

An appeal for suffrage support, 1871

Introduction

The National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee was formed in the spring of 1871. The Washington DC–based committee pledged to act as the “centre of all action upon Congress and the country.” The group was also dedicated to the education of women on subjects affecting the United States’ welfare so that “women may become intelligent and thoughtful on such subjects, and the intelligent educators of the next generation of citizens.” This pamphlet, *An Appeal to the Woman of the United States*, written in 1871, urges women to demand equal rights for themselves and gives reasons why women should fight for their right to vote.

The committee, including President Isabella Beecher Hooker and Susan B. Anthony, reminds women of the grievances they face, including taxation without representation, a trial by those who are not their peers, and living under laws they had no voice in making. They refer to the Declaration of Independence in saying, “your rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are daily infringed, simply because you have heretofore been denied the use of the ballot, the one weapon of protection and defence under a republican form of government.”

The pamphlet concludes with a call for donations to support the continued publication of educational materials.

Excerpt

Declaration and Pledge of the Women of the United States concerning their Right to and their Use of the Elective Franchise.

“We, the undersigned, believing that the sacred rights and privileges of citizenship in this Republic were guaranteed to us by the original Constitution, and that these rights are confirmed and more clearly established by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, so that we can no longer refuse the solemn responsibilities thereof, do hereby pledge ourselves to accept the duties of the franchise in our several States, so soon as all legal restrictions are removed.

“And believing that character is the best safe-guard of national liberty, we pledge ourselves to make the personal purity and integrity of candidates for public office the *first* test of fitness.

“And lastly, believing in God, as the Supreme Author of the American Declaration of Independence, we pledge ourselves in the spirit of that memorable Act, to work hand in hand with our fathers, husbands, and sons, for

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the maintenance of those equal rights on which our Republic was originally founded, to the end that it may have, what is declared to be the first condition of just government, *the consent of the governed.*”

