ‘Recreancy’ being used as the noun form of ‘recreant’, in this case.
movement’s migration away from equal rights arguments across a longer period. Kraditor and Marilley have located this shift from equal rights to sex-specific language somewhere from the late 1870s to the 1890s.³ DuBois has studied the more general shift in the woman suffrage discourse at this time, tracing how sex- and race-specific language assumed a greater importance than the egalitarian arguments of the AERA. However, DuBois’s focus was specifically on Stanton, Anthony, and the NWSA, and the development of these arguments after the NWSA was formed.⁴ Kerr argued that the betrayal of equal rights principles was only to be found in the record of the NWSA, and that the AWSA remained true to equal rights.⁵ This chapter will argue, however, that the de-centring of equal rights can be seen as early as the AERA years, and across the spectrum of its membership, rather than just in Stanton, Anthony, and their allies in the NWSA. As black (male) suffrage became more likely, suffragists turned their focus to women’s enfranchisement. As attention shifted to woman suffrage, the AERA came to focus less on equal rights – that is, the rights of all individuals, based on their common humanity – and more on the rights of women, defined by their sex. Some advocates had used sex-specific language in AERA conventions before, but the official pronouncements of the association, particularly the convention resolutions, had remained firmly rooted in egalitarian language applicable to all.⁶ By focusing on the official pronouncements of the AERA, however, we can measure a clear change. By 1869 the emphasis had changed to introduce sex-specific language into convention resolutions. This trend continued in the creation of the NWSA and the AWSA. Not only does this chapter complete the analysis of the collapse of the AERA, it also demonstrates the historical distinctiveness of the association. Never

⁵ Kerr, ‘White Women’s Rights,’ pp.61-78.
⁶ See ch. 3 for the dominance of liberal equal rights language. See ch. 5 for attitudes on women’s special role to uplift politics and society.
again did a woman suffrage organisation explicitly connect its programme with the rights of any men.

As shown in chapter three, the AERA’s intellectual definition was very simple: ‘to secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex.’ Women and black men were to be treated as individual citizens, rather than according to their sex or complexion. Chapter two has shown how this position was reflected in the official pronouncements of the AERA from 1866 to 1868, and chapter four has shown how the official pronouncements of the meetings throughout the canvass of New York State maintained a commitment to equal rights principles.

However, despite this official commitment to equal rights, early 1867 saw the beginnings of a shift away from egalitarian arguments and onto those built on other foundations. One of the earliest examples of this shift came when Stanton was given a hearing before the judiciary committee of the New York legislature in January 1867. Alongside the arguments couched in the tradition of American republicanism and a universal language of human rights, Stanton brought in new arguments, which juxtaposed the position of educated women with ‘the motley crew from the ten thousand dens of poverty and vice in our large cities, limping, raving, cringing, staggering up to the polls.’ Meanwhile, Stanton lamented, ‘the loyal mothers of a million soldiers whose bones lay bleaching on every Southern plain, stand outside sad and silent witnesses of the wholesale desecration of Republican institutions.’ ‘I warn you, legislators of New York,’ she continued, ‘that you need the moral power of wise and thoughtful women in your political councils, to outweigh the incoming tide of poverty, ignorance, and vice that threatens our very existence as a nation.’ By arguing for a distinction between the ‘loyal mothers’ and the ‘incoming tide of poverty, ignorance, and vice’, Stanton argued for women’s enfranchisement not in concordance with their own rights, and not because they were human beings, but for the very things she believed they were

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not – poor, degraded, or ignorant. As Free argued, this was the moment when ‘Stanton moved away from her earlier common-rights argument ... [and] from this point on, the question of difference began to appear more and more frequently in the suffragists’ speeches.’

Stanton developed these arguments and, four months later, deployed them at the 1867 AERA anniversary convention. This time she made a more explicit link between the ‘incoming tide of poverty, ignorance, and vice’ and the freedmen, directly referring to them as ‘two million ignorant men’. George T. Downing, renowned campaigner for black rights, felt that some confusion lay over the convention. He wanted clarification as to whether Stanton opposed the enfranchisement of black men if women were not given the vote at the same juncture. Stanton began by arguing that it was not ‘the right step for this hour’ to demand ‘suffrage for any class; as a matter of principle I claim it for all.’ But then she turned to arguments not informed by AERA principles. She declared she was not willing to have a black man enfranchised before her, because ‘I would not entrust him with all my rights; degraded, oppressed himself, he would be more despotic with the governing power than even our Saxon rulers are.’ Twice more, Stanton had the chance to confirm her position, and twice more she began with an equal rights argument before turning to race-based language. If black men were to get the vote, according to Stanton, women voters would be needed to ‘outweigh this incoming tide of ignorance, poverty, and vice’, making explicit this connection to the freedmen. Stanton did not stick with the egalitarian arguments, but made the decision to push on further. By grounding woman suffrage on a different foundation from men – that is, the notion that women’s votes would be needed to ameliorate the effects of black men’s entry into the political sphere – she contradicted one of the fundamental principles of the AERA, which was that all rights belonged to individual citizens as human beings.

We have already seen how, in Kansas, Stanton and Anthony justified their decision to join with George Francis Train by arguing that he supported woman

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8 E.C. Stanton, Address in Favor of Universal Suffrage, for the Election of Delegates to the Constitutional Convention, Before the Judiciary Committees of the Legislature of New York, in the Assembly Chamber, January 23, 1867, in Behalf of the American Equal Rights Association (Albany, 1867), pp.11-12.


10 Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.53-55.
suffrage, not because he supported equal rights, suggesting that the former was more important to them. This shifting of priorities was reflected in the arguments that Stanton and Anthony used on their lecture tour with Train as they returned to New York from Kansas. As with the 1867 AERA anniversary, the equal rights language was still there. 'I do not speak of woman as woman [sic],' Stanton declared to an audience in Chicago, 'but as a citizen of the republic.' She made similar claims elsewhere on that tour. She even claimed she had no new arguments for her cause: 'I use those [arguments] you have made in pressing the claims of white men ... and the Republican party has made for blacks.' Yet, as with the 1867 AERA anniversary dispute, Stanton went further. Rather than sticking to an equal rights argument about lifting women 'from the political degradation', she attacked the freedmen, juxtaposing 'educated women' with 'uneducated men', and asked the question: 'Shall the ballot be placed in the hands of a debased man, and withheld from her [that is, the educated woman]?' To conclude, Stanton turned to her argument from the New York judiciary committee hearing, that '[w]e need the intelligence and refinement of women to stem the incoming tide of vice that threatens us.' Anthony joined Stanton in her attack on suffrage for the freedmen, referring to them as 'the lowest and most degraded class of men'. As with the New York judiciary committee argument, Stanton and Anthony suggested (educated) women's right to the ballot rested not (solely) in their humanity, but also in what they believed women were not.

