

“Where No Human Aid is Possible”, Or Is It?: How the Temperance Movement and Suffrage Movement Changed the Family

“How the little courtesies of life on the surface of society, deemed so important from man towards woman, fade into utter insignificance in view of the deeper tragedies in which she must play her part alone, where no human aid is possible...” – Elizabeth Cady Stanton¹

*“Susan B. Anthony
Forever haunting me
Owned raped sold thrown
A woman was never her own
They cried freedom rise up for me.
I want i want i want freedom...” – The Distillers²*

That freedom isn't simply prescribed by law is a lesson that Americans learned the hard way through the arduous and still continuing process toward racial equality that began with the outlawing of slavery following the Civil War.

For women of the 19th century, freedom meant many things. For some, it meant freedom from tyranny within the home, where drunken or otherwise useless men economically, emotionally or physically abused women who were dependent upon them for their support. For some it meant freedom from oppressive laws that disenfranchised women from voting or participating in representative government. For some it meant changing the culture to uphold standards that would allow women to be the “angel in the house” she was “meant” to be. These seemingly conflicting ideals, undergirded by religious belief, cultural expectations, political theory, or sometimes simply an instinctual thirst, intersected in the 19th century as reform movements such as the Women's Suffrage movement and the Temperance movement.

By exposing some of the serious social problems created by drunkenness, the Temperance movement developed cultural capital in its development of ideology that changed prevailing viewpoints about male dominance and private vs. public matters, and this newly developed capital was harnessed by Suffragists for their cause. This paper will examine how the Temperance narrative of the failed or fallen man helped to develop a cultural paradigm that would undermine some of the theories that gave male-only voting its legitimacy. Further, it will explore how the issue of domestic violence, as interrogated by the Temperance movement, also created a culture in which previously private matters became a public concern. The paper will then show how this enabled the Women's Suffrage movement to gain validity as a public expression of private needs as law

¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *“Solitude of Self” Address in Women's Rights in the United States: A Documentary History*, ed. Winston E. Langley and Vivian C. Fox (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 169.

² The Distillers, “Seneca Falls”, *Sing Sing Death House Album*, 2002.

attempted to grapple with the newly perceived need for public intervention in the domestic sphere. Finally, it will show the historical link between the two movements that enabled ideology and cultural capital to flow freely between them.

Adam at the Apple: The Temperance Narrative of the Fallen Man

Because the Temperance movement was not strictly a women's movement, it gained significant support among the preachers and other cultural leaders of the 19th century, who unwittingly contributed to changes in Americans view of men and agency that would set the stage for women's suffrage. Through the development of a new cultural paradigm that in some ways preempted the Biblical view of women as tempters and men as the morally superior force, this narrative, in conjunction with other social forces, helped to reconfigure the role of women to that of morally correcting force. With the reinforcement of this new role for women, it seemed more suitable that women should have a vote, have political power, and have more social influence than ever before in order to reform a society soaking in the failures of fallen men.

For example, Ten Nights in a Bar-room by T.S. Arthur, a popular drunken redemption narrative published in 1854, was available not only as a novel, but was reworked into a play that was staged all over the nation³. By showing the downfall of an entire town as well as several of the individuals and families in it, Arthur provides strong argument for the moral necessity of prohibition and temperance, reminding us through the mouth of Joe Morgan, the repentant drunkard⁴ that no one "in fact, has any right to sow disease and death in our community? The liberty, under sufferance, to do so, wrongs the individual who uses it, as well as those who become his victims."⁵

³ The Literature Network, "T.S. Arthur" <http://www.online-literature.com/ts-arthur/> Last accessed March 19, 2008. T.S. Arthur aka Timothy Shay Arthur (1809-1855), was a Christian temperance reformer who wrote hundreds of short stories and several novels utilizing the drunken narrative.

⁴ Joe Morgan only repents after his child has been killed by a blow to the head trying to retrieve him from the bar, his wife has been placed in a mental institution, and his son has been put in prison for the murder of the tavern owner.

