

## **Call for Papers**

### **Forging Bonds Across Borders: Mobilizing for Women's Rights and Social Justice in the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Transatlantic World**

April 28-30, 2016 - Conference at the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C.

Conveners: Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson (GHI), Anja Schüler (HCA, Heidelberg),  
Sonya Michel (University of Maryland)

This conference will explore how female activists inside and outside of institutions and organizations exchanged ideas in the Atlantic world and collaborated across national borders and bodies of water and sometimes also across borders of race, class, and gender throughout the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. One purpose is to show how, even without formal political rights, women were able to develop effective strategies and bases of power, working both within their own countries and through the personal transnational connections, alliances, and organizations they created.

Initially women did not focus mainly on gaining rights for their own sex but were concerned about issues such as the abolition of slavery, temperance, child protection, pacifism, and labor. But through their participation in these movements, which were often dominated by men, many women became aware, for the first time, that they too were an oppressed group in need of emancipation. Some fought to link suffrage and women's rights with struggles against the inequities of industrial capitalism 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, worked to apply the values associated with it to society at large.

Historians have by now produced a rather extensive literature on national feminist movements as well as a number of bi-national and multi-national comparative studies of female mobilizations. But so far, few scholars have focused on the transnational, especially the transatlantic, collaborations of women's rights activists throughout the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. This conference aims to begin to fill that gap.

A number of factors led to the proliferation of social and political movements during this period: the spread of enlightenment ideals, as well as 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. Many turned to missionary and charitable work as well as to social and political reform as outlets for their newfound energies. Across industrializing countries, highly motivated, determined women's rights and social justice activists as well as maternalist reformers and missionaries wrote countless letters, traveled widely, sought educational opportunities abroad, and worked for decades to establish personal connections and to collaborate with like-minded activists in other countries. Their efforts eventually provided the foundations for worldwide organizations around issues as diverse as women's rights, protective labor legislation, and temperance.

Our conference aims at bringing together established as well as younger historians who are studying 19<sup>th</sup>-century transnational women's rights and social justice movements from new and different perspectives, using, for example, the methods of 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 as well as severe external backlash.

Among the topics that we plan to discuss are the role of publications and the flow of ideas and organizational know-how across borders, asking how well strategies and rhetoric "traveled" from one national context to another. We will 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.

Special attention will be paid to the factors of race and class, i.e., the challenges for women of color and the working class in organizing for purportedly universal feminist causes and participating in networks dominated by white middle-class women. We will also look at how revolution, migration, and religion shaped women's movements and ideologies across borders. We welcome proposals that deal with the transnational mobilization not only of abolitionists, feminists, or labor activists but also of conservative and nationalistic women's organizations as well as other activists who conceived of temperance or eugenics as matters of social justice.

Possible topics and panel themes include:

- Early feminist publications as vehicles for the transnational exchanges of ideas
- Women's participation in revolutions as impetus for women's rights struggles
- Social justice struggles (abolition, labor rights, domestic violence) and their connections to women's rights
- Nationalism and eugenics as platforms for female activists
- Missionary and charitable work (e.g., for women and children) as bases for activism
- Women's strategies and rhetoric in the absence of formal political rights
- The struggle for access to higher education and certain professions (e.g., medicine)
- The role of religion (esp. evangelical Protestantism)
- Differences in legal systems and women's legal rights
- Socialist vs. bourgeois feminist activism (e.g., around protective legislation)
- African American and other non-white women's rights activists and their engagement with (or disengagement from) white-dominated transnational movements
- Transnational female peace activism
- Transnational exchange and cooperation of suffragists
- Transnational exchange and cooperation in nationalistic and antifeminist organizations

The conference will be conducted in English, and the organizers will cover travel and lodging expenses of invited participants.

Please send a short abstract of your proposed contribution (no more than 400 words) and a brief academic CV with institutional affiliation **in one file** to Susanne Fabricius (fabricius@ghi-dc.org) by **October 31, 2015**. All applicants will be notified by December 20, 2015, regarding the acceptance of their proposals.