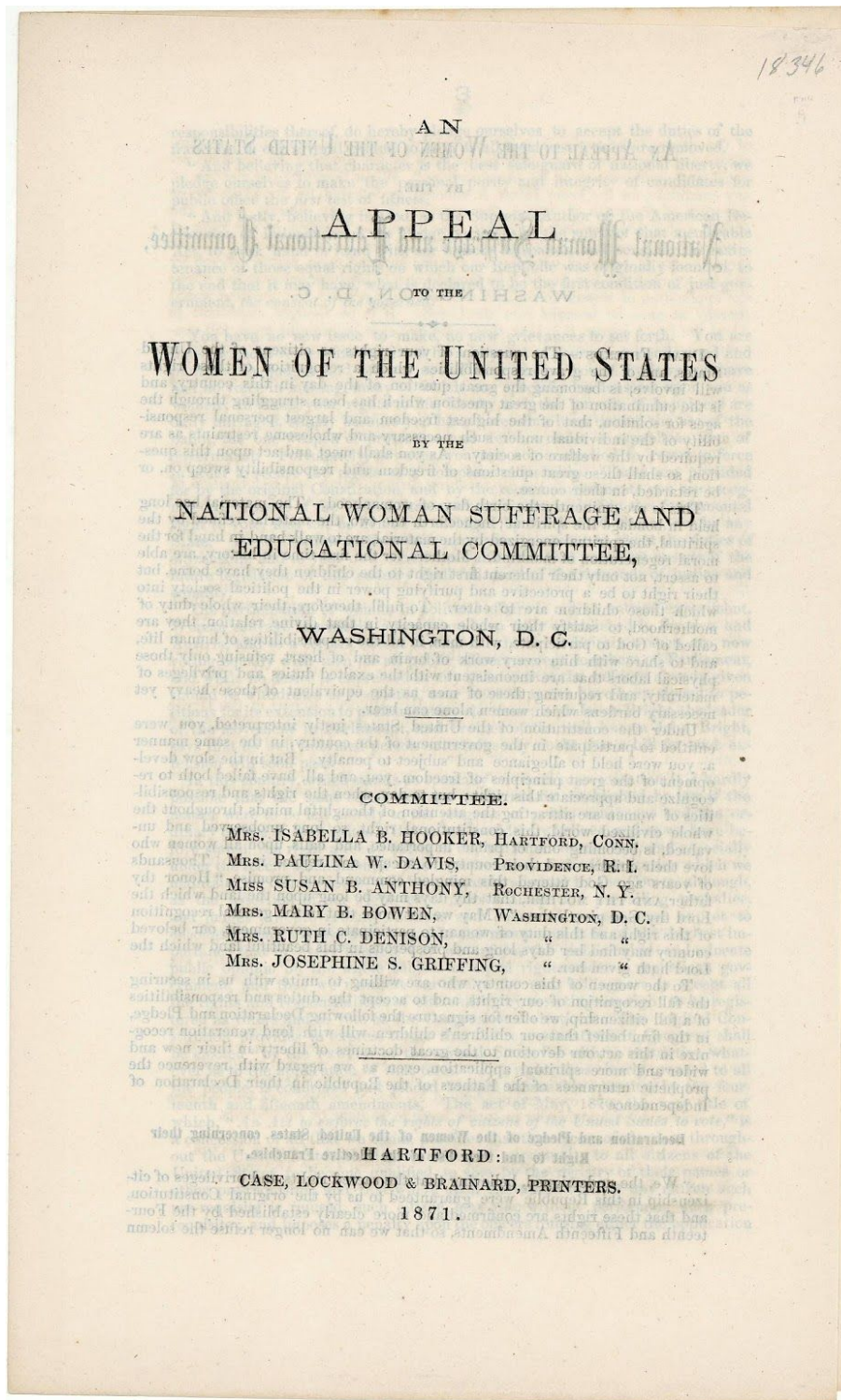
Questions for Discussion

Answer the following questions based on the introduction and excerpt, the transcript, and your knowledge of American history.

1. What constitutional arguments did women offer as a legal basis for their right to vote?
2. According to the pamphlet, what rights and responsibilities were included in the “whole duty of motherhood”?
3. What evidence indicates that the leaders of the National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee were trying to appeal to a very broad audience in a non-threatening way?
4. According to the pamphlet, what evidence is there that women’s right to vote was not an “untried experiment”?
5. What characteristics did the authors indicate were important qualifications for candidates for political office?
6. What did the National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee urge both men and women to do to advance the cause of suffrage rights?
7. What was the most powerful argument put forward in this pamphlet? To whom would it appeal?