Throughout 1868, Stanton and Anthony continued to use these arguments in the pages of their newspaper, the Revolution. They used, in Dudden's words, a 'mixed bag' of arguments from the need for 'educated' women to outweigh 'ignorant' men to more general sex-specific language, in arguing that women as women would be needed to counterbalance 'the male element' in government.16

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11 See ch. 4 of this thesis.
12 'The Suffrage Question,' Chicago Tribune, 23 November 1867; 'George Francis Train,' Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, 29 November 1867; 'Untitled,' Buffalo Daily Courier, 3 December 1867, all in P.G. Holland & A.D. Gordon (eds), The Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony [microform] (Wilmington, 1991) [hereafter ECS-SBA Papers], Reel 12.
13 'Woman and the Ballot,' Daily Missouri Democrat, 16 November 1867; 'Woman Suffrage,' Cleveland Daily Leader, 30 November 1867, both in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.
14 'The Suffrage Question,' Chicago Tribune, 23 November 1867 in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.
15 'Woman Suffrage,' St. Louis Daily Times, 26 November 1867; 'Woman Suffrage,' Daily Missouri Democrat, 26 November 1867, both in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 12.
16 Dudden, Fighting Chance, pp.148-149.
Yet again, Stanton took the argument one stage further. Rather than arguing that women and black men should be enfranchised simultaneously, she would take what she called ‘the low ground of expediency’ and call for ‘educated women first, ignorant men afterward.’ Where in the past, the emphasis had always remained on simultaneous enfranchisement, retaining at least some adherence to AERA principles even when directly denigrating the freedmen, the argument now became explicitly for women first. As Dudden argued, these arguments ‘involved contradictory logic when employed alongside the classic egalitarian arguments’ of the AERA, that the Revolution still tried to use on occasions.

The winter of 1868 to 1869 marked a significant point in the development of Stanton and Anthony’s arguments. The catalyst for this was the publishing of drafts for what would become the Fifteenth Amendment. As was seen in the previous chapter, Stanton immediately responded with an editorial in the Revolution focusing her opposition on ‘manhood suffrage’, and these drafts confirmed in Stanton’s mind the inevitability of black (male) suffrage, something she had believed from at least as early as December 1865. The first opportunity they got to present their objections in a public meeting came at the annual convention of the D.C.-based Universal Franchise Association (UFA) in January 1869. Stanton spoke of her objection to ‘manhood suffrage’ in the context of the discourse she had been developing over the past twelve months. The Daily Morning Chronicle reports that ‘she wished the suffrage of this country to be infused with a woman’s love, and she felt it would produce an untold change in the society of the world.’ By contrast, however, she argued that ‘[t]he most ignorant men are the most hostile to the elevation of woman.’ For her part, Anthony introduced resolutions denouncing the drafts of the Fifteenth Amendment, in language that set ‘educated women’ against ‘ignorant men’, and argued that ‘a white man’s government’ would be better than ‘a man’s government’. This line of argument reached a critical point, however, with a resolution arguing that the enfranchisement of black men would put them into conflict with women.

17 Quoted ibid., p.150.
18 Ibid., pp.148, 151.
19 ‘Manhood Suffrage’, Revolution, 24 December 1868; “‘This is the Negro’s Hour’”, National Anti-Slavery Standard [hereafter NASS], 30 December 1865.
throughout the country, unleashing ‘injustice and oppression’ upon women, implicitly predicting violence by black men on women. This language echoed some of the most extreme white supremacist rhetoric emanating from the Southern states at this time, concerning the supposed danger of giving black men their full freedom, and the effect this might have on Southern white society.\(^{21}\) This resolution was eventually rejected by the UFA convention, along with others that were overtly hostile to men, but this represented Stanton and Anthony’s clearest example of non-egalitarian rhetoric.\(^{22}\)

Of all the deviations from the egalitarian arguments of the AERA, Stanton and Anthony’s was perhaps the most extreme. But why did they so quickly and easily abandon the equal rights principles they had so recently made the centre of their campaign? Historians have debated this for many years. It is probable that humiliation played a role, with Stanton unwilling to accept that the freedmen would be enfranchised before her, as Griffith argued.\(^{23}\) It is also probable that their view reflected something of the race-conscious environment of American society in the mid-nineteenth century, as Newman and Terborg-Penn have argued.\(^{24}\) Free argued that these factors are not enough to explain why there came this turn at this particular point in history, and argued that this shift was part of an attempt to relate woman suffrage to Democrats’ hopes to retain a white supremacist government. We have already seen how the AERA tried to re-claim the idea of ‘equal rights’ and include women in a larger definition of equality. In response to the difficulties Stanton felt in convincing Republican politicians that women should be included in this definition, Free and Dudden argued that Stanton abandoned hope of converting Republicans, and instead aimed to convince the Democrats that white women voters could contribute to the perpetuation of white supremacist government.\(^{25}\) It is not clear from the evidence that Stanton really contemplated perpetuating white supremacist government, for she still argued that black men

should ultimately be enfranchised. As DuBois argued, the abandonment of egalitarian arguments left Stanton in uncharted territory and she was in a process of developing a new language in which to speak about rights, which perhaps explains her ‘mixed bag’ of arguments. What is abundantly clear, however, is that Stanton and Anthony were, at this time, clearly moving away from egalitarian arguments and using increasingly racist and elitist arguments.

The issue that perhaps best illustrates Stanton and Anthony’s confused discourse over suffrage at this time is that they claimed to be the ones remaining true to equal rights while accusing those who supported the Fifteenth Amendment of betraying the AERA. Parker Pillsbury summed up the charge in an article for the Revolution entitled ‘The Fifteenth Amendment – It’s Ludicrous Side’, arguing that the AERA was right to oppose the amendment because of ‘its high and holy purpose of enfranchisement of all American citizens, KNOWING NO RACE, NO COLOR, NO SEX.’ He further argued that Revolution suffragists were the only ones sticking to their principles. In another article, Pillsbury argued that to ask women to postpone their claims until black (male) suffrage was secured was to betray them and betray their principles of equal suffrage, guaranteed to all. Stanton and Anthony echoed this assertion – that they were the only ones sticking to their principles – with Anthony arguing, at the 1869 AERA anniversary, that ‘the Fifteenth Amendment was not an equal rights affair, as it elevated one-half of a new class to a position where it could be law makers’ for the other half.

Was support for the Fifteenth Amendment a betrayal of equal rights? In one respect it was, because, as Pillsbury argued, the AERA was formed to demand universal suffrage, not black (male) suffrage. However, this issue is not quite so straightforward. Where the Revolution suffragists argued that they should oppose anything that did not do exactly what they called for, others argued that the inherent universal rights of black men were not something that could be denied in

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26 For example, see ‘Editorial Correspondence,’ Revolution, 28 January 1869; ‘Gerrit Smith on Petitions,’ Revolution, 14 January 1869; ‘Stand By Your Guns, Mr. Julian,’ Revolution, 14 January 1869; ‘S.B.A. on the Fifteenth Amendment,’ Revolution, 7 October 1869.
27 DuBois, Feminism and Suffrage, pp.177-179, 202.
29 ‘Battling for the Ballot,’ World (New York), 14 May 1869; Elizabeth Cady Stanton [hereafter ECS] to Paulina Wright Davis, [12 August 1869], in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13.
the event that they were not simultaneously accompanied into the electorate by women.

Abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips rejoiced at the amendment, with the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* calling it ‘the grandest and most Christian act ever contemplated or accomplished by any nation.’30 AERA members, on the other hand, were more conflicted. Some, such as Mary F. Davis and Julia Ward Howe, used language that suggested that the Fifteenth Amendment should be supported for expediency’s sake, and would, in Davis’s words, ‘pave the way for another and a broader movement’ to gain rights for all.31 Frances Dana Gage echoed these sentiments by arguing that those who had worked for black (male) suffrage would now work for woman suffrage. In that sense, support for the Fifteenth Amendment was not in itself based on equal rights principles, but the amendment could be a means to an equal rights end.

Gage’s position on the issue was not so simple, however. She lamented that there had ever been a separation between black (male) and woman suffrage, arguing that it would have been best to have argued for universal suffrage, but she, along with Lillie B. Chace, argued that the amendment was before them, whether they liked it or not – Congress had spoken, and to actively oppose such a measure now would be the real betrayal of principle because it would be to deny the inherent universal rights of black men. ‘Could I with a breath defeat the Fifteenth Amendment, I would not do it,’ Gage concluded.32

This concern for not denying the inherent rights of black men is particularly evident in the attitude and behaviour of Lucy Stone, Stephen Foster, and Frances Watkins Harper. All three were tireless workers for equal rights, and all faced a difficult dilemma over the Fifteenth Amendment. Dudden has charted Stone’s change from advocating universal suffrage to supporting the amendment. At the founding convention of the New England Woman Suffrage Association (NEWSA) in November 1868, Stone called on the Republican Party to ‘drop its watchword of “Manhood suffrage”’ and grant suffrage to all citizens. However, by January 1869,

30 ‘The Constitutional Amendment,’ *NASS*, 20 March 1869.
31 For Howe, see: ‘Woman Suffrage,’ *Daily Missouri Republican*, 8 October 1869, in *ECS-SBA Papers*, Reel 13; For Davis, see: ‘The Ballot for the Colored Man,’ *NASS*, 29 January 1870.
32 For Chace, see: ‘The Fifteenth versus the Sixteenth Amendment,’ *Woman’s Advocate*, 2, No. 1 (July, 1869), pp.39-43; For Gage, see: ‘The Fifteenth Amendment,’ *Woman’s Advocate*, 2 No. 2 (August 1869), p.95.
she was telling an audience in Washington D.C. that ‘[w]oman must wait for the negro.’ Dudden attributed this change to Stone’s reliance on her amendment-supporting husband, Henry Blackwell, and on Stone’s disgust at the nature of Stanton and Anthony’s opposition to the amendment. At the 1869 AERA anniversary, in May, Stone tried to argue that ‘[w]e are lost if we turn away from the middle principle and argue for one class,’ but eventually declared her position by stating: ‘I thank God for the Fifteenth Amendment’, which Dudden argued confirmed Stone’s transition.33

Dudden suggested that Stone’s approach to the Fifteenth Amendment shows a change from an equal rights position to a black (male) suffrage position. But Stone, like Gage and Chace, was responding to what was in front of her. The NEWSA meeting, at which Stone called for universal suffrage, was before Congress had resumed its session and commenced a discussion of proposals for the Fifteenth Amendment, so Stone was still in the mindset of the proposing reformer, calling on the Congress that was about to re-convene to remember woman suffrage. By January, however, it was clear that the forthcoming amendment would guarantee black (male) suffrage alone, so Stone, speaking before an audience of Republican politicians, was faced with a situation which she, like Gage and Chace, could ultimately not oppose. By May, however, Stone was again acting as a proposing reformer, championing the ‘middle principle’ showing that she still harboured a broader vision of equal rights. This commitment to equal rights is even evident in her reasons for thanking God for the Fifteenth Amendment: ‘I will be thankful in my soul if anybody can get out of this terrible pit.’ Like Gage and Chace, whatever her misgivings, she ultimately declared her support for the amendment because to reject it would be to deny the inherent rights of others to escape the ‘terrible pit’ of disfranchisement.34

Stephen Foster was another who had tirelessly campaigned for universal suffrage throughout the life of the AERA. He had been particularly vocal in his support for woman suffrage at anti-slavery conventions.35 He had also arranged

34 ‘Women of the Period,’ *World* (New York), 13 May 1869.
his own universal suffrage conventions in his home town of Worcester, Massachusetts.36 But he, too, did not oppose the Fifteenth Amendment. Dudden argued that he had ‘switched sides’ on the issue before the 1869 AERA anniversary, exemplified by his demand that Stanton resign her office in the AERA.37 However, Foster’s behaviour is more easily understandable in the same context as Stone, Gage, and Chace above. Foster attacked Stanton not because she favoured woman suffrage, or even that she objected to the Fifteenth Amendment, but because she had used the Revolution to espouse educated suffrage. ‘I put myself on this platform as an enemy of educated suffrage, as an enemy of white suffrage, as an enemy of every kind of suffrage except universal suffrage,’ Foster argued. He also stated that he would not consent to welcome George Francis Train into the AERA with ‘his ridicule of the negro’. Foster was opposed to the denigration of black men, revealing his overriding concern for sticking to his principles.38

Frances Watkins Harper occupied a similar position to Stone and Foster. As a black woman, Harper had the most to gain by a universal suffrage campaign, so one would expect to see her at the forefront of the demand for equal rights. Like all those above, however, Harper faced a complex situation that defied simple navigation. Like Stone, she, too, supported the Fifteenth Amendment at the 1869 AERA anniversary, reported by the New York World as stating that ‘when it was a question of race she let the lesser question of sex go.39 But evidence presented by Dudden and O’Brien has shown that Harper was strongly committed to women’s rights throughout this period. Indeed, at the NEWSA convention just a few weeks after the AERA anniversary, Harper ‘pointed out the need of a tenderer and broader humanity, more of the motherly element, in our civilization.’ Her equal rights principles meant that she, like Stone and Foster, could not countenance opposing the extension of black men’s inherent rights.40

36 ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 4 April 1868; ‘Woman Suffrage,’ NASS, 11 April 1868.
37 Dudden, Fighting Chance, p.177.
38 ‘Woman of the Period,’ World (New York), 13 May 1869.
All these examples show the complex nature of attitudes to the Fifteenth Amendment. While some supported the amendment for reasons for expediency, others thought that opposing it was unprincipled because they could not deny the inherent universal rights of black men. However, there is something in the accusation that is not just Stanton and Anthony who had moved away from equal rights principles at this time, and not all of that evidence is as obvious as the race- and class-based language of the Revolution. Some examples of the de-centring of equal rights were far more subtle, and involve the increasing prevalence of sex-specific language.

