

**Forging Bonds Across Borders:
Mobilizing for Women's Rights and Social
Justice in the Nineteenth-Century
Transatlantic World**

Veranstalter: Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson, German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.; Sonya Michel, University of Maryland, College Park; Anja Schüler, Heidelberg Center for American Studies, University of Heidelberg

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Bericht von: Sonya Michel, University of Maryland, College Park; Anja Schüler, Heidelberg Center for American Studies, University of Heidelberg

Historians have by now produced a rather extensive literature on national feminist movements as well as a number of bi-national and multi-national comparative studies of female mobilizations. But so far, few scholars have focused on the transnational, especially transatlantic, collaborations of women's rights activists throughout the long nineteenth century. This conference explored how female activists inside and outside of institutions and organizations exchanged ideas in the Atlantic world and collaborated across national borders and bodies of water and sometimes also across borders of race, class, and gender. It explored how, even without formal political rights, women were able to develop effective strategies and bases of power, working both within their own countries and through the personal transnational connections, alliances, and organizations they created. Their efforts eventually provided the foundations for worldwide organizations around issues as diverse as women's rights, protective labor legislation, and temperance.

The conference opened with a panel on „defining women's issues.“ BONNIE ANDERSON (New York) portrayed the life of freethinker Ernestine Rose, a life that developed transnationally and led her from her homeland, Poland, to Berlin, Paris, London, New York, and back to London. Rose's activism on both sides of the Atlantic ranged from advocating for women's property rights and a change in divorce laws to associ-

ating herself with freethinkers and pacifists. MARIYLN LAKE (Melbourne) then introduced another woman reformer whose work transcended national boundaries: the Scottish-born Australian journalist, feminist reformer, and Unitarian preacher Catherine Helen Spence. Spence traveled as an official delegate to the Conference on Charities at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 and then across the country, lecturing on women's suffrage, children's courts, boarding-out, education, and proportional representation. Assuming that women needed political rights to secure the welfare of women and children, Spence was amazed to find that American women were socially and economically advanced but politically relatively powerless. The panel concluded with a look at women's transnational work for peace. WENDY CHMIELEWSKI (Philadelphia) analyzed the so-called „Friendly Addresses“ that men and women in the U.S. and Britain signed in 1846 in relation to a boundary dispute between Canada and the U.S. The addresses exchanged between the women of Exeter and Philadelphia reflected the emerging but contested roles of women in the transatlantic antiwar movement. On the one hand, women left the domestic sphere by engaging in international politics, while on the other, they remained within their traditional gender role by addressing only their female counterparts.

That evening, MARGARET MCFADDEN (Chapel Hill) presented the conference keynote on „Mothers of the Matrix.“ As McFadden explained, the „matrix“ that laid the groundwork for women's transnational movements included opportunities for travel and education, participation in evangelical religion, missionary work and/or social reform, and improved means of communication. Anna Doyle Wheeler emphasized women's individualism and asserted that women's rights were human rights. Influenced by early nineteenth-century socialism, she criticized marriage for „reducing women to a state of helplessness“ and emphasized their need for suffrage. For Frederika Bremer, the bonds among women grew out of the familial ties between mothers, daughters, and sisters. A „relational feminist,“ she

sought signs of international commonality among women. Ray Strachey served as a bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, taking first radical and then more moderate positions on suffrage. Strachey, a prolific author, also ran for office and served as an assistant to Lady Astor, the first female member of the British Parliament.

The second day of the conference continued with a panel on women's transnational work for abolition and racial equality. STEPHANIE RICHMOND (Norfolk) presented on British and American abolitionist women who traveled to America, England, and France in the 1840s and 1850s to spread their antislavery message and strengthen international relations. Americans like Maria Weston Chapman, Sarah Pugh, and Sarah Parker Remond traveled alone or spoke to „mixed audiences“ of men and women, thus challenging the social norms of their respective cultures, opening paths for women political activists, and establishing women as authority figures. British Quaker Anne Knight promoted the cause of antislavery throughout France after male abolitionists refused to take up the opportunity, again challenging the restrictive gender roles of the Atlantic world. KATHARINA SCHMIDT (Princeton / New Haven) then looked at a German woman who joined the American abolitionist movement: Otilie Assing. The Hamburg-born writer and activist is best known for her relationship with Frederick Douglass, but she also pursued independent political projects. Assing was influenced by other émigré intellectuals and her membership in German-American immigrant networks. Schmidt focused on Assing's involvement in these networks, rather than on her personal ties with Douglass, arguing that Assing's antislavery activism emerged primarily from her identity as a „freethinker“ who favored feminism, atheism, and republicanism. In the final presentation of this panel, NOAQUIA CALLAHAN (Washington, D.C.) explored the transnational career of African American feminist Mary Church Terrell. Callahan described the 1904 Berlin Congress of the International Council of Women as a moment in which black and white, American and European feminists came together to exchange

ideas about issues of race, sexual violence, and woman suffrage. Published as part of the widely circulated proceedings of the Berlin congress, Terrell's address on the „Progress of Colored Women“ in the United States since the end of the Civil War met with great interest.