⁵ T.S. Arthur *Ten Nights in a Barroom*. (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2000), 288. The original publication date is 1854. The full text is also available online at <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/etext03/tnngh10.htm>.



Engraving based on Ten Nights in a Bar-room

In fact, so convinced is Joe and his town of Cederville of the evils that drinking can cause, that they pass a town ordinance disallowing the sale of alcohol within its borders. Joe presents the suggested ordinance with a speech:

The accursed traffic must cease among us. You must cut off the fountain, if you would dry up the stream. If you would save the young, the weak and the innocent—on you God has laid the solemn duty of their protection—you must cover them from the tempter....To this end I offer these resolutions:

Be it resolved by the inhabitants of Cedarville, That from this day henceforth, no more intoxicating drink shall be sold within the limits of the corporation...⁶

The reasoning is clear: women and children must be protected from the beasts that men become when they are consumed with alcohol and begin their descent into moral decay. This was the reasoning behind the argument for many

⁶ Ibid 289.

reformers and traditions that produced innumerable variations on the drunken narrative and the fallen man.

Elaine Frantz Parsons, in her book *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women in Nineteenth-Century United States*, outlines six aspects of the drunkard narrative that plays out in countless retellings:

There are six key aspects of the classic nineteenth-century drunkard narrative. First, the drinker, before his first drink, is a particularly promising young man. Second, the drinker falls largely or entirely because of external influences. Third, if the story blames the drinker for contributing to his own fall, his weakness is a desire either for excitement or to please his ill-chosen friends. Fourth, after he begins to drink, the desire to drink overcome all of his other motivations. Fifth, he loses control over his family, his economic life, and/or his own body. Sixth, if the drinker is redeemed it is through a powerful external influence.⁷

Significantly, the fallen man in the drunkard narrative seems to require extreme external circumstances in order to be able to exercise his will to get off the alcohol: the addiction to the drink is so powerful that it meets its match in only the most dire of prompts. For example, in T. S. Arthur's short story "The Broken

⁷ Parsons gives some more specific examples of these aspects, writing, Drunkard narratives...generally began with a young man on the brink of adulthood. Longing to exercise the privileges of adulthood and yearning for excitement, he allows himself to be lured into a saloon, usually by a "fast" young man. His entry into the saloon and his subsequent 'fatal first drink' launch him into the downward spiral of the chronic inebriate. After describing the first drink, the story often jumps forward a few years, and we see the young man well along the road to ruin. His wife and children are suffering from hunger, cold and his abuse. His parents have often gone to an early grave out of sorrow. He has drunk and gambled away any property that he has accumulated and everything that has been built up by his ancestors and passed along to his family. Ultimately, after a dramatic bout of delirium tremens, the drunkard usually either dies or is reformed through some external power or the sudden death of a loved one.

Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women of the 19th Century United States*. (MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 11.

For an interesting look at some of the narratives, see John W. Crowley (ed.), *Drunkard's Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair and Recovery*. (MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

Pledge”, Mr. Marshall is a reformed, temperance pledge-signing teetotaler who believes that “the obligations of my pledge are perpetual.”⁸



A temperance pledge⁹

⁸ T.S. Arthur. Broken Pledge. Online at <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnLine/2594/> accessed March 23, 2008. The Temperance pledge was a popular method of pressuring men to avoid drink. Pledges were included in many family Bibles, for instance.

⁹ This commonly used temperance pledge includes 12 reasons for signing, including “5. The drinking habit is the cause of the larger portion of the misery, poverty and crime in our land” and “12. Intemperance obstructs civilization, education, religion and every useful reform.”

His friends try to convince him that the pledge was foolish and that once he had broken the appetite for too much drink he had fulfilled his promise and no longer needed to avoid all alcohol. He begins to rationalize to himself and finally concludes,

I consider this binding of a man to perpetual total-abstinence, as an unnecessary infringement of individual liberty. As I look upon it, the use of the pledge is to enable a man, by the power of an external restraint, to gain the mastery over an appetite that has mastered him. When that is accomplished, all that is wanted is obtained: of what use is the pledge after that?¹⁰

He further argues that he was duped into signing the pledge because at the time he didn't know there was any other way of becoming free from the habitual effects of drink.

