



Women's Political Rights In Connecticut 1830-1980

Curriculum Unit 81.ch.08
by Whitney C. Russell

Republicanism : a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to them and governing according to the law.

Liberty : the state or quality of being free, the power to do as one pleases and be free from physical restraint, the positive enjoyment of various social, political, or economic rights and privileges.

Equality : the state of being alike in status, quality, or nature. *Feminism* : the theory of the political economic and social equality of the sexes, and organized in an activity on behalf of women,s rights.

Autonomy : the state or quality of being self-governing, self-directing freedom and especially moral independence.

Emancipation: the releasing of a person from paternal care and responsibility, and making one free.

Civil Rights : the nonpolitical rights of a citizen, especially the rights of personal liberty guaranteed to U.S. citizens by the 13th & 14th Amendments to the Constitution and by Acts of Congress.

Suffrage : the vote or franchise used by a citizen in deciding a question or choosing a person for an elective office.

SKILLS:.

Historical Analysis : the separating of a whole picture into its component parts through short essay, outline, timeline and debate formats.

Historical Cause and Effect : explaining the sequential relationship between two historical facts or situations with answers to the questions when, how and why.

Historical Comparison and Contrast : an examination of two or more items to establish their similarities and their differences.

Oral History : historical information that is obtained through interviews with persons who have participated in the event under study or with the subject being analyzed. Interviews are usually tape recorded.

Infusion History : the method of integrating one limited aspect of history into a larger historical survey.

THE FOUR HISTORICAL ERAS:

Connecticut Women in the Reform Era, 1830 1860s.

Connecticut Women in the Progressive Era, 1870s 1910.

Connecticut Women in the Era of the World Wars, 1910s 1950.

Connecticut Women in the Modern Era, 1950s to the present.

LESSON PLANS: for two or three days.

1. Present a brief lecture on the history of Catharine Beecher and the Reform Era, or have students read photocopies of the material.
2. Discuss with your students their views on Beecher's cult of domesticity and its presence in our society.
3. Give as in-class work or homework assignments some or all of the following passages from Beecher. Have your students write a one paragraph analysis of her central points. Have your students use selected quotations from these writings to validate their observations. The passages are on the next page.
4. Consider a possible debate between Catharine Beecher, played by a student volunteer, and either Susan B. Anthony or Elizabeth Cady Stanton from New York. Most libraries will now have biographies on these women for those who wish to research their views.

KEY QUESTIONS: Covering a two or three day assignment.

1. Can you recognize the decidedly conservative and traditional points of view in Catharine Beecher's writings on the theory of domesticity? [Consider statements made by Kathryn Sklar in her book *Catharine Beecher; A Study in American Domesticity* . Here she discusses the potential isolation that Beecher's view could cause in the rapidly changing life styles of 19th-century America.]
2. Knowing that Reverend Lyman Beecher was a strong and dynamic social leader, can you explain the influence such a parent might well have on a daughter as well as on a son? [Have students look at their own parental relationships, and consider research in the early chapters in Sklar's book on *Catharine Beecher* .]
3. Would your understanding that Beecher's views found wide acceptance in antebellum

Connecticut help to support the view that the state’s society was one that held very strong ties with the ways of the past? [Thus making Connecticut at least during the first half of the century a state “ruled” by the attitude of maintaining the “Steady Habits.”]

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Connecticut Women in the Progressive Era, 1870s-1910; Isabella Beecher Hooker, 1820-1907, et al.

With the Seneca Falls *Declaration of Sentiment* in 1848, the American women’s political rights movement began in earnest. Women from many states and walks of life were able, probably for the first time, to identify common grievances and realize that they were not alone. A woman’s rights convention was held every year in New York state from 1850 to 1860, with the exception of 1857. Women’s political consciousness also developed through their participation in early reform and the abolition movement. With the ending of the Civil War, the knowledge and experiences gained through participation in these earlier activities, and the fact that American women were no better off after than before the war, caused women’s rightists to work with renewed efforts.