This more subtle de-centring of equal rights principles is ably illustrated by two events over the winter of 1868 and 1869. The first was the formation of the NEWSA in November 1868. Kerr argued that the betrayal of equal rights principles came only from Stanton, Anthony, and their allies, while Stone and the NEWSA remained true by supporting the Fifteenth Amendment.41 This analysis, however, fails to appreciate the subtler shifts. The simple fact that the name of this new association incorporated ‘woman suffrage’ rather than ‘equal rights’ is indicative of the shift. It demonstrated that this new association intended to break from what had come before. Most of the official pronouncements of this association, such as the resolutions passed at the founding convention, remained committed to equal rights, including, for example, one that asserted ‘that the suffrage is an inherent right of every American citizen’.42 There were, however, some examples of the shift to sex-specific language. For example, at a NEWSA meeting in Springfield, Massachusetts, in March 1869, a resolution was passed referring to woman’s ‘peculiar and legitimate influence upon the customs and institutions of society’, in language that resembled Stanton’s argument that women voters were needed to outweigh the vices of male voters, albeit without the accompanying attack on any other group of people.43

The second event in this regard was the UFA convention in Washington, D.C., in January 1869. The UFA, led by AERA member Josephine S. Griffing, was created in 1868 specifically for the woman suffrage campaign in the District of

41 Kerr, ‘White Women’s Rights,’ pp.61-78.
Columbia, where black (male) suffrage had already been secured, in 1867.\textsuperscript{44} The UFA convention was intentionally advertised as a ‘National Woman Suffrage Convention’ and, throughout, the focus was on woman suffrage rather than equal rights.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, at one point in the proceedings, Lucretia Mott, acting as president of the convention, was asked to confirm the nature of the meeting. ‘It is a woman’s suffrage convention,’ was her reply.\textsuperscript{46}

Equal rights principles did come back into focus for a brief period in the run up to the 1869 AERA anniversary convention, as shown in the previous chapter, as hopes grew that the association could unite behind a sixteenth amendment for woman suffrage. But the proceedings of the convention itself proved to be the clearest example of the de-centring of equal rights arguments, and not just in the debate over the Fifteenth Amendment. As with other examples in this chapter, egalitarian arguments were not abandoned entirely. However, sex-specific language was becoming more and more overt and more widespread than ever before.

Stanton drove her opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment home with her speech against ‘manhood suffrage’. Others de-centred equal rights in their own way. The Rev. O.B. Frothingham used his speech to argue that a man should not really be speaking on a woman’s platform, in contrast to the AERA principle that suffrage was for all to gain and for all to campaign for. ‘This is a meeting,’ he said, ‘of the old Woman’s Rights Association,’ which confirmed his attitude. Dr. William Blackwell shared this conclusion. When Stephen Foster rose to challenge Stanton and Anthony, Blackwell argued that ‘[w]e should no more exclude a person from our platform for disbelieving negro suffrage than a person should be excluded from the anti-slavery platform for disbelieving woman suffrage.’ For Blackwell, this was clearly a woman suffrage convention, not one for the enfranchisement of all, despite arguments from others that the Fifteenth Amendment still needed the support of the AERA for its ratification.\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{footnotesize}
\item[44] Dudden, \textit{Fighting Chance}, p.147.
\item[45] ‘National Woman Suffrage Convention,’ \textit{NASS}, 9 January 1869.
\end{footnotesize}
Many women of the convention shared this view – Olive Logan, Phoebe Cozzens, and Grace Greenwood (the latter speaking through a letter read by Stone) all spoke of the convention as part of the woman suffrage cause. James W. Stillman, of the Rhode Island legislature, the Rev. Gilbert Haven and Massachusetts senator Henry Wilson spoke of the convention in similar terms. So strong was the mood of the convention in this direction that Frederick Douglass had to explicitly remind the audience that this was an equal rights convention. To complete the de-centring of equal rights, Ernestine Rose used her speech to argue that the association should change its name from the “National Equal Rights Association” [sic] to the “National Woman Suffrage Association.” The change was rejected as unconstitutional, with alterations needing three months’ notice before a vote could be taken of the association’s membership, but the suggestion was indicative of the wider trend towards sex-specific language.

Such language in favour of woman suffrage was not entirely unheard of in the discourse of the AERA, such was the nature of the free platform. The association inherited an intellectual tradition of Romantic philosophy from the antebellum women’s rights convention movement, and this is evident in a number of speeches at AERA events. For example, at the 1867 anniversary convention, Charles C. Burleigh, Henry Ward Beecher, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton all made some reference to language that spoke of the possibility of women’s special influence on politics. Also, Douglass had made the assertion that an equal rights meeting was resembling a woman suffrage event before, during the canvass of New York in 1866. What made the 1869 convention different in this respect was the number of speakers who devoted themselves specifically to the women’s cause and what they referred to as women’s peculiar abilities and talents. More importantly, however, what sets the 1869 convention apart from those that came before are the explicit official pronouncements of the association – the Call to the


convention, and the resolutions – which make it far more explicit that this was a woman’s rights convention, not an equal or human rights meeting. The Call is the first sign of this shift. It made no explicit mention of women’s peculiar abilities or talents, but it did make the assertion that black suffrage was no longer an issue up for discussion, despite the fact that the Fifteenth Amendment remained to be ratified. In contrast to previous convention calls, this one made no link between black (male) and woman suffrage. It also juxtaposed ‘every type and shade of manhood’ with the women of the country, suggesting that their causes were not mutually inclusive.\textsuperscript{51}

The resolutions, unanimously adopted by the 1869 anniversary convention, also show the emergence of sex-specific language, again in contrast to the record of previous AERA meetings. For example, one resolution argued that ‘the extension of suffrage to woman is essential to the public safety and in the establishment and permanence of free institutions’. Another argued that ‘woman ... is now the conservator of the private morals’ and would, with the ballot, ‘become the conservator of the public morals’.\textsuperscript{52} Language such as this, emphasising what was perceived to be different about women, had never been seen in AERA resolutions before this point.\textsuperscript{53} The 1868 convention resolutions, the year previous, had seen no language like this.\textsuperscript{54} Even the NEWSA founding convention, with its explicit reference to woman suffrage, did not see resolutions with language such as this.\textsuperscript{55} A look at the make-up of the business committee of the 1869 convention, which had the responsibility of drawing up the resolutions, indicates the widespread nature of the shift. Among their number were Ernestine Rose, Henry Blackwell, Mary Livermore, Stephen Foster, and Josephine S. Griffing. That Stanton and

\textsuperscript{51} SBA to John Sherman, [before 23] April 1869, in ECS-SBA Papers, Reel 13. Letter written on the back of the Call. For the calls to the 1866 and 1867 AERA conventions, see: Proceedings of the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention, Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 10, 1866 (New York, 1866), pp.3-4, and: Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the AERA, pp.3-4.