The conference's third panel examined networks created through words and images. CAROL STRAUSS SOTIROPOLUS (Marquette) looked at the connections between Margaret Fuller, one of the foremost American promoters of German literature, and author Bettina von Brentano-Arnim. While introducing her readers to Arnim's literary writings, Fuller remained silent about Arnim's social justice projects, creating the impression that Fuller was not interested in politics. Sotiropoulos showed, however, that Fuller was very familiar with the political system and power structures on the other side of the Atlantic but highly selective about the rhetoric strategies she deemed useful for her own purposes. ALLISON LANGE (Boston) went on to examine how the visual tactics of labor activists and suffragists in Britain informed parallel campaigns in the United States. Before World War I, strategies like parades, open-air meetings and lectures, picketing, and other publicity stunts imported from Britain generated popular support for woman suffrage and transformed women's relationship to politics; the imagery reveals much about the different tactics of the militant and moderate suffragists. The panel concluded with CHRISTINE NEEJER's (East Lansing) paper on women's international bicycling networks and the suffrage press women cyclists turned to in the 1890s to find advice about dress, riding styles, cycling-based travel, and international races. Neejer explored the transnational coverage of women's bicycling in British and American suffrage periodicals, which served as an international forum for collaboration and inspiration and shifted the boundaries between politics, sports, and leisure by positioning women's cycling within transatlantic networks.

The conference's fourth panel took a look at transnational connections among professional women. SARA KIMBLE (Chicago) documented the transatlantic alliance of legally-

oriented feminists in the *belle époque* that preceded women's right to practice law in France. Networks like the Women's International Bar Association developed along with the International Council of Women (ICW) and nurtured an international feminist lawyers' movement that worked simultaneously at the grass roots and the elite level. MARION RÖWEKAMP (Berlin) then examined how the ideas and activism the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine contributed to the campaign for transnational family law reform within the International Council of Women. She showed that the different ideas about legal reform in the national women's movements could translate into serious problems on the transnational level. At the same time, the legal debates in the ICW reveal the dynamics of trans- and international legislative work at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, MARGARET VIGIL-FOWLER (San Francisco) looked at the role of transatlantic networks in the Anglo-American medical women's movement. It re-examined the canonical nineteenth-century physicians Elizabeth Blackwell, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, and Sophia Jex-Blake within a transnational framework. These women were well aware that their work was setting an international precedent, especially for their counterparts in Britain. They met in person, maintained a prolific correspondence, and were well-connected to feminists, abolitionists, and suffragists on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the opening paper of the fifth panel on the global reach of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), THOMAS LAPPAS (Rochester) outlined the WCTU's contradictory policies toward American Indians. While on the one hand pursuing a goal of „kill the Indian, save the man“ and attempting to destroy the reservations, on the other hand it recognized the existence of a Native American nation with a distinct culture, one whose people had rights but also needed protection from the evils of drink. LORI OSBORNE (Evanston) followed with a paper on the WCTU in India, tracing the different paths three activists took there. Pandita Ramabai, concerned with the plight of child widows, established special schools for them. Frances Willard saw India as an opportunity to in-

ternationalize the WCTU and use temperance as a platform to strengthen women's position within the family and expand their rights. Mary Leavitt, who spent more time on the ground, formed numerous WCTU chapters and prevailed upon Indian men to create their own, facing opposition from British officials for speaking to mixed audiences. Concluding the panel, JESSICA PLILEY (San Marcos) looked at the WCTU's role in the campaign against human trafficking, tracing the tensions between figures like Josephine Butler, who sought to repeal Britain's Contagious Diseases Act, which effectively legalized prostitution, and the WCTU's Kate Bushnell, who believed it was important to hear the voices of women in the sex trade and improve their conditions.

The final panel on protecting women and children began with a paper by EVA PAYNE (Cambridge) that intricately analyzed the three-way debate over age-of-consent laws in Britain, the United States, and India. She showed how the U.S. women physicians who were concerned with this issue played the three countries off against one another, using claims to „civilization“ as a lever. ANN TAYLOR ALLEN (Louisville) then described how women reformers around the world, drawing on the ideas of German education pioneer Friedrich Froebel, promoted the establishment of kindergartens as a way of advancing themselves professionally. Finally, SONYA MICHEL (College Park) read a paper by MINEKE BOSCH (Groningen) which traced the international transfer of birth control knowledge by looking at how the „Dutch cap,“ an early contraceptive device, got its name. One of its chief advocates was the Dutch feminist Aletta Jacobs, who encountered opposition from colleagues who feared that birth control advocacy would taint the suffrage movement.

Bosch's point segued smoothly into the wrap-up discussion of themes that had emerged throughout the conference. The papers had shown that women's strategies changed over the course of the „long nineteenth century“ as permanent organizations were formed, yet national political and legal contexts as well as cultures constrained efforts at reform. Participants emphasized the im-

portance of considering philanthropy as well as government policies, comparing individual and organizational techniques, and noted the irony that international figures often drop out of national narratives. The papers had shown that women formed bonds across borders in different ways, as individuals, through organizations, and with the help of publications. In addition, participants identified several themes that connected the panels, like the aspiration of „universal sisterhood,“ which could culminate in social movements and the transfer of knowledge. They also agreed that many papers were contributions to the historiographic trend of „new biography.“ Given the coherence of the papers and their many original findings, the participants concluded that an edited volume should be feasible.

Conference Overview

Panel 1: Defining Women’s Issues: Suffrage and Pacifism

Bonnie Anderson (CUNY): Transatlantic Free-thinker, Feminist and Pacifist: Ernestine Rose in the 1870s

Marilyn Lake (University of Melbourne): More nearly of Kin – Catherine Helen Spence and Anna Garlin Spencer, Advanced Women in New Worlds in New Conversations

Wendy E. Chmielewski (Swarthmore College Peace Collection): Women’s Work against War: The Mid-Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Peace Movement

Keynote Lecture

Margaret McFadden (Appalachian State University): Mothers of the Matrix – Anna, Fredrika and Ray: Forging Bonds of Feminist Activism

Panel 2: Joining other Struggles: Women’s Transnational Work for Abolition and Racial Equality

Stephanie Richmond (Norfolk State University): Abolitionists Abroad: Women, Travel and Abolitionist Networks

Katharina Isabel Schmidt (Princeton and Yale): Strategically Navigating the Publicist Sphere: Otilie Assing and America’s German-Intellectual Communities, 1865–1884

Noaquia Callahan (GHI): A Rare Colored Bird: Mary Church Terrell, *Die Fortschritte der farbigen Frauen* (The Progress of Colored Women), and the International Council of Women’s Congress in Berlin, Germany 1904

Panel 3: Creating Networks through Words and Images

Carol Strauss Sotiropoulos (Northern Michigan University): Speaking Truth to Divergent Powers: Margaret Fuller, Bettine von Arnim and the Broken Bond

Allison Lange (Wentworth Institute of Technology): British Suffragists, Labor Activists and the American Suffragists’ Visual Campaign

Christine Neejer (Michigan State University): Riding Locally, Reading Transnationally: Women’s International Cycling Networks and the Suffrage Press

Panel 4: Professions as a Base for Feminist Mobilization

Sara Kimble (DePaul University): Transatlantic Networks for Legal Feminism, 1888–1900

Marion Röwekamp (Freie Universität Berlin): Reform Claims in Family Law and Legal Struggles within the International Council of Women, 1888–1914

Margaret Vigil-Fowler (University of California, San Francisco): Friends Across an Ocean: The Role of Transatlantic Networks in the Anglo-American Medical Women’s Movement

Panel 5: The Global Reach of the WCTU

Thomas Lappas (Nazareth College): Mixed Messages in the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s Publications: Destroying and Uplifting American Indian Nations

Lori Osborne (Frances Willard Memorial Library and Archives): The World’s Woman’s Christian Temperance Union: An Early Transnational Women’s Organization and its Struggle to Grow and Thrive in India

Jessica R. Pliley (Texas State University): Mobilizing against Trafficking: Transna-

tional Feminist Coalitions against Consuming Women's Bodies

Panel 6: Protecting Women and Children: Feminism by Other Means?

Eva Payne (Harvard University): A Battle for Sound Morality: The Age of Consent Campaigns in the United States and India

Ann Taylor Allen (University of Louisville): The Transatlantic Kindergarten Movement, 1840s–1917

Mineke Bosch (Maastricht University): Aletta Jacobs and the Dutch Cap: Transfer of Knowledge in the Changing Transnational Networks of Birth Control Activists

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