After the Civil War, as before, women were interested in establishing rights and equality through property reform, control of earnings, educational and work opportunities, labor regulations, guardianship rights over children, and equal legal status. For a number of women’s rightists suffrage became the major goal. This emphasis was in part women’s reaction to the Republican and abolitionist request for them to hold off on woman suffrage demands. Behind this request was men’s belief that suffrage for Negro males could not be attained if it were connected to a women,s suffrage amendment. The results were a renewed unity and activism among women suffragists, and the realization once again that male power was forcing women to take self-sacrificing action.

Women now began to organize on state and national levels for their right to vote. It was at this time in the late 1860s that Isabella Beecher Hooker of Hartford founded the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association in Hartford. Beginning at the age of 47 Isabella Hooker sought to lead Connecticut women in obtaining the vote. She allied herself with other national woman suffragists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Paulina Wright Davis, and Olympia Brown. She corresponded with these and many other woman suffragists in Connecticut and around the nation. She delivered many speeches within Connecticut and on national lecture tours. She wrote legislation and testified before state and federal legislative committees. Finally, in 1889 Isabella and her husband John put their words and thoughts into action in Hartford by promoting two limited woman suffrage bills before the state legislature.

While such attempts had been tried before in Connecticut and in numerous other states, the suffragist and anti-suffragist arguments surrounding this event are quite worthy of our analysis. The two suffrage bills proposed by Isabella Hooker sought the vote by women on the local option sale of liquor and on local school issues. The advocacy of a limited suffrage for women, and the tactics that Mrs. Hooker used to seek its approval represent an excellent model for subsequent efforts in other states. [A limited success for Connecticut suffragists was achieved in 1893 when local communities could let women vote on education issues.] These early activities and the arguments for and against the legislation were also important in preparing the way for the final years of the struggle between 1916 and 1920 for woman's suffrage gained in the Nineteenth Amendment.

4. Have your students debate or discuss the similarities and differences between the two women's rights perspectives. These are the Code of Domesticity and the principle of Equal Political Participation.
5. Consider a class field trip to Nook farm in Hartford. This is where the Beechers, Hookers, Stowes, Mark Twain lived. It's on Farmington Ave near exit 46 off of Rt. 84. The tours and the sights are alive with social, political, and architectural history.

KEY QUESTIONS: Covering a few days assignment.

1. What might the positive and negative effects on society and on women be if they possessed the vote and the right to run for elective office?
2. Would Isabella Beecher Hooker be described by her peers as being a progressive and liberal thinker, or as a conservative? Which political label would fit her today?
3. Does the failure of the 1889 limited woman suffrage bills indicate that Connecticut is still a conservative, and "Steady Habits" state?

Bibliographical citations for Isabella Hooker, et al.

Hooker, Isabella Beecher. *The Constitutional Rights of the Women of the United States* . Washington, D.C.: International Council of women, 1888.

———. *Memorial of Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association to the Constitutional Convention* . Hartford.: Plimpton Mfg. Co., 1902.

———. *Womanhood; Its Sanctities and Fidelities* . New York: Lee, Shepard and Dillingham, 1874.

Farnam, Anne. "Isabella Beecher Hooker," *Bulletin of the Connecticut Historical Society* 36 (April, 1971): 41-51.

Stowe-Day Foundation. *Isabella Beecher Hooker Project* . Hartford: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1979.

Connecticut Women in the World Wars Era" 1910s-1940s , Katharine Houghton Hepburn and Charlotte Perkins Gilman

By the early 1900s the founders of the woman suffrage movement in Connecticut and the nation were gone. Lucy Stone died in 1893, Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1902, Susan B. Anthony in 1906, and Isabella Beecher Hooker in 1907. Their deaths marked the end of an era and the end of the second phase of the women's rights movement. These deaths created a temporary vacuum in the movement's leadership. But new women did joined the state and national suffrage organizations. These new women brought new policies and ideas on suffrage and other women's issues to revitalize the organizations in Connecticut and on the national level. Carrie Chapman Catt and Harriot Stanton Blatch instilled new life into the suffrage movement with the formation of the Woman's Political Union. New tactics of spreading suffrage propaganda and interacting with the male power structure were initiated by these women. This new generation believed that health care, reform of living and working conditions, and educational reforms were political causes just as much as the right to vote. Thus, many women now thought that aggressive political tactics would be necessary to gain any or all of these reforms.