\textsuperscript{52} ‘May Anniversaries,’ New York Tribune, 13 May 1869.


\textsuperscript{55} ‘The New England Woman’s Rights Convention,’ NASS, 5 December 1868.
Anthony were not on this list demonstrates that it was not just them shifting from equal rights principles.\textsuperscript{56}

The 1869 AERA convention marked a departure from equal rights that would be continued in the work of the NWSA and the AWSA. Explicit egalitarian language and principles, embodied in the AERA’s constitution and its previous resolutions, were no longer front and centre in the suffragists’ discourse. Consider the following rallying cry from the Revolution from May 1869, issued shortly after the creation of the NWSA: ‘Now then, let every friend of Equal Rights put shoulder to the wheel ... Lay aside collateral questions. Disregard side issues. Commend Woman suffrage upon its merits.’ This call to arms begins with a call for ‘Equal Rights’, but that now meant ‘Woman Suffrage’ for the Revolution.\textsuperscript{57} The specific link between equal rights and a true equality of suffrage for all American adults was gone. For the AWSA, it was woman suffrage alone. ‘Even the terms “Woman’s Rights” covers too wide a field’, argued Henry Blackwell.\textsuperscript{58}

Part of the explanation for this shift lies in the fact of the Fifteenth Amendment enfranchising black men, leaving women as the only disfranchised group. This makes the change of name from ‘Equal Rights’ to ‘Woman Suffrage’ understandable. Indeed, the Woman’s Journal stated that the reason the AERA was dropped as an organisation was because black (male) suffrage had been gained.\textsuperscript{59} But context does not explain this entirely. There was also a conscious decision on the part of the suffragists to explicitly disconnect their campaign from black suffrage. For the NWSA, this was doubtless part of its endeavour to empower women, individually and collectively, and fitted with the desire to put women’s emancipation right at the heart of its programme. For the AWSA, this intention to concentrate on woman suffrage alone came from the desire to avoid controversial or distracting side issues – where the AERA had tried to convince Americans that woman suffrage and black (male) suffrage were not two separate issues, the AWSA now argued that anything other than woman suffrage was a side issue. Perhaps it was not an explicit intention to disconnect women’s rights from men’s – after all, as shown in chapter six, the Woman’s Journal repeatedly asserted that the AWSA

\textsuperscript{56} ‘May Anniversaries,’ New York Tribune, 13 May 1869.
\textsuperscript{57} ‘The Woman and the Negro,’ Revolution, 27 May 1869.
\textsuperscript{58} ‘The American Woman Suffrage Association,’ Woman’s Journal, 8 January 1870.
\textsuperscript{59} ‘American Equal Rights Association,’ Woman's Journal, 2 April 1870.
was not ‘anti-man’.\textsuperscript{60} However, the practical effect of this avoiding of side issues was a tacit acceptance that woman suffrage was a single issue in and of itself.

In both these conceptions of woman suffrage – the broader emancipation of women for the NWSA and the narrower single issue of suffrage for the AWSA – the wider definition of equal rights was lost. This separation would not have an immediate effect – the two suffrage societies would continue to use natural justice and equal rights arguments for many decades, but the rhetorical link between equal rights and rights for all, including men, had been severed.\textsuperscript{61} It could be argued that this change was the first instance of the shifting emphasis of the woman suffrage movement, from natural rights arguments to expediency arguments as delineated by Kraditor and Marilley.\textsuperscript{62} Never again would the woman suffrage movement in the U.S. explicitly link itself with the rights of men. The AERA remains the one and only location in American nineteenth-century history where women’s and men’s rights occupied an equal place in an explicit programme for political reform.

\textit{Conclusion}

The collapse of the AERA was about more than just the end of the organisational structures and the split in the membership between the AWSA and the NWSA. The dominance of the AERA’s official intellectual definition had also come to an end. Rather than arguing for suffrage for all based on the common humanity of individuals, regardless of race or sex, the AERA had begun to argue explicitly for woman suffrage with arguments that they applied specifically to women.

This de-centring of equal rights took many forms. Between 1867 and 1869, Stanton and Anthony developed arguments that women needed to be enfranchised because of what they believed women were – more moral and pure – and what they argued women were not, juxtaposing them with what they believed to be ‘ignorant and degraded’ men. Not only did they justify women’s enfranchisement with sex-specific arguments, they used race-specific arguments to assert that women’s enfranchisement was much more pressing than giving the ballot to black

\textsuperscript{60} ‘No Antagonism,’ \textit{Woman’s Journal}, 19 February 1870; ‘One or Two Plain Words’, \textit{Woman’s Journal}, 12 March 1870; ‘The “Looker-On” of the “Nation”,’ \textit{Woman’s Journal}, 19 March 1870.
\textsuperscript{61} Marilley, \textit{Woman Suffrage}, pp.82-89.
men. Occasionally, Stanton, Anthony and their allies still used arguments that used a universal language of human rights, but these were becoming less prevalent than sex- and race-specific language as they turned their attention to arguing against the Fifteenth Amendment.

Other AERA members, such as Frances Dana Gage and Lillie B. Chace, struggled with their attitude towards the Fifteenth Amendment. Although it was not strictly a measure for universal suffrage, most AERA members could not justify to themselves opposing it because it ended at least one suffrage restriction. Supporters of the Fifteenth Amendment, such as Lucy Stone, Stephen Foster, and Frances Watkins Harper, however, retained an overall commitment to equal rights in that they refused to countenance denying to others their inherent rights.

There was, however, a more subtle and widespread de-centring of equal rights principles than the outright opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment as expressed by Stanton and Anthony. As black (male) suffrage became more likely, and the focus turned to ending suffrage restrictions based on sex, more and more sex-specific language was employed by AERA members. This is especially true of the 1869 AERA anniversary convention. While the association’s conventions had always seen a certain amount of sex-specific language employed by the speakers, the AERA’s official pronouncements – calls to convention and the resolutions of those meetings – had always remained rooted in a language of universal rights. The 1869 anniversary convention, however, was different, as the AERA began to employ sex-specific language in its official pronouncements, which argued for woman suffrage based on what they believed were women’s special qualities.

