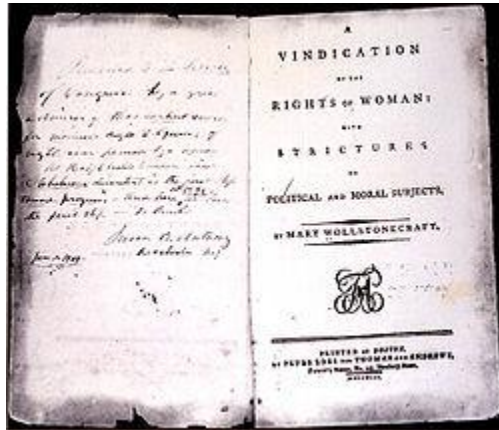


**Interventions: Women’s Rights and Women Write--  
Seeking Suffrage and Women’s Rights:  
A Collaborative Transatlantic Endeavour**



This week we will be building upon prior readings by continuing to follow bodies and texts as they moved across the ocean and participated in an important reform issue, suffragism and women’s rights. We will also continue to consider transatlantic networks that resulted in cross-national collaboration.

Western feminism has long been a transnational phenomenon, beginning with the “*querelles des femmes*” (women’s quarrel) among Renaissance humanists (which included both women and men writing in France, Italy, and England). Nineteenth-century women’s rights activism also involved multiple nations since the French Revolution as well as the American Revolution were key factors in opening the way to envision a modern society reorganized upon new terms.

If you are unfamiliar with the history of the women’s rights movement, you might want to start your reading with historian Sandra Holton’s essay, which, along with consideration of the personal transatlantic experiences of the American Elizabeth Cady Stanton, provides useful historical background on larger trends.

Here’s the citation: **Sandra Stanley Holton, “‘To Educate Women into Rebellion’: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Creation of a Transatlantic Network of Radical Suffragists.” *The American Historical Review*, 99.4 (Oct., 1994): 1112-1136. [Available through the TCU library via JSTOR]**

To utilize the Holton essay for building a chronological framework, you’ll want to note a date and an event that’s actually positioned about a quarter of the way through the essay, on page 1116: in locating the beginning of the American Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s links to the British

suffrage movement in 1840, at the World Anti-slavery Convention in London, Holton alerts us to several important points, some explicit here, some implicit:

- There were important connections (personal and political, logistical and intellectual) between the abolitionist enterprise/network and the community working for suffrage; more specifically, many women participated in both efforts (which also had some overlap with the temperance movement).
- As we saw from our discussion of EBB's poetry in the *Liberty Bell* last week, leaders of these movements on both sides of the ocean collaborated in longstanding ways, and they used various nineteenth-century technologies (like steam ships for travel and print publication to share ideas).
- Key figures from one movement (like William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglas and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the US) interacted with and built sustained friendships with British counterparts (exemplified in Holton's article, in part, by what she terms the Bright kinship circle).
- We can point to key transatlantic moments in these ongoing movements—including this one in 1840 but also others Holton treats in the article.
- Along with the pattern of collaboration, we need to track significant differences between the different national communities in this longstanding interaction, including contrasts in style, at times, but also different points of view around core issues (such as coverture and married women's voting).

In addition to providing us with an overview of the suffrage movement by following Stanton's moves back and forth across the Atlantic (while focusing on the years when she spent extensive time in Britain after her daughter's marriage there), Holton's essay suggests several other topics we'll want to discuss:

- It reminds us that the "influence" process can be tracked in both directions—i.e., not just British women writers' impact on the U.S. women's rights movement, but vice versa. In this context, this article demonstrates both the central role of Elizabeth Cady Stanton as an *individual leader* and the tendency of women's networks to be reciprocal.
- The essay also exemplifies how work in transatlantic studies "looks" different when carried out by an historian than it does when developed by a scholar whose primary training is in literature and/or cultural studies. In that vein, what are some markers you notice of this essay's being an example of historical work on transatlantic suffrage?
- In light of the question above, how might a literature or cultural studies scholar build on Holton's work with additional research and analysis? What kinds of texts would you want to

bring into play, and how? What methods of interpretation might you use, and why? What additional figures might be worth exploring?