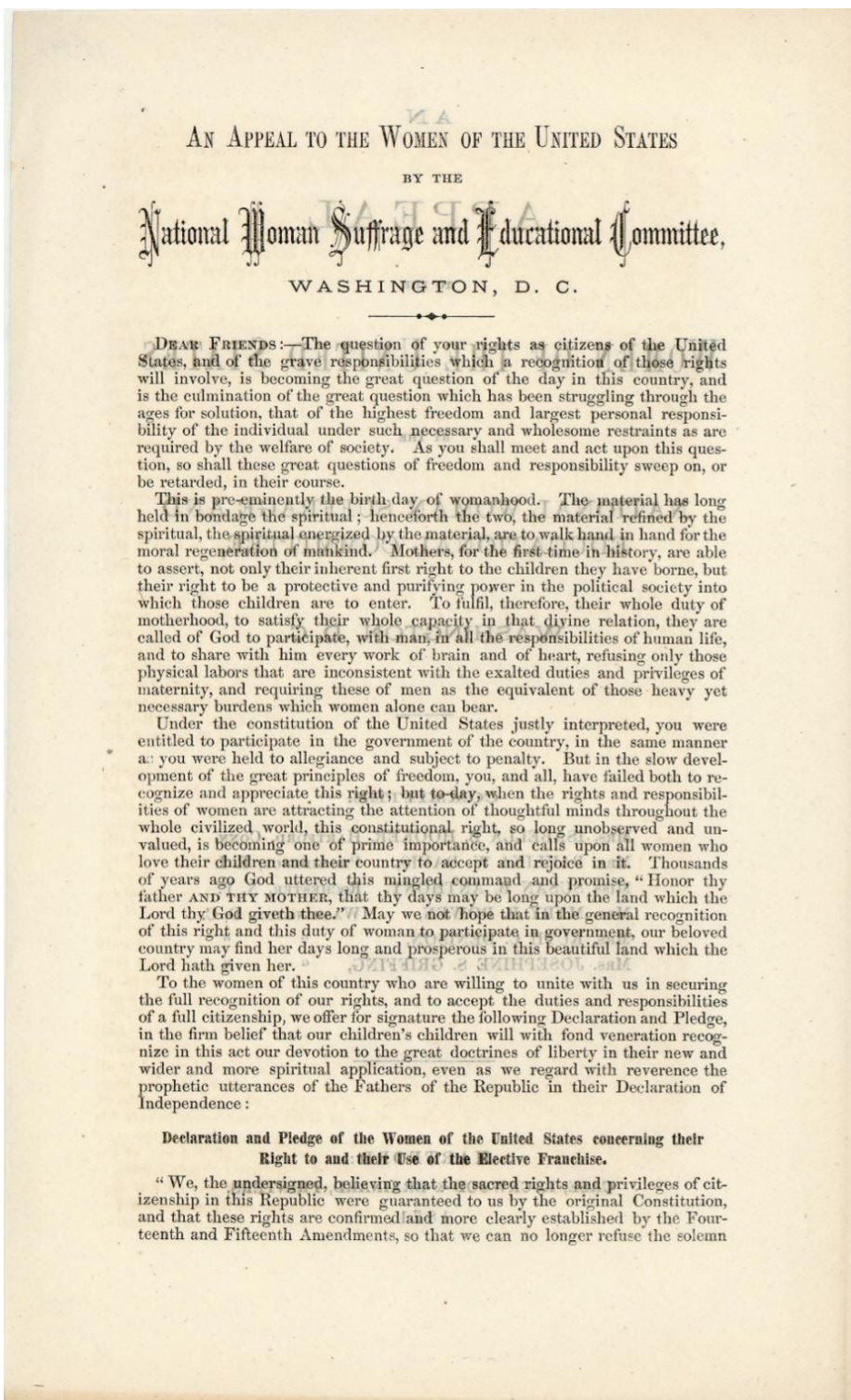
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Images



An Appeal to the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee, Hartford, CT, 1871. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC08999 p1)

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An Appeal to the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee, Hartford, CT, 1871. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC08999 p2)

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Transcript

[An Appeal to the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee. Hartford, Connecticut, 1871.]

AN
 APPEAL
 TO THE
 WOMEN OF THE UNITED STATES
 BY THE
 NATIONAL WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND
 EDUCATIONAL COMMITTEE,
 WASHINGTON, D.C

 COMMITTEE.
 MRS. ISABELLA B. HOOKER, HARTFORD, CONN.
 MRS. PAULINA W. DAVIS, PROVIDENCE, R.I.
 MISS. SUSAN B. ANTHONY, ROCHESTER, N.Y.
 MRS. MARY B. BOWEN, WASHINGTON, D.C.
 MRS. RUTH C. DENISON, “ “
 MRS. JOSEPHINE S. GRIFFING, “ “

 HARTFORD:
 CASE, LOCKWOOD & BRAINARD, PRINTERS.
 1871.

[2]AN APPEAL TO THE WOMEN OF THE UNITED STATES
 BY THE
 National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee,
 WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEAR FRIENDS: – The question of your rights as citizens of the United States, and of the grave responsibilities which a recognition of those rights will involve, is becoming the great question of the day in this country, and is the culmination of the great question which has been struggling through the ages for solution, that of the highest freedom and largest personal responsibility of the individual under such necessary and wholesome restraints as are required by the welfare of society. As you shall meet and act upon this question, so shall these great questions of freedom and responsibility sweep on, or be retarded, in their course.