This trend was continued in the post-AERA suffrage societies – the NWSA and the AWSA – and fitted in with the wider visions that these two associations had developed for themselves – either the explicit intention to focus solely on women’s rights in the case of the NWSA, or in the desire to treat all matters other than woman suffrage as side issues in the case of the AWSA. Never again would any woman suffrage organisation make an explicit connection between campaigning for the rights of women and the rights of men. This fact, combined with the official ending of the AERA in May 1870, demonstrates the historical distinctiveness of the association and its vital importance as a separate stage in any study of the history of suffrage in America.
8
Conclusion

This thesis began by showing how historians have not devoted a historical study to the AERA. Not only does the uniqueness of the AERA mean it needs a historical study in its own right, but such a work can offer a re-assessment of conclusions in a number of branches of historiography that have examined the AERA indirectly. The last six chapters have shown the fruits of such a focus. In its formation, definition, membership, campaigning, organisational dynamics, political culture, demise, and legacy, this thesis has shown that the AERA was a distinctive and significant phenomenon in nineteenth-century American history. This final chapter will argue for the overall distinctiveness and importance of this unique organisation. Furthermore, it will show how these elements challenge established understandings in a variety of historiographical contexts, including the woman suffrage movement, political culture, and Reconstruction. This study has conclusions for wider questions, also, including the place of men in movements for gender equality and the use of historical sources, all of which prove the significance of the AERA.

There are many aspects of the AERA that testify to the association’s distinctiveness. Most fundamentally, the AERA is the only example of a nineteenth-century reform organisation that explicitly linked men’s and women’s political advancement in its programme. Its simple idea, ‘to secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex,’ was entirely unique.¹ Nothing of its kind was seen before, at the time, or after. Though the antebellum women’s rights movement had argued that women’s right to the ballot should be recognised for the same reasons that men’s right was recognised, they stopped short of explicitly linking the two on the same platform. When the AERA was formed, in 1866, there were a number of other organisations pressing for ‘equal rights’, and the phrase ‘equal rights’ was common currency in

the discourse of politicians such as Massachusetts senator and radical Republican Charles Sumner. However, these examples referred only to black men’s equal right to the ballot with white men. The AERA was the only site where ‘equal rights’ included women. Furthermore, after the AERA had collapsed, the explicit demand for equal rights for all collapsed with it. Like the antebellum movement, the two wings of the woman suffrage movement, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) argued that women’s right to the ballot was the same as men’s, but neither explicitly linked the two causes.

The AERA sought to make this intellectual agenda a reality by forming an organisation that would be representative of both sexes, black and white. As shown in chapter three, there was a relatively even split in the membership between men and women, and officer roles were shared between the sexes. Although, as chapter five has shown, there was some criticism of men, no man or woman was denied access to the organisation and all were encouraged to attend, vote, and speak at the meetings. Furthermore, chapter five showed that, in their political culture, there was no neat distinction between the two sexes. There are, of course, other examples of cross-sex organisations in nineteenth-century America. Men and women worked together in the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), for example, but the AERA was the only one whose membership structures reflected its goals for political advancement. Similarly, despite the lack of black membership of the organisation, no black man or woman was denied membership or opportunities for engagement. As shown in chapter three, despite there being only a handful of black members, these were appointed to prominent positions in the officer ranks and Charles Lenox Remond and Louisa Jacobs were prominent on the New York canvass. As with the cross-sex divide, chapter five showed that there was no neat distinction in the political culture of black and white members of the AERA.

A further aspect that asserts the distinctiveness of the AERA lies in the attitudes of these members towards their organisation. As shown in chapter three, there is much evidence that these individuals considered their membership as more than just the signing of a petition or the dropping of a coin into the collection hat. This is particularly important in the case of members of the AASS. As pointed
out at the time by Abby Kelley Foster, if those who supported only black (male) suffrage had wanted a vehicle for their reform work, they would have stayed in the AASS. The fact that they joined the AERA, and contributed much time and money to its campaign, demonstrates that they considered the campaign for equal rights and universal suffrage to be separate from purely black (male) suffrage, and the AERA a distinct association from the AASS. This thesis has also shown the engagement that members of the AERA had with the political parties. While there was engagement with Republicans and Democrats, neither party held the association’s loyalties entirely, and many AERA members sought a non-partisan position.

A further point that demonstrates the distinctiveness and significance of the AERA lies in the association’s legacy. Chapter six has shown that, in crafting their visions for the post-AERA woman suffrage movement, both the AWSA and the NWSA drew conclusions based on what they thought they had learned while in the AERA. The AWSA objected to the mass-membership system, in which they believed a few individuals had been able to usurp power and undermine the principles of the association. In response, AWSA leaders instituted a delegate system for their new organisation and adopted a consensual approach to decision making. The AWSA also confessed to learn from the AERA that to include anything other than woman suffrage on the platform was detrimental to the cause. As such, they chose to jettison the explicit link to men’s rights and the rights of the freedpeople and concentrate on woman suffrage alone.

For the NWSA, the lessons they drew from the AERA were similar, although their conclusions were slightly different from the AWSA. The NWSA argued that the most important lesson drawn from the AERA experience was that women could not rely on men in working for the advancement of women’s position. NWSA leaders Stanton and Anthony argued that men had betrayed their organisation by insisting on black (male) suffrage first. Their solution was to empower women by building their new organisation solely around women, both in its membership and in its ideas. Like the AWSA, the NWSA jettisoned the question of men’s rights, but rather than focus on woman suffrage alone, they would advocate anything that they thought would lead to the emancipation and elevation of women. Regardless of whether or not these interpretations of the AERA’s legacy were accurate, they
marked a clear break from the past. Furthermore, the fact that these two new suffrage organisations drew lessons directly from their AERA experiences demonstrates both the significance and distinctiveness of this organisation.

This picture is continued in how former AERA members came to write about the AERA in later years. For Stanton and Anthony, the AERA became a matter of central importance in their writings, particularly in the History of Woman Suffrage, published in the early 1880s. Lisa Tetrault has deconstructed the narrative of the History of Woman Suffrage, showing that, rather than being just a simple recounting of events, the work is steeped in interpretative bias. One of the main elements of this narrative was the time of trial during Reconstruction, in which, after devoting themselves to the nation during the Civil War, women were betrayed and abandoned. All blame for defeat of the AERA strategy was heaped on scheming politicians and recreant, compromising abolitionists. The women who followed them were excused as being led astray by men’s false promises, while only Stanton, Anthony, and a handful of others stayed true to the cause by founding the NWSA.

For a long time, AWSA members refrained from publishing an account of the AERA period. The first published statement came in 1890, at the time that the NWSA and the AWSA were re-uniting after 20 years apart. Two articles from Henry B. Blackwell in the Woman's Journal laid the blame for the AERA split at the door of George Francis Train, and on Stanton and Anthony for bringing him into the association. Nine years later, Blackwell published another statement of facts on the AERA period, this time in response to the publication of Anthony’s official biography. Again, Blackwell laid the blame for the AERA split at Stanton and Anthony’s door for recruiting Train and so inviting ridicule onto the whole venture. This article finishes by claiming victory for the AWSA by its assertion that the re-unified National-American Woman Suffrage Association had accepted that

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‘persons of conspicuous absurdity or notorious immorality’ should not be brought into the campaign.\(^7\)

In recent years, memory studies theorists have shown the importance of historical writings and their impact on the writers’ present, with David Blight arguing the importance of conflicts over power in the writing of history.\(^8\) In their studies of the writings of woman suffragists, DesJardins, DuBois, and Tetrault have shown how suffragists wrote their histories to secure their power and protect their legacies.\(^9\) Both the AWSA and the NWSA suffragists used their reflective writings about the AERA period to argue that the other wing of the movement had betrayed or undermined the cause. In this situation, the AERA acts as a well of power from which these individuals could draw from to cement their positions. This is especially true of Blackwell’s articles in 1890, published at the time of the re-union, where the two wings were seeking to assert their leadership of the new united organisation. It is clear that these suffragists attributed an enormous amount of importance to the AERA and to winning the interpretative battles of the events of that experience. This adds to the argument for the wider historical significance of the AERA itself.

This thesis has not only proven the historical distinctiveness and importance of the AERA on its own terms. Several conclusions from these chapters offer a reassessment of certain assumptions that have been made in woman suffrage historiography. Chapters two and three have shown that, although the AERA was created at the Eleventh National Woman’s Rights Convention and was the only organisation in Reconstruction to include women in its definition of ‘equal rights’, it was more than just the vehicle for woman suffrage at this time. Instead, it was a space where reformers could think about and discuss Reconstruction, citizenship, and voting rights in a whole new way. Chapter two has also shown that the formation of the AERA was much more than a reactive step in response to the introduction of the word ‘male’ into the Federal Constitution in the Fourteenth

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\(^7\) ‘Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony’, *Woman’s Journal*, 11 March 1899.
Amendment and the failure to convert the AASS to the cause of truly universal suffrage. Although these factors were involved in the creation process – the Fourteenth Amendment galvanised women's activism, and if the AASS had converted to universal suffrage there would have been no need to form another organisation – to characterise the formation as a negative reaction is to miss the truly progressive and positive nature of the move.

Chapters two, three, and four showed that there was no neat or inherent division in the AERA between supporters of woman and black (male) suffrage. A majority of the association's members were active and committed to both reforms, embodying the equal rights principles that suffrage reform was a single issue that concerned the rights of individuals based on their humanity. This was demonstrated in chapter four, which showed the AERA was working well in its canvass of New York, and not ridden with disputes, divisions, or arguments. This was also true of the 1867 AERA anniversary convention, which remained largely harmonious despite one disagreement between two members – Stanton and George T. Downing – over whether black men or educated women should be enfranchised first. Other speakers who responded to this disagreement refrained from divisive language and emphasised the unity of the AERA's programme.

The lack of an inherent split between black (male) and woman suffrage is connected to another re-assessment offered by this thesis. Contrary to contemporary and reflective arguments, the equal rights campaign did receive some support from organised abolitionism. Although the AASS was keen to assert the distinctiveness of its position from the AERA's, individual abolitionists continued to use anti-slavery platforms and resources to support the equal rights cause. The National Anti-Slavery Standard, the AASS's official newspaper, included news of equal rights events and frequently editorialised in support of the AERA's cause. This support may not have been as great as some equal rights workers would have liked, but it was certainly there.

Stanton and Anthony were two equal rights workers who thought that the support they got from organised abolitionism was not enough, and this was a major reason why they accepted the financial support of George Francis Train. The fact that the AERA did receive support from organised abolitionism, however, highlights the importance of looking beyond Stanton and Anthony to develop a
comprehensive understanding of the AERA. For example, Stanton and Anthony’s decision in 1868 to pour their agitation efforts into their newspaper, the Revolution, rather than into the AERA, does not mean that the association had ceased to be of any importance at all. Looking at the wider spectrum of the membership, chapter six showed that work in 1868 continued much the same as it had in 1866 and 1867 – spreading the campaign on a state level and continuing to appeal to anti-slavery meetings for support. Although Stanton and Anthony’s partnership with Train had caused disputes between them and the rest of the AERA leadership, it was by no means clear at this point that this dispute would lead to the ultimate collapse of the association.

The AERA did finally split, however, and this thesis has offered a new interpretation of that split. Rather than focusing on the disagreement over the Fifteenth Amendment, chapter six showed how a more fundamental dispute was taking place, between two competing visions for the suffrage movement. These competing visions did not necessarily require an entrenched division, but this is what occurred as the two wings of the movement – the AWSA and the NWSA – fought over the inheritance of the AERA. Neither side could afford to consider a compromise on any terms other than their own, or risk undermining their own credibility. In this case, the Fifteenth Amendment, although the cause of much disagreement, became just another location for the playing out of the conflict over the respective visions and the rivalry over the women’s rights inheritance that was passed down through the AERA.

This thesis has offered a further re-assessment of a conclusion from the woman suffrage historiography, relating to the intellectual aspects of the movement. As shown in chapter seven, there was a subtle and widespread de-centring of equal rights in the last year of the AERA’s existence. Although Stanton and Anthony were particularly culpable in undermining the association’s intellectual definition, with their employment of race- and sex-based language, they were not alone in introducing sex-specific arguments. The language of the official pronouncements of the AERA in its last year suggests that the movement shifted away from egalitarianism as a defining principle earlier than has previously been recognised. Instead of employing arguments that based women’s right to suffrage on the same terms as men, arguments that emphasised women’s
special need and duty to exercise the suffrage began to emerge in official AERA pronouncements in 1869. All of these re-assessments of woman suffrage historiography conclusions have come from the distinctive approach that this thesis has taken towards studying the AERA, particularly the different perspectives that have been revealed through focusing on the association’s internal dynamics.

The perspectives offered by a focus on the AERA itself has enabled a re-assessment of the conclusions of a number of other branches of historiography and scholarship. The AERA has long been overlooked in the historiography of Reconstruction, often treated merely as the vehicle for woman suffrage in these years. This thesis has shown, however, that the AERA was more than that and it made a unique and important contribution to Reconstruction debates over rights and citizenship. The association offered new ways of thinking about the questions of suffrage, representation, and what it meant to be a citizen at a time when the American people were listening. It sought change, but this was change within the larger context of American republicanism, employing the language of equal rights and attempting to re-claim that phrase from those who gave it a narrower definition.

It is true that the AERA was a relatively small and short-lived organisation, but it was by no means isolated or separated from the wider polity. The association was led by nationally-recognised figures, such as Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Henry Ward Beecher, and others. As a group, they interacted and engaged with the political system, sending out petitions and memorials to Congress and state legislatures and dealing directly with both political parties. Above and beyond this, the AERA took its message directly to the people in conventions, lectures, tracts, and articles in newspapers. Those same newspapers covered equal rights activities. The AERA may have been small, but it was an organisation that received national attention, especially in newspapers and journals, and its very engagement with Reconstruction debates must be acknowledged to give a more complete picture of the American polity in these tumultuous years.
As well as discussing Reconstruction politics, this thesis has contributed to a debate over American nineteenth-century political culture more broadly. Where other historians have concentrated on examining differences in political culture between various groups, this study has shown that there could be much flexibility when it came to forms of political participation. Chapter five showed that there was no neat distinction between the political culture of men and women. Individuals transcended the boundaries of contemporary and historiographical definitions of gendered political cultures and the roles of the sexes. This came in a number of distinct forms. Both sexes engaged with and disengaged from working through the structures of a voluntary association, employing collective strength and defending independence of action; both sexes spoke of what they saw as the importance of women’s collective role for the uplift of society; both sexes spoke of the importance of influencing politics and society; both sexes engaged with and disengaged from the traditional political avenues of partisanship and electoral activity; and both sexes used the language of individualism and independence to speak about the ballot. Furthermore, all this was true of the association’s black members. Just as there was no neat divide between male and female, there was no neat divide between black and white. Overall, the AERA presents a picture of fluidity and interchange rather than rigidity.

Again, questions could be raised about the importance of such a small organisation and its ultimate representativeness of the political culture of the wider American population. Was this association, radical and unique in its demands, radical and unique in its culture too? To a certain extent, the answer to this question is yes. However, as this thesis has argued, the AERA shows what was possible in nineteenth-century America. If it was possible that the two sexes, whether black or white, could participate in politics in a number of different forms, engaging with and disengaging from various aspects of political culture, then this says something in itself about the nature of the polity in which it resided. Cultural and social restrictions on their behaviour could not be held entirely to blame for the uniqueness of the AERA.

Scholarship over the last two decades has increasingly questioned the notion that men and women occupied separate spheres in the nineteenth century, showing that women were engaging with the public sphere in a whole host of
different ways. What needs more attention, however, is what men and women, black and white, shared throughout their lives. Historians need to finally respond to the call of Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone and think about the ways in which men’s and women’s lives could be a shared experience in nineteenth-century America.\(^{10}\)

These conclusions about the sexes have ramifications beyond historical analysis; they raise questions about the very nature of gender and the operation of movements for the equality of the sexes. Chapter five has shown many AERA members, male and female, wondering if men could be truly trusted to work, or were even capable of working, effectively in such a movement. The historical record, on the other hand, shows the lack of distinction between the sexes. If there was no neat distinction between the sexes, then it stands to reason that men are just as capable of working for equality as women.

This conclusion is important for scholarship on the question of whether it is possible for men to be feminists. Most scholars who have dealt with this question have concentrated on theoretical or sociological debates, speculating on men’s experiences of patriarchy, their ability to understand women’s position and standpoint, and their ability to fight the inherently sexist undercurrents of their own thinking, or asserting that men \emph{should} be involved in the feminist movement as a means of ensuring equality for all, regardless of sex.\(^{11}\) What this scholarship could benefit from is a deeper understanding of concrete historical examples of men working in women’s reform movements as a means of testing some of these hypotheses. The uniqueness of the AERA within the nineteenth-century American reform tradition makes it a particularly important example.

This importance of looking beyond the rhetoric of those involved in the nineteenth-century debate about the place of men in the AERA highlights another

\(^{10}\) L. McCall & D. Yacovone (eds), \textit{A Shared Experience: Men, Women, and the History of Gender} (New York, 1998).

key conclusion that this thesis can contribute to historiographical debates. This is the necessity of seeking to find the correct balance between the use of contemporary historical documents and reflective writings from later periods, even if they are from individuals who took part in the original debates. Despite the enormous worth and influential position of these later writings for the woman suffrage movement, particularly the History of Woman Suffrage, this thesis has sought to ground the analysis firmly in AERA-contemporary documents and events. This had led to a number of new interpretations. For example, it has altered the understanding of the role of men in the AERA and challenged the understanding of Stanton and Anthony’s conclusions in the History of Woman Suffrage that the women’s cause got no support from organised abolitionism. Furthermore, as shown in chapters three and four, one major piece of evidence that has been used to show the disputes and disagreements in the AERA in 1866 and 1867 was the position of Charles Lenox Remond. Historians have used the later-written memoirs of Olympia Brown to argue that Remond was combative and even hostile towards women’s rights. However, this charge is not supported by the historical record. Remond was a strong supporter of the AERA’s cause and was widely reported to be a source of strength and unity on the canvass of New York. Historians of this period have too easily accepted certain claims, whether they were made at the time or in later-written pieces. This thesis has shown several examples to assert that only with an analysis of the totality of the historical record can a fuller understanding of these issues be achieved.

Conclusion
This chapter has shown how this thesis has argued for the distinctiveness and historical importance of the AERA and its warranting of a dedicated and focused study. The efficacy of this central focus is shown in the benefits that such an angle can give in offering a re-assessment of certain conclusions in a number of historical fields. A host of conclusions about the character and development of the woman suffrage movement can be seen in a new light in this thesis, all through the life of this association. The AERA’s importance to Reconstruction historiography and its place in wider debates about citizenship and rights has been asserted, along with its significance for debates about political culture more generally. On an
even more foundational level, this thesis has offered new ways to think about the
study of gender and the equality of the sexes, and reinforced the importance of
understanding the totality of the historical record, rather than relying too much on
opinion and attitudes, whether contemporary to the historical period or written in
reflective pieces at a later date. New evidence is constantly being uncovered by
historians, archivists, and antiquarians, and with digital developments opening up
incredible possibilities for their use, it is always worth reminding ourselves as an
academic community of the importance of the totality of the extant historical
record.

More fundamental than all these conclusions, however, is the central
importance and distinctiveness of the AERA itself. For so long it has been treated
as the neutral or passive site for the discussion of larger questions or more
widespread debates. It is such a unique instance in American history and one that
brings together a whole host of questions in one site, so it is not surprising that it
has been used in this way. The development of woman suffrage historiography as a
whole, with its reluctance to concentrate on suffrage organisations or the white,
middle-class, North-Eastern leadership have further contributed to the lack of
attention on the AERA. Nevertheless, it should not only be seen as a place to inform
other debates. The AERA was unique and distinctive in a number of ways, in its
make up, in its relations with other organisations, in the attitudes of its
membership, and its place within the history of the woman suffrage organisations.
More importantly, it remains the one and only example in nineteenth-century
American history where the political rights of men and women, black and white,
were explicitly linked in the same reform campaign.
Appendix

The Membership of the American Equal Rights Association

The table in the following pages amalgamates the biographical material gathered for each of the 252 individually-identified AERA members.

The column headings are as follows:
- Name.
- Sex.
- State of residence
- Occupation.
- Religion.
- Family – a 'Y' denotes that the evidence shows that this member shared a familial link with another member.
- AASS $ – any money donated to the American Anti-Slavery Society between May 1866 and May 1867, as indicated in donation lists in the National Anti-Slavery Standard.
- AERA $ – any money donated to the AERA between May 1866 and May 1867, as indicated in donation lists in the Proceedings of the First Anniversary of the American Equal Rights Association: Held at the Church of the Puritans, New York, May 9 and 10, 1867 (New York, 1867), pp.77-80.

All sources of the material listed in this appendix are given in the endnotes, following the table.
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Appendix Notes


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