- As a side note, but one helping us see the connections across various weeks' themes in the course, what do you make of Holton's statement that Stanton's impact on the British suffrage movement provides evidence of a "Garrisonian legacy within the British movement"—i.e., of connections between the radical wings of abolitionist work in the U.S. and British suffrage politics?
- How does this account of Stanton's interactions with British leaders of the suffrage movement both point to the power of social, even friendly, networks of women and also underscore some points of tension and differences between the U.S. and English counterparts campaigning for women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

### **Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)**

The excerpt from this book (chapter 2) available on eCollege also includes a brief headnote giving key details in Wollstonecraft's life and writing career that led up to her 1792 *Vindication*. It omits that Thomas Paine, author of *The Rights of Man*—so important a text in pre-Revolutionary America—was another member of her circle in Newington Green, as was William Blake. For further background on Wollstonecraft's publication you might like to check the overview provided by the distinguished Romanticist scholar Anne Mellor on BRANCH, a peer-reviewed, open-access website devoted to forming an historical timeline of nineteenth-century British literature and culture ([http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps\\_articles=anne-mellor-one-the-publication-of-mary-wollstonecrafts-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman](http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=anne-mellor-one-the-publication-of-mary-wollstonecrafts-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman)).

In addition to questions above, please consider the following:

- 1) What awareness of nations beyond Britain does Wollstonecraft's text indicate, and how does she represent these alternative cultures and nationalities?
- 2) What rhetorical strategies does Wollstonecraft adopt? To help you think this through, you might find it useful to see this brief excerpt from Olympe de Gouges's *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (a text relevant to the *Declaration of Sentiments* as well) issued in France the year before Wollstonecraft published her work. To what degree do Wollstonecraft and de Gouges follow different routes, and to what effect?

### **Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen**

#### Preamble

Mothers, daughters, sisters [and] representatives of the nation demand to be constituted into a national assembly. Believing that ignorance, omission, or scorn for the rights of woman are the only causes of public misfortunes and of the corruption of governments, [the women] have resolved to set forth in a solemn declaration the natural, inalienable, and sacred rights of

woman in order that this declaration, constantly exposed before all the members of the society, will ceaselessly remind them of their rights and duties; in order that the authoritative acts of women and the authoritative acts of men may be at any moment compared with and respectful of the purpose of all political institutions; and in order that citizens' demands, henceforth based on simple and incontestable principles, will always support the constitution, good morals, and the happiness of all.

Consequently, the sex that is as superior in beauty as it is in courage during the suffering of maternity recognized and declares in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following Rights of Woman and of Female Citizens.

#### Article I

Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights. Social distinctions can be based only on the common utility.

#### Article II

The purpose of any political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of woman and man; these rights are liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression. . . . [of 17 Articles in all]

You might be interested to know that Elizabeth Barrett Browning told her friend Mary Russell Mitford later in life that she had read *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* at age 12 and instantly agreed with it.

## American Women's Responses to Mary Wollstonecraft

**Rosemarie Zagarri, "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America." *The William and Mary Quarterly Third Series*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Apr., 1998), pp. 203-230.**

"Wollstonecraft's tract represented the strongest and most reverberant statement of women's rights up to that time. First published in Britain in 1792, American editions appeared shortly thereafter. The title echoed Thomas Paine's sensational work on the French Revolution, *The Rights of Man*, issued in 1791 and 1792.... Wollstonecraft's work gained initial popularity-and later notoriety- through a relatively new popular medium, the literary periodical.... *A Vindication* quickly won a wide audience in the United States. Excerpts appeared as early as 1792 in the *Ladies Magazine* [long edited by Sarah J. Hale], published in Philadelphia, and the *Massachusetts Magazine*, published in Boston. By 1795, three American editions had been issued. A modern study finds that treatise in more private American libraries of the period than was Paine's *Rights of Man*. In America as in England, many of the first reviews were laudatory. The *New-York Magazine* noted that, 'While thousands are shedding their blood in asserting the *Rights of Man*, a female has lately wielded her Pen, and we think with great success, in vindicating the Rights of Woman.' By the end of the decade, it is true, Wollstonecraft's apparent disdain for conventional norms of sexual behavior and the sanctity of marriage made her the object of vitriolic personal attacks. Nonetheless, her intellectual influence persisted over time.... Newspapers and magazines picked up her terminology and popularized a new language-the language of rights-by which

Americans could understand, refer to, and analyze women. This language had radical implications. ‘Let the defenders of male despotism answer (if they can) the Rights of Woman, by Miss Wollstonecraft,’ declared the National Magazine in 1800. Just as the rights of man took on new meanings over time—meanings the American Revolutionaries had not anticipated—so, too, did the rights of woman.’” (203 et passim)

**Michael Brown Chandos, “Mary Wollstonecraft, or, the Female Illuminati: The Campaign against Women and ‘Modern Philosophy’ in the Early Republic.” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Special Issue on Gender in the Early Republic (Autumn, 1995), pp. 389-424**

“Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was published and much discussed in America in the early and mid-1790s, but around 1800 her reputation suffered a sharp decline. In 1799, Mary Moody Emerson (the philosopher's aunt) could take for granted that her sister Ruth held strong opinions regarding the *Vindication's* descriptions of the oppression of women and its call for equality between the sexes. She was less confident that her sister had actually seen the book. ‘Have you read Woollstonecraft's [sic] works, about which we were so warmly disputing the last time I saw you?’ she inquired somewhat plaintively and then begged the loan of the volume. If Emerson deemed Wollstonecraft's theology ‘bad’ and her arguments overly ‘intricate,’ she nonetheless praised her views on the education of women. But the rumors of Wollstonecraft's sexual license became fact with the publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs*. Even Eliza Southgate, a reluctant admirer, wrote sadly in the spring of 1801, that ‘upon the whole her life is the best comment on her writing,’ a judgment that rendered Wollstonecraft immediately hors de combat as a serious person....” (391-92).

**Yet, Chandos notes, Wollstonecraft continued to draw readers, some of whom were true fans:**

“Eliza Southgate [herself later a published author], inclined to censure, nonetheless ‘allowed’ that Wollstonecraft spoke wisely about some things and confessed to admire ‘many of her sentiments’; but in this she may have been influenced by the example of her teacher, Susanna Rowson, author of *Charlotte Temple*. Aaron Burr promised himself ‘much pleasure’ in reading the *Vindication* aloud to his wife Theodosia and employed Wollstonecraft as a sort of female Chesterfield in the education of his daughter, also named Theodosia. Wollstonecraft's emphasis on a rigorous education for women, for instance, struck a responsive chord, even if the limits of that education remained the subject of enduring debate. Yet the use to which Burr put Wollstonecraft in the rearing of Theodosia exquisitely refined that amalgam of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and the subversion of gender roles that actuated the Federalist response to the ‘modern philosophy.’ Burr encouraged his daughter to be learned; he permitted her to mingle freely in the company of the men who met to discuss politics under his roof....” (412)

**Overall, Chandos’s research demonstrates that, at the very least, American women found Wollstonecraft a site of intense interest:**

“[W]omen knew Wollstonecraft, however they came by that understanding: through conversation, through correspondence, through the passing hand-to-hand of small and increasingly foxed volumes, through subscription libraries, through the distorted accounts of her detractors and, one must finally acknowledge, through her husband's *Memoirs*....” (422).

**Over the years, on into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the women who admired Wollstonecraft and her writing most, and who drew upon the *Vindication* in their own thinking, were the same bold women**

working to lead the nascent women's rights movements, including the campaign for sufferance. In that vein, Howard M. Wach quotes Lucretia Mott in a headnote for his article: "A Boston Vindication: Margaret Fuller and Caroline Dall Read Mary Wollstonecraft" [\*Massachusetts Historical Review\*](#) Vol. 7, (2005): 3-35:

"Young women of America, I want you to make yourselves acquainted with the history of the Woman's Rights movement, from the days of Mary Wollstonecraft. All honor to Mary Wollstonecraft. Her name was cast out as evil, even as that of Jesus was cast out as evil, and as those of the apostles were cast out as evil, but her name shall yet go forth and stand as pioneer of this movement" (3). Wach reports that Mott kept a copy of the book on display in her own parlor (4).

The main focus of Wach's essay is to track ways in which both Fuller and Dall worked to recuperate Wollstonecraft for American women readers, whose view of the British writer had been undermined by her husband William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798), where he revealed her escapades with Henry Fuseli and Gilbert Imlay. Wach offers readings of the treatments of Wollstonecraft in Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and Dall's *The College, the Market, and the Court; or Woman's Relation to Education, Labor, and Law* (1867) that highlight how both authors engage with the complex legacy of Wollstonecraft, so that "they insured their own confrontation with the ideological apparatus that made her a pariah" for others (8). Thus, Fuller aligns Wollstonecraft with the French renegade author George Sand and, though stopping short of excusing the Englishwoman's earlier transgressions, points to the marriage with Godwin as a model and characterizes Wollstonecraft herself as "rich in genius, of most tender sympathies, capable of high virtue and a chastened harmony" (9). Similarly, when Dall (then the wife of a minister) first read *Vindication* in 1852, Wach reports, she was able to reject the stereotype condemning Wollstonecraft as immoral and to claim: "I feel that she must have been a great [and] virtuous woman, say what the world will" (14). Several years later, having separated from her husband and having turned to writing and the lecture circuit for self-support, Dall would credit her reading of *Vindication* with having generated her own views on (and ongoing support of) women's rights (14-15). Going even farther than Fuller (whom Dall actually links with Wollstonecraft), Dall's *The College, the Market and the Court* would offer a highly laudatory portrait of Wollstonecraft as an ideal role model for women—a dedicated and unselfish daughter and sibling, a caring friend, and a deep thinker.

Dall would encounter some pointed criticism for her portrayals of Wollstonecraft, but, as Wach's treatment suggests, engaging deeply with the figure of the British author helped Dall both to develop a personal confidence in the justice of claiming women's rights and to find a voice to advocate for the cause.

### **Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* (1837)**

For those who are reading Martineau for the first time, here is a bit more background on her.

Martineau (1802-1876) was an important Victorian intellectual and is considered the first female sociologist. According to Linda Peterson in *Becoming a Woman of Letters: Myths of Authorship and Facts of the Victorian Market* (Princeton UP, 2009), Martineau also invented the Victorian woman of letters by understanding the new professional opportunities and

communication circuits opening up amidst proliferating periodicals. For example, she adapted (“repurposed”) the tract format pioneered by Hannah More in her *Cheap Repository* series (moral tales from a strict evangelical point of view distributed to the lower classes) to a more politically liberal agenda and the increasingly important subject of economics in *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-1834). These provided illustrative vignettes of economic laws and principles and were immensely successful, making Martineau a well-known writer by the time she set off for America. One of the best known tales, “Demerara,” was set on a sugar plantation in what is now Guyana, and served to demonstrate the corrupting influence of the institution of slavery. You may recall that Michael Slater, Dickens’s biographer, felt that Dickens was responding in *American Notes* to Martineau’s *Society in America* more than to any other British travel writing about the US. Though Martineau does not address the issue of disabilities in the readings for today, you should know that she was almost completely deaf and had to use an ear trumpet in conversation; nonetheless, she traveled and, until retreating due to uterine illness in 1840, created a formidable network. When she died the *New York Independent* remarked of her,

Miss Martineau came to our shores in 1834 . . . preceded by an honorable reputation as a writer on political economy and an earnest advocate of freedom for the slave; and, as she did not hesitate to avow her sentiments, she was . . . frequently placed in disagreeable, and even dangerous circumstances. . . . The clearness of judgment and fidelity to conviction which marked her whole career appear most strongly in her course in America, and for this Americans of to-day cannot but honour her. (Qtd. by Ted Hovet, Jr., “Harriet Martineau’s Exceptional American Narratives,” *American Studies* 48.1 [2007]: 64)

### **Declaration of Sentiments (1848)**

A strategy that’s frequently used for engaging with the 1848 “Declaration of Sentiments” is to set it alongside the U.S. Declaration of Independence. What are some ways that you see the 1848 document “riffing” on the 1790s’ text? What might we gain, to help us conceive of suffrage as a transnational movement, by thinking of the earlier Declaration as a transatlantic as well as a US national text?

### **Elizabeth Cady Stanton Address (1848)**

Stanton’s address was never published and so enables us to give further consideration to the role of nineteenth-century oratory in transatlanticism. You will note that her address also mentions Harriet Martineau at one point. What are some specific rhetorical techniques adopted by Stanton that work better as oratory rather than (as with Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication*) written discourse? Consider as you read Stanton’s citations and frames of reference; to what degree does the writing emerge from a transatlantic network and framework even though the unpublished text did not travel abroad?



Some larger questions you might consider of all the readings for this week, taken as a group, include these:

1) What is to be gained from focusing primarily on Britain and America as reference points for women's suffrage and activism to secure political and legal rights? What do we sacrifice? What do we gain?

2) Several of the documents that we're reading for today, especially the Wollstonecraft chapter and *The Declaration of Sentiments*, are foundational texts for first- and second-wave feminism. What concepts have remained constants in the transatlantic evolution of women's demand for full citizenship? What seems to be missing from these statements?

3) Why would Americans and Britons find each of these readings not only of interest but of social use? What similarities and differences in their receptions and circulations would you anticipate on either side of the Atlantic?

4) What were some of the rhetorical challenges facing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Anglo-American women writing about women's rights in their own time? What are specific discursive strategies you notice in this week's readings that point to the rhetorical sophistication of these writers?

5) In what ways do any of these documents begin to respond to each other and/or suggest a kind of textual and imaginative collaboration as well as the possibility of working across borders?