This is pre-eminently the birth day of womanhood. The material has long held in bondage the spiritual; henceforth the two, the material refined by the spiritual, the spiritual energized by the material, are to walk hand in hand for the moral regeneration of mankind. Mothers, for the first time in history, are able to assert, not only their inherent first right to the

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children they have borne, but their right to be a protective and purifying power in the political society into which those children are to enter. To fulfil, therefore, their whole duty of motherhood, to satisfy their whole capacity in that divine relation, they are called of God to participate, with man, in all the responsibilities of human life, and to share with him every work of brain and of heart, refusing only those physical labors that are inconsistent with the exalted duties and privileges of maternity, and requiring these of men as the equivalent of those heavy yet necessary burdens which women alone can bear

Under the constitution of the United States justly interpreted, you were entitled to participate in the government of the country, in the same manner as you were held to allegiance and subject to penalty. But in the slow development of the great principles of freedom, you, and all, have failed both to recognize and appreciate this right; but to-day, when the rights and responsibilities of women are attracting the attention of thoughtful minds throughout the whole civilized world, this constitutional right, so long unobserved and unvalued, is becoming one of prime importance, and calls upon all women who love their children and their country to accept and rejoice in it. Thousands of years ago God uttered this mingled command and promise, "Honor thy father AND THY MOTHER, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." May we not hope that in the general recognition of this right and this duty of woman to participate in government, our beloved country may find her days long and prosperous in this beautiful land which the Lord hath given her.

To the women of this country who are willing to united with us in securing the full recognition of our rights, and to accept the duties and responsibilities of a full citizenship, we offer for signature the following Declaration and Pledge, in the firm belief that our children's children will with fond veneration recognize in this act our devotion to the great doctrines of liberty in their new and wider and more spiritual application, even as we regard with reverence the prophetic utterances of the Fathers of the Republic in their Declaration of Independence:

Declaration and Pledge of the Women of the United States concerning their Right to and their Use of the Elective Franchise.

"We, the undersigned, believing that the sacred rights and privileges of citizenship in this Republic were guaranteed to us by the original Constitution, and that these rights are confirmed and more clearly established by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, so that we can no longer refuse the solemn [3] responsibilities thereof, do hereby pledge ourselves to accept the duties of the franchise in our several States, so soon as all legal restrictions are removed.

"And believing that character is the best safe-guard of national liberty, we pledge ourselves to make the personal purity and integrity of candidates for public office the *first* test of fitness.

"And lastly, believing in God, as the Supreme Author of the American Declaration of Independence, we pledge ourselves in the spirit of that memorable Act, to work hand in hand with our fathers, husbands, and sons, for the maintenance of those equal rights on which our Republic was originally founded, to the end that it may have, what is declared to be the first condition of just government, *the consent of the governed.*"

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You have no new issue to make, no new grievances to set forth. You are taxed without representation, tried by a jury not of your peers, condemned and punished by judges and officers not of your choice, bound by laws you have had no voice in making, many of which are specially burdensome upon you as women; in short, your rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are daily infringed, simply because you have heretofore been denied the use of the ballot, the one weapon of protection and defence under a republican form of government. Fortunately, however, you are not compelled to resort to force in order to secure the rights of complete citizenship. These are provided for by the original Constitution, and by the recent amendments you are recognized as citizens of the United States, whose rights, including the fundamental right to vote may not be denied or abridged by the United States, nor by any State. The obligation is thus laid upon you to accept or reject the duties of citizenship, and to your own consciences and your God you must answer if the future legislation of this country shall fall short of the demands of justice and equality.

The participation of woman in political affairs is not an untried experiment. Woman suffrage has within a few years been fully established in Sweden and Austria, and to a certain extent in Russia. In Great Britain women are now voting equally with men for all public officers except members of Parliament, and while no desire is expressed in any quarter that the suffrage already given should be withdrawn or restricted, over 126,000 names have been signed to petitions for its extension to parliamentary elections; and Jacob Bright, the leader of the movement in Parliament, and brother of the well known John Bright, says that no well informed person entertains any doubt that a bill for such extension will soon pass.