Nevertheless, one friend argues:

...when a man gives to any pledge or contract a fullness and a confirmation by the act of subscribing his name to it, and then deliberately violates that pledge or contract, he necessarily separates himself still further from the saving power of good principles and influences than in the other case, and comes more fully under the power of evil principles and evil influences. After such an act, that man's state is worse, far worse than it was before.

Despite this warning, of course, Marshall caves and goes to a tavern where he drinks himself into a stupor. On his way home he falls and cracks his head on the pavement. Brought home to his suffering wife, he awakes in the morning convinced that he is damned and that there is no returning to the happiness he found in abstinence. He goes out again immediately to drink. Mrs. Marshall seeks him out and finds him lying on the pavement drunk and covered in blood as some vehicle had run him over. Both of his legs are broken and he spends a long time in convalescence, still arguing that he can never return to the happiness of an unbroken promise again. Yet, Mrs. Marshall, a brilliant example of woman's influence, perseveres until finally Marshall signs a second pledge. How did she achieve such a feat? Well, much like Joe Morgan in Ten Nights in a Barroom the salve to his intemperance is the love of a child:

'Come with me a moment,' Mrs. Marshall said, after a thoughtful pause Her husband followed, as she led the way to an adjoining room, where two or three bright-eyed children were playing in the happiest mood.

¹⁰ Ibid.

‘For their sakes, if not for mine, Jonas, sign the pledge again,’ she said while her voice trembled and then became choked, as she leaned her head upon his shoulder. ‘You have conquered! I will sign!’ he whispered in her ear.

Despite the fact that T.S. Arthur doesn’t even choose to be specific in the number of children in the room (two or three?), he is clear that their innocence and need for protection is a powerful motivator for Jonas Marshall to return to temperance, without excuses this time. It did take two broken legs, a smashed head, and a persistent wife to get him back though, proof positive that once liquor gets a hold of a man, he can’t easily escape.

So if men are so easily enslaved by drink, what of the notion of the free white man as independent, in charge, and efficiently representing the interests of his family that forms the foundation of the view of suffrage that disenfranchises women? Or, to put it succinctly, Parsons argues:

The Founding fathers had constructed the United States’ democratic government around the belief that adult, propertied, usually white men, unlike other people, were in a position to make independent political decisions. . . . To imagine voting men as mere parts of a social organism lacking individual responsibility for their decisions was to pose a radical challenge to the democratic system, especially the privileged position of white men within it. Ultimately, the drink debate did just that.¹¹

If men had fallen in their moral status, women were elevated. The cult of domesticity placed women at the center of home life and assigned them the burden of moral development of children and moral correction of wayward husbands. This idea didn’t disrupt the status quo overmuch: women were still in the home, not competing with men for work or social power beyond the homestead walls. Women were unsullied by that outside world, were pure.¹² Elizabeth Pleck argues that:

Men, who carried the heavy burden of providing for the family, wanted the home to serve as a refuge from cut-throat competition. Thus the ‘empire of the mother’ served not only as a response to

¹¹ Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women of the 19th Century United States*. (MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 21.

Parsons boils the drink debate down to “largely a conflict between one group of people that was more willing and another that was less willing to entertain the notion that individuals lacked moral responsibility for their actions.” 20.

¹² Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

the political vagaries of the post-Revolutionary period, but to economic instability as well...¹³ .