In Connecticut during this time, two women wrote, lectured, and demonstrated for equal rights for women. While the suffrage issue dominated the activities and writings of Katherine Houghton Hepburn (1878-1941) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) they and other Connecticut women spoke out on a wide variety of women's issues. Job opportunities, working conditions, birth control, social welfare, domestic and living conditions attracted their attention. Both Hepburn and Gilman were from Hartford of the educated elite.* Each woman, in her own fashion, was a proponent of a united woman's movement. Such a union of women and women's organizations could well achieve equality in politics, business, employment, and social welfare. One reason women had always sought to vote was to be able to pressure legislators into writing reform laws in these areas.

Katharine Houghton Hepburn, described as one who was committed to the suffrage movement, was an early advocate of birth control. She worked along side of the famous Margaret Sanger in seeking to overturn oppressive birth control and anti-abortion laws. She also picketed before the White House for better working conditions for women. Hepburn spoke throughout Connecticut and New England against women's enslavement in the home and the work place. Paradoxically, she was the mother of six children and in bearing them, she had expressed her "love for her husband who profoundly wanted children." However, she was clearly aware of the fact that, "for many poorer women, bearing children was simply an onerous duty, seriously affecting their health, welfare and psychological development." Her husband, the successful physician Dr. Thomas Hepburn, enthusiastically shared her views on women's rights. He too became an early supporter of birth control, and together the Hepburns stood for respect for freedom of thought, and the encouragement of freedom of movement for each person.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman earned an enormous reputation in her life time. She, like Isabella Hooker and

Katharine Hepburn are almost unknown today. It was through her writings that she became a famous and serious critic of society and history, and in early 1900s believed that:

It is only in social relationships that we are human, and thus, to be human, women must share in the totality of humanity's common life. Women, forced to lead restricted lives, retard all human progress. Growth of the organism, the individual or the social body, requires the use of all of our powers in four areas; physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social. In each, women are still denied their equal share of human activities. ³

Like her earlier Beecher relatives, Mrs. Gilman lectured upon her theoretical view of the world. This view on humankind in the future would achieve a new society based on combining the principles of feminism and socialism. She concluded that women, as a collective entity, could if they so chose become the peaceful moving force in the reorganization of society.

Before reading the selected passages from Hepburn and Gilman, we should consider the following lesson plans and historical questions for use with students.

LESSON PLANS: For two or three days.

1. Present a brief lecture on the history of Hepburn and Gilman during the World Wars Era, or have your students read photocopies on the material.
 2. Have your interested students research the difference between the attitudes and actions of the Women's political Union and the earlier National American Woman Suffrage Association. They could research encyclopedias, women's history texts, and personal histories of the women who participated in these groups. Your students could give a brief description of their findings to the class, or write on their political values and contributions.
 3. Give some or all of Hepburn's and Gilman's readings to the class as in-class or homework assignments. Have them compare or contrast these two women's ideas, or analyze one or both of their writings. Have students use selected quotations from these writings to validate their opinions.
 4. Alice Paul was from Connecticut and wrote the national Equal Rights Amendment in 1923. The Amendment stated:
Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction.
Have some or all of your students conduct a brief research of Alice Paul's life and political career, and write a brief essay on this women in the inter-war era.
 - *5. Any students interested in developing an oral history project of this era could study the original and radio tapes of 20 Connecticut women who participated in state politics between 1920 and 1945. The originals of this collection entitled, "The Emergence of Political Women in Connecticut, 1920-45" is on file at the center for Oral History, University of Connecticut at Storrs. The project was conducted by Carole Nicols & Joyce Pendery.
- KEY QUESTIONS: Covering the two or three day assignments.
1. Why did women in Connecticut and throughout the nation achieve woman suffrage in 1920, when they could not in earlier decades?