In this country, which stands so specially on equal representation, it is hardly possible that the same equal suffrage would not be established by law if the matter were to be merely to the progress of public sentiment and the ordinary course of legislation. But as we confidently believe, and as we have before stated, the right already exists in our national constitution, and especially under the recent amendments. The interpretation of the Constitution which we maintain, we cannot doubt, will be ultimately adopted by the Courts, although, as the assertion of our right encounters a deep and prevailing prejudice, and judges are proverbially cautious and conservative, we must expect to encounter some adverse decisions. In the mean time it is of the highest importance that in every possible way we inform the public mind and educate public opinion on the whole subject of equal rights under a republican government, and that we manifest our desire for and willingness to accept all the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, by asserting our right to be registered as voters and to vote at the Congressional elections. The original Constitution provides in express terms that the representatives in Congress shall be elected "by the PEOPLE of the several States" — with no restriction whatever as to the application of that term. This right, thus clearly granted to all the people, is confirmed and placed beyond reasonable question by the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. The act of May, 1870, the very title of which, "*An Act to enforce the rights of citizens of the United States to vote,*" is a concession of all that claim, provides that the officers of elections throughout the United States shall give an equal opportunity to all citizens of the United States to become qualified to vote by the registry of their names or other prerequisite; and that where upon the application of any citizen such prerequisite is refused, such citizen may vote without performing such prerequisite; and imposes a penalty upon the officers refusing either the

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application [4] of the citizen to be qualified or his subsequent application to vote. The Constitution also provides that "each House shall be the judge of the elections, returns, and qualifications of its own members." When therefore the election of any candidate for the lower House is effected or defeated by the admission or rejection of the votes of women, the question is brought directly before the House, and it is compelled to pass at once upon the question of the right of women to vote under the Constitution. All this may be accomplished without the necessity of bringing suits for the penalty imposed upon public officers by the act referred to : but should it be thought best to institute prosecutions where the application of women to register and to vote is refused, the question would thereby at once be brought into the Courts. If it be thought expedient to adopt the latter course, it is best that some test case be brought upon full consultation with the National Committee, that the ablest counsel may be employed and the expenses paid out of the public fund. Whatever mode of testing the question shall be adopted, we must not be in the slightest degree discouraged by adverse decisions, for the final result in our favor is certain, and we have besides great reason to hope that Congress at an early day will pass a Declaratory Act affirming the interpretation of the Constitution which we claim.

The present time is specially favorable for the earnest presentation before the public mind of the question of the political rights of women. There are very positive indications of the approaching disintegration and reformation of political parties, and new and vital issues are needed by both the great parties of the country. As soon as the conviction possesses the public mind that women are to be voters at an early day, as they certainly are to be, the principles and action of public parties will be shaping themselves with reference to the demands of this new constituency. Particularly in nominations for office will the moral character of candidates become a matter of greater importance.

To carry on this great work a Board of six women had been established, called "The National Woman Suffrage and Educational Committee," whose office at Washington it is proposed to make the centre of all action upon Congress and the country, and with whom through their Secretary, resident there, it is desired that all associations and individuals interested in the cause of woman suffrage should place themselves in communication. The committee propose to circulate the very able and exhaustive Minority Report of the House Judiciary Committee on the constitutional right of woman to the suffrage, and other tracts on the general subject of woman suffrage. They also propose ultimately, and as a part of their educational work, to issue a series of tracts on subjects vitally affecting the welfare of the country, that women may become intelligent and thoughtful on such subjects, and the intelligent educators of the next generation of citizens.

The Committee are already receiving urgent appeals from women all over the United States to send them our publications. The little light they have already received concerning their rights under the constitution, and the present threatening political aspect of the country, make them impatient of ignorance on these vital points. A single Tract has often gone the rounds in a neighborhood until worn out, and the call is for thousands and thousands more.

A large printing fund will therefore be needed by the Committee, and we appeal first to the men of this country, who control so large a part of its wealth, to make liberal donations toward this great educational work. We also ask every thoughtful woman to send her name to

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the Secretary to be inserted in the Pledge Book, and if she is able, one dollar. But as many working women will have nothing to send but their names, we welcome these as a precious gift, and urge those who are able, to send us their fifties and hundreds, which we promise faithfully to use and account for. Where convenient it is better that many names should be sent upon the same paper and the smallest contributions in money can be put together and sent with them. Every signature and every remittance will be at once acknowledged by the Secretary, and one or more tracts enclosed, with a circular as to the work to be done by individuals.

ISABELLA BEECHER HOOKER, President.

JOSEPHINE S. GRIFFING, Secretary.

MARY B. BOWEN, Treasurer.

Washington, D. C., April 19, 1871.

PAULINA WRIGHT DAVIS.

RUTH CARR DENISON.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY.