INTRODUCTION

Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson and Anja Schüler

Often I wonder if you have an idea of how much you and Mrs. Stanton have influenced my life. You may know [...] how much you have influenced the women of your own country, but I want that you should know how vividly we Finnish women feel our gratitude to you, how we follow what you speak and write. Is it not wonderful how great ideas unite different peoples?1

Finnish feminist Aleksandra Gripenberg penned these lines to her American counterpart Susan B. Anthony in 1903, three years before Finland, at the time a Russian Grand Duchy, became the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote, not the least because of Gripenberg’s untiring efforts. Her letter provides evidence of the great importance of women’s collaboration, the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and their mutual support for emancipation processes on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond throughout the long nineteenth century.2

From the wide international distribution and discussion of British feminist Mary Wollstonecraft’s famous text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* of 1792 to the creation of the International Council of Women in 1888 and the founding of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in 1919, feminists in many parts of the world were engaged in forging personal friendships as well as in creating intellectual and organizational networks within the transatlantic world. Their collaborations and achievements, which created the base for the modern women’s rights movement, have remained rather neglected by historians for a long time.3 This volume aims to contribute to closing this scholarly gap. It explores how female activists exchanged ideas and cooperated on issues across national borders and bodies of water, sometimes also across borders of race, class, and gender. The collection of essays by various European and North American scholars shows how, even in the absence of formal political rights, women were able to develop effective strategies and bases of political power, working both within their own countries and through the transnational connections, alliances, and organizations they created.

Initially, women did not focus mainly on gaining rights for their own sex but were concerned about issues such as abolition, temperance,

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1 Gripenberg’s letter to Anthony, cit. in Margaret H. McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington, 1999), 171.

2 The long nineteenth century, as defined by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm, was the period between the years 1789 and 1914, i.e., the era between the French Revolution and the First World War.

3 In the introduction to the edited collection of source documents, Susan Bell and Karen Offen, eds., *Women, the Family, and Freedom: The Debate in Documents* (Stanford, 1983), here p. 7, the editors state that “the international intellectual ferment surrounding the cause of women has, until recently, been one of Western civilization’s best-kept secrets.”
child protection, pacifism, and labor. Yet through participation in
these movements, which were often dominated by men, many women
eventually became aware that they too were an oppressed group in
need of emancipation. Some fought to link suffrage and women’s
rights to the struggle against the inequities of industrial capital-
ism in what came to be known as “social justice feminism.” Others
embraced “maternalist” ideologies that exalted women’s status as
mothers and, rather than seeking feminist alternatives to that role,
sought to apply the values associated with that to society at large.4

By now, historians have produced a rather extensive literature on
women’s movements in single countries,5 as well as a number of
binational and multinational comparative studies of female mobiliza-
tion.6 There are also some excellent collections of primary sources.7
But so far, few scholars have focused on the transnational—and espe-
cially the transatlantic—collaborations of female activists throughout
the nineteenth century.8 Two volumes deserve special mention in this
case, since they were the first monographs to explore transatlantic
connections between European and American feminists: Margaret
H. McFadden’s Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources
of Nineteenth-Century Feminism (1999) and Bonnie S. Anderson’s
Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement 1830–1860
(2000). The main focus of McFadden’s study is on the individual
roles and networking skills of selected feminists whom she refers
to as “mothers of the matrix.” Anderson’s book presents sweeping
insights into feminists’ activism in Europe and the United States but
centers on developments in the United States during the antebellum
era; it ends with the outbreak of the American Civil War. The research
provided by McFadden and Anderson as well as that of other scholars

4 See Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler, and Susan Strasser, eds., Social Justice Feminisms in
the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885-1933 (Ithaca, 1998); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel,

5 See, e.g., the works of Jean Baker, Ellen Du Bois, Susan Conrad, Nancy Isenberg, Karen
Offen, and Keith Melder for the USA; Ann Taylor Allen, John Fout, Ute Frevert, Ute
Gerhard, Gabrielle Hauch, Carola Lipp, Renate Mühmann, and Gudrun Wittig for
Germany; Patrick Bidelman, Sara Melzer, Claire Goldberg, and Joan W. Scott for France; as
well as Christine Bolt, Barbara Caine, Philippa Levine, Marie M. Roberts, and
Diane M. Worzala for Britain.

6 See Christine Bold, The
Women’s Movements in the
United States and Britain (New
York, 1993); Richard Evans,
The Feminists: Women’s Emanc-
ipation Movements in Europe,
America and Australasia,
1840–1920 (London, 1977); Ute
Gerhard, Frauenbewegung und Feminismus: Eine
Geschichte seit 1789 (Munich,
2012); Karen Offen, Global-
izing Feminism, 1789–1945
(London, 2010); Sylvia
Palatschek and Bianka
Pietrow-Enkker, eds., Women’s
Emancipation Movements in
the Nineteenth Century: A
European Perspective
(Stanford, 2004). See also
Kathryn Kish Sklar and James
Brewer Stewart, eds., Women’s
Rights and Transatlantic
Antislavery in the Era of Emanci-
pation (New Haven, 2007); and
Ian Tyrrell, Reforming the World: The Creation of
America’s Moral Empire
(Princeton, 2010). For a sur-
vey of the theory and practice of
international feminism beyond the transatlantic
context with a focus on the
twentieth century, see
Minalini Sinha.

Donna J. Guy, and Angela
Woodacott, eds., Feminism
and Internationalism

7 See the collections already
cited in notes 3 and 4
as well as Nacy M.
Forestell and Maureen
Anne Moynagh, eds.,
Documenting First Wave
Feminisms (Toronto,
2012).

8 Recently there have been
some new publications on
transnational feminist
movements, especially
with regard to women’s
organizing activities
in the so-called Third
World. However, almost
all of these volumes deal
with the post-World War II
era. One excellent,
comprehensive study of
this kind is the Oxford
Handbook of Transnational
Feminist Movements, edited
by Rawwida Baksh and
Wendy Harcourt (New
York, 2013). On over 900
pages this volume illu-
minates a great variety of
topics from body politics,
human rights, citizenship,
and state building to fem-


has provided a great deal of valuable information for enhancing our understanding of the transnational and transatlantic connections of early feminists. Building on that base, this essay collection seeks to further broaden and deepen the approach by including race and social justice as categories of analysis; by embracing innovative biographical aspects; and by examining the collaboration of feminists in specific professions (such as medicine or the law), and also within large transnational organizations (such as the World Women’s Temperance Union or the International Council of Women) in the transatlantic world from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

A variety of factors led to the proliferation of social and political movements during this particular period: the emergence of Enlightenment ideals and political liberalism; urbanization; scientific advances, especially in medicine; and technological progress in transportation and communication. For women, especially those of the middle class, unprecedented access to education opened up new intellectual vistas, and then improved household technology freed them from conventional domestic responsibilities and gave them time for activities outside the home. Generally barred from paid employment, women turned in large numbers to missionary and charitable work in addition to social and political reforms as outlets for their newfound energies. Across industrializing countries, highly motivated and determined women’s rights and social justice activists as well as maternalist reformers and female missionaries wrote countless letters, traveled widely, sought educational opportunities abroad, and worked for decades to establish personal connections and to collaborate with activists in other countries who shared their views. Their efforts eventually provided the foundations for worldwide organizations dedicated to issues as diverse as women’s rights, protective labor legislation, racial equality, and temperance.

In the spring of 2016, the editors of this volume, together with Sonya Michel of the University of Maryland, organized a conference entitled **Protecting Women: Labor Legislation in Europe, the United States, and Australia, 1880-1920** (Urbana, 1995); for a detailed analysis of the challenges and accomplishments of the International Council of Women, see, e.g., Éliane Gubin and Leen Van Molle, eds., *Des Femmes Qui Changent le Monde: Histoire du Conseil International des Femmes, 1888-1988* (Brussels, 2005).

9 We are delighted that Bonnie Anderson agreed to contribute some of her newest research to this volume, focusing on one of the great heroines of the nineteenth-century movement for female equality as well as racial and social justice: Ernestine Rose. Her new biography *The Rabbi’s Atheist Daughter: Ernestine Rose, International Feminist Pioneer* was published in early 2017. Another noteworthy example of an exemplary transnational feminist biography is Marita Krauss’s *Hope: Dr. Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann — Arztin und Visionärin. Die Biografie* (Munich, 2009), which illustrates the accomplishments of a British woman who, in 1880, became the first certified female doctor in Germany.


11 Leila Rapp’s *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton, 1997), traces the successful organization of a more institutionalized international feminist movement, but she focuses on the interwar period, not on the nineteenth century.
Forging Bonds Across Borders: Mobilizing for Women’s Rights and Social Justice in the Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic World at the German Historical Institute in Washington, DC. About twenty scholars from both sides of the Atlantic presented their research in the field of nineteenth-century transnational women’s rights and social justice activism from new and different perspectives. The discussions at that meeting served as the inspiration for this volume.

Many of this volume’s contributions revolve around the concepts of “transnationalism” or “internationalism.” While “internationalism” focuses on the practice and promotion of interstate cooperation, “transnationalism” includes the broader field of non-governmental political, social, economic, and cultural activities and exchange. It thus describes the movements of people and tangible items, but also of ideas, knowledge, and institutional know-how across national boundaries. We would also like to point that our use of the terms “feminist” and “feminism” is, of course, anachronistic, since the term, which originated from the French word “féminisme,” was coined by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier and was not commonly used until the 1890s. However, in our view the radicalism and broad scope of early women’s rights activists legitimizes the use of this term for the entire period examined in this volume. Finally, it should be mentioned that while our focus is on female activists, there were also quite a few male feminists who supported women’s rights during the nineteenth century, such as the Marquis de Condorcet, Theodor von Hippel, Henry Maine, John Stuart Mill, and Parker Pillsbury.

The nine essays selected for this volume use the methodologies of cultural biography and histoire croisée to examine how early women’s networks were established and continued to increase in density and scope despite disagreements and conflicts among activists and some external backlash at different points in time. Among the various topics they address are the role of publications and the flow of ideas and organizational know-how across borders. One of the key questions in this context is to examine how well strategies and rhetoric “traveled” from one national context to another, and what kind of difficulties the activists encountered in the process. Our authors analyze different aspects of struggles for social reform and for the legal, economic, social, and political equality of women and seek to identify instances in which women from one country were able to use policies established elsewhere to leverage changes in their own national systems.
Our collection also pays special attention to the challenges for women of color, many of whom were daughters or granddaughters of former slaves, who organized for purportedly universal feminist causes and participated in networks dominated by white middle-class women. While some essays focus on looking at how revolutions, migration, new venues for publication, and religion shaped individual feminists’ lives and women’s movements on the whole, others concentrate on the transnational mobilization of various groups, from abolitionists, feminist authors and orators, to suffragists, temperance activists, or promoters of women’s health and educational equality.

The different chapters of our book cluster around four topics: new contributions to women’s biography, in this case women who lived their lives “across borders”; women’s networks formed around the turn of the century, in particular, but not exclusively, in the legal professions; women’s global fight against alcoholism and slavery; and, finally, women’s exchange of knowledge across the Atlantic.

The volume opens with a section on “new women’s biography” focusing on personal connections. Some of these were tight-knit bonds forged in person as feminists criss-crossed the Atlantic over decades; others were rather removed, not based in personal contact but rather engagement with the writings and ideas of other women and social activists. Bonnie Anderson’s opening essay looks at the nineteenth-century feminist and freethinker Ernestine Rose. Born in 1810 as a rabbi’s daughter in Poland, Rose was one of the few atheists among nineteenth-century American feminists and an early women’s rights leader. Anderson gives a glimpse into Rose’s transnational life, which led her from her homeland 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 associating herself with freethinkers and pacifists. Considered a superb orator, Rose was an early feminist who linked women’s rights to human rights. The second contribution in this biographical section by Carol Strauss Sotiropolous traces the connections between Margaret Fuller, one of the foremost American promoters of German literature, and author Bettina von Brentano-Arnim. Sotiropolous points out that while Fuller introduced her readers to Arnim’s literary writings, she remained silent about Arnim’s social justice projects; this created the impression that Fuller was not interested in politics. Sotiropolous shows, however, that Fuller was very familiar with the political system and power structures on the other side of the Atlantic.
but highly selective in choosing rhetorical strategies for her own purposes. Thus, this essay sheds light on how ideas were borrowed or dismissed.

The second section looks at the emergence of women’s international networks in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, a period many historians consider the heyday of early non-governmental organizations. Part of a growing international civil society, these organizations negotiated cultural differences and gave their members an opportunity to exchange a great deal of information long before the information age. The contributions in this section show, among other things, how ideas traveled and how institutional knowledge and know-how crossed borders. Sara Kimble’s paper on the transatlantic networks for legal feminism is a case in point. It documents the transatlantic alliance of legally-oriented feminists in the belle époque that preceded women gaining the 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 levels. While suffrage was important for these French feminists, they also led parallel campaigns for the reform of family law and civil codes to achieve equality for wives and mothers within the family. Marion Röwekamp’s essay then examines how the ideas and activism of the Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine contributed to the campaign for transnational family law reform within the ICW. She shows that the different ideas about legal reform in the national women’s movements sometimes translated into serious problems on the transnational level. At the same time, the legal debates in the ICW reveal the dynamics of transnational legislative work at the turn of the twentieth century. The national and international efforts of these German feminists and their French counterparts put family law on the agenda of international reform. In the final contribution of this section, Noaquia Callahan explores the transnational career of African American feminist Mary Church Terrell. In particular, Callahan revisits the 1904 Berlin Congress of the ICW and sees in it a moment when black and white, American and European feminists came together to exchange ideas about education and professionalization, the franchise, and social issues like the abolition of prostitution and alcohol. 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 and made

her an uncontested representative of American feminism abroad. It also is an early example of the international involvement of African American women activists.

Our third section turns to the global reach of female abolitionist movements that saw their work for social reform as part of the struggle that would ultimately bring about legal and political equality for women. The contributions in this section show that the antislavery movement crossed geographical and gender boundaries from the beginning and that the internationalism of the temperance movement reached far beyond the transatlantic reform community. Stephanie Richmond’s essay looks at abolitionists abroad, particularly 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 and 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. The second contribution in this section looks at a different kind of global abolitionism: In the late 1880s, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), at the time the largest women’s organization in the United States, branched out internationally, forming the W(orld)WCTU. Lori Osborne’s paper contends that the WWCTU’s work provided an important bridge between Christian missionaries and the Indian reform world. The international organization sparked the founding of the WCTU of India, a very early if not the earliest women’s organization to operate in India. Temperance work on the subcontinent involved both indigenous men and women and maintained its own organizational culture but also brought American views, values, and organizational procedures to India. Osborne looks at the different paths to reform taken by the WCTU’s “round-the-world” missionaries and other American missionaries.

The final section presents some examples of the ways women exchanged knowledge across the Atlantic and shows how this exchange contributed to their professional development. Like the first section of this volume, it gives us an idea of how ideas traveled in the nineteenth
century. Ann Taylor Allen analyzes the global impact of German education pioneer Friedrich Froebel. Women reformers around the world not only drew on his ideas for the sake of children’s education but also promoted the establishment of kindergartens as a way of advancing themselves professionally. The kindergarten movement became part of the larger trend of international organizing, forming the International Kindergarten Union, which, in turn, was affiliated with the International Council of Women. As kindergartens became part of national education systems, however, international solidarity among their proponents waned. In the final essay, Mineke Bosch traces 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, the first female physician of the Netherlands, whose efforts were vital to the growing birth control movement, but who also encountered opposition from other feminists who feared that this kind of advocacy would taint the suffrage movement. Jacobs was undoubtedly well connected internationally, but Bosch also argues that the work of many prominent activists and less prominent contemporaries had quite an international scope.

Together the sections of this volume show how women’s strategies for social change and for their own emancipation changed over the course of the long nineteenth century, particularly as permanent organizations were formed. At the same time, they also indicate that national, political and legal contexts, and diverging cultures did sometimes constrain reform efforts. The collection thus emphasizes the importance of considering philanthropy as well as government policies, compares individual and organizational techniques, and notes the irony in the historiography arising from the fact that international figures often drop out of national narratives. It demonstrates that women formed bonds across borders in different ways, as individuals, through organizations, and with the help of publications. In addition, the contributions identify themes like women’s aspiration to create a “universal sisterhood” that would be able to culminate in social movements and the transfer of knowledge. Finally, all the essays contribute to the historiographic trend of “new biography,” which is greatly enriched by transnational perspectives.

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It is our hope that they and other scholars will continue to study the many areas of transnational women’s rights and social justice activism of the nineteenth century, large parts of which are still unexplored. Among these are, for example, diverse efforts to establish a transnational women’s peace movement, transatlantic collaborations of female socialist activists, as well as contemporary collective feminist publication projects. If this volume can help to inspire additional interest in this field of research, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

While we have seen incredible progress in the last century, the struggle against discrimination of women and minority groups continues on many levels. Therefore, we would like to dedicate this book to the individuals who devoted their lives to fighting for human rights, equality, and social justice in the past — and to those who are doing so today.

About the Editors

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