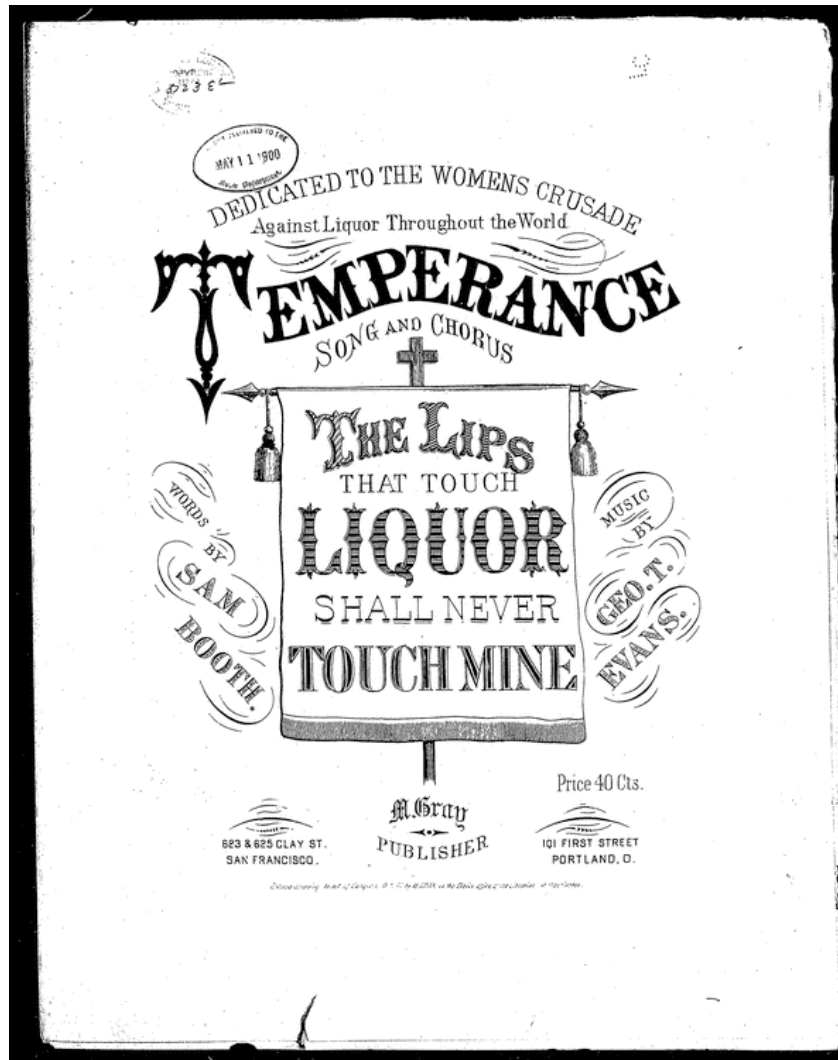
Further, she states that

The division of the world into two spheres and the assignment of each sex to its separate sphere has been referred to as the ideology of domesticity. This ideology promoted the view that women had the power to reform the morals of fathers, sons and brothers...[but] women were to use their influence only in their own homes, rather than acting collectively.¹⁴

As women moved outside the walls of the home to public charities and organizations, they discovered the power of this moral agency was significant when they worked together for a common cause. For example, what we moderns would call “peer pressure” was commonly used by female temperance activists who wielded the sword of their sexuality to convince men to give up the drink. Much like the women of Aristophanes’ play *Lysistrata* who eschewed sexual congress with the men of Athens until they agreed to stop the War with Sparta, the women committed to temperance took up the banner “Lips That Touch Liquor Shall Never Touch Mine!” Several popular songs and poems were developed on this theme. For example, this temperance song by Sam Booth and Geo. T. Evans was published in 1874:

¹³ Ibid 40.

¹⁴ Ibid 52.



The first verse is a call to action for women to take control over the temperance of men by denying affection if “the Demon of Rum” is not tamed:

The Demon of Rum is abroad in the land
 His victims are falling on every hand
 The wise and the simple, the brave and the fair
 No station too high for his vengeance to spare
 Oh, women the sorrow and pain is with you
 And so be the joy and the victory too
 With this for your motto and succor divine
 The lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine
 The lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine.¹⁵

¹⁵ Geo T. Evans and Sam Booth. “Lips That Touch Liquor Will Never Touch Mine.”

Sheet Music. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mussm&fileName=sm/sm1874/05100/05123/mussm05123.d>

The second verse continues on this theme, but now it goes a little further, putting the ultimate responsibility for temperance on women:

Wives, maidens and mothers to you it is giv'n
To rescue the fallen and point them to heav'n
With God for your guide you shall win by this sign,
The lips that touch liquor shall never touch mine.¹⁶

Not only is there now peer pressure leading the men away from alcohol, but this song invokes a powerful pressure for women to take the responsibility for temperance reform entirely upon their own shoulders. Even if they were not drinking, one would imagine that the intemperance of their mates may also be a cause for their accountability. For them it is “giv'n to rescue the fallen and point them to heav'n”, which is an immense responsibility for a woman who, in the 19th century, has little formal power and can only achieve “mastery” over a man through affectional ties. The taste of this power, and the yoke of this responsibility, would linger, and women would begin to seek other means to assert their moral authority: formal, political means.

None of Your Business: Recasting Domestic Violence from a Private Problem to Public Concern

The temperance debate unwittingly dragged the dirty little secret of wife abuse into the public arena. Pleck writes that prior to the temperance debate “the public had not grasped the extent of women’s suffering, the reformers argued because family privacy concealed it from public view.”¹⁷ The family was sacrosanct and the rule of the father absolute. Yet now, with a new understanding of the potential weaknesses of the father, the safety of the innocents under his domination became a matter of public concern. If some men could not be trusted to refrain from drink and moral decay, their will over their wives and children, especially when it turned violent, could also not be trusted.

David Peterson, in his article, “Wife Beating: An American Tradition” offers evidence of the public nature of domestic violence in the late 19th century when he quotes a study of Oregon divorce cases that showed that “courts friends, neighbors and relations sometimes intervened against violent husbands... [and] most of the violent husbands seem to have internalized the belief that striking

b&recNum=0&itemLink=S?ammem/mussm:@OR(@field(TITLE+@od1(The+Lips+that+touch+liquor,+shall+never+touch+mine++))+@field(ALTITILE+@od1(The+Lips+that+touch+liquor,+shall+never+touch+mine++)))&linkText=0 Accessed March 20, 2008.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 53.

women was wrong.”¹⁸ The husband’s absolute authority could be undone should he overstep it.

One of the forces that co-evolved with the Temperance movement that also helped to move the issue of domestic violence from a private to a public cause was the development of the Social Gospel theology.¹⁹ Social Gospel theology perpetuated the belief that individual conversion was not sufficient: the entire culture had to change to become the kind of culture that supports the believer. Therefore, temperance laws would enable communities to support Christian conversion. Laws against violence in the home would also be a way of enabling communities to heal and to pledge themselves to proper devotion to the gospel. The goal was to bring God’s kingdom to earth.²⁰

None of this replaced the family ideal of the “angel in the house” stewarding over the education and care of youth and husband, whose job it was to go out into the world and provide for the family financially. Instead, it created a greater stake in the community of the success of that model and, in fact, gave reformers permission to alter the laws and mores of the community to suit that ultimate end.

Changing the Laws to Protect the “Angel in the House”

As the Temperance movement continued to point out the urgent needs of women and children in homes wracked by violence and despair due to intemperance, the law scrambled to respond to these needs in a way that attempted to walk a line between maintaining the privacy of the home while still protecting the home’s occupants.

One of the earliest legal methods of protecting the “angel in the house” was through civil damage laws. Civil damage laws spread through the states beginning in the early 19th century and by 1890, 21 states had enacted them.²¹ Although their breadth and content varied from state to state, the main idea of the civil damage laws was to allow saloonkeepers or even saloonkeepers landlords to be held liable for damage that drunken men did to others, including their families.²² Legislatures, buying the drunkard narrative explanation that men

¹⁸ David Peterson. “Wife Beating: An American Tradition”. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIII: I (Summer 1992) 97-118, 100.

¹⁹ For an excellent look at one very popular Social Gospel reformer who helped to popularize the movement see Fred Nicklason, “Henry George: Social Gospeller”, *American Quarterly* (MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 649-664.

²⁰ Ibid 651.

²¹ Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Manhood Lost: Fallen Drunkards and Redeeming Women of the 19th Century United States*. (MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 37.

²² According to Parsons, the purpose of the laws were usually the protection of families:

under the affect of alcohol lacked volition, had no trouble punishing the saloonkeepers who they felt may have been in a better position to decide whether it was safe to serve someone. Civil damage laws, therefore, disrupted the traditional tort conception of proximate cause, because the drinker himself was not held as responsible as the seller.²³ Civil damage laws allowed women who had been victimized physically or economically by their drunken husbands to receive some restitution from the saloonkeepers who served the men, however it offered the women no protection from continued violence.

Some temperance and suffrage reformers worked to change divorce laws so that women in perilous circumstances due to domestic violence could get out of them. Indeed, the Seneca Falls Convention produced the Declaration of Human Sentiments which decried the current state of divorce law:

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes and, in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of the women -- the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man and giving all power into his hands.²⁴

One suffragist newspaper, the Lily, which was established by Amelia Bloomer in 1849, frequently printed editorials demanding divorce law changes that would allow drunkard's wives to get free of their husbands. It was even posed that it might be a requirement of the law that women leave drunken husbands for the protection of her children.²⁵ These were not issues without contest, however.

State statutes at the time varied. Some permitted divorce in cases of cruelty. Others permitted only a legal separation. The definition of cruelty varied significantly from state to state. Between 1867 and 1871, a study showed that only 13 percent of divorces were given on the grounds of cruelty. However,

“When legislatures considered these acts, they explicitly evoked the language of the drunkard narrative. Take the temporarily successful but hotly contested struggle in the Wisconsin legislature in 1872. Members who endorsed the act submitted an impassioned and lengthy supporting statement. Intemperance, they explained, was a ‘monster vice’ carrying ‘misery’ into the ‘very heart of otherwise happy families’. Ibid.

²³ In fact, sometimes the civil damage act itself would spell this out clearly, such as in the case of the Illinois Act which stated “that ‘a person selling or giving intoxicating liquors’ could ‘cause the intoxication’ of the drinker.” Ibid 39-40.

²⁴ Seneca Falls Convention. Declaration of Human Sentiments. Available online at <http://www.closeup.org/sentimnt.htm> Last accessed March 20, 2008.

²⁵ Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 55.

drunkenness was also a possible ground for divorce, and nearly twice as many divorces were granted on that.²⁶

Reformers differed on how liberal the divorce laws should be. Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked tirelessly to change New York divorce laws.²⁷ Speaking before the New York State Women's Temperance Society in 1852, Stanton attempted to get support for a divorce bill that was about to go before the New York Senate. She used the familiar drunkard's narrative to remind these women why such a bill was needed. She argued that although it was women who were the innocent victims of the intemperance of their men, they lacked the political power and the vote to change policy. She urged them to use the tools they had, much like the "Lips that Touch Liquor Shall Never Touch Mine" song:

1. Let no woman remain in the relation of wife with the confirmed drunkard. Let no drunkard be the father of her children. Let no woman form an alliance with any man who has been suspected ever of the vice of intemperance; for the taste once acquired can never, never be eradicated. Be not misled by any pledges, resolved, promises, prayers or tears. You cannot rely on the word of a man who is, or has been the victim of such an overpowering appetite.²⁸

But Stanton doesn't stop there. She goes beyond the personal control women can exhibit over individual men to:

2. Let us petition State governments so as to modify the laws affecting marriage, and the custody of children, that the drunkard shall have *no* claims on either wife or child.²⁹ [emphasis added]

As docile a suggestion as this sounds to modern ears, Stanton's audience likely contained many members who thought this was extremely radical. Stanton and Susan B. Anthony would continue their efforts to push this controversial issue and even bring it before the 1860 Women's Rights Convention, causing some

²⁶ Ibid 55-56.

²⁷ Joyce W. Warren. *Women, Money and the Law*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2005). Warren writes,

"[Stanton] maintained that marriage was a 'contract' and that if the husband did not fulfill the terms of the contract (e.g. he was a drunkard or a wife beater) the wife had the right to dissolve that contract. Some feminists were appalled at Stanton's application of the commercial and legal theory of contract to what they regarded as a permanent Christian relationship; others were afraid that her stance on divorce would prejudice people against the campaign for suffrage." 245.

²⁸ Quoted in Pleck, 57.

²⁹ Ibid.

controversy. They even lost the support of some supporters, such as Wendell Phillips who wrote to Anthony,

I note what you say about "Marriage & Divorce" & have read what Mrs. Stanton says--of course it is no right & no wish of mine to dictate what shall be our platform... [but] whatever it is understood that the platform will include these questions I shall have nothing to do with the Convention - & wish my name wholly disconnected therefrom.³⁰

Outside the movement, divorce reform met with even more opposition. For example, Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, editorialized that marriage was sacred and that liberal divorce might make people selfish, egoistic and immoral. He argued that in the case of truly bad behavior on the part of the husband, a wife might procure a legal separation only, rather than a divorce which could permit more freedom and access to support. Divorce, according to Greeley and so much of society, would undermine the family unit and wreck civilization.³¹

Despite the tireless efforts of Stanton and Anthony, New York's divorce reform bills failed. In New York, the only legal ground for absolute divorce remained adultery.³² Throughout the nation, divorce reform had limited success in the late 19th century. It simply was too much of a break with traditional values, even in light of the harm the Temperance narratives demonstrated. The frustration of women reformers led to many, though not all, being moved to support Women's Suffrage just to be able to change laws affecting downtrodden women. This support was invaluable to the ultimate success of suffrage.

Although the Temperance and Suffrage movements had a strong impact on the development of awareness of domestic violence, there was minimal success in creating laws that would combat it. More successful were the attempts to change public perception and, in fact, to turn the perception of the issue from a private, family matter to a public concern. Ultimately, laying this foundation enabled reformers in the mid-twentieth century (now buffered by the woman's vote, as

³⁰ University of Rochester Library. Upstate New York and the Women's Rights Movement. Available online at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?page=1800>. Last accessed March 10, 2008.

³¹ Elizabeth Pleck, *Domestic Tyranny: The Making of American Social Policy against Family Violence from Colonial Times to the Present*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 60-61.

³² Joyce W. Warren. *Women, Money and the Law: Nineteenth Century Fiction, Gender, and the Courts*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 245. Warren discusses the economic impact of divorce on women, and that most women sought divorces or legal separation primarily in order to receive support from absent or indigent husbands.

well) to begin the process of changing the laws, long after the Temperance movement had lost its steam and the Suffrage movement had won its victory.

The Historical Connection Between Temperance and Suffrage

The connection between the Temperance and Suffrage movements was not just the philosophical one thus far examined in this paper.³³ Many of the same women spearheaded both, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony.³⁴

Susan B. Anthony, for example, began her career as a temperance reformer and promoted many of the values intrinsic to the temperance narrative. For example, at an 1853 Temperance convention, Anthony

...made a statement of the objects of the women's State Temperance Society. Women had discovered that there were other duties for her besides picking up the drunkard, who had sunk low in moral depravity, ministering to his wants. She said that she would work in removing the root of the evil. On this consideration, the Temperance Society was formed in Rochester, for this State, and they had four women as lecturers. There was another method by which great good could be done to those who could not come

³³ Joseph R. Gusfeld, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and The American Temperance Movement*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971). Gusfeld points that reform through temperance or suffragists movements were among the few "organizational movements open to women in the mid-1800's". Further he writes "The formation of the WCTU was in itself an important event in the history of women in the United States. During the winter of 1873-74, church women in Ohio and other Midwestern states led a "crusade" into saloons, praying and pleading for their closing. Such conduct was shocking by the rules of middle-class female conduct of the time. The direct action by women, and the subsequent formation of the WCTU as a result of it, was a unique activity for the women of the 1870's." 88-89.

³⁴ Another, less famous, example, of the link between temperance and suffrage is Mother Stewart, or Eliza Daniel Stewart, an Ohio woman whose early work in the Temperance movement led her to be committed not just to temperance but to suffrage as a tool to protect women and their families. Mother Stewart was permitted to speak during the first trial in Ohio under the civil damage laws of that state. The court found in favor of the wife and issued a verdict of \$100 and costs to her. Mother Stewart's unprecedented foray into the legal world gave women a taste for what life might be like after suffrage. Erin M. Masson, *The Women's Christian Temperance Union 1874-1898, Combatting Domestic Violence*. 3 Wm. & Mary J of Women & L. 163 (Spring 1997), 175.

within the reach of their lecturers. This could only be done by means of issuing tracts....After speaking of the failure of men to advance the cause of temperance, and the necessity for women to take that work upon herself, Miss Anthony read the Constitution of the Women's State Temperance Society and announce that a committee would collect the names of any persons who wished to join...³⁵

In this short section of a newspaper piece from the period, it is evident that Anthony was espousing the ideology of the Temperance movement, an ideology she took with her to her work in Suffrage. She spoke of the evils of relying on fallen men and the harm it does to women and society, the failure of men to "advance the cause of temperance", and the need of women to take up that cause...even to suffrage, so that her voice may be made powerful enough to affect real change.

Beginning in the early 1850's, around the time Anthony made the speech above, Temperance reformers were moving from trying to reform individual drunkards to seeking prohibition of the sale of liquor. They had some success with the Maine Law, adopted by Maine in 1853, which ended the sale of liquor by the glass in that state and effectively closed saloons.³⁶ Efforts such as this would require the vote, many argued, in order to elect politicians who backed the Temperance movement's values. Not coincidentally, it was in the 1850's that Susan B. Anthony became involved in Women's Suffrage as well, and she would become one of its most stalwart leaders.³⁷ She, and others, would maintain a link between the two movements, their zeitgeist, and their goals even in the wake of division between different factions within each movement.

Although the Temperance movement began as a series of local temperance societies and actions, in 1874 an organization called the Women's Christian Temperance Union emerged to become the face of the Temperance movement in America. In 1879, with Frances Willard at the helm as president, the WCTU adopted the "do everything" policy, which meant that they felt "that all reform was interconnected and social problems could not be separated."³⁸

³⁵ *Temperance and Women's Rights*. New York Daily Times, Feb. 8 1853, p8.

³⁶ Janet Zollinger Giele. *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance and Suffrage*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995). 64-65.

³⁷ New York Times. Miss Susan B. Anthony Died This Morning. Obituary, March 13, 1906. Online at <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0215.html>. Last accessed April 15, 2008.

³⁸ Women's Christian Temperance Union. *Early History*. <http://www.wctu.org/earlyhistory.html>. Last accessed April 10, 2008.

Despite some early disputes about the role that suffrage would play in the organization's platform, they formally adopted suffrage as part of their vision and goal in 1894, securing the support of many women and women's organizations to the suffrage movement. Their adoption of suffrage was under the "home protection" program which was born out of concern for the women and children who were victimized by drunkard husbands and fathers.³⁹

These two movements became inexorably linked by their shared goals of increasing women's power, even though for the Temperance movement the purpose of gaining this power was only to implement reform. The Suffrage movement clamped hold of the enthusiasm for change, the concern for the destitute, and the urge for reform that Temperance organizers continually stirred in the wake of their efforts, and used it to gain the support needed to get women the vote.

Conclusion

The Temperance movement, by developing paradigms and cultural perceptions that questioned the male-dominated status-quo, made a path for the development of Women's Suffrage. The infallibility of the male was exploded by the temperance narrative. The usefulness of retaining total privacy over the home was debunked by the movement's examination of domestic violence and the destitution of women yoked to drunkards. The frustration created by the law's attempt to grapple with these issues created sympathy among many women for the Suffrage movement. All these important cultural changes created by the Temperance movement, combined with the sharing of resources, leaders and goals with the Suffrage movement were invaluable in allowing the Women's Suffrage movement to make real headway in getting the vote for women.

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³⁹ Ibid.

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