2. Can political and philosophical differences be found between the woman suffragists of the progressive era and the women politicians of the world wars era?

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3. Can Connecticut's ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, shortly after Tennessee had ratified the amendment as the required 36th state, be a further example of our state's conservative and "Steady Habits" character?

Connecticut Women in the Modern Era, 1950 to the Present

Mrs. A. Whitney Griswold, Mrs. Ella T. Grasso. Barbara Lifton, and Griswold V. Connecticut.

Anna Howard Shaw, a suffragist leader and the Director of the Committee of Women's Defense in World War I, stated in 1920 that:

Despite the political progress for women accomplished by the 19th Amendment, women, especially young women, will face great difficulties that having the vote will not solve. You younger women will have a harder task than ours. You will want equality in business, and it will be even harder to get than the vote. You will have to fight for it as individuals and that will not get you far. Women will not unite, since you will be in competition with each other.

By the 1920s and '30s the unity that had existed among women no longer existed. Women's rights leaders were still calling for unity, but there was very little response. Suffragist and other women's rights activists discovered that their right to vote seemed to give women less political power, not more. In Connecticut this problem clearly existed, especially because women did not wish to form a united bloc of voters, and because

the Democratic Party was not able to become a viable alternative to the Republicans. Early attempts to ratify the 1923 Equal Rights Amendment, written by Connecticut woman Alice Paul, illustrate the problem. In Connecticut and around the country numerous conservative groups joined with many labor and even women's organizations to oppose the ERA and work for more protective legislation for women. The general belief now ran that political and economic rights of women would be better advanced by government's protective legislation than through complete equality with men in open competition.

Progress for women was quite gradual in Connecticut, and at times the appearance of progress in the political sphere of life was not progress at all. Women were entering government service in both bureaucratic and elective offices. By the late 1930s twenty percent of the federal bureaucracy were women. In Connecticut's House of Representatives the percentage of women representatives was as follows:

1921 = 4 of 262, or 1.5%

1927 = 14 of 267, or 5.3%

1931 = 21 of 267, or 7.9%

1937 = 21 of 267, or 8.0%

1941 = 19 of 272, or 7.0%

1947 = 32 of 272, or 12.1%

1951 = 34 of 272, or 12.5%

1957 = 45 of 279, or 16.1%

1961 = 52 of 294, or 17.7%

1967 = 19 of 177, or 10.8%

1971 = 16 of 151, or 10.6%

1977 = 27 of 151, or 17.8% ⁵

World War II had a slight affect on the number of women participating in elective offices. Opportunities in industry improved for women as the armament and related industries began a new era of economic prosperity in Connecticut. Yet, through the second World War and into the 1950s little change occurred. Republican women made up most of the women state legislators during this period, and their view of politics was to support the status quo. A survey made at the end of the war in 1945 presents another view of this traditionalist attitude in Connecticut.

The average thinking American woman has a fairly modest, though as yet utopian, dream of the good life. It would be something like this: She would live in a comfortable, though not pretentious home, probably with a backyard grill, equipped by science to relieve her from drudgery and give her time for the subtler phases of homemaking. Her husband would have a secure and stable job in an economy that had a minimum of unemployment. He would probably work six hours per day, thus having time to help make the home a center of education and enjoyment. ⁶

By the late 1950s this image of the ideal, traditional woman was stated and refined hundreds, even thousands, of times in magazine articles, and over radio and television. However, an alternative picture of woman's life was gradually developing in Connecticut and across the country.

While a few Connecticut women, such as Claire Boothe Luce and Chase Going Woodhouse, attained either national or state offices respectively, they were successful as individuals. Most were not open, outspoken, or active in support of women's causes and rights. They were successful because they adapted to the male power structure, gaining and using the political support of men. Thus, from the 1920s through the 1950s, the words of Anna Howard Shaw rang true.

Historical progress, however, runs in cycles, and in the early 1960s a renewed women's political consciousness experienced a renaissance. Women became involved increasingly in paid employment and became aware of political injustices and inequalities that needed to be redressed. Connecticut women became active in court actions, in writing the new state constitution, and running for elective office in response to the 1964 Supreme Court decision on "one man one vote." Women now re-established the old belief of the turn of the century that direct political action and participation by women was the better and just way to improve society and attain equal status for women.

The 1964 federal Civil Rights Act, furthered women's awareness that legislative assemblies and the courts were institutions that could begin to correct problems of sex discrimination. Connecticut women were initiating court cases, running for local, state, and federal offices, and joining in numerous political organizations, such as the Connecticut Women's Political Caucus and the Connecticut chapters of the National Organization for Women. The Black civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War protests had been both a consciousness raising experience and a training ground for the development of political organization and tactics. By the early 1970s Connecticut women were increasingly ready to actively work within the political system to remedy their own conditions.

The following Connecticut women and court cases will illustrate some characteristics of the modern women's political rights movement. You will be able to see the scope and depth that women's political consciousness has achieved. In order to help your students appreciate the opinions of these participants, a series of brief background sketches is provided. Mary B. Griswold, referred to below as Mrs. A. Whitney Griswold, is the first participant mentioned and she earned a B. A. degree from Smith College. Ella T. Grasso is the second to be studied and she earned her B. A. degree from Mt. Holyoke College. Barbara Lifton is the third women studied in the political arena of Connecticut and she earned her law degree from the University of Connecticut.

LESSON PLANS: For two or three days.

1. Present a brief lecture on the history of some of the important women of this modern era, or have your students read photocopies of the material.
2. Have interested students research such present women's organizations as Connecticut N.O.W. and the Connecticut Women's Political Caucus. They can contact public relations chairpersons in local chapters or on the state level. Your students can research to find their philosophies, tactics, and accomplishments, and return to the class with an oral or written presentation.

3. Give some or all of the readings and descriptive biographies to your students. Have them compare and contrast the women involved. Have your students use quotations from these women to validate their own observations.
4. Claire Booth Luce and Chase Going Woodhouse were very important Connecticut women involved in federal and state politics respectively. Have your students research these women's political lives and write brief descriptive biographies like those that follow.
5. Any student interested in developing an oral history project on political women of this modern period should contact the Women's Political Caucus in the state to find the names, addresses, and phone numbers of nearby Connecticut women they might want to interview.

KEY QUESTIONS: Covering the two or three day assignments.

1. Has the women's movement in Connecticut helped to advance the political nature and structure of state politics? If so, why has the women's movement been successful? If not, what facts have limited the potential success of the women's movement?
2. Can you explain the existence of at least two different perspectives of thought and action within the Connecticut women's rights and feminist movements?
3. After reading statements by women like Mrs. A. Whitney Griswold and Barbara Lifton, would you conclude that politically, Connecticut is still a state of "Steady Habits?"

Bibliographical sources for learning about modern women. Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Phone # 1-566-4192. *Connecticut Register and Manual* . Hartford: Yearly 1785 to 1980. The Women's Studies Program and Center at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Ct. Phone # 1-486-3970. *University of Connecticut Oral History Project* , Storrs Campus.

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Notes

*Advocacy of woman suffrage in New England went back at least as far as Abigail Adams' letters to her husband John in 1776. In one letter Abigail Adams wrote that the "women would not be bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." This can be interpreted as a call for woman suffrage.

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman was related to the famous Beecher family

1. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973. p. 85.
2. Anne Farnam, "Isabella Beecher Hooker," *The Bulletin* . Vol. 36, No. 2, Ap., 1971. p. 43.
3. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* . New York: Pantheon Books, 1979. p. xi.
4. Beth Millstein and Jeanne Bodin, *We, the American Women* . Toronto: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1977. p. 202.
5. *Connecticut Register and Manual* , Hartford: 1921-1977.
6. Millstein, *Women* . p